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GO MAKE DISCIPLES: SERMONIC APPLICATION OF THE
IMPERATIVE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

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**GO MAKE DISCIPLES: SERMONIC APPLICATION OF THE
IMPERATIVE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION**

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To Jenn, Caleb, and Emily:
You are blessings beyond measure

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Acts Thom.	Acts of Thomas
<i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>1 Apology</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De agricultura</i>
<i>3 Bar.</i>	<i>3 Baruch (Greek Apocalypse)</i>
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago, 1999
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk. <i>Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago, 1961
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
Bel	Bel and the Dragon
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>The Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>1 Clem.</i>	<i>1 Clement</i>
<i>Congr.</i>	<i>De congressu eruditionis gratia</i>
<i>CTQ</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidari solet</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache</i>
1 Esd	1 Esdras
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde Theologiese Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary

Ign. <i>Pol.</i>	Ignatius, <i>To Polycarp</i>
IMB	International Mission Board
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
Jdt	Judith
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
Jos. <i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
L & N	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9th ed. Oxford, 1948
LXX	Septuagint
1 Macc	1 Maccabees
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i>
<i>Mos.1</i>	<i>De vita Mosis I</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De plantatione</i>
Pol. <i>Phil.</i>	Polycarp, <i>To the Philippians</i>
QG 4	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesis IV</i>

<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
SP	Sacra Pagina
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>Somn. 1</i>	<i>De somniis I</i>
<i>Somn. 2</i>	<i>De somniis II</i>
<i>Spec. 3</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus III</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata</i>
Tob	Tobit
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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PREFACE

When I began the PhD program, I expected that it would be a lot of work and would involve several years of strenuous effort. What I did not realize, however, was the depth of the academic rigor involved and how many people would contribute to my completion of the dissertation process. More than I could have ever imagined when I began the program, many have played a significant role in this phase of my life.

I have been blessed to study at Southern Seminary both during my Master of Divinity and PhD studies, and this institution has played an incalculable role in my education and formation. Through many courses and seminars, numerous professors have helped to train me for ministry and academic study, and I am forever grateful for their investment in my life. During these courses, fellow students have helped to sharpen me, especially in my preaching and New Testament seminars. I am thankful for my dissertation committee of Drs. Robert Vogel, Hershael York, and Bill Cook; they have helped throughout the process of writing, offering valuable critiques and providing encouragement along the way. Special mention, of course, must be made of my supervisor, Dr. Robert Vogel. He has been the definition of a pastoral scholar who combines academic quality with a pastor's heart and a sincere desire to see students succeed. He has been a source of continued advice and thoughtful critique throughout the process of writing this dissertation, and my work is far better because of his guidance.

Throughout my time in the doctoral program, I have served as one of the pastors at Grace Baptist Church, and what few comments I offer here cannot convey the gratitude I feel toward this wonderful body of believers. Many members have

regularly prayed for me, and countless others have offered words of encouragement and support. Lynn Shearer has been gracious to offer her grammatical critiques throughout this process, for which I am very grateful. I'm thankful for my fellow pastors, Bill Haynes, Todd Meadows, and Ricky Teal, with whom I have served many years at Grace. Bill, my senior pastor, has been especially gracious and encouraging as he granted me time to study and write. Grace is a special church, and I am grateful for the privilege I have to serve such a wonderful body of believers.

Many others have encouraged me and helped throughout this process. Innumerable friends and family members have offered words of support, not only to me, but also to my wife and children. Krista and Aaron Boaz have been especially generous and hospitable in providing a place for me to stay during many long weeks of seminars and writing. They always opened their home for me, both during my MDiv studies and throughout the past four years of the PhD process. This kindness on their part has been a great help, as well as a joy in visiting with them.

Most important, words cannot express the indebtedness I feel for my family. Our children, Caleb and Emily, have endured well through the challenge of a father who is completing a dissertation. They have been looking forward to the time when I am finished, and I am excited that the day has come. Kids, thank you for your patience while I have been studying and writing. Most of all, I am thankful for my wife, Jenn. She has unceasingly encouraged me, supported me, prayed for me, cared for our children, and attended to countless other matters throughout these busy four years. She is a loving and godly mother, and she is a far better wife than I deserve. Jenn, I could not have completed this dissertation without you. I am blessed beyond words to have the privilege to be your husband.

As I have been writing this dissertation, my prayer is that it will be of benefit to the church in general and to preachers in particular. The Great Commission is our mandate—let us be obedient in making disciples of all nations.

May God use this dissertation, in whatever small way he may choose, toward that end.

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Somerset, Kentucky

December 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the past two hundred years, Matthew 28:16-20 has been a common text in evangelical pulpits, particularly as a call to missionary endeavor. Since the publication of William Carey's *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, the commissioning text of Matthew 28:16-20 has often been viewed as the marching orders for foreign missions.¹ Indeed, the commonality of this text's relationship to the expansion of the gospel to the nations has led to it being known as the Great Commission.² Countless sermons have been preached and books have been written, particularly on a layman's level, about the Great Commission mandate for foreign missions.

However, the relative ubiquity of the correspondence of missions with the Great Commission belies the lack of uniformity in both the preaching of this passage and the scholarly treatment of it. Throughout much of church history, preachers and scholars often viewed it as a descriptive narrative of the mission given to the apostles, not an abiding missional command for the church. Oskar Skarsaune summarizes well the position of many in the first centuries of Christianity:

¹Prior to Carey's publication of this highly influential booklet, one finds far less consensus regarding the continuing imperatival nature of this commission. Writings throughout church history commonly consider it to be historically descriptive of a commission given to the disciples rather than prescriptive for the continuing activity of the church in missions. Also, christological and baptismal concerns often outweighed missiological emphases, both in preaching and writing. See especially the brief history of interpretation in David P. Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed New Light on Old Texts* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2006), 101-42.

²For an overview of the history of the interpretation of Matt 28:16-20 and the origin of the term "Great Commission," see David F. Wright, "The Great Commission and the Ministry of the Word: Reflections Historical and Contemporary on Relations and Priorities," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 25, no. 2 (Autumn 2007): 132-57.

The early church did not consider the great commission as a standing order for the church at large, or for future generations following the apostolic generation. The great commission was the personal task of the eleven, later twelve, apostles. It should not only be begun by them, it should also be completed by them.³

Unfortunately, this interpretation held sway throughout much of church history, extending into the period of the Reformation⁴ and into modern scholarship.⁵ Even in contemporary works, many disagree whether the Great Commission imperative is for the local church as a whole⁶ or the individual,⁷ and scholars give little attention to explaining the practical implications of the distinctions among these views.

Likewise, one finds a lack of scholarly consensus in several other aspects of the imperative of the Great Commission. The phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη evinces much debate, particularly whether ἔθνη refers to Gentiles or nations.⁸ In other words, of

³Oskar Skarsaune, “The Mission to the Jews: A Closed Chapter?,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 72. The citations throughout this dissertation retain the original spelling, grammar, and punctuation of the sources. Corresponding footnotes mention any changes, such as italics for emphasis.

⁴Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) explicitly denies that the command has an abiding imperative beyond the apostles. He writes, “There was no successor of the Apostles. The command to preach the Gospel in the whole world ceases with the Apostles.” Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici* 24.5.220, trans. and quoted in Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901), 31.

⁵Ulrich Luz is one of the premier Matthean scholars in modern academia. In examining this text, he writes, “I am incapable of inferring traditio-historically from the almost exclusive Matthean text of 28:16-20 a universal baptismal and missionary commission.” Ulrich Luz, “Has Matthew Abandoned the Jews? A Response to Hans Kvalbein and Peter Stuhlmacher Concerning Matt 28:16-20,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 68.

⁶Robert Plummer writes, “Local congregations *as a whole* inherit this missionary commission from the apostles, and depending on an individual person’s gifts, supernatural leading, and life circumstances, obedience to this commission will be manifested in a variety of ways.” Robert L. Plummer, “The Great Commission in the New Testament,” *SBJT* 9, no. 4 (December 2005): 9.

⁷William Mounce contends that the Great Commission reveals God’s will for every believer’s life: “The will of God is that you make disciples. There. Period. End of discussion.” William Mounce, “The Great Commission,” *Biblical Training*, n.d., accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/great-commission/52-major-stories-of-the-bible/william-mounce>.

⁸For an example of those affirming that it refers to “Gentiles,” see Douglas R. A. Hare and Daniel J. Harrington, “Make Disciples of All the Gentiles (Mt 28:19),” *CBQ* 37, no. 3 (July 1975): 359–69. For an example of scholars arguing it refers to “nations,” see Kukzin Lee and Francois P. Viljoen, “The Target Group of the Ultimate Commission (Matthew 28:19),” *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010): 9–13.

whom are Christians to make disciples? The precise determination of what this phrase means has major ramifications for the practical implications of obedience to the Great Commission. Similarly, scholars are not uniform in their understanding of πορευθέντες. Some suggest it should be translated with an emphasis on antecedent time (“having gone”),⁹ others contend it indicates contemporaneous time (“as you go”),¹⁰ most argue that it has an imperatival idea (“go”),¹¹ and some suggest it adds no meaning to the imperative μαθητεύσατε.¹²

Sermonic Treatment of the Great Commission

Given the divergence of scholarly opinions regarding this passage, it is not surprising that its homiletical treatment varies, as well. Indeed, sermons give evidence of a broad understanding of not only the interpretation of the passage, but also its application to the hearers, particularly regarding verse 19. The following section provides a brief overview of some of the various ways preachers have articulated how the Great Commission applies to their hearers; although by no means comprehensive, the differing emphases provided here indicate the diverse ways this passage has not only been interpreted, but also preached.

Continuing Normativity

Although modern evangelicals broadly recognize the continuing normativity of the Great Commission mandate, preachers have not uniformly

⁹Harold M. Parker, Jr., “The Great Commission,” *Interpretation* 2, no. 1 (January 1948): 74–75.

¹⁰Mike Graves and David M. May, *Preaching Matthew: Interpretation and Proclamation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 133.

¹¹Daniel Wallace is one of the major grammarians who strongly emphasizes that the participle has an imperatival idea. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 642.

¹²Zerwick argues it is a pleonasm that offers no additional meaning to the text. Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (Rome: Iura Editionis et Versionis Reservantur, 1963), 127.

understood to whom this normativity applies. In other words, who is under an obligation to go make disciples of all nations? One means of answering this question has been to assert that this task is incumbent only upon ministers. John Skinner, who served as the bishop of Aberdeen and the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church during the early years of the modern missions movement, contends in a sermon on this passage that the commission devolves on ministers as the successors of the apostles:

This remarkable promise must have been made to the apostles, not as private persons, or as our Lord's immediate attendants, but as *apostles*, persons sent to convert and baptize the nations, and whose office was, therefore, to continue, as long as there should be nations upon earth, to partake of the benefits of it. . . . But the truth is, and every discerning person must at first sight perceive it, that this promise, so essential to the support, nay, to the very being of the Christian church, is not made so much to the persons of the apostles, as to the apostolical office, or at least to their persons only, as vested with that office, and consequently to all persons, to the end of the world, who should ever have that office conferred upon them.¹³

Ministers have an obligation to carry out the command of the commission “as long as there are nations to be instructed in the principles of the gospel, or a church to be formed in any part of the inhabited world.”¹⁴ The key for Skinner is that ministers are the successors of the authority given to the apostles to take the gospel to the world; therefore, the imperative of the Great Commission applies only to them. He is by no means alone in this conviction, for numerous preachers and theologians have advocated this position, such as Jonathan Edwards¹⁵ and even William Carey, the father of modern missions.¹⁶

¹³John Skinner, *The Nature and Extent of the Apostolical Commission. A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of the Right Reverend Dr. Samuel Seabury, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. By a Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Scotland* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers & Co., 1785), 31, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=lou57655&tabID=T001&docId=CW3319916699&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁵Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (New York: American Tract Society, 1816), 281, accessed April 23, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/historyofworkofr00edwa>.

¹⁶Carey often uses the term “minister” in describing those who are to go. See William

A more commonly recognized way to preach the continuing normativity of the Great Commission is to contend for its applicability to all believers. Charles Spurgeon in his “The Missionaries’ Charge and Charta” explicitly states that the mandate to make disciples of all nations falls on every Christian:

O! I would that the Church could hear the Saviour addressing these words to her now; for the words of Christ are living words, not having power in them yesterday alone, but to-day also. The injunctions of the Saviour are perpetual in their obligation; they were not binding upon apostles merely, but upon *us* also, and upon every Christian does this yoke fall, “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁷

The Savior’s injunction does not devolve on ministers only, but remains for all followers of Christ. For this reason, he pleads for those in his congregation to hear and submit to Christ’s command to take the gospel to the lost around the world. One may adduce additional nuances in determining for whom the Great Commission applies, but the above indicates that preachers’ conceptualization of this passage’s continuing normativity is far from monolithic.

The Meaning of “Go”

Translating *πορευθέντες* has also proven to be a sticky issue, and just as scholars have not uniformly affirmed a translation, neither have preachers consistently proclaimed the application that flows out of this word. Beyond the common translation “go” that appears in most English versions of the Bible, preachers have sometimes latched onto the participial nature of *πορευθέντες* in order to suggest that the best translation is “as you go.” Steve Gaines, the senior pastor of the historic Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, suggests this meaning

Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891), 7-10, 72, 82, accessed June 29, 2014, http://archive.org/details/pts_enquiryintotheobligations_1687_2.

¹⁷Charles Spurgeon, “The Missionaries’ Charge and Charta,” in *The New Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Containing Sermons Preached and Revised by the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon*, vol. 7, *During the Year 1861* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1995), 281.

in urging his congregation to make evangelism “a part of your daily life.”¹⁸ So also does Mike Glenn, the senior pastor of the large, multi-site Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee. He contends that disciple-making should be part of the routine of life: “as you go to work, as you are at school, as you talk to your friends, as you go, as you are going about the daily things of your life.”¹⁹ The applicational emphasis, based on this translation, is that disciple-making is to be interwoven into the fabric of one’s normal life.

A different perspective is that the participle indicates antecedent time, which may be translated “having gone.” John MacArthur is perhaps the most prominent preacher to make this claim, and he asserts,

The commission of the church is not to wait until the world shows up. The commission of the church is to go to the world, to go to them. Now let’s talk about that first participle, going, *πορευθέντες*. Actually, in the Greek it could be translated better “having gone—having gone.” It isn’t a command—go ye, that’s not a command in the Greek. In the Authorized they put it in the imperative mode but in the Greek it’s an assumption, having gone. I mean, it’s basic that if you’re going to make disciples of all nations, you’ve got to have gone. Having gone is assumed. It’s obvious. It’s natural. It’s a corollary.²⁰

MacArthur considers the participle to indicate that going to the lost is assumed: “the assumption [is] that you’re not going to do this until you’ve gone somewhere it needs to be done. . . . It all starts with going.”²¹ His point is that making disciples

¹⁸Steve Gaines, “Multiplying Disciple Makers,” video of sermon (Memphis, TN: Bellevue Baptist Church, November 24, 2013), accessed July 10, 2014, http://www.bellevue.org/messages#!/swx/pp/media_archives/140663/episode/44858.

¹⁹Mike Glenn, “As You Go, Make Disciples,” video of sermon (Nashville: Brentwood Baptist Church, July 14, 2013), accessed July 18, 2014, <http://www.brentwoodbaptist.tv/index.php?id=507>.

²⁰John MacArthur, “The Making Disciples of All Nations (Part 2),” transcript of sermon (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Community Church, June 9, 1985), accessed July 18, 2014, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/2405/the-making-disciples-of-all-nations-part-2>. For another contemporary preacher who offers this translation, see Paul Washer, “As You Go, Make Disciples,” audio of sermon (Laurel, MS: Audubon Drive Bible Church, February 28, 2010), accessed August 7, 2015, <http://www.heartcrymissionary.com/sermons-en#!sid=292>.

²¹John MacArthur, “Reaching the World,” transcript of sermon (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Community Church, January 14, 1990), accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/80-66/reaching-the-world>.

depends on going to where evangelism needs to occur. Although MacArthur seems quite confident in his assertion, the sermonic evidence indicates that there is a wide discrepancy in how this participle is understood and preached.

The Nature of Making Disciples

The heart of the Great Commission, namely the imperative to make disciples, likewise evinces several differing conceptualizations by preachers. Among those in the vein of theological liberalism, a social gospel interpretation is not uncommon.²² The social gospel movement understands God's kingdom to include "the whole of life,"²³ and the establishment of a fair and just society is the means for advancing the kingdom.²⁴ Walter Rauschenbusch, one of its leading preachers and intellectuals, contends that right teaching forms the kingdom, and the world might experience God's kingdom more if it were not for "the selfishness and sloth of Christians. We prefer to clothe ourselves in purple and fine linen, rather than speed the coming of Christ; our young men and women desire to become rich."²⁵ Disciple-

²²Of course, not all within theological liberalism preach this text merely in view of the social gospel. Fred Craddock emphasizes that everyone in the world wants to know something about God, although he falls short of advocating evangelism or missions. Fred B. Craddock, "What God Wants This Church to Do," in *The Cherry Log Sermons* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 42-47. Mary Hinkle Shore suggests several ways of preaching the Great Commission, such as seeking to empower loving community, working for the good of others, preaching the virtues of Jesus, and entering into dialogue with others; notably absent are emphases that include evangelism or missions. Mary Hinkle Shore, "Preaching Mission: Call and Promise in Matthew 28:16-20," *Word & World* 26, no. 3 (2006): 322-28. Robert Luccock ends his preaching guide through Matthew by emphasizing loving and serving others, but he does not include a clear exhortation to make disciples. Robert E. Luccock, *Preaching through Matthew: Expository Reflections on the Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 230. Stanley Saunders in his monograph on how to preach Matthew highlights disciple-making that leads to "a turning away from the world, away from violent leaders, away from the economies of rich and poor, away from the religions of sacrifice and status, and away from the politics of exclusion and exploitation." Again, the emphasis falls on social issues more than on mission. Stanley P. Saunders, *Preaching the Gospel of Matthew: Proclaiming God's Presence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 301.

²³Washington Gladden, *The Church and Modern Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908), 85.

²⁴Washington Gladden, "The Nation and the Kingdom," in *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920*, ed. Robert T. Handy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 137.

²⁵Walter Rauschenbusch, "The Kingship of Christ," in *Watson (MacLaren) to Rufus Jones: 1850-1950*, vol. 7 of *A Treasury of Great Preaching* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), 163.

making, therefore, does not primarily concern missions or evangelism, but establishing a just and equitable society in which Christians are not consumed with the trappings of wealth.

Whereas social gospel preachers often identify the task of making disciples with working for societal change, many evangelicals view it primarily in terms of the conversion of non-believers to become followers of Christ. John Stott in his sermon on this passage during the World Congress on Evangelism in 1966 describes making disciples in the context of evangelism, particularly in missionary endeavor; thus, “to make disciples of all nations means to win disciples for Jesus Christ out of all nations on earth.”²⁶ Likewise, James Montgomery Boice summarizes the central message of the Great Commission by stating, “Evangelism is making disciples.”²⁷ Indeed, the title “Great Commission” indicates that one of the primary modern ways of understanding the ongoing mission of the imperative in Matthew 28:19 is to proclaim the gospel so that those who are not disciples might become followers of Christ.²⁸

However, despite the prevailing association of the Great Commission with evangelism and missions (especially among evangelicals), some view it less in terms of the conversion of unbelievers and more in association with discipling other believers. In a sermon on this passage, Scott Gibson recognizes that most consider it

²⁶John Stott, “The Great Commission, Part II” (World Congress on Evangelism, 1966), accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/Berlin66/stott2.htm>.

²⁷James Montgomery Boice, “The Great Commission—Matt. 28:18-20,” video of sermon (Dallas: Believers Chapel, January 15, 1993), accessed January 7, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/24440561>. Boice makes a similar statement in his commentary on Matt 28: “In this commission, evangelism is the primary task.” James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, *The Triumph of the King: Matthew 18-28* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 468.

²⁸David Wright asserts that Matt 28:18-20 was not commonly called the Great Commission “until the last decades of the nineteenth century, or even perhaps the earliest years of the twentieth.” Wright, “Great Commission,” 1. My point is that during the modern missions movement the passage was so prevalently used in association with missions and evangelism that it became widely known as the Great Commission.

to be about evangelism; however, he contends that the “focus on this text may not necessarily be the focus that has been banner-waved by folks.”²⁹ Instead, the emphasis of the text is discipleship, meaning to guide and teach believers so that they might grow to be increasingly mature followers of Christ. Gibson is not alone in recognizing a discipling emphasis in the Great Commission. Although he undoubtedly gives the priority of emphasis in disciple-making to evangelism and missions, David Platt contends that obedience to the Great Commission includes walking alongside a less mature believer to help them in their spiritual growth.³⁰ Thus, even the meaning of the command to make disciples is not uniformly preached.

The Nations

Since the rise of the modern missions movement, much of the application regarding the Great Commission pericope revolves around missions to people groups that have little or no access to the gospel.³¹ John Piper, for example, has famously declared that there are only three ways that a Christian can respond to the

²⁹Scott M. Gibson, “The Great Commission to Discipleship,” CD of sermon (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary), *Pulpit Talk* 10, no. 4 (Summer 2012). Scott Gibson is the director of the Center of Preaching and is the Haddon W. Robinson Professor of Preaching and Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Seminary.

³⁰See especially David Platt, “Two Simple Words: Make Disciples,” transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, February 11, 2007), accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.radical.net/resources/sermons/two-simple-words-make-disciples>. Platt views the Great Commission holistically, contending that both evangelism and discipling must function together.

³¹In the modern missions movement, preachers would often plead for ongoing outreach to non-Christian areas. Early in this movement, the plea for missions was often articulated as a need for missionaries to go to the heathen. Edward Griffin, the third president of Williams College and the first pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, began a sermon on this passage by stating, “I rise to advocate the cause of missions to the heathen and to plead for a dying world.” Edward D. Griffin, “Arguments for Missions,” in *The Missionary Enterprise: A Collection of Discourses on Christian Missions*, ed. Baron Stow (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1846), 22, accessed August 30, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/missionaryenterp00stow>. Spurgeon urged his congregation to consider the plight of the heathen: “The heathen are perishing; they are dying by millions without Christ, and Christ’s last command to us is ‘Go ye, teach all nations:’ are you obeying it?” C. H. Spurgeon, “The Power of the Risen Saviour,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon*, vol. 20 of *During the Year 1874* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1981), 612.

Great Commission: “Go. Send. Or disobey.”³² Therefore, when preaching on this passage during a missions week service at Bethlehem Baptist Church, he stated that his aim is

first, to speak God's word concerning cross-cultural missions in such a way that everyone who hears my voice will take the next step of engagement in God's great purpose to make disciples for Jesus in every people group in the world. And, second, my aim and prayer is that, for many of you, that next step will be a decisive step of preparation to go as missionaries to the unreached and less-reached peoples of the world.³³

At the end of the sermon he offers several potential responses related to either going or sending, including praying, giving, and taking steps toward going to the mission field.³⁴ In other words, Piper, like many others, considers the primary locale of obedience to the Great Commission to be the nations, particularly those that have little or no gospel access.

However, not all preachers have understood the commission to be only a mandate to cross cultural missions. William MacLaren, in a sermon at the opening

³²See, for example, John Piper, “The Legacy of Antioch,” video of sermon (Minneapolis: Bethlehem Baptist Church, October 25, 2009), accessed November 14, 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-legacy-of-antioch>.

³³John Piper, “The Lofty Claim, the Last Command, the Loving Comfort,” transcript of sermon (Minneapolis: Bethlehem Baptist Church, November 1, 1998), accessed November 19, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-lofty-claim-the-last-command-the-loving-comfort>.

³⁴Preachers have often described praying for missions and giving to missionary causes as ways to obey the Great Commission. In her analysis of missionary sermons preached in Britain during the years 1851-1901, Jessica Sheetz-Nguyen states that the preachers’ application “generally focused on a request for prayers, missionaries, or financial support.” Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, “Go Ye Therefore and Teach All Nations.’ Imperial Evangelical and Mission Sermons: The Imperial Period,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901*, ed. Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 551. Similarly, preachers in the Triennial Convention in the United States would often articulate the response to a call to missions in terms of praying or giving (with ministers often being the ones who would go to the nations). Richard Furman, in a sermon from Matt 28:20 that he preached at the first meeting of the Triennial Convention, declared,

Let the wise and good employ their counsels; the Minister of Christ, who is qualified for the sacred service, offer himself for the Work; the man of wealth and generosity, who values the Glory of Emmanuel, and the Salvation of Souls more than gold, bring of his treasures in proportion as God has bestowed on him; yea, let all, even the pious widow, bring the mite that can be spared; and let all who fear and love God, unite in the Prayer of Faith before the Throne of Grace; and unceasingly say, “Thy Kingdom come!”

Richard Furman, “Sermon,” in *Proceedings of the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States, at Their First Triennial Meeting, Held in Philadelphia, from the 7th to the 14th of May, 1817: Together with the Third Annual Report of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States* (Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814), 24, accessed September 14, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/proceedingsofgen00amer>.

of the Presbyterian General Assembly in Montreal in 1885, urged the necessity of viewing the Great Commission as including all unbelievers, not just those in foreign countries.³⁵ He stated, “The commission knows nothing of the distinction between home and foreign missions. It obliterates the dividing lines of country, and teaches us to see in every fallen man a brother.”³⁶ It does not concern only foreign missions, for the mandate remains in effect as long as “one member of the human family remains who is not enrolled among the visible followers of Christ.”³⁷ Similarly, in spite of his regular emphasis on going to the nations, David Platt contends that obedience to the Great Commission does not mean only going to the nations, but also includes one’s own location. Rather than making disciples in either the nations or one’s own location, he suggests that “it’s a both and.”³⁸ Thus, despite the common association of Matthew 28:18-20 with cross-cultural missions, preachers have not always indicated that the Great Commission is only about making disciples in the context of foreign missions.

The divergence of scholarly opinions and sermonic examples of the Great Commission pericope raises several questions about how to preach the imperative of Matthew 28:18-20 in a biblically faithful manner. For whom is the Great

³⁵William MacLaren served as the chair of systematic theology at Knox College in Toronto from 1873 until 1904, and he was principal of the college from 1904-1908. Additionally, he served as moderator of the general assembly in 1884 and was the convener of the Presbyterian committee on foreign missions from 1867-1883. Alexander Fraser, *A History of Ontario: Its Resources and Development* (Toronto: The Canada History Company, 1907), 630-33, accessed January 10, 2017, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Hbg8AQAAIAAJ&pg=RA1-PA628&dq=william+maclaren+knox+college&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiut72h8rfRAhVJ2oMKHURIB7EQ6AEIQzAH#v=onepage&q=william%20maclaren%20knox%20college&f=false>. Michael Gauvreau, *Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 331n51.

³⁶William MacLaren, *The Great Commission: A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the General Assembly in Crescent Street Church, Montreal, June 10th, 1885* (Toronto: Presbyterian News Co., 1885), 4, accessed August 7, 2015, http://archive.org/details/cihm_04636.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸David Platt, “The Christ-Directed Mission,” transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, March 12, 2006), accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.radical.net/sermons/sermons/a-christ-directed-mission/>.

Commission? If it has enduring significance for today, what are the practical implications that preachers should emphasize? What is the meaning of *πορευθέντες*, and how does the translation of this word affect application? Who are the *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*, and how does this interpretive decision impact preaching this passage? What is the proper modern application for *μαθητεύσατε*? This dissertation seeks to provide a hermeneutically-grounded answer to these questions to articulate contemporary sermonic application that properly corresponds to Matthew's intentions in the Great Commission pericope.

Thesis

This dissertation argues in light of a careful hermeneutic of application that preaching the Great Commission necessitates exhorting every believer in the congregation to go and engage intentionally in both evangelism and discipling less mature believers among all the nations of the earth. Two fundamental concerns drive this thesis, the first of which is a hermeneutic of application. Although some of the differences in the interpretation of this pericope are due to exegetical considerations, the root of many of both the interpretational and applicational differences springs from differing hermeneutical assumptions.³⁹ For example, the determination of the intended audience, whether it extends beyond the apostles to contemporary readers, depends upon one's hermeneutic. May one find a legitimate correspondence between the apostles and modern Christians so that the imperative applies not only to the apostles, but also to contemporary believers? If such a correspondence exists, is it between the apostles and ministers,⁴⁰ the apostles and the church,⁴¹ or the apostles

³⁹For example, the translation of *πορευθέντες* is primarily an exegetical decision.

⁴⁰Edward Griffin considers ministers to be the successors of the apostles and, therefore, he argues a correspondence exists between them. He explains, "The injunction in the text was not addressed to the eleven exclusively, but to them as depositaries of the divine commands, and through them to the whole body of ministers in every age." Griffin, "Arguments for Missions," 22.

⁴¹Landmark Baptists argue for a correspondence between the local church and the

and every believer? In part, one's hermeneutic, particularly a hermeneutic of application, determines the answer to this question. Therefore, this dissertation attempts to articulate a hermeneutic of application in order to provide a way of rightly understanding how the author's intended meaning impacts the application in a sermon on this passage. Specifically, the hermeneutic of application used in this dissertation results in the conclusion that the imperative is for every believer.

Second, this dissertation's homiletical concern is the applicational element of the sermon. Primers on expository preaching regularly include the necessity of application,⁴² and this dissertation thus assumes its homiletical necessity.⁴³ Given this assumption, the dissertation attempts to articulate application that is faithful to the author's intended meaning. Of course, the phrase "authorial intent" is laden with difficulty in regard to contemporary application, for a gap exists between the recipients of this commission: the apostles who originally received Jesus' command, Matthew's readers who were the original recipients of the text, and the modern readers (or, in the case of a sermon, the modern congregation). This dissertation seeks to provide a hermeneutically viable method of application that takes into

apostles in Matt 28:16-20 (whom they consider to be the first local church). See James Robinson Graves, *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?* (Memphis, TN: Baptist Book House: Graves, Mahaffy & Company, 1880), accessed November 5, 2014, http://books.google.com/books/download/Old_Landmarkism_what_is_It.pdf?id=k04NAAAAYAAJ&hl=en&capid=AFLRE73sx3yQtCz48OFvy-Mb7WRNrfuCFH4Xmrs0uDDocJzn87Inf5swOfVA3fe_LGR4qGCV76NltwDiaxnxvvhfN9--GDzA&continue=http://books.google.com/books/download/Old_Landmarkism_what_is_It.pdf%3Fid%3Dk04NAAAAYAAJ%26output%3Dpdf%26hl%3Den.

⁴²Many homileticians include application in the definition of expository preaching. Hershael York contends, "Expository preaching is any kind of preaching that shows people the meaning of a biblical text and leads them to apply it to their lives." Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 33. Haddon Robinson, in his well-known *Biblical Preaching*, states, "Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers." Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 33.

⁴³See Scott Blue's PhD dissertation for a defense of application as a necessity in expository preaching. Scott Avery Blue, "Application in the Expository Sermon: A Case for Its Necessary Inclusion" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001).

account Matthew's purpose both in the pericope and the Gospel as a whole in order to articulate contemporary application that corresponds as closely as possible with Matthew's intended meaning and application.⁴⁴

Based on careful textual analysis and a hermeneutic of application, this dissertation attempts to answer four interpretive questions from Matthew 28:19 in order to determine the proper sermonic application of the text. First, for whom is the Great Commission? A preacher cannot describe practical implications of the text for his congregation until he first determines whether his audience is also an intended audience of the imperative of Matthew 28:19. Second, what is the correct translation of *πορευθέντες*? The application will certainly vary if it means "go" rather than "as you go." Third, who are *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*? Determining whether this phrase refers to Gentiles or both Jews and Gentiles will undoubtedly impact the contemporary application that a preacher should espouse from the pulpit. Fourth, and perhaps most critical, what does *μαθητεύσατε* mean? Is it primarily evangelistically-oriented, or does it also include the process of guiding a person toward growth as a disciple? As the only imperative mood verb of the Great Commission in Matthew, rightly understanding the meaning of this verb has a major impact on not only the proper interpretation of the passage, but also how one should preach it.

Contemporary Scholarship and Preaching the Great Commission

A brief overview of the scholarship concerning the subject of this dissertation, namely a hermeneutically-grounded approach to preaching the imperative of the Great Commission, reveals a gap in the available literature. Such

⁴⁴Since the rise of historical criticism, many have denied the historicity of the events of Matt 28:16-20, thus *a priori* questioning its authority. This dissertation assumes that 28:16-20 is historically reliable and accurately records the events that happened. For a good overview of the history of criticism, see Robert L. Thomas, "Historical Criticism and the Great Commission," *Masters Seminary Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2000).

scholarship in general falls into the categories of guides for preaching Matthew (including both sermonic outlines and homiletical guidance based on brief exegesis), exegetical and interpretive scholarship of Matthew, and works that focus on a hermeneutic of application.⁴⁵ As this summary of the literature indicates, a need exists for an extensive analysis of the text that combines a robust theory of interpretation with the best of contemporary Matthean scholarship to articulate a hermeneutically-driven sermonic application for this passage. The aim of this dissertation is to provide such a monograph.

Preaching Guides

The first category of works includes those which attempt to explain how to preach this passage. Much that is available is primarily pastoral or lay-level material, such as preaching guides that provide either full sermons or expansive outlines of the Gospel of Matthew. Older volumes such as Alexander MacLaren's exposition of Matthew⁴⁶ and Charles Simeon's outlines of the Bible⁴⁷ have been beneficial examples of exposition for preachers. Of particular contemporary note is Douglas O'Donnell's volume on Matthew in the Preaching the Word series, in which he weds exposition to clear application.⁴⁸ However, these books, as helpful as they may be in

⁴⁵Undoubtedly, one could parse these categories into different configurations or include different emphases. The three provided, however, are sufficiently general to include the key avenues of academic inquiry for this dissertation. Of note is that this list does not include historical studies; historical analysis falls outside the scope of this dissertation except for determining the primary interpretive and sermonic options this analysis must take into consideration.

⁴⁶MacLaren wrote his volume as expositions of Matthean pericopes for use by Sunday schools and Bible classes. The section on Matt 28:16-20 provides a brief overview of the chapter, with little attention given to application. Alexander MacLaren, *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, vol. 2 (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1894), 211-20.

⁴⁷For Simeon's outline of Matt 28:18-28, see Charles Simeon, *Matthew*, vol. 11 of *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 617-20. His outline is quite simplistic, offering three points: the commission given to the apostles, the promise of encouragement, and the present application. The explanation for each point is only a few paragraphs, and the application centers on the duties of ministers.

⁴⁸O'Donnell's volume is perhaps the best available sermonic exposition of the Great Commission pericope. However, as an example of a sermon, it is limited in clearly-delineated exegesis, and it does not provide insight into hermeneutical issues inherent in this passage. Douglas

providing examples of exposition of the Great Commission pericope, do not bridge the gap between exegesis and exposition in that they give only an expositional outline or an example of a sermon.

A number of resources seek to provide both exegetical and homiletical guidance. Commentary series such as *The Pulpit Commentary* and *The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary* offer a brief explanation of the text with examples of sermon outlines based on the passage. However, their exegetical work is quite simple, and they offer no explanation for how exegesis translates into application. The few individual monographs on preaching Matthew are often quite simplistic and provide only the most basic comments on exegesis and homiletics (with nothing in regard to hermeneutics).⁴⁹

A few preaching guides provide slightly more complex analysis of the text and attempt to relate the exegesis to preaching. *Preaching the Gospel of Matthew* by Stanley Saunders views the whole of Matthew through the lens of what he considers to be the dominant theme, "God with us."⁵⁰ He articulates the commissioning pericope not as a call to mission, but as an enjoinder to replicate "Jesus' steps to the lost and the least, and to conflict and the cross."⁵¹ *Preaching Matthew* by Mike Graves and David May is more thorough in its hermeneutical method in that it utilizes a "socio-rhetorical homiletic" that seeks to base the sermon on interpretation that is sensitive to social norms and rhetorical conventions in Matthew.⁵²

Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and Earth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 905-19.

⁴⁹An example of such a work is Joseph Parker, *A Homiletic Analysis of the Gospel by Matthew* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1870).

⁵⁰Saunders, *Preaching the Gospel*, xiii.

⁵¹Ibid., 302.

⁵²Graves and May, *Preaching Matthew*, 2-3.

Unfortunately, these preaching guides come from a far more liberal perspective than is exegetically and theologically acceptable to most evangelicals, and their presuppositions obviously color their interpretation and homiletical advice. Even beyond their theological perspective, these books are less than thorough in their demonstration of a hermeneutic of application and explanation of how their hermeneutic impacts interpretation and application. In short, the homiletical guides for Matthew lack a clearly-articulated, in-depth hermeneutical foundation that drives application.

Interpretive and Exegetical Scholarship

Interpretive and exegetical scholarship on the Gospel of Matthew has been quite prolific, particularly over the last forty years.⁵³ Although one could note many important contributions and trends, the following are particularly pertinent for the Great Commission pericope. First, there has been an increasing interest in the structure of Matthew which recognizes the care he took in arranging his material.⁵⁴ Of note are the proposals that emphasize the role of the Great Commission pericope as structurally situated to provide a key to interpreting the entire Gospel.⁵⁵ Although

⁵³For an overview of key trends in Matthean scholarship through 1998, see Douglas R. A. Hare, "Current Trends in Matthean Scholarship," *Word & World* 18, no. 4 (September 1998): 405–10.

⁵⁴For a good summary of contemporary proposals, see David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, JSNTSup 31 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1988), 21-56.

⁵⁵Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 165; Oscar S. Brooks, "Matthew 28:16-20 and the Design of the First Gospel," *JSNT* 10 (January 1981): 2; Robert Duncan Culver, *A Greater Commission: A Theology for World Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 11; Andrew Ryder, *Following Christ: Models of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 1999), 52; Peter F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1974), 19. David P. Scaer, "The Relation of Matthew 28:16-20 to the Rest of the Gospel," *CTQ* 55, no. 4 (October 1991): 246; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 66; Saunders, *Preaching the Gospel*, 299. Davies and Allison summarize the passage's role as the conclusion of the Gospel: "28:16-20 . . . is, from the literary point of view, perfect, in the sense that it satisfyingly completes the Gospel: we could hardly improve upon it. Nothing is superfluous, yet nothing more could be added without spoiling the effect. The grand denouement, so consonant with the spirit of the whole Gospel because so full of resonances with earlier passages, is, despite its terseness, almost a compendium of Matthean theology." W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, vol. 3 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC

scholars variously interpret this passage, a growing consensus insists that Matthew organized his gospel in such a way that the themes present in 28:16-20 are fundamental to Matthew's overall message.

Second, and integrally related to the emphasis on Matthew's structure, scholars have applied rhetorical and narrative criticism to the study of Matthew. Following giants of rhetorical criticism such as George Kennedy,⁵⁶ many scholars have utilized rhetorical criticism to study Matthew.⁵⁷ Likewise, narrative criticism, the examination of Scripture through the lens of modern literary critical studies, has proven to be an advantageous method of Matthean scholarship. Starting with the pioneering work of Jack Kingsbury, many have recognized the value of viewing the Gospel of Matthew as a cohesive literary work, thus examining how the pericopes function together as part of Matthew's overall message.⁵⁸ The pertinence for these two avenues of scholarship is that they affirm that the Great Commission pericope is integral to Matthew's purpose for his Gospel. However, these analyses are most often of Matthew as a whole or particular themes in Matthew; to date, no one has written a monograph about the Great Commission pericope from either the standpoint of rhetorical or narrative criticism. Also, in regard to the relevance of this dissertation, no one has yet used these interpretive methods for a monograph-level treatment of the preaching and application of the imperative of 28:19.

(New York: T & T Clark, 1997), 687.

⁵⁶Kennedy argues that the books of the New Testament are rhetorical documents created by men who would have at least a basic understanding of rhetoric, so "approaching the New Testament through classical rhetoric is thus historically justified." George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 10.

⁵⁷See the following for two applications of rhetoric to the study of Matthew. Robert Allan Vogel, "Against Your Brother: Conflict Themes and the Rhetoric of the Gospel According to Matthew" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1989); Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

⁵⁸See especially Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

Third, scholars have given attention to the social setting of Matthew, with particular focus on the distinction between Jewish and Gentile mission. Anthony Saldarini⁵⁹ and Amy-Jill Levine,⁶⁰ for example, have used (respectively) a sociological and an ethnographic analysis to argue that the Matthean community was primarily Jewish. The relevance for the social setting of the Gospel of Matthew to the Great Commission pericope is how one should understand the missions mandate, whether it is to Gentiles or to both Jews and Gentiles. Several recent works address this important question, attempting through various interpretive methods to ascertain to whom the mission of 28:19-20 is intended.⁶¹ However, despite the recent attention given to the question of the target group of the mission, few have addressed how this interpretive decision impacts sermonic application.⁶² The need remains for a clearly articulated explanation of how this interpretive decision impacts how a preacher explains the practical application to his congregation.

⁵⁹Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁶⁰Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*.

⁶¹Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, eds., *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Ulrich Luz, "Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of Matthew as a Historical and Theological Problem: An Outline," in *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 243-64; A. J. Levine, "To All the Gentiles: A Jewish Perspective on the Great Commission," *RevExp* 103, no. 1 (2006): 139-58; Matthias Konrad, "Die Sendung zu Israel und zu den Völkern im Mattheusevangelium im Lichte seiner narrativen Christologie," *ZTK* 101 (2004): 397-425; Matthias Konrad, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Wayne Coppins and Simon Gathercole, trans. Kathleen Ess (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

⁶²John Piper's *Let the Nations Be Glad!* is perhaps the work that most carefully explains the practical implications for πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 167-218. However, although Piper provides application for interpreting this passage as directed to the nations, he does not take into consideration whether there are any applicational implications if the missions mandate also includes the Jews. Also, it is neither academically oriented, nor does it seek to provide a hermeneutically-driven application for preaching the Great Commission pericope.

Hermeneutic of Application

A final area of relevance for this dissertation concerns the current literature on a hermeneutic of application. Many of these works are principle-based in their approach, meaning that they provide a series of principles or rules that may be followed in order to determine the practical implications that flow out of a given passage. Indeed, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard contend, “Recent evangelical analysis has come to a consensus that the key to legitimate application involves what many writers call ‘principlizing.’”⁶³ Some of these approaches provide general rules,⁶⁴ while others seek to articulate principles for discerning application in light of the differences between the culture of the biblical author and the modern reader.⁶⁵ However, despite the commonality of a principle-based method, the recent contribution of Abraham Kuruvilla takes a somewhat different approach by building on Paul Ricoeur’s concept of the world in front of a text.⁶⁶ While holding to the primacy of authorial intent, Kuruvilla contends that the original textual sense should also be understood through what the author is *doing* with the text (his purpose for the biblical book in general and the pericope in particular). In Kuruvilla’s words, each pericope has a world in front of the text that bears a transhistorical intention; the preacher may apply the transhistorical intention through “exemplifications” that are

⁶³William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 483. See also the arguments for principlizing in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

⁶⁴An example is the four-stage model in Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 483-503.

⁶⁵One of the best known is William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003).

⁶⁶See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013). Ricoeur’s world in front of the text is a means to “bridge Lessing’s ditch” and “to link Kant’s noumenal and phenomenal worlds.” Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 60.

specific to the modern audience, yet are in accord with what the author was doing in his original writing.⁶⁷ Kuruvilla's approach has received attention among many homileticians, yet few have applied his method to specific biblical books or passages. Concerning this dissertation topic, no one has yet utilized a hermeneutical approach such as transhistorical intentions and the world in front of the text to ascertain the implications for sermonic application of the Great Commission.

Although much scholarship is available on the Great Commission pericope, a need still remains for an academic treatment of the preaching of this passage. In particular, contemporary scholarship offers very little concerning a hermeneutic of application. The goal of this dissertation is to help fill this gap by providing a hermeneutically robust analysis of the imperative of the Great Commission in order to delineate the application that the preacher should articulate.

Of course, in considering the contemporary research on this passage and this dissertation on preaching the imperative of the Great Commission, one may wonder, "Why this passage? Why should there be a dissertation on preaching such a short section of Scripture?" Beyond the above explanation of the need to fill a gap in current academic literature, perhaps no other passage has exerted more influence in the evangelical church in the past two hundred years. In his brief overview of the history of the interpretation of the Great Commission passage, David Wright contends, "The Great Commission is the single most important statement of commissioning of the Christian church from the risen Christ. In terms of what the church should be doing, the New Testament contains no other passage of comparable significance."⁶⁸ His assertion is undoubtedly correct, as is evident from the influence this passage has had in modern evangelicalism. Since it is the marching

⁶⁷Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 35.

⁶⁸Wright, "Great Commission," 135.

orders for the church, rightly understanding how one should preach the imperative of Matthew 28:19 is of major importance.⁶⁹ The aim of this dissertation is to be an aid to the church and her mission by contributing to the scholarship of the Great Commission in order to help articulate sermonic application of the imperative that is hermeneutically grounded and flows out of authorial intent.

Methodology

Expository preaching, by its very nature, is transdisciplinary. It necessarily must utilize many different avenues of scholarship in order to rightly understand the meaning of the text and then communicate that meaning effectively in such a way that the congregation not only learns the meaning of the text, but how it is to impact their lives. Thus, preaching is the culmination of such disciplines as hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics. Therefore, a dissertation that seeks to discern the proper sermonic application of a biblical passage must draw from numerous disciplines in order not only to articulate the authorial intent of the pericope, but also to explain the contemporary application that corresponds with the textual meaning.

Methodologically, hermeneutics drives this dissertation. Because “hermeneutics may be regarded as the *theory* that guides exegesis,” biblical interpretation is necessarily grounded in hermeneutics.⁷⁰ However, this dissertation does not assume a particular hermeneutical method, but explicitly expounds a hermeneutic that articulates the single meaning intended by the author, while at the same time recognizing that the meaning of the author is transhistorical in both its intent and application.

⁶⁹For an example of a sermon that utilizes this language of “marching orders,” see Daniel L. Akin, “SEBTS Commencement Sermon: The Final Marching Orders of King Jesus—Matthew 28:18-20” (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2015), accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.danielakin.com/sebts-commencement-sermon-the-final-marching-orders-of-king-jesus-matthew-2818-20/>.

⁷⁰Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 47.

Specifically, the method used in this dissertation is closely related to the hermeneutic of application proposed by Abraham Kuruvilla in *Privilege the Text!* Kuruvilla's purpose in this monograph is "the traversal from the *then* of the text to the *now* of the audience."⁷¹ His means for such a traversal is through his use of Paul Ricoeur's concept of the world in front of the text. In other words, Kuruvilla suggests that the meaning of the text has transhistorical intentions (the world in front of the text) that has contemporary exemplifications, namely ways that the reader can apply the author's transhistorical intention. Kuruvilla takes this broad concept of the world in front of the text and more narrowly defines it by his own conceptualization of authorial intent, transhistorical intention, and exemplifications for each pericope, the whole process of which he terms pericopal theology. More specifically, he argues that the purpose of each text is christiconic, meaning that each pericope contains a divine demand that is intended to conform the reader or hearer more to Christ.⁷² The hermeneutical methodology of this dissertation will build on Kuruvilla's concept of transhistorical intentions; however, whereas Kuruvilla's approach is primarily pericopal, the dissertation expands the hermeneutic to give greater emphasis to the unitary nature of the book of Matthew in order to discern not only what the author intended in the pericope of 28:16-20, but how Matthew's transhistorical intentions for the pericope are governed by what he was *doing* (his purpose for the gospel) in the entire book.

In addition to its hermeneutical focus, this dissertation, since it concerns analysis of a particular passage, necessarily includes biblical interpretation; rightly preaching the application of a text depends on right interpretation of that passage. Thus, this dissertation brings to bear various tools of interpretation on the question

⁷¹Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 20.

⁷²For a brief summary of the book, see *ibid.*, 271-73.

of the proper understanding of the meaning of Matthew 28:19. Translational scholarship plays a role, particularly for understanding *πορευθέντες* and *ἔθνη*; how these two words are translated have a major impact on the application for the passage. In addition to standard lexical and grammatical analyses, this dissertation also applies the advances from rhetorical and narrative criticism to key interpretive decisions, particularly in understanding how Matthew's overall purpose impacts the meaning and application for disciple-making and the nations. The use of rhetorical and narrative methods of interpretation thus take into consideration not only the pericopal theology (to use Kuruvilla's terminology) of the passage, but also the scope of what Matthew intended to accomplish in the Great Commission pericope as the *peroratio* of the entire gospel.

Yet, as a dissertation in Christian preaching, the fundamental concern of this work is sermonic application. Whereas hermeneutical and interpretive analysis is a necessary concomitant of discerning authorial intent, the ultimate aim of the dissertation is to articulate how a preacher should exhort his congregation to respond faithfully to the text. The methodological approach to application used herein is that the exhortation of the sermon should match as closely as possible the exhortation intended by the biblical author.⁷³ However, traversing the divide between the biblical and contemporary world is not always a simple correspondence of identical concepts. A helpful means of ensuring that the modern application appropriately corresponds to the application intended by the author is to use what Haddon Robinson describes as a "ladder of abstraction" that seeks to ensure that the preacher exhorts his hearers to respond in a way that is as closely analogous as

⁷³Evangelical homileticians recognize the necessity of sermonic application that corresponds to the author's intended meaning. For example, see York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 77-80.

possible to what the biblical author intended.⁷⁴ This dissertation attempts to describe application that is as close as possible to what Matthew intended for his readers; when the correspondence of the application is not identical between the original and modern reader, abstraction provides a way to suggest application that is highly analogous to that which Matthew intended.

Although already narrowly focused in topic on the sermonic application of the imperative of the Great Commission, several limitations restrict the scope of this dissertation. First, the primary analysis is of the clause *πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* in Matthew 28:19, not the entire pericope of 28:16-20. The scholarship available for the whole passage is quite substantial, and a thorough hermeneutical, interpretational, and applicational examination of the other verses would be far more than this work could accomplish. This dissertation addresses other verses of the passage only as they impact the interpretation of the imperative of 28:19. Second, the subject of this study is only the Great Commission passage of Matthew 28; whereas examining other commissioning passages (such as Acts 1:8) certainly has benefit for understanding the entire New Testament picture of the commission of the disciples, the aim of this work is to examine only the Matthean commission. Third, the homiletic focus is only application derived from interpretation, not other sermonic elements such as illustration; however, in order to further demonstrate how one could preach the imperative of the Great Commission, an appendix provides a

⁷⁴Haddon W. Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Craig Brian Larson and Haddon W. Robinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 306–11. See also Hershael York’s affirmation of this method in York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 79–81. Robinson is not alone in his affirmation of the need for this kind of abstraction, for a process of abstracting application is commonly cited as a way to articulate potential contemporary responses to a passage. For example, William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard Jr. suggest that applications have different levels of authority; the closer the contemporary application is to the original intent, the greater confidence one may have that the application is correct. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 500–503. This dissertation cites Haddon Robinson’s ladder of abstraction in recognition that it is one among many similar models of application.

sample sermon. Given these limitations on the extent of the analysis in this dissertation, many avenues of research remain available for scholarly inquiry into both the interpretation of the Great Commission pericope and how one should preach it.

Overview and Chapters

Chapter 1 introduces the dissertation by describing the diversity of sermonic treatment of the Great Commission and the lack of a detailed hermeneutic of application for the passage. Chapter 2 proceeds to establish the hermeneutic that drives the conclusions of the dissertation. It begins by summarizing three principlizing approaches, noting the distinctive elements of each: Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard in *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*; William Larkin in *Cultural Hermeneutics*; and Robertson McQuilkin in *Understanding and Applying the Bible* and “Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent.” It also briefly describes the principlization of Walter Kaiser, which is slightly different from the other principle-based approaches in that he advocates that antecedent theology should determine meaning and application. In contrast to these methods, the primary hermeneutic of the dissertation is closely related to that espoused by Abraham Kuruvilla, which is itself based on Paul Ricoeur’s concept of the world in front of the text. This chapter explains this hermeneutic and argues for its advantageous use in determining application based not only on the pericope, but Matthew’s overall purpose for his gospel.

Chapter 3 begins the interpretive analysis of verse 19 by attempting to answer the question of for whom the Great Commission is intended. It summarizes five key views that are evident throughout church history, giving particular attention to how preachers have articulated to whom it is intended. Each of these views includes a synthesis of the key hermeneutical principles that undergird the view.

Finally, the chapter argues that Matthew intends the imperative to apply to every believer; this conclusion derives not only from interpretation of the pericope, but also from Matthew's overall rhetorical purpose in the gospel.⁷⁵

Chapter 4 seeks to answer three remaining exegetical decisions which are necessary before determining contemporary application: what Matthew means by "make disciples," the best translation of *πορευθέντες*, and the meaning of *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. The chapter examines these interpretive issues using standard exegetical tools such as semantic analysis, but also incorporates how the book-level methods of rhetorical and narrative criticism help to determine authorial intent. It offers the following conclusions: Matthew's conceptualization of "make disciples" involves both evangelism and discipling less mature believers, *πορευθέντες* has an imperatival function, and *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* refers to all people groups and includes both Jews and Gentiles.

Chapter 5 takes the conclusions drawn from chapters 3 and 4 in order to explain the transhistorical intentions and contemporary exemplifications that a preacher may extrapolate from Matthew's intended meaning. The intended audience is every believer, so the imperative's significance is for every disciple of Christ. Because the imperative is for every follower of Christ, the command is that every Christian should actively seek to make disciples through proclaiming the good news of the gospel and seeking to aid less mature believers in becoming mature disciples. The applicational implications of the meaning of "nations" help to define the locale

⁷⁵I agree with Michael Wilkins that Matthew's gospel is at least in part a manual on discipleship. With all of the major discourses directed at least in part to the *μαθηταί*, with the term arranged in such a way that most sayings directed to the disciples have become teachings on discipleship, with the positive yet realistic enhancement of the picture of the disciples, and with the disciples called and trained and commissioned to carry out the climactic mandate to "make disciples" in the conclusion of the gospel, Matthew has constructed a gospel that will equip the disciples in the making of disciples.

Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988), 172.

of the imperative; specifically, since the mission is to both Jews and Gentiles, the Great Commission concerns not only the nations, but also one's own community. Finally, understanding *πορευθέντες* as predominantly imperatival in force demonstrates the intentionality that is necessary in going to those who need to hear the gospel and in actively engaging in discipling less mature believers.

The final chapter summarizes the preceding chapters. It also suggests a few additional lines of inquiry for further study of preaching the pericope. In order to further facilitate the homiletical implications of the conclusions of this dissertation, an appendix provides a sample sermon of Matthew 28:16-20.

CHAPTER 2

HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES TO APPLICATION

As the previous chapter demonstrates, the interpretation of the Great Commission pericope is quite diverse, which consequently leads to a broad array of ways preachers have articulated the practical application that flows out of this passage. In order to determine how a preacher should explain the contemporary implications of this text, one must first establish a hermeneutic of application. The purpose of this chapter is to delineate such a method that a preacher or interpreter may use to determine the contemporary, practical implications that correspond to Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19.

Although the aim of this chapter is to present a hermeneutic of application that guides interpretation and application throughout the remainder of the dissertation, the commonality of several other approaches provides an impetus for first summarizing some of the most well-known evangelical hermeneutics of application. Though certainly not exhaustive, the methods outlined below represent some of the most common that one might find used by evangelical preachers. Because these methods have proven to be of great benefit to the church and are broadly known among either preachers or scholars, this chapter outlines their use in order to provide both the background and contrast necessary to expound the hermeneutic of application advocated herein. Having articulated these methods, the chapter concludes by presenting a way forward for discerning application that closely corresponds to authorial intention.

Four Clarifications

Before expounding the hermeneutic of application used in this dissertation, clarification is necessary to delineate several key concepts that are pertinent to the proposal of this chapter. First, one must consider the meaning of the term “hermeneutic of application.” “Hermeneutics” broadly concerns the theory that guides interpretation, and in biblical scholarship it refers to the theory or principles used in determining the meaning of the text.¹ Recent scholarship has been quite prolific in biblical hermeneutics, offering many variations on precisely what hermeneutics both means and includes.² However, the concern of this dissertation is not recent debates about the nature of biblical hermeneutics, but instead uses the term “hermeneutics” to describe what is at the core of the concept: the theory that guides interpretation. Therefore, the term “hermeneutic of application” refers to the theory or set of principles that one uses to determine the application that flows out of the interpretation of a biblical passage.

Second, this chapter and the entirety of this dissertation assumes the primacy of authorial intent in discerning the meaning of the text.³ Contemporary

¹Thus, Anthony Thiselton writes, “Hermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own.” Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 1.

²Robert Thomas provides a helpful overview of some recent works in hermeneutics and the varying emphases that each gives to what constitutes biblical hermeneutics. He contends that many contemporary works obfuscate the nature of hermeneutics by adding various concepts to the core of interpretation, which is using the grammatical-historical method to determine the meaning of a text. Robert L. Thomas, “Current Hermeneutical Trends: Toward Explanation or Obfuscation?,” *JETS* 39, no. 2 (1996): 241–56.

³Although some evangelicals have become increasingly open to a plurality of meaning through *sensus plenior*, this dissertation affirms that the meaning of a biblical passage is singular. Indeed, article seven of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics states, “We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed.” “Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), 881–87. For arguments rejecting *sensus plenior* and affirming the singular meaning of the text, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Single Intent of Scripture,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 55–69.

hermeneutical scholarship evidences a wide-ranging approach to discerning meaning, in particular a movement away from author-oriented theories.⁴ Despite the commonality and influence of this shift, the analysis of this dissertation affirms the evangelical consensus that authorial intent is foundational not only to discerning the meaning of the text, but also its application.⁵ Specifically, using the definition of Robert Stein, meaning is “what the author consciously willed to convey by the words he or she has given to us.”⁶

Third, “application” refers to the way in which a contemporary reader may legitimately respond to the author’s intended meaning. In other words, “Application refers to the task of relating the Author’s authoritative message to the believer.”⁷ A biblical author wrote for a specific contextual situation, yet the message of the text is transcultural and temporally transcendent in that it remains authoritative and applicable for all time. For this reason, the apostle Paul states, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every

⁴For a helpful overview of some of these theories and issues, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 465-521. For a more in-depth treatment of key hermeneutical theories over the past two hundred years, see Stanley E. Porter and Jason Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2011).

⁵The following quotes demonstrate the evangelical consensus that authorial intent is foundational for discerning the meaning of the text and its application. Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 24: “The goal of evangelical hermeneutics is quite simple—to discover the intention of the Author/author (author = inspired human author; Author = God who inspires the text).” I. Howard Marshall, introduction to *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 15: “Our aim is to discover what the text meant in the mind of its original author for his intended audience.”

⁶Robert H. Stein, “The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics,” *JETS* 44, no. 3 (2001): 456. For a more linguistically technical definition of meaning, consider that of E. D. Hirsch: “Verbal meaning is whatever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those signs.” E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 31. This dissertation assumes the intelligibility of an author’s meaning through the conveyed signs (i.e., the language used by the author) in the text itself.

⁷Elliot Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 224. Elliot capitalizes “Author” to emphasize God’s role in determining the message of the text.

good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).⁸ Therefore, application in preaching concerns rightly understanding the author’s intended meaning and then properly relating that meaning to how the contemporary hearer should live in light of the text’s meaning.⁹ A hermeneutic of application, therefore, is the means whereby one may determine how the textual meaning rightly relates to the modern hearer.

Fourth, a hermeneutic of application must sufficiently address the problem of distancing so that it provides a way of explaining how a contextualized meaning (a text that is embedded in a specific historical context) should elicit a corresponding response from a different audience at a different time. One of the most difficult problems of contemporary hermeneutics concerns the distances of time, language, geography, and culture—not only for discerning the author’s intended meaning, but also for determining in what sense that original meaning is applicable to someone in a different time and setting.¹⁰ One of the major modern ways of answering the problem of distancing is to shift the *locus* of meaning

⁸Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical citations are from the English Standard Version.

⁹Milton Terry provides a classic statement of the homiletical necessity of basing application upon the author’s intended meaning. At the end of several hundred pages about the nature of biblical interpretation, he writes,

Accordingly, in homiletical discourse, the public teacher is bound to base his applications of the truths and lessons of the divine word upon a correct apprehension of the primary signification of the language which he assumes to expound and enforce. To misinterpret the sacred writer is to discredit any application one may make of his words. But when, on the other hand, the preacher first shows, by a valid interpretation, that he thoroughly comprehends that which is written, his various allowable accommodations of the writer’s words will have the greater force, in whatever practical applications he may give them.

Milton Spenser Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, rev. ed. (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1890), 469, accessed January 13, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/biblicalhermeneu00terruoft>. In his classic text on preaching, William Perkins describes application as “the skill by which the doctrine which has been properly drawn from the Scriptures is handled in ways which are appropriate to the circumstances of the place and time and to the people in the congregation.” William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying; With the Calling of the Ministry*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 54. These two quotations, separated by more than two hundred years, indicate the common evangelical understanding of application as properly explaining how the author’s intended meaning should correspond to the life of the contemporary hearer.

¹⁰William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard use these four categories of distance to describe some of the challenges of interpreting the Bible. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 13-17.

from the text to the self. . . . The result is that the reader is now seen as the creator of meaning rather than the text, and the act of “coming to understanding” has become an individual self-discovery more than a process of decoding textual meaning. The author is now seen as entirely removed from the text or the discovery of meaning.¹¹

Many modern hermeneutical theories, therefore, suggest that meaning is a product of the reader’s interaction with a text rather than the author’s intent.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, highly influenced by the existential metaphysics of Heidegger, is perhaps the key figure in modern hermeneutics for re-orienting meaning to the reader’s experience of the text rather than authorial intent.¹² He contends that a “fusion of horizons” happens as a reader encounters a text; however, this fusion does not refer to the reader’s understanding of the author’s meaning, but is a dialectic that occurs between the reader and the text. By positing this fusion of horizons, Gadamer seeks to remove the problem of distancing; since meaning is not found primarily in the author’s intent but in the reader’s encounter of the text in the present, no longer is authorial meaning necessary for determining meaning for the reader. Thus, this fusion of horizons simplifies the hermeneutical challenge of application, for one’s experience of the text dictates how one responds. Therefore, since the *locus* of meaning and application is in the present in one’s encounter with the text, distancing is effectively nullified. Of course, Gadamer’s conclusion is untenable for a number of reasons, not least of which are its susceptibility to subjectivity, rejection of the primacy of authorial intent, and distortion of the doctrine of inspiration.¹³

¹¹Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 467.

¹²I am heavily indebted to the summary of Gadamer’s work found in *ibid.*, 469-71. For a more thorough overview of Gadamer’s hermeneutic, see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 206-27. For Gadamer’s work itself, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

¹³Walter Kaiser describes the subjectivity and thus hermeneutical inadequacy of Gadamer’s method: because “the meaning of a text *always* goes beyond what its author intended,” determining the meaning of a text “is an unending process which is never exhausted or captured by an infinite line of interpreters.” Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 30.

In response to the re-orientation of hermeneutics around the reader, many have heralded E. D. Hirsch's attempt to place the sphere of meaning in authorial intent. Hirsch, in considering the separation of meaning from the author, rightly states, "Once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation."¹⁴ His solution is to distinguish between meaning and how the text relates to the reader, for hermeneutics had unnecessarily united these concepts without recognizing their distinguishing features. For Hirsch,

Meaning is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.¹⁵

His distinction between meaning and significance allows one to affirm that the meaning of a text is unchanging, while also providing a way for contending that the text has relevance for the contemporary reader.

The implications for biblical interpretation and preaching are obvious—the meaning of a biblical passage depends on the author's intent, but that meaning also has relevance for the modern reader. Biblical and homiletics scholars have been quick to affirm the utility of Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance as a way to understand contemporary application.¹⁶ However, despite Hirsch's enormous contribution to hermeneutics, one should not overstate his theory's ability to provide a means for articulating application. He contends that significance "names a relationship between that meaning [authorial intent] and a person," but he does

¹⁴Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 3.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶For example, see Scott A. Blue, "The Hermeneutic of E. D. Hirsch, Jr. and Its Impact on Expository Preaching: Friend or Foe?," *JETS* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 253–69; Stein, "Author-Oriented Approach;" Jerry Vines and David Lewis Allen, "Hermeneutics, Exegesis, and Proclamation," *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (1987): 315–16.

not precisely state the nature of that relationship or how to determine if a significance ascertained by the reader properly corresponds to the author's meaning.¹⁷ Vern Poythress perceptively notes this limitation of Hirsch's theory: "There are many possible 'significances,' even for a single reader. There are many possible applications. What then distinguishes a good from a bad application of a passage of the Bible? Is it up to the reader's whim?"¹⁸

Assuming the validity of Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance, an interpreter must be able to relate meaning to legitimate significance. Concerning the subject matter of this dissertation, a hermeneutic of application must be able to articulate a significance that *properly* corresponds to the meaning of the text. Thus, it must be capable of not only discerning the potential significances of a passage, but also explaining how application is *properly* significant based on the author's intended meaning. This chapter seeks to delineate a hermeneutic of application that provides a way to identify the generally intended significance of Jesus's words "πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη."¹⁹

Step-Based Approaches

One of the most common ways to determine the application that flows out of a biblical passage is what this dissertation terms "step-based approaches." In other words, these methodologies espouse a series of steps or guidelines that an interpreter may use to elucidate in what way the biblical text has a continuing normativity for the modern reader. According to the proponents of these methods,

¹⁷Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 8.

¹⁸Vern S. Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture," *WTJ* 48, no. 2 (September 1986): 245.

¹⁹By using the phrase "generally intended significance," this dissertation recognizes that the specific significances may differ from individual to individual based on that person's setting and God's work in that person's life. Chapter 5 more thoroughly fleshes out some of these distinctions in possible significances.

by following certain steps or guidelines, one would accurately be able to discern the application for that passage. Each of the methodologies described below is evangelical, affirming the authority of Scripture and the necessity of application that derives from the meaning of the text. Using Hirsch's terminology of meaning and significance, these approaches assert that the original authorial meaning of a passage remains unchanged for the contemporary audience and that the significance is determined by generalizing the original application so that it may apply to the modern audience. The following approaches are three well-known step-based methods used by evangelicals. The first, as perhaps the most common of the methods, is explained in the greatest detail, and the other two provide a slight contrast or differing emphasis in methodology.

Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard

William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr.'s *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* is a widely-used introduction to biblical hermeneutics, and it represents a common approach to both interpretation and application. Like most evangelicals, they contend that application is a necessary part of interpretation and preaching: it "focuses the truth of God's Word to specific, life-related situations. It helps people understand what to do or to use what they have learned."²⁰ The means they use for discerning the practical implications of a text is "principlizing," which they describe as the means to discern "in a narrative [i.e., a text] the spiritual, moral, or theological principles that have relevance for the contemporary believer."²¹

Principlizing, the general method of application in *Introduction to Biblical*

²⁰Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 477.

²¹Their definition of principlizing comes from Henry Virkler and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo. For their citation of Virkler and Ayayo, see Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 483. For the original quotation, see Henry A. Virkler and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 194-95.

Interpretation, is, perhaps, the most fundamental, contemporary way of determining the application for a text.²²

In their method, they offer four steps for determining these principles. First, the reader should “determine the original application(s) intended by the passage.”²³ This stage of their model seeks to ascertain how the author wanted the original audience to respond to the message of the text. By first identifying the original application, the interpreter may determine to what degree that application corresponds to how the modern reader should respond.

Second, the interpreter should assess the level of specificity of the original application and determine if it is transferable to a contemporary setting. This guideline specifically concerns the issue of how the original context and culture limits the continuing normativity or application of the passage. They propose ten questions that the interpreter may use to determine in what sense the setting of the text may limit the passage’s contemporary application:

1. Does the text present a broad theological or moral principle or does it give a specific manifestation of such a principle, which another book of Scripture elsewhere embodies in one or more different forms?

²²Numerous authors contend for principlizing as the means for determining the application of a passage. Bernard Ramm writes, “To *principlize* is to discover in any narrative the basic spiritual, moral, or theological principles. These principles are latent in the text and it is the process of deduction which brings them to the surface. It is not an imposition on the text.” Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 199-200. To expand the above citation in *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Virkler and Ayayo explain, “Principlizing is an attempt to discover in a narrative the spiritual, moral, and/or theological principles that have relevance for the contemporary believer. It is based on the assumption that the Holy Spirit chose those historical incidents recorded in Scripture for a purpose to give information, to make a point, to illustrate an important truth, and so on. Principlizing attempts to understand a biblical account in such a way that we can recognize the original reason it was included in Scripture, the principles it was meant to teach.” Virkler and Ayayo, *Hermeneutics*, 194-95. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays affirm principlization as the means to determine application. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 21-25, 213-23. Walter Kaiser, Jr., is one of the primary proponents of principlization. He writes, “Principlization seeks to bridge the ‘then’ of the text’s narrative with the ‘now’ needs of our day.” Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 198. Eliot Johnson summarizes the views of contemporary evangelical hermeneutics in stating, “There appears to be a general consensus among evangelicals that principles drawn from the Bible become the basis of application.” Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics*, 229.

²³Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 483.

2. Does the larger context of the same book of Scripture in which the passage appears limit the application in any way or does it promote a more universal application?
3. Does subsequent revelation limit the application of a particular passage even if the book in which it appears does not?
4. Is the specific teaching “contradicted” elsewhere in ways that show it was limited to exceptional situations?
5. Are cultural conditions identified in Scripture or assumed by its authors that make it inappropriate always to apply a given text in the same way?
6. Is the particular cultural form expressed in the biblical text present today, and if so does it have the same significance as it did then?
7. Is the rationale for the application rooted in a creation ordinance, in the character of God, or in part of his redemptive plan for humanity?
8. Is the command or application at variance with standard cultural norms of the day?
9. Does the passage contain an explicit or implicit condition that limits its application?
10. Should we adopt a “redemptive movement” hermeneutic?²⁴

By posing these questions to the text, the interpreter may discern whether the passage has continuing normativity for the contemporary audience.

Third, if the questions posed in the second step indicate the original applications are not transferrable to the modern reader, one should “identify one or more broader cross-cultural principles that the specific elements of the text reflect.”²⁵ This step, therefore, allows the interpreter to principlize the concept found in the text to discern a broader principle from the specific statement or command in the passage. Key to this process is that the “closer the modern application corresponds to the application in the biblical text, the greater the degree of confidence we have that our application is legitimate.”²⁶

Fourth, the reader should “find appropriate applications for today that

²⁴Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 487-98.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 483.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 500. One should note that this step seeks to provide an answer to Poythress’ question of how to determine legitimate significance. The closer the contemporary application is to the original application intended by the biblical author, the greater confidence the preacher may have that the application is faithful to the biblical text. This concept of the correspondence of the original application with the modern application is a key component of step-based methods.

implement those principles.”²⁷ After determining a general principle that stands behind the specific statement or prescription in the text, the task remains to articulate a practical way to carry out the general principle. The authors do not provide specific instruction about how to determine these points of application, but they emphasize that one should give careful consideration to modern implications of the text. They conclude by urging modern interpreters to have a strong understanding of their own world so that they can apply the biblical principles in a way that rightly corresponds to the meaning of the text and its original application: “Faithful application of the Bible to new contexts requires that we become as earnest in our study of the contemporary world as we are of Scripture itself.”

Robertson McQuilkin

Robertson McQuilkin has been quite influential in biblical hermeneutics.²⁸ He takes a somewhat different approach from the authors of *Introduction to Interpretation* in that he begins with the presupposition that all of Scripture is normative. This assertion is the first principle in his two-step model, for he contends that “a fully authoritative Bible means that every teaching in Scripture is universal unless Scripture itself treats it as limited.”²⁹ Thus, whereas *Introduction to Interpretation* provides a series of questions to determine whether the original application is transferrable, McQuilkin assumes its normativity and transferability.

²⁷Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 483.

²⁸Robertson McQuilkin (1927-2016) served as a missionary for twelve years in Japan and later was the third president of Columbia International University (1968-1990). He famously resigned as president to care for his wife, Muriel, who had Alzheimer’s disease. His influence in hermeneutics is broadly recognized through his *Understanding and Applying the Bible* and his participation in the second summit of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. See Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009); J. Robertson McQuilkin, “Problems in Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984): 219-40.

²⁹McQuilkin, “Problems in Normativeness,” 230.

However, despite these presuppositions, McQuilkin, like *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, offers a series of questions to ascertain if the *Bible itself* limits a passage's normativity, because only Scripture, not culture, can limit a passage's normativity or transferability.

1. Does the context limit the recipient or application?
2. Does subsequent revelation limit the recipient or the application?
3. Is this specific teaching in conflict with other biblical teaching?
4. Is the reason for a norm given in Scripture and is that reason treated as normative?
5. Is the specific teaching normative as well as the principle behind it?
6. Does the Bible treat the historic context as normative?³⁰

The second major step guiding McQuilkin's method is application, namely that a response to the text requires "faith and obedience to both the direct teachings and the principles of Scripture."³¹ In other words, two general applications flow out of a biblical passage: faith and obedience. If a passage teaches a doctrine, the response that the text demands is belief in that teaching, but not merely mental assent to its truthfulness, but the application of that doctrine to one's own life. If a passage includes an explicit directive, the response required is obedience to the command. Of course, not all texts give a clear command, but may instead include a general principle.³² Flowing out of his assumption of normativity and transferability of scriptural passages, however, he concludes that even such principles demand faith and obedience. He explains, "When those principles are clearly the revealed will of God, they have equal authority with explicit declarations of doctrine or directives for

³⁰McQuilkin, "Problems in Normativeness," 230-40. In his *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, McQuilkin only provides the first two delimitations concerning the normativity of the biblical statement. See McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 307-14.

³¹McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 327.

³²McQuilkin describes four sources of principles: (1) explicitly stated principles, (2) general principles derived from explicit declaration, (3) general principles derived from historical passages, and (4) general principles derived from passages that do not directly apply to contemporary life. See *ibid.*, 330-38.

life. Faith and obedience are the responses God expects to His revelation.”³³

McQuilkin offers two clarifications for how the historical and cultural embeddedness of Scripture impacts application. First, concerning an event recorded in historical narrative, he argues that “the historic context of a teaching is normative only if Scripture treats it that way.”³⁴ Therefore, an event in a narrative is not normative unless that or another passage views the event as in some way an example to be followed. He suggests that the narrative of David’s sin with Bathsheba, for example, should not be held as exemplary because other passages describe adultery as sin. Second, regarding the role of culture in application, he states that “the culture context is normative unless Scripture treats it as limited.”³⁵ By this statement he means that one should consider the behavior prescribed or proscribed in Scripture as normative regardless of one’s culture unless “the *Bible itself* gives a culturally based reason for a particular teaching.”³⁶ However, he concedes that if the biblical command addresses people in a particular cultural setting and that setting is not present in one’s modern culture, the specific biblical command may be applied through a generic principle. He explains, “If Scripture expresses no moral injunction that the situation be recreated, the generic principle that undergirds the biblical injunction rather than the culturally or historically limited injunction itself should be applied to other situations.”³⁷ He considers greeting one another with a holy kiss (1 Cor 16:20) as such a command in which the modern believer should apply the general principle of “unity and cordial relationships,” not necessarily the specific

³³McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 336.

³⁴McQuilkin, “Problems in Normativeness,” 237.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 320.

³⁷Ibid., 320-21.

form mandated in the text.³⁸

These brief outlines of the methodologies of *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* and McQuilkin note some distinctions in principlizing methodology. McQuilkin's hermeneutic of application is unique in his presupposition of the normativity and transferability of all biblical teaching. Also, he provides additional explanation to the way in which culture or history may impact how one views normativity, all while still affirming the normativity of the text unless Scripture itself limits the way that the reader should apply the passage. Yet, despite the variations in their assumptions and guidelines for principlization, the underlying methodology of *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* and McQuilkin is relatively the same—following a prescribed series of steps should elicit application that appropriately corresponds to the principle inherent in the biblical text.

William Larkin, Jr.

Although the above proposals give some attention to the issue of how to discern normativity in light of the text's original setting, William Larkin devotes the entirety of his *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics* to discerning how a biblical interpreter may apply the message of a culturally-situated biblical text. Aware of the "gap that yawns between the culture in which the Bible was written and . . . the contemporary cultures to which the Word must now be addressed," Larkin seeks to answer this hermeneutical difficulty by appealing to how the Bible itself addresses the question of cultural normativity.³⁹ His method, therefore, highlights how both the culture of the writer and reader impact application.

Like McQuilkin, Larkin assumes the normativity of all biblical teaching,

³⁸McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 321.

³⁹William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 17.

but he offers three steps for moving from interpretation to application. First, and most important for Larkin due to his emphasis on discerning how culture impacts application, the expositor must determine whether to apply the biblical teaching directly or utilize a “culturally relevant form.”⁴⁰ Four criteria aid in discerning whether to apply the text indirectly (using a modern equivalent) rather than directly (using the form found in the text): (1) if the original recipients limit the intended audience, (2) if cultural conditions restrict commands or promises in such a way that their original form cannot be applied, (3) if the form of an Old Testament command was restricted to Israel’s culture, or (4) if the rest of Scripture provides a reason for not viewing the teaching as binding.⁴¹ The second step of his application process is to identify the contemporary situation to which the text applies, and the third is to develop a response that appropriately corresponds to applying the biblical passage to one’s situation.⁴²

These three step-based methods each follow a fairly standard formula of determining a principle from the biblical text. They occasionally advocate slightly different assumptions, such as McQuilkin’s opening premise that all of Scripture is normative. Also, their methods offer some distinction in how to ascertain whether the biblical injunction has continuing normativity, particularly in how the original setting of the text impacts contemporary application. However, foundationally, their principlization (and, indeed, that of many evangelical hermeneutics texts) is quite similar in that the source of an application principle is a generalization of a concept inherent in the text. In Hirschian terms, these principlization methods suggest that the text’s meaning is unchanging, but the significance is primarily found through a

⁴⁰Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 354.

⁴¹See *ibid.*, 316-18.

⁴²For his delineation of these three steps, see *ibid.*, 353-60.

series of steps that allows the interpreter to correlate a general principle of application for the original reader with implications for the contemporary reader.

The World Behind the Text: Walter Kaiser, Jr.

Walter Kaiser has played an influential role in the subject of the hermeneutics of application by writing extensively on principlization; however, his method is distinct from those described above in that he does not present a series of steps for ascertaining meaning and application.⁴³ While maintaining the same goal of discerning “what a text meant in its original setting and context” and then “*applying* that text in one’s own day and culture,” Kaiser emphasizes the importance of understanding revelation that is chronologically prior in order to ascertain meaning and application.⁴⁴ As such, his method may be described as dependent upon the world behind the text.

Recognizing the challenge of moving from the text of the biblical world to modern application, Kaiser formulates what he terms a syntactical-theological method of exegesis which enables the interpreter to discern practical implications for the contemporary reader which conform to the author’s intent.⁴⁵ Five forms of analysis comprise his syntactical-theological method: contextual, syntactical, verbal, theological, and homiletical (the last of which concerns formulating contemporary application based on the preceding four analyses). What distinguishes Kaiser’s approach, however, is his reformulation of the grammatico-historical method in his

⁴³See Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 149-63; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Hermeneutics and the Theological Task,” *Trinity Journal* 12, no. 1 (1991): 3-14; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “A Principlizing Model,” in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 19-50.

⁴⁴Kaiser, “Principlizing Model,” 19.

⁴⁵For the best explanation of the syntactical-theological method, see Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 69-184. Kaiser considers this method to be the solution to overcoming distanciation. See especially *ibid.*, 17-19, 88-89, 131-40.

syntactical analysis.⁴⁶ Although he agrees with the fundamental premises of this approach, including the exegetical analysis that comprises the core of the method, he contends,

Grammatico-historical exegesis has failed to map the route between the actual determination of the authentic meaning and the delivery of that word to modern men and women who ask that that meaning be translated into some kind of normative application or significance for their lives.⁴⁷

His proposal for correcting this failure is syntactical-theological exegesis, the heart of which is the analogy of antecedent Scripture. *Contra* the common method of using the analogy of faith to determine meaning, Kaiser suggests that each passage has an “informing theology” that the exegete must consider.⁴⁸ Because Scripture has been progressively revealed, later revelation builds upon that which God previously revealed. Also, because the canonical center of Scripture is God’s promise to bless Israel and through them to bless the nations, one may conclude that a given passage is predicated on God’s preceding revelation as he works his purposes to redeem Israel and bless the nations.⁴⁹ These epistemological presuppositions are fundamental to Kaiser’s method, for he contends that the meaning of the text and

⁴⁶Kaiser uses the term “grammatico-historical” rather than “grammatical-historical” due to the influence of Milton Terry and Karl Keil. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 87. Milton Terry explains, “The Grammatico-Historical [is] the method which most fully commends itself to the judgment and conscience of Christian scholars. Its fundamental principle is to gather from the Scriptures themselves the precise meaning which the writers intended to convey.” Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 70.

⁴⁷Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 88.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 138. Kaiser does not entirely reject the utility of the analogy of faith; however, he strongly objects to using chronologically later texts “to *introduce* new meanings unattested by the words, syntax, or grammar of that earlier text.” It is best used only after ascertaining the text’s original meaning. Kaiser, “Hermeneutics and Theological Task,” 9. See the rest of this article for an overview of his understanding of the analogy of faith.

⁴⁹Kaiser defines the canonical center as “God’s word of *blessing* (to use the word especially prominent in the pre-Abrahamic materials) or *promise* (to use the New Testament word which summarizes the contents of the Old Testament) *to be* Israel’s God and *to do* something for Israel and *through them* something for *all the nations* on the face of the earth.” Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 139.

the author's purpose in its writing are inherently tied to the theology that informs the passage.

Clearly, for Kaiser the informing theology of a text is central to the correct interpretation of the passage. Because application flows out of interpretation, informing theology plays an integral role in discerning how someone should respond to the message of the text. From this perspective, therefore, determining legitimate application partially depends on the world behind the text.

By understanding the antecedent theology of a passage, the interpreter may ascertain the author's purpose, which in turn gives him or her the understanding needed to ascertain the application intended by the author. Having determined this application, the exegete may then principlize the original application with general implications for the modern reader. Because application derives from the text's informing theology, at no point in the exegetical process or preaching may the interpreter use chronologically later Scripture to import meaning or application into the text.⁵⁰ Only informing theology, in conjunction with contextual, syntactical, and verbal analysis, is capable of determining what the author intended and, therefore, how the contemporary reader should respond.

Like the step-based approaches of *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, McQuilkin, and Larkin, Kaiser's method recognizes the difficulty of moving from the ancient text to modern application. Whereas the above authors argue for a series of steps that lead to biblically faithful application of a text, Kaiser contends that a critical aspect of proper application is the text's informing theology. According to his method, rightly understanding the informing theology of a passage overcomes the problem of distanciation, because the interpreter comes to understand the theology that undergirded the biblical writer's message. Therefore, by knowing this theology,

⁵⁰Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 140.

he or she may then correctly ascertain the original application and the principles that are inherent in the text.

Despite these distinctions, however, the step-based approaches and Kaiser's world behind the text are more similar than different. Each fundamentally operates through exegetical analysis that seeks to understand the meaning of the text and its original application. Through determining the meaning and original application, they attempt to articulate contemporary application that corresponds to the author's intent. Each method often relies on discerning the principles inherent in the biblical text to formulate corresponding principles of application for the modern reader. Concerning Hirsch's concept of significance, therefore, these methods suggest that legitimate significance is a function of the correspondence between the author's originally-intended application or a principle inherent in the passage with how the modern reader should respond to the text.⁵¹

The World in Front of the Text

The following methods provide a different hermeneutic of application in that they attempt to answer the problem of distancing not through a series of steps to provide a generalization of application principles, but positing a world in front of the text. In other words, these methods suggest that the text and application transcend time in such a way that the text legitimately provides normativity by projecting a world that extends to the modern reader. This world in front of the text, however, is not akin to Gadamer's fusion of horizons, for he posits meaning that depends on the reader as he or she encounters the text; Gadamer's solution inherently changes the textual sense through this fusion. Instead, the following

⁵¹The authors of *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* and Robertson McQuilkin explicitly state that application involves either the transferal of the original application or the generalization of a principle inherent in the text to the modern reader. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 483; McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 328.

views suggest that the meaning of the text is fixed in the text itself. Using Hirsch's terminology, meaning is in the text and significance extends beyond the original reader due to the inherent property of textualization.

Paul Ricoeur

Widely recognized as one of the most important theorists of hermeneutics in the twentieth century, Paul Ricoeur's work has proven to be quite influential in interpretation in general and biblical interpretation in particular.⁵² His career began in studying and teaching philosophy, and he was highly influenced by the Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), the existentialist psychiatrist Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), and the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).⁵³ Although his work initially was primarily philosophical, by the mid 1960's he had begun writing about hermeneutics.⁵⁴ In doing so, he incorporated his phenomenological background in his approach to interpretation, and many of his writings over the next several decades present his attempt to articulate his phenomenological hermeneutic.

Ricoeur's hermeneutical work is broad-ranging, but for the purpose of the present study, his exploration of the relationship between a text and reader is quite instructive. Indeed, he recognizes that one of the primary problems inherent in interpretation is distancing: "In my view, the text is much more than a particular

⁵²Anthony Thiselton writes, "Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer rank as the two most significant theorists of hermeneutics of the twentieth century. But although much of his theological work remains implicit rather than explicit, Ricoeur will have a lasting impact on the future of Christian theology perhaps even more than Gadamer." Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 228. Ronald Allen contends that Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory "is becoming as canonical to the present generation of biblical scholars as was the demythologizing program of Rudolf Bultmann a generation ago." Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching Is Believing: The Sermon as Theological Reflection* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 131. See also the comments in Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 490.

⁵³For a brief overview of Ricoeur's life and influences, see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 106-10. For a more extensive biography, see Charles E. Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and His Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁵⁴Anthony Thiselton provides a helpful overview of Ricoeur's major works in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 228-54.

case of intersubjective communication: it is the paradigm of distanciation in communication.”⁵⁵ Whereas spoken communication involves the hearer’s immediate reception of what the speaker says, the written text is quite different in that the author’s context is separated from the reader, perhaps by a vast difference of language, culture, and time.

Fundamental to his means of overcoming the problem of the distance between the text and the reader is Ricoeur’s conceptualization of the text as discourse. In spoken communication, the communicator conveys a message to a recipient. Similarly, written communication is not merely the *record* of the author’s words, but is a discourse (i.e., communication) that conveys meaning.⁵⁶ As discourse, a text is an event in which what is written is *doing* something and the reader experiences the communication of the text.⁵⁷ Using the language of speech act theory, he writes,

By the meaning of the act of discourse, or the *noema* of the *saying*, we must understand not only the correlate of the sentence, in the narrow sense of the propositional act, but also the correlate of the illocutionary force and even that of the perlocutionary action, insofar as these three aspects of the act of discourse are codified and regulated according to paradigms, and hence insofar as they can be identified and reidentified as having the same meaning.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” in *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 131.

⁵⁶For Ricoeur’s view of language as discourse, see Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 1-24.

⁵⁷Ricoeur explains his concept of communication that takes place *via* a text: “Language or discourse has a speaker, a world, and a *vis-à-vis*. These three traits together constitute discourse as an ‘event’ in a threefold sense: the speaker is brought to language, a dimension of the world is brought to language, and a dialogue between human beings is brought to language.” Paul Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 4 (1975): 66.

⁵⁸Ricoeur, “Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” 135. Ricoeur regularly and approvingly cites speech act theory as a beneficial means of understanding discourse. In particular, he affirms that discourse is not merely the conveyance of information, but that the text does something—it has an illocutionary force that leads to perlocution. See, for example, his approbation of J. L. Austin and John Searle in Paul Ricoeur, “Rhetoric-Poetics-Hermeneutics,” in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time: A Reader*, ed. Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde, trans. Robert Harvey (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 60-61.

Therefore, a text is discourse that contains both its meaning and its thrust, namely the illocutionary force of the text. In this sense, the text speaks to the reader, who is the recipient of the discourse.

However, one must not merely identify the meaning of the author with the meaning of the text, for the text as a work is autonomous from its writer. By the very nature of writing, the work is distanced from the author, and “there is no longer a situation common to the writer and the reader.”⁵⁹ Due to this textual autonomy, the reader cannot possibly ascertain the “psychological intentions of another person which are concealed *behind* the text.”⁶⁰ However, the reader is not left without recourse to understanding the text, for as discourse what is written contains both *sense* (the meaning of the words of the text) and *reference* (what the text says, including its thrust that extends beyond the world of the author and text).⁶¹

The capability of ascertaining both the sense and reference of a text is due to what Ricoeur terms the world in front of the text.⁶² Contrasting spoken

⁵⁹Ricoeur, “Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” 141.

⁶⁰Ibid., 141. Ricoeur argues the text is semantically autonomous from the author. Therefore, “with writing, the verbal meaning of the text no longer coincides with the mental meaning or intention of the text. This intention is both fulfilled and abolished by the text, which is no longer the voice of someone present.” Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 75. However, he concedes that there is some relationship between the text and the author’s intention, although the text may not be understood simply through presumed authorial intention, but the intent of the world in front of the text. He explains, “By this I mean that what is finally to be understood in a text is not the author or his presumed intention, nor is it the immanent structure or structures of the text, but rather the sort of world intended beyond the text as its reference.” Paul Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” *HTR* 70, nos. 1–2 (January 1977): 23.

⁶¹Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 19–20. He more thoroughly explains the meaning of sense and reference in “Naming God”:

By reference is meant discourse’s character of relating itself to an extra-linguistic reality, what above I called the lived experience that is brought to language, before any bifurcation within discourse into speech and writing. By sense is meant, within the perspective of abolished reference, a network of relations purely internal to the text, whether it be a question of a hierarchical relation by which units of a lower rank are integrated into units of a higher rank, a relation between the surface message and the underlying codes, a combination of various codes within the same text, or the quotation of some codes external to the text considered within the relation of intertextuality mentioned above.

Paul Ricoeur, “Naming God,” *USQR* 34 (1979): 217. See also his explanation, along with his indebtedness to Gottlob Frege for the concept of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, in Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 81.

⁶²Ricoeur uses “world of the text” and “world in front of the text” interchangeably. He

communication with written, he explains that “only writing can, by addressing itself to anyone who knows how to read, refer to a world that is not there between the interlocutors.”⁶³ This world to which he refers is the world in front of the text, which he views as the meaning and impact of the text that a reader may experience.⁶⁴ In other words, reading a text is not merely about ascertaining the meaning of the work, but following “the movement which conveys meaning, that is, the movement of the internal structure of the work toward its reference, toward the sort of world which the work opens up *in front of* the text.”⁶⁵ Thus, the reader may recontextualize what has been written (experience the text in his or her own context) in such a way that he or she may “follow its movement from sense to reference: from what it says, to what it talks about.”⁶⁶ Reading, therefore, becomes not merely understanding the text, but encountering it. Interpretation is not simply ascertaining the meaning of words, but explicating and engaging with “the sort of being-in-the-world unfolded in front of the text.”⁶⁷

Only in the world in front of the text may appropriation occur, which is Ricoeur’s term for application of the text to the reader. As textualized discourse,

states, “By the world of the text I mean the world displayed by the text in front of itself, so to speak, as the horizon of possible experience in which the work displaces its readers.” Paul Ricoeur, “Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 240.

⁶³Ricoeur, “Naming God,” 217.

⁶⁴Kevin Vanhoozer succinctly describes the world in front of the text as “a possible state of affairs or a possible way of looking at things that readers can contemplate or imagine.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “A Drama-of-Redemption Model,” in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 166. Vanhoozer is one of the foremost interpreters of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic, and he has appropriated many of Ricoeur’s insights into his own drama-of-redemption model of hermeneutics. See *ibid.*, 165-69.

⁶⁵Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 82.

⁶⁶Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 87-88.

⁶⁷Paul Ricoeur, “Philosophy and Religious Language,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 43.

appropriation is not with the intention of the author *per se*, but with the sense and reference of the text. As the reader encounters the text, he or she experiences the world in front of the text, aiming not only to understand its sense, but also apprehend its reference; thus, “what was initially *alien*” to the reader becomes contemporary and familiar as the reader experiences the text for itself.⁶⁸ Therefore,

hermeneutics can be defined no longer as an inquiry into the psychological intentions which are hidden beneath the text, but rather as the explication of the being-in-the-world displayed by the text. What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities.⁶⁹

Although the world of the author is not open to the reader (as one cannot know the psychological inner workings of the author), the text projects itself forward so that the reader may experience its reference. Through encountering the text, the reader receives “a new mode of being from the text itself.”⁷⁰ Therefore, the text invites one to enter the world it projects, consider one’s own self, and transform oneself in light of the world of the text.

Key to the capability of this encounter and understanding of the text is the world-projecting power of language, particularly in poetry, metaphor, and narrative.⁷¹ Ricoeur writes,

⁶⁸Paul Ricoeur, “What Is a Text? Explanation and Understanding,” in *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 159.

⁶⁹Paul Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 112.

⁷⁰Paul Ricoeur, “Appropriation,” in *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 192. Kevin Vanhoozer explains that in this encounter the reader “comes to see the text’s world, and himself, in light of that world.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: A Study in Hermeneutics and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 89.

⁷¹Ricoeur’s understanding of poetry and narrative derives from his conceptualization of symbolism from his earlier writings. The use of symbols indicates that meaning extends beyond the mere identity of the thing itself to that which it refers, and its double meaning invites interpretation. See especially Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970). For an overview of his understanding of symbols, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992), 344-50. Ricoeur’s later writings expand on the concept of the plurivocal nature of language as evident in metaphor and

It may be asked how we can speak of a semantic innovation, a semantic event, as a meaning capable of being identified. . . . Only one answer remains possible: it is necessary to take the viewpoint of the hearer or the reader and to treat the novelty of the emergent meaning as the counterpart, on the author's side, of a construction on the side of the reader. Thus the process of explanation is the only access to the process of creation.⁷²

In other words, an author creates meaning through language. Metaphor, as a kind of creative language, uses signs and symbols to create meaning that extends beyond the mere sense of the words.⁷³ Narrative likewise is imaginative language in that narrative does not only record events, but provides arrangement and unifying meaning to those events.⁷⁴ Thus, what an author writes has the ability as discourse not only to describe the meaning of the words (the sense of the text) but also to convey a reference that goes beyond only the sum of the meanings of the words he uses.⁷⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer succinctly summarizes Ricoeur's complex appeal to metaphor and narrative:

Beyond the level of sense or meaning, there is a connection between metaphor and narrative with regard to reference and truth. Like metaphor, narrative redescribes the world—in this case the temporal world of human action. Here we are challenged and invited to consider and adopt not simply different ways of seeing but of *doing*.⁷⁶

narrative.

⁷²Paul Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," in *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 174.

⁷³Similarly, poetic language has the ability to extend meaning beyond merely the denotation of the words themselves so that the text has a surplus of meaning; just as the reader of a poem may ascertain what the author is doing with the words of the poem, so also may the reader of a text experience the world in front of the text—the meaning projected by the written words. In writing of the poetic function of Scripture, Ricoeur explains, "The poetic function incarnates a concept of truth that escapes the definition by adequation as well as the criteria of falsification and verification. Here truth no longer means verification, but manifestation, i.e., letting what shows itself be. What shows itself is in each instance a proposed world, a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my ownmost possibilities. It is in this sense of manifestation that language in its poetic function is a vehicle of revelation." Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic," 25.

⁷⁴For a thorough explanation of Ricoeur's view of narrative, as well as its implications for theological reflection, see Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*.

⁷⁵For this reason, Ricoeur regularly speaks of the poetic function of language; the reference of the words in poetry extend beyond the mere sum of the meaning of the words. See Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 88; Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic," 21-27; Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 36-37, 68-69.

⁷⁶Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*, 90. According to Ricoeur, "Meaning' is not confined to

In this way, Ricoeur's analogical view of metaphor and narrative provides a means to the reader's encounter with the world in front of the text.

When applied to biblical interpretation, Ricoeur's hermeneutic suggests that Scripture projects a world that invites the reader to encounter the text and be transformed by it. The primary concern with reading the Bible, therefore, is not to ascertain the meaning of the author (whose psychology is inaccessible) or the world behind the text (which cannot be appropriated due to distanciation), but to experience the world in front of the text.⁷⁷ Therefore, Scripture does not merely offer passages for interpretation, but functions as an encounter in the experience of reading.

This world in front of the biblical text is "a new creation, a new Covenant, the Kingdom of God."⁷⁸ In other words, Scripture presents a new way of being for the reader and invites him or her to experience the new way of life that the text projects.⁷⁹ However, the reader's response is not simply to understand the content of the passage and then attempt to live differently in light of it; rather, the text does the work of interpretation while the reader likewise interprets the passage.⁸⁰ As Ricoeur states, "Relinquishment is a fundamental moment of appropriation and distinguishes

the so-called inside of the text. It occurs at the intersection between the world of the text and the world of the readers. It is mainly in the *reception* of the text by an audience that the capacity of the plot to transfigure experience is actualized." Ricoeur, "Toward a Narrative Theology," 240.

⁷⁷The emphasis in Ricoeur's hermeneutic on encountering the text of Scripture is due to the nature of the biblical text as a discourse of imaginative language (such as narrative or poetry). A passage conveys both sense and reference, and the goal is not simply historical inquiry or exegesis, but for the world of the text to encounter and transform one's own being.

⁷⁸Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic," 26.

⁷⁹Vanhoozer summarizes Ricoeur's view well: "Ricoeur believes that the biblical narratives display a unique manner of being-in-time that challenges our ordinary temporal existence. The Bible discloses a way of being-in-time that reveals and transforms my humanity: my values, my hopes and my actions." Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative*, 196-97.

⁸⁰Ricoeur explains, "The text interprets before having been interpreted. This is how it is itself a work of productive imagination before giving rise to an interpretive dynamism in the reader which is analogous to its own." Paul Ricoeur, "The Bible and the Imagination," in *The Bible as a Document of the University*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 67.

it from any form of ‘taking possession.’ Appropriation is also and primarily a ‘letting-go.’ Reading is an appropriation-divestiture.”⁸¹ Therefore, “The task is to submit oneself to what the text says, to what it intends, and to what it means.”⁸² In summary, the world in front of the text invites the reader not only to read and understand the passage, but to be interpreted *by* the passage so that the biblical text transforms the reader through engagement with the world in front of the text.

Ricoeur’s conceptualization of appropriation through the world in front of the text is a major departure from the methods of *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, McQuilkin, Larkin, and Kaiser. Foundationally, Ricoeur’s bifurcation of the text from the author runs counter to the commitment of these authors to ground meaning and application in authorial intent. Ricoeur, therefore, has a different starting point than these evangelical hermeneuts.

Given the fundamental distinction concerning authorial intent, his method of application is unsurprisingly quite different. Whereas the authors of the step-based methods argue for principlization that generalizes or contemporizes the application of the original audience based on the *author’s intent*, Ricoeur contends that application occurs through appropriating what the *text itself* is doing through its world projection. In his method, one need not merely search for principles that correspond to the modern reader, for the *text* invites the reader to inhabit the world that it projects. In terms of meaning and significance, Ricoeur’s hermeneutic suggests that meaning is inherent in the text as a property of discourse; however,

⁸¹Ricoeur, “Appropriation,” 191. Ricoeur explains, therefore, “Faith is the attitude of one who accepts being interpreted at the same time that he interprets the world of the text.” Ricoeur, “Philosophy and Religious Language,” 84.

⁸²Paul Ricoeur, “Preface to Bultmann,” in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 67. Similarly, he explains, “To understand oneself before the text is not to impose one’s own finite capacity of understanding on it, but to expose oneself to receive from it a larger self which would be the proposed way of existing that most appropriately responds to the proposed world of the text.” Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic,” 30.

meaning is not only what the text signifies (its sense), but includes also its reference (what the text is doing as it projects a world to be inhabited). Contrary to principlizing methods, the contemporary reader finds significance not through the correlation of concepts across the distance of time and culture, but through experiencing and inhabiting the world in front of the text. Specifically, Ricoeur's method describes a significance that occurs through the text's function as discourse. The text displays a proposed "being-in-the-world," and the reader is transformed as he or she inhabits that world; one's "ownmost possibilities" interact with the projected world, resulting in the reader's appropriation of the world in such a way that the reader incorporates the textual world (including its sense and reference) into his or her own world.⁸³

Abraham Kuruvilla

Like Ricoeur, Abraham Kuruvilla recognizes the problem of how a biblical text, written to an ancient audience, may have a legitimate impact on the modern reader.⁸⁴ Whereas Ricoeur gives the majority of his attention to general hermeneutics rather than primarily to biblical hermeneutics, Kuruvilla's concern is to discern how the text of Scripture applies to a contemporary audience. In particular, his aim is to delineate a hermeneutic for homiletics in order "to remedy the bemoaned lacuna

⁸³Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," 112.

⁸⁴Abraham Kuruvilla is Research Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary. He began his career in the field of medicine, completing a PhD at the Baylor College of Medicine in 1993 and then becoming a licensed dermatologist. In 2002 he completed his ThM at Dallas Theological Seminary, and he then in 2007 received his PhD from the University of Aberdeen, where his research was on hermeneutics for homiletics. The publication of his *Privilege the Text!* helped to expand his influence among preachers and teachers of homiletics. Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013). The general influence of Kuruvilla among homiletics is clearly evident through his serving as a former president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. For an affirmation of the utility of Kuruvilla's hermeneutic of application for preaching, see Timothy S. Warren, "Exploring Precursors to and Benefits of Abe Kuruvilla's 'Pericopal Theology'" (paper presented at the 2014 conference of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Chicago, October 9-11, 2014), accessed March 10, 2017, http://ehomiletics.com/willhite/2014_warren.pdf.

between text and praxis by a fruitful dialogue between hermeneutics and homiletics.”⁸⁵

Key to Kuruvilla’s method for moving from text to praxis is his appeal to Ricoeur’s concept of the world in front of the text. Due to distanciation, neither the psychology of the author nor the first-order referent (the original purpose of the author for his or her audience) is available to the contemporary reader; by the nature of inscription, the text is separated from the author.⁸⁶ However, following Ricoeur, Kuruvilla asserts that the problem of distanciation may be overcome through appealing to the world in front of the text. The text as discourse does not merely speak to the originally-intended audience, but projects a world which the reader may encounter; this projected world is the second-order referent, namely the projection of the concepts in the text that bring application to the life of the reader.

Essential to Kuruvilla’s approach is his use of language-games to understand the text’s sense and projected world. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), he contends that communication is a function of language-games; to understand any form of communication, one must know the rules that underpin the particular discourse of the author or speaker. In other words, understanding communication necessitates recognizing what the communicator is doing with the specific communication and the method or rules by which he or she communicates the message. In textualized discourse, a writer predicates the message on certain

⁸⁵Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 2.

⁸⁶Kuruvilla seems to accept Ricoeur’s view of the autonomy of the text from its author. He explains, “However, at the moment of inscription of an utterance, a radical breach is created between utterance event and meaning, between the ‘saying’ and the ‘said’, by means of a distanciation. Texts have been estranged from their authors, their intended audiences, and their original circumstances of composition. Writing has rendered the text autonomous, an orphan.” *Ibid.*, 20. However, he leaves open the possibility of ascertaining the author’s intended meaning through the text. He writes that the interpreter should seek to understand “what the author is *doing* with what he is saying, the world projected *in front of* the text.” Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 129. He seems to suggest that textual distanciation from the author does not preclude understanding authorial intent.

assumptions or rules concerning the method or genre used to communicate.

Kuruvilla explains,

Language-games thus function as linguistic performances—discrete communicative practices of discourse that include those that are textual in nature, related by family resemblance, and governed by particular rules that provide broad and adequate direction for the playing of those games.⁸⁷

Literary genres are language-games, and properly ascertaining the meaning of a given text necessitates understanding the genre used by the author and that genre's intrinsic rules of interpretation.

Therefore, although the text is autonomous from the author in the sense that one may not speak to the author or know his or her psychology, the choice of genre partially communicates what the author is doing. By utilizing a specific literary genre (known as primary genre), the author conforms in a given text to a particular language-game, the rules of which the reader may use to ascertain its sense.

However, genre does not merely govern the ascertainment of the semantics (meaning) of the text, but also its pragmatics (application). Genres, therefore, are *genetic* in that they dictate how the author conveys meaning, but they are also *heuristic* in that properly recognizing the genre allows the reader to understand what the author is communicating.⁸⁸ In essence, “Genres beckon the reader to look at the world in a specific way, as recommended by the author.”⁸⁹ By recognizing the genre used by the author (with its attendant language-games), the reader can understand

⁸⁷Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 19.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 40. In this quotation one may discern a difference between Kuruvilla's view of the role of the author and the view of Ricoeur in that Kuruvilla gives more emphasis to the continuing role of authorial intent. Regarding authorial intent and textual autonomy, Kuruvilla explains,

This work advocates a *via media*. Though there is, in writing, some degree of freedom of message from the author, it is not a complete severance that would make authorial guidance unavailable for interpretation. Distanciation does not render the text utterly autonomous, for the text bears with it, to some extent at least, artefacts of the event of writing and traces of the author in its script, medium, content, arrangement, etc. Authorial fingerprints can be detected in the inscription; such residues of intent are essential for interpretation, and are sufficiently present in most texts to establish the writer's intention and purpose.

Ibid., 22.

the world that the text projects.

Although primary genres are essential for conveying both sense and reference,⁹⁰ Kuruvilla contends that one must understand the secondary genre of Scripture as a classic, particularly a *canonical* classic, in order to rightly grasp the future-directed nature of the worlds projected by biblical texts.⁹¹ Following the criteria offered by Michael Levin, Kuruvilla suggests that the Bible falls into the category of a classic text.⁹² Of particular note for understanding the Bible's capability of future application is that classics, by their nature as classical texts, have three characteristics that pertain to their capability of futurity. First, a classic demonstrates prescriptivity in that it presents normative truth for the reader. Second, a classic exhibits perennality, meaning that it has continuing impact long beyond its writing. Third, a classic shows plurality in that it contains a surplus of meaning.⁹³ Kuruvilla here does not assert that a biblical text has a plurality of meaning, but that its application extends beyond the original situation addressed by the author to every

⁹⁰Kuruvilla writes, "Genres may therefore be seen as 'meta-information,' supplementing semantics with pragmatic value. In other words, the particular language-game determines how both author and reader should participate in the playing of that game. It controls the meaning of the text as proposed by the author, and it directs how the text is to be responded to by the readers." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 39. For this reason, Kuruvilla devotes all of chapter 2 of *Text to Praxis* to delineating the rules of different biblical genres.

⁹¹Kuruvilla contends that Scripture is in a unique class as a classic: "The biblical canon will be considered as an example *nonpareil* of the category of the classic: each of the features of the classic achieves the zenith of its expression as it is exemplified in this particular classic, the Bible. Indeed, it is by virtue of its overlapping characteristics as both canon and classic that Scripture promulgates a peremptory call: 'Read and apply!'" Ibid., 42.

⁹²Kuruvilla summarizes Levin's criteria as follows: "(1) philosophical quality; (2) original content; (3) influence on events; (4) the foremost example of a certain category of thought; and (5) extended relevancy beyond their own time of publication to the present, even to provide judgments of universal application." Ibid. For the original article, which is concerned with classics in political theory, see Michael Levin, "What Makes a Classic in Political Theory?," *Political Science Quarterly* 88 (1973): 462-76.

⁹³Kuruvilla derives the concepts of perennial significance and plurality from the work of Sandra Schneiders. He adds the third, prescriptivity, which is a reformulation of Hans Georg Gadamer's articulation of the normativity of a classic. For Kuruvilla's explanation of from where and how he derived these characteristics, see Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 55. For Schneiders' article, see Sandra Marie Schneiders, "The Paschal Imagination: Objectivity and Subjectivity in New Testament Interpretation," *Theological Studies* 43, no. 1 (March 1982): 64. For Gadamer's view of the classic as normative, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 253-58.

generation of reader. Specifically, Kuruvilla contends that Scripture falls into the category of a classic as a work that projects a world for all readers to enter and be transformed.⁹⁴

Therefore, by their very nature, classics have a future-directedness that extends beyond the original situation of the author's writing. In general, authors of such works are "conscious of the future-directedness of their work" and they "typically intend meanings to go beyond what is attended to at the moment of the writing."⁹⁵ However, an author need not recognize the way in which the work may address future readers, for futurity is a property of the text itself, not necessarily the writer's willed intention for futurity. Thus, Kuruvilla explains that "works of legal and religious literature," for example, "appear to require that meaning go beyond what a historical author could possibly have willed."⁹⁶ The bottom line of Kuruvilla's contention is that classical texts project a world that speaks directly into the life of the reader, even if a vast distance separates the author and reader.

His means for ascertaining how a classic projects a world that has continuing relevance for a later reader is bound up in his conceptualization of the transhistorical intentions of a text. Each text has an original textual sense which comprises both semantics (the meaning of the passage) and pragmatics (what the author was doing or addressing in the passage). This meaning is not limited to the original writing, but due to the property of futurity, meaning includes a transhistorical intention, defined by Kuruvilla as "a conceptual entity with a defined boundary that can comprise one or more future exemplifications (applications)."⁹⁷

⁹⁴For a list of the rules Kuruvilla expounds for reading Scripture in light of its canonicity, see Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 100-141.

⁹⁵Ibid., 46.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid.

Exemplifications are later applications of the transhistorical intention of the original meaning. Therefore, the intentions of the original application of the text may be *exemplified* in later responses to the text that carry out the spirit of the text's original intention. An author need not be conscious of the possible exemplifications that may arise from the intended meaning, for "the distanciation achieved by writing generates this phenomenon of unfixed future-directedness; the transhistorical intention of the text enables all its possible future exemplification(s) to be derived from the fixed past meaning."⁹⁸ Although in Kuruvilla's method exemplification falls into the category of the meaning of the text, it also is part of the application. Using Hirsch's terminology, an exemplification leads to a potential significance for how someone may apply the meaning of the text in a contemporary setting.

Kuruvilla gives as an example London's *Metropolitan Police Act* of 1839 which prohibits the repair of carriages on streets in London. The original textual sense is that carriages must not be repaired on the road. The transhistorical intention of this act (even though it may not have been in the minds of the legislators) was that no vehicle should be repaired on the road in order to ensure the proper flow of traffic. A modern exemplification would be that a Honda Civic that breaks down on a street in London should be moved so that it may be repaired in a location other than in traffic. A significance of this exemplification, according to Kuruvilla, is to purchase AAA so that one may be prepared beforehand to call a tow truck in case of such an event.⁹⁹ As seen in figure 1 below, the original textual sense, transhistorical intention, and exemplification all are facets of meaning. The exemplification (operating both in meaning and application) and significance are part of the application.

⁹⁸Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 48.

⁹⁹For this illustration, see Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 44-46, 61-62.

Facets of Meaning			
Original Textual Sense	Transhistorical Intention	Exemplification	Significance
No carriage repair	No broken vehicles on the road	No Honda Civic repair	Join the AAA
Facets of Application			

Figure 1. Kuruvilla’s facets of meaning and application
Source: Figure adapted from Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 62.

For interpreting and applying Scripture, Kuruvilla builds on these principles of general hermeneutics to explain how a preacher may use what he terms “pericopal theology” to derive sermonic application from a given passage.¹⁰⁰ A pericope functions not only as a manageable portion of a passage for preaching, but is a “self-intact sense unit bearing a relatively complete and integral idea that contributes to the whole, a defined portion of Scripture that reflects a unified span of thought and content.”¹⁰¹ As a sense unit of the larger biblical text (in which the biblical author is *doing* something), a pericope contains meaning and has a theological purpose. In essence, a pericope itself is world-projecting in that it has a transhistorical intention that is capable of modern exemplification. This transhistorical intention bears a divine demand, and the preacher’s task is to elucidate this demand so that the congregation may understand how the original

¹⁰⁰Kuruvilla defines pericopal theology as “the theology specific to a particular pericope, representing a segment of the plenary world in front of the canonical text that portrays God and his relationship to his people, and which bearing a transhistorical intention, functions as the crucial intermediary in the homiletical move from text to praxis that respects both the authority of the text and the circumstances of the hearer.” Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 111.

¹⁰¹Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 144. Kuruvilla does not provide an extensive argument for the self-contained nature of pericopes or how to determine what constitutes a pericope. Instead, he assumes their nature as textual portions that contribute to the whole of the biblical book, yet are distinct units that have meaning within the context of the larger work.

meaning thus has impact on their lives. Pericopal theology, therefore, is Kuruvilla's concept of how the divine demand of a pericope extends to a contemporary audience through the transhistorical intention of the text.

Kuruvilla's view of pericopal theology asserts that "the central theological function of pericopes is the facilitation of covenant renewal, the restoration of God's people to a right relationship with him."¹⁰² In describing pericopes as means for covenant renewal, he utilizes the concept of the world in front of the text to assert that "pericopes project segments of the canonical *world in front of the text*." Yet, these portions of Scripture do not merely invite the reader to enter covenant renewal, but each pericope contains a divine demand for the reader or hearer. The text beckons the reader to enter the world projected by the text, to hear the particular call of the text to covenant renewal, and be transformed more into the image of Christ.¹⁰³

The task of the preacher, therefore, is to ascertain the pericopal theology of the text to determine the application that conforms to it. Because the author was *doing* something (not merely conveying sense, but also reference) in the pericope that contributes to the whole of the biblical book, the preacher must consider the world that the pericope projects and explain how the congregation is to live in light

¹⁰²Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 150. Kuruvilla asserts that pericopes function for covenant renewal because he considers the preaching and covenant renewal of Neh 7-8 as "a prototype for all future communities that desire to orient themselves towards God and align themselves to the demands of his word." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 99.

¹⁰³In *Text to Praxis*, Kuruvilla does not expound how a passage contributes to conforming someone to the image of Christ. In *Privilege the Text!*, however, he goes into detail explaining, Each pericope of the Bible is actually portraying a facet of Christlikeness, a segment of the image of Christ: what it means to fulfill the particular divine demand in that pericope after the manner of Christ. Thus, fulfilling the divine demand is part of what it means to be Christlike, and the Bible as a whole, the plenary collection of all its pericopes, canonically portrays the perfect humanity exemplified by Jesus Christ, God incarnate. So much so, the *world in front of the text* may even be considered to be an 'image' (εἰκὼν, *eikōn*) of Christ, portraying the impeccable Man, the only One who has fully met divine demand, the only One who has completely inhabited the ideal world of God, being perfectly aligned with its precepts, priorities, and practices.
Ibid., 260.

of the text's divine demand. Kuruvilla describes this process in two steps, the first of which is to expound the text in such a way that the congregation hears its meaning and theology (its pericopal theology). Second, using the concept of transhistorical intentions, the preacher must offer application that exhibits both fidelity to the original authorial intention and novelty in modern exemplifications and responses to the ancient text.¹⁰⁴ By this method, the preacher exhorts the hearers to inhabit the world in front of the text by submitting and conforming to its divine demand.¹⁰⁵

Building on Ricoeur's hermeneutic, Kuruvilla's hermeneutic of application utilizes the concept of the world in front of the text as a means to bridge the gap of distanciation and provide a way for modern application. Although Kuruvilla makes seemingly contrasting statements regarding a text's distanciation from the author, he seems more accepting than Ricoeur of the continuing role of authorial intent in ascertaining both the meaning and application of a biblical passage. Kuruvilla accepts a degree of textual autonomy from the author, but he does not reject the necessity of determining authorial intent.¹⁰⁶ Instead, he argues that interpretation necessarily involves understanding not only the author's meaning, but what he or she was *doing* in the text.¹⁰⁷ Because the author had an intent that extends to both sense and reference, one may discern the transhistorical intentions of the author through reading a text. In summary, Kuruvilla's hermeneutic of application contends

¹⁰⁴For his discussion of this two-step process, see Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 136-42. For his comments on novelty and fidelity, see Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 178-89.

¹⁰⁵For an example of Kuruvilla's hermeneutic of application, see his commentary on Mark in which he seeks to apply his understanding of pericopal theology to delineate the divine demand inherent in each pericope: Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

¹⁰⁶Kuruvilla writes, "At the moment of inscription of an utterance, a radical breach is created between utterance event and meaning, between the 'saying' and the 'said', by means of a distanciation. Texts have been estranged from their authors, their intended audiences, and their original circumstances of composition. Writing has rendered the text autonomous, an orphan." Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 20.

¹⁰⁷Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 129.

that meaning is evident in the text based on the author's intent and is discernable by the reader.

Most important, however, significance is not simply a relationship with the text that the reader establishes or recognizes, but Kuruvilla's method posits an *intended significance*. The author's intent, conveyed through the text, exhibits transhistorical intentions in such a way that application is not merely a matter of generalizing principles from the text, but discerning and carrying out the exemplifications of the text's intention that function as the world in front of the text.¹⁰⁸ The preacher, therefore, must discern the authorial meaning and the transhistorical intention in order to expound how the text establishes an intended significance with concomitant exemplifications and applications for the hearer.

A Way Forward

Standing on the foundation of Ricoeur and Kuruvilla, this dissertation proposes a hermeneutic of application that derives practical implications from the world in front of the text as the biblical author establishes an *intended significance* with the reader. However, this hermeneutic is not identical with either of the approaches posited by Ricoeur or Kuruvilla, but builds off their proposals. Functionally, this hermeneutic argues that what the author is *doing* (including both sense and reference) in the text presents a way forward for understanding how the reader should respond.

Before expounding this methodology, however, the sheer commonality of the principlizing approaches (represented by *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*,

¹⁰⁸Kuruvilla notes this distinction between his method and principlization. He writes, "In the 'principlizing' hermeneutic, the *principle* is antecedent to the text (and the text is often considered reducible to that principle *behind* it); by the theological hermeneutic espoused in this work, the *text* gives rise to the world/theology (and the text is irreducible to that world *in front of* it/pericopal theology)." Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 129.

McQuilkin, Larkin, and Kaiser) necessitates a brief critique. In spite of the following critique, one should not miss the beneficial nature of principlization, whether through step-based approaches or the syntactical-theological method of Walter Kaiser. Principlization is widely recognized as a helpful approach that takes seriously the authority of Scripture and the necessity of determining application that conforms to the biblical text. The method is generally easy to use by the preacher, and, as Kevin Vanhoozer aptly describes principlization, “the people in the pew ‘get it.’”¹⁰⁹ This approach generally enables a preacher to bridge the ancient and modern world, providing the contemporary audience with application that makes sense of the passage.

However, despite the commonality of principlization (in its many different forms) and utility in preaching, it is not without detractors. A practical deficiency of this method is the lack of clear guidance from those who advocate this method. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* provides only 27 pages about application, 21 of which specifically describe their methodology. Larkin has a mere 16 pages of his monograph that explain how to apply a culturally-situated text to a contemporary congregation. McQuilkin, offering slightly more, in *Understanding the Bible* has two chapters encompassing 41 pages.¹¹⁰ Although Kaiser’s *Toward an Exegetical Theology* is more expansive, the principlizing methodology described in many primers of hermeneutics is not sufficiently thorough to provide a theoretically and practically robust approach to application.

Of course, minimal explanation *per se* does not necessitate hermeneutical inadequacy. However, the minimalism of the step-based approaches at times reveals

¹⁰⁹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “A Response to Walter C. Kaiser Jr.,” in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 58.

¹¹⁰Respectively, see Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 477-504; Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 344-60; McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 304-45.

the challenge and complexity of applying the ancient biblical text to a modern audience. For example, McQuilkin has two simple principles: (1) all of Scripture is normative unless Scripture itself limits transferability and (2) application requires faith or obedience (or both). In considering Paul's command to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (1 Cor 16:20), McQuilkin contends that a holy kiss of greeting "is an example of a historic-specific command" that does not have universal application.¹¹¹ However, his conclusion is at odds with his first principle that all Scripture is normative unless Scripture indicates the command or prohibition is normative. McQuilkin's reason for setting aside this principle is that the "cultural factor" of the kiss is not present in other cultures and that the Bible does not express a "moral injunction that the situation be recreated."¹¹² Unfortunately, his reasoning begs the question of why one should not consider the command to greet one another with a holy kiss to be a moral injunction for a holy kiss. The point is not to argue for reinstating Christian greetings with a holy kiss, but to illustrate that the simplicity of step-based approaches sometimes belies the complexity of application.

In addition to these practical challenges of principlization, the method may also suffer from focusing so much on determining a principle from the text that the interpreter may miss what the author is doing in the text and how the conveyance of the message (*via* its genre in a culturally and historically-embedded situation) contributes to the author's overall purpose. Daniel Doriani perceptively explains, "Principlizing treats the particularity and cultural embeddedness of Scripture more as a problem to be overcome than as something essential to the givenness of the Bible."¹¹³ The emphasis on ascertaining a principle may thus lead the interpreter to

¹¹¹McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 321.

¹¹²Ibid., 320.

¹¹³Daniel M. Doriani, "A Response to Walter C. Kaiser Jr.," in *Four Views on Moving beyond the Bible to Theology*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 53.

give priority to discerning a principle stated in a propositional truth rather than the message of the text; of course, this danger does not in itself negate the utility of principlization, but the overemphasis on principlization may result in the inadvertent minimization of what the author is seeking to accomplish in the passage or book as a whole.¹¹⁴

One should not construe these critiques, along with others, as negating the general utility of principlization for the interpreter or preacher.¹¹⁵ Indeed, some form of principlization is often helpful and even necessary for applying passages in a modern context.¹¹⁶ However, relying *solely* on this method may miss some of the riches that are available in Scripture, particularly for discerning how authorial intent may indeed extend beyond the original recipients in such a way that the author intends more than only principles.¹¹⁷ In other words, principlization rightly upholds the primacy of authorial intent in determining the meaning of the text, but potentially may miss that the author intends more than principles. This critique is not that principlization cannot account for an author's intended application, but that

¹¹⁴Another related concern by Doriani is that “principlizing’s insistence on timeless, propositional truth privileges one form of divine communication above others. While we must never deny or even minimize the importance of propositional truth, we must remember that revelation comes in many forms. Alongside propositions, the Bible contains commands, questions, prayers, promises and curses, riddles, vows, parables, and more.” Doriani, “Response to Kaiser,” 54.

¹¹⁵David Clark offers several potential pitfalls for the use of principlization. First, one may not always be certain which principle to derive from a passage. Second, naïve principlization may fail to see the way in which one’s own culture impacts the formulation of principles from a passage. Third, uncritical principlization may privilege propositional content while ascribing lesser value to other biblical forms such as narrative and poetry. David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 91-98. Kevin Vanhoozer adds three questions concerning the principlizing method of Kaiser. First, if revelation is progressive, should not the principles be also progressive rather than timeless? Second, does principlization unnecessarily bifurcate the theological principles and their cultural embeddedness? Third, does applying principles sufficiently describe Christian discipleship? Vanhoozer, “Response to Kaiser,” 60-61.

¹¹⁶Preaching narrative passages from the Old Testament, for example, often benefits from principlization.

¹¹⁷Given the variety of genres and rhetorical purposes evident throughout the canon, as well as the unity of the canon itself, one would be wise not to conclude that only one prescribed hermeneutic of application is valid. Whereas the grammatical-historical method of exegesis is foundational for interpretation, an interpreter will at various times benefit from principlization, a redemptive-historical approach, or Kuruvilla’s world in front of the text.

its methodology may not for all passages provide the most straightforward means of determining application that the author intends for later readers. Its reliance on principles seems to suggest that significance with the modern reader occurs through the relationship of the principle inherent in the passage to the reader. Although many passages undoubtedly have principles that are demonstrably relative to the lives of contemporary readers, perhaps a hermeneutic of application could give greater attention to an *intended* significance by the author for later readers.

The possibility of an intended significance with the reader makes Paul Ricoeur's approach using the concept of the world in front of the text an appealing proposal for understanding the application of Scripture. Indeed, one finds much to commend in his methodology, particularly in that his conceptualization of a text as discourse serves as a means for overcoming the problem of distancing. Ricoeur is correct in contending that a text has both a sense and reference, and the referential character of the text is especially helpful for understanding how written discourse speaks beyond its original audience.¹¹⁸ His association of the text's reference with the illocutionary force of speech act theory rightly recognizes that a text is more than mere propositional content, but includes a thrust that is indicative of what the author is *doing* with the text, namely what he or she seeks to accomplish through it by the reader's response.

However, two primary concerns with Ricoeur's hermeneutic limit its applicability *in toto* to Scripture.¹¹⁹ First, he unnecessarily bifurcates the text from

¹¹⁸Anthony Thiselton recognizes the value of Ricoeur's method for understanding a text as having application for a later audience: "The shift of emphasis to what *effects* a text *produces creatively* provides a welcome corrective to more antiquarian and purely informational approaches. Common to Ricoeur and to some important strands in recent literary theory is the question: what does this text *do*?" Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 5.

¹¹⁹Beyond these two primary concerns (primary in regard to the purpose of the present hermeneutical analysis), a number of others may be cited. For example, due to his focus on the world projected by the text, Ricoeur demonstrates little concern for the historicity of the events described in the text. See especially his comments in Paul Ricoeur, "Reply to Lewis S. Mudge," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 44. Also, and

the author. Although his intention in arguing for this semantic autonomy is to preserve the intelligibility of a text (due to the reader's inability to know the psychology of the author), his concern for knowing the mind of the author is unwarranted because the intentions of the author are evident in the text.¹²⁰ In effect, Ricoeur's hermeneutic creates another distancing, in this instance between the author and the text. Nicholas Wolterstorff recognizes Ricoeur's error and asks, "But why accept this injunction? Why not practice authorial discourse interpretation? Why not interpret with the aim of discerning the authorial discourse of which the text is the medium—its illocutionary stance, its noematic content, its designative content?"¹²¹ The creation of a text neither necessarily nor automatically removes its meaning or illocution from authorial intent; instead, meaning and the purpose of the text still must be determined based on the intent of the author.

Second, although Ricoeur's hermeneutic overcomes the distancing between the text and the reader through a projected world, his explanation of the way a text projects a world is less than satisfactory. He contends that textualized discourse has the ability to speak beyond the author's original audience specifically because it is a text, and the nature of a text itself (as *poiesis* using language that functions metaphorically) gives it this world-projecting capability. However, despite

pertinent for understanding Ricoeur's de-emphasis on historicity and authorial intent, he views biblical inspiration in terms of the world projected by the biblical writings, not the inspiration of Scripture itself. See his comments about revelation in Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," 44.

¹²⁰Geoffrey Robinson observes that the divorce of the author and the text leads Ricoeur to view meaning as inherent in the world in front of the text rather than in the text itself through the author's intent. The result is that "a radical and inherent relativism and subjectivism is unavoidable." Geoffrey D. Robinson, "Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion: A Brief Overview and Critique," *Presbyterion* 23, no. 1 (1997): 55. Indeed, Ricoeur argues that the text's autonomy from the author means "it is open to an infinite range of interpretations." Ricoeur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," 38.

¹²¹Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 149. "Noematic content" is the locution, and "designative content" refers to what the locution indicates. He contends that Ricoeur's use of "sense" includes both noematic and designative content. See *ibid.*, 138-39.

his attempts to argue for the poetic nature of language, Ricoeur is unclear as to how a text *itself* (apart from authorial intent) projects a world and can thus have a reference for a later reader. Wolterstorff rightly questions Ricoeur's notion of world projection:

Most commentators on this part of Ricoeur's thought remark on the obscurity of the notion of a *world* to which he here appeals. What seems to me more obscure is his notion of *projection*: what is it for a sense to project a world? How must it be related to a world to project it? Does every sentential sense project a world?¹²²

Although Ricoeur affirms the world projection of texts (and thus that texts have reference for later readers), his argument for *how* this projection occurs is not satisfactory. In other words, Ricoeur affirms that a text has an intended significance (although he does not use the language of intended significance) for a reader, but his recourse to textualization and metaphorical language as a means for world projection is not a sufficient explanation for how a text has a reference for the reader, particularly one far removed by the distance of time and culture.¹²³

Abraham Kuruvilla's hermeneutic takes the best of Ricoeur's method, namely that texts project a world for the reader, and undergirds it with an explanatory foundation to demonstrate how Scripture speaks beyond the original audience to the contemporary reader. Most important, whereas Ricoeur contends for the semantic autonomy of the text from the author, Kuruvilla seems to embrace the necessity of understanding authorial intent for rightly ascertaining both the meaning and reference of the text.¹²⁴ Both in the choice of genre (according to its specific

¹²²Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 144.

¹²³Ricoeur briefly mentions "referential intentionality" in which he suggests "the passage from the text to life, which governs the passage from the semiotic phase of interpretation to its existential phase, is still guided by something that takes place in the text." Ricoeur, "Bible and Imagination," 71. Unfortunately, he does not expand on this concept other than to suggest referential intentionality is a function of "the parabolizing of the narrative." Ibid., 72.

¹²⁴As stated above, Kuruvilla both accepts textual autonomy from the author and affirms the necessity of an author-oriented hermeneutic. Although he does not explicitly state how both affirmations cohere, perhaps he accepts that a text is divorced from the author chronologically, but

language-games) and the semantics of the text, the author conveys a message that not only presents the locution of textual meaning but also the illocution inherent in the author's intent. For this reason, Kuruvilla repeatedly refers to what the author is *doing*—not merely recognizing the sense (both of the noematic and designative character of the text's meaning, *a la* Wolterstorff's conceptualization of sense), but that the text has a reference that extends beyond merely the sense of the words.

This concept of the world in front of the text provides the largest point of distinction between the principlization methods and that of Kuruvilla. Both share many similarities, most fundamental of which is the primacy of authorial intent for understanding the meaning of the text and discerning legitimate application. Likewise, both methods depend on exegetical analysis to ascertain the meaning of the text and thus the corresponding application. However, the distinction in these two hermeneutics of application is *how* authorial intent and exegesis determine application. For principlization, contemporary implications of a text derive primarily through how a general principle from the text or the original application correspond to a response from the modern reader. For this reason, Kaiser states that “to principlize is to state the author's propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church.”¹²⁵ Therefore, to use Kuruvilla's term, according to principlization the transhistorical intention of a passage derives from a principle that “is antecedent to the text.”¹²⁶ Of course, the notion of an antecedent principle is not incorrect, for principles that are antecedent to the writing of the text are evident in some biblical passages.¹²⁷ However, Kuruvilla's world in front of the

recognizes that the text still evidences authorial intent as written discourse.

¹²⁵Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 152.

¹²⁶Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 129.

¹²⁷For example, David uses an antecedent principle in Ps 34. In this psalm, he describes

text method places the emphasis on how a biblical author's message conveys more than principles, but *intentionally* projects a way of living for the reader. This distinction between principlization and Kuruvilla's method, perhaps slight in many biblical passages, is most pronounced in those texts in which the author clearly intends for his message to extend beyond his original readers. In those passages, Kuruvilla's hermeneutic may be beneficial, for it shows how the biblical author describes a way of being that is not only for his own time period, but that extends forward throughout time. As chapter 3 demonstrates, this kind of world projection (to use Kuruvilla's language) is evident in the Gospel of Matthew.

Therefore, the hermeneutic of application used in this dissertation is largely that which Kuruvilla proposes in *Text to Praxis* and *Privilege the Text!* He rightly affirms that a biblical passage bears the marks of the author's intent in such a way that the contemporary reader may ascertain how it applies to himself.

Application is not only discerning principles from the text or from the world behind the text (as in Kaiser's approach), but necessitates noting the world that the text projects. Through observing what the author is doing in the pericope and throughout the biblical book, the interpreter may understand the transhistorical intention evident in the text and formulate exemplifications that correspond to the original textual sense and transhistorical intention. The hermeneutic of application affirmed in this dissertation, therefore, uses many concepts from Kuruvilla's method: the preacher must rightly understand and explain the author's meaning, discern the transhistorical intentions of the pericope evident from the world in front of the text, formulate exemplifications for the modern audience that flow out of the

deliverance that God provided him in the presence of King Achish of Gath. Then, he draws the conclusion from his past experience that "the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them" (Ps 34:7). David, therefore, derives a principle from God's work in his life to how God delivers his people.

transhistorical intention, and offer practical examples for how one might respond in faith and obedience to the divine demand of the pericope.¹²⁸

However, three qualifications clarify and distinguish the hermeneutic of application used henceforth from that of Kuruvilla. First, the method of this dissertation argues that the futurity of a text (its capability of having application beyond the original readers) is due to authorial intent. Whereas Ricoeur associated the futurity of texts (which he referred to as their world-projecting nature) with the nature of text as discourse, Kuruvilla contends that the futurity of Scripture is largely due to its nature as a classic. Unfortunately, the designation of a work as a classic is not in itself an explanation of how a text has futurity. Rather, a more biblically faithful and hermeneutically satisfying solution is to posit that the Bible has future application due to authorial intent. Kuruvilla comes close to this supposition in affirming that “the nature of the Bible as divine discourse plays no small part in both its canonicity and its disposition as a classic.”¹²⁹ However, despite this affirmation, additional explanation is necessary to expound the relationship between authorial intent—both divine and human—and a text’s future-directedness.¹³⁰

Most important for the futurity of biblical texts is that they are the result

¹²⁸Kuruvilla uses the term “significance” to describe how someone might practically apply a modern exemplification of a transhistorical intention. For example, in his illustration of the *Metropolitan Police Act of 1839*, a potential significance is for a modern driver to purchase AAA so that he or she would have a way for a car to be towed in the event of an accident or malfunction of the car. Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 62.

¹²⁹Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 42. He also writes, “One consequence of the divine act of communication and the reciprocal human construal of that act as being such (canonization) is that the constituent texts, written to specific groups of people in particular time periods, become, in the singularity of the canon, potentially applicable to all believers for all time, with prescriptivity, perenniality and plurality.” Ibid., 108. Unfortunately, Kuruvilla does not clearly expound how divine discourse leads to a text’s potential applicability, nor why applicability is potential rather than intended.

¹³⁰In his review of *Privilege the Text!*, Mark Bowald suggests that Kuruvilla’s lack of explanation of the relationship between the divine and human author is a major *lacuna* of the book. Mark Bowald, review of *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*, by Abraham Kuruvilla, *Journal of Reformed Theology* 9, no. 2 (April 2015): 207.

of a divine author.¹³¹ Inherent in the nature of human authorship is the limitation of the knowledge and spacio-temporal location of the author; however, a divine author knows no limitations. Therefore, Scripture, as the product of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, speaks a message with transhistorical intentions precisely because it is discourse from the atemporal God. Divine discourse, therefore, nullifies distanciation because the Bible is the inscription of God's Word not only to the original recipients, but also to all later readers. For this reason, Paul in describing the wilderness wandering of Israel writes, "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor 10:11). Likewise, he explains to the Roman Christians that "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). Kevin Vanhoozer is correct, therefore, in asserting that through the Holy Spirit the biblical text "has a *mission* of meaning."¹³² The Holy Spirit intended the text to speak to later audiences; therefore, the Spirit through Scripture reaches across time and culture to present the meaning of the text to the reader so that the reader may appropriate the divine demand of the passage in his or her life. In this way, every text has a divine transhistorical intention.

Another aspect of this futurity is that the *intent* of the human author in some texts may be for the message and application to extend beyond the original audience. Kuruvilla recognizes this possibility in affirming that authors may be "conscious of the future-directedness of their work" and "intend meanings to go

¹³¹One should note that the distinction between the human and divine author of Scripture does not require a *sensus plenior* or any kind of plurality of meaning.

¹³²Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 410.

beyond what is attended to at the moment of writing.”¹³³ His supposition of authorial intent is an important consideration for discerning the intended significance of a passage, for distancing may be nullified because the human author intends meaning and application (potentially even exemplifications) for future readers.¹³⁴ In reading a biblical text, therefore, the interpreter should take note that the author may intend his message for future readers beyond the initial audience; therefore, the author’s intent may be for both the meaning and application of the passage to extend to future readers, thus negating the problem of distancing through the author’s willed purpose for the text to apply to a chronologically later audience. However, one should not assume that all biblical texts necessarily exhibit human authorial intention that clearly includes readers beyond the original audience. Yet, if a text exhibits an authorial assumption or assertion of normativity or intent for later readers, the interpreter should take the text at its face value of an authorially-willed transhistorical intention. Although not all texts demonstrably exhibit a human author’s mindfulness of a later audience, this dissertation argues that the Matthean commissioning pericope reveals Matthew’s intent that Jesus’ commission to the disciples extends into the future to later disciples.

A second qualification is that Kuruvilla’s emphasis on discerning the theology of the pericope may give so much attention to the pericope that the interpreter may miss how the pericope functions in the overall message of the biblical author. He, of course, is correct in asserting the general utility of pericopes for the task of preaching, particularly his contention for a pastor’s weekly task of

¹³³Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 46.

¹³⁴Kuruvilla recognizes that the biblical author may not be aware of the future exemplifications that flow out of the transhistorical intentions of the text. *Ibid.*

preaching to a congregation.¹³⁵ Also, he rightly recognizes that “the theologian-homiletician may not deny the unity of the wider text of which the pericope is a part. Indeed, the theology of the pericope can be grasped only in light of the theology of the broader context.”¹³⁶ The danger, therefore, is not that Kuruvilla misses the role of the larger context of the biblical book as a whole, but that an over-emphasis on the pericope may cause the interpreter to fail to see how the overall message of the author informs the message of the pericope.¹³⁷ This dissertation seeks to discern the pericopal theology of Matthew 28:19 while (and by) necessarily viewing it through the lens of the entire Gospel of Matthew.¹³⁸

Third (and somewhat minor in regard to Kuruvilla’s overall hermeneutic of application), one should not view pericopes only in terms of Christiconic interpretation and covenant renewal. Although the formation of Christ in a believer is undoubtedly one purpose of Scripture, a preacher should not uphold it as the primary applicational work of all passages; more purposes, such as pointing to Christ (the Christocentric model against which Kuruvilla writes in chapter four of *Privilege the Text!*), are certainly legitimate ways of viewing Scripture. Likewise, his contention that all pericopes function for covenant renewal is an unnecessary

¹³⁵See his explanation of the use of the pericope in preaching in Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 162. See also his summary of pericopal theology as a necessary part of preaching in Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 91-109.

¹³⁶Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 164.

¹³⁷Related to his view of the function of pericopes, Kuruvilla may go too far in viewing pericopes almost as independent entities. One should exercise caution in too stringent of a demarcation between different passages in a biblical book. For practical pastoral preaching, providing a broad diet of text may require preaching large swaths of Scripture in one sermon, not merely individual pericopes. Also, pericopes should not be construed as self-contained entities unless the biblical author so indicates (such as the song of Moses in Exod 15). Even so, these passages should be viewed as contributing to the overall message of the author—not only what the author records, but what the author is seeking to accomplish through the text.

¹³⁸Despite this emphasis on interpretation using the whole of Matthew’s Gospel, this dissertation does not reject the necessity of the *analogia fidei*. Rather, it assumes this principle of interpretation, yet gives interpretational priority to first determining Matthew’s message. Where necessary, this dissertation turns to other passages to offer support for a proposed interpretation.

application of Nehemiah 7:73-8:12 to all of Scripture. Indeed, he is unclear as to why this passage dictates the purpose of all preaching. In short, the breadth of Scripture and the plurality of God's purposes for all of Scripture mitigate against seeking to confine the purpose of all biblical texts to one contrived function. Rather, one should allow the intention of the author to determine the way the text functions not only in the larger book and canonical context, but also for application to the reader.

To summarize briefly the hermeneutic of application espoused in this dissertation, authorial intent determines application. Therefore, an interpreter must discern the original authorial meaning, but the text's meaning is not merely the sum of the semantics of the passage, but includes the sense and reference of the text. By ascertaining the textual meaning and transhistorical intention, the preacher may describe exemplifications that are faithful to the transhistorical intention of the passage. He may then suggest examples that are practical ways to carry out the modern exemplification of the transhistorical intention. Throughout this process, the preacher should seek as closely as possible to align the application with the author's intent, including both sense and reference.

Application and Matthew 28:19

Discerning the application of Matthew 28:19, therefore, begins with considering the authorial intent of this verse. As such, the first step of interpretation is to ascertain the original meaning of the text, which necessarily includes the semantics of the verse. However, as both Ricoeur and Kuruvilla contend, the meaning of the text is not limited merely to its semantic sense. Rather, one must also consider the reference or illocution evident in the passage (as well as in its broader context) to discern what Matthew was seeking to accomplish through the text.

The examination of the original meaning must then turn to determining the transhistorical intention of the passage. In doing so, the interpreter must

consider in what sense the text is future-directed. Specifically, does this verse, viewed in the context of Matthew's larger purpose, give evidence of an author-intended significance that extends beyond the original audience? In other words, did Matthew write in such a way that his Gospel has intended futurity? If so, what is his intended significance in this text for the reader? Or, if an intended significance is not evident, what is the transhistorical intention that the preacher may use to develop a legitimate exemplification of the author's intent for a contemporary audience?

The aim of chapters 3 and 4 is to answer four questions using this hermeneutic of application in order determine the intended significance of Matthew 28:19 for contemporary believers. First, for whom is the Great Commission? An analysis of the text must assess whether the Great Commission pericope and the Gospel as a whole gives evidence to indicate an intended significance for the contemporary believer. Whereas most analyses of this issue seek to provide an answer to this question by determining whether or in what sense a correspondence exists between the disciples and later Christians, this dissertation seeks a hermeneutical solution in the transhistorical intentions of Matthew.

Second, what does *πορευθέντες* mean? Answering this question is less a matter of hermeneutics than of grammar and semantics. However, the grammar-oriented nature of this issue does not negate the necessity of viewing this participle through a hermeneutic of application, for Matthew did not merely insert this word to satisfy a grammatical need. Rather, he was *doing something* with this word that contributes to his overall meaning, his transhistorical intention, and how a contemporary Christian must respond to Christ's command.

Third, what does *μαθητεύσατε* mean? Of course, lexical analysis plays a significant role in understanding this imperative. However, Matthew's meaning and purpose for this word must not be limited to the interpreter's word studies, for Matthew's concept of discipleship runs deep throughout the entire Gospel.

Therefore, a hermeneutical analysis of this imperative requires the preacher to understand not only the attendant lexical issues of the μαθητής word group, but also consider Matthew's understanding of discipleship. Rhetorical and literary analyses thus serve an important role in interpreting Matthew's use of μαθητεύσατε in light of his overall message in the Gospel as a whole and in the commissioning pericope in particular. Fundamentally, though, the preacher must be able to articulate how the command for Jesus' disciples to make disciples plays out in a contemporary Christian's life.

Fourth, who are πάντα τὰ ἔθνη? Like the third question, this one requires significant lexical analysis. However, Matthew's intent is not confined merely to denotations of the word, but includes his overall purpose for the ἔθνη throughout his Gospel. Concerning a hermeneutic of application, the foundational issue is how the nations intended by Matthew correspond to the response of a believer today. At root, therefore, is not simply the need to understand the meaning of ἔθνη, but if the Great Commission bears a transhistorical intention for a believer's discipling of the nations. If so, in what sense does the context of the ἔθνη necessitate a disciple-making exemplification for the modern Christian that includes an ἔθνη context? The following chapters seek to answer these four questions and offer corresponding sermonic application by applying the hermeneutic of application outlined above.

CHAPTER 3

FOR WHOM IS THE GREAT COMMISSION?

Sermonic application of the Great Commission pericope inherently relates to the question of for whom the commission was intended, for, given the presupposition of the primacy of authorial intent for application, Matthew's intent for the normativity of the 28:19-20 impacts how the preacher should articulate application. However, one of the major difficulties in scholarship of this passage is the issue of the continuing normativity of the missions mandate of verses 19-20. Indeed, preachers and scholars have posited numerous options regarding to whom the imperative of the Great Commission is primarily addressed, whether it was only for the original disciples who heard Jesus' command or it was for other believers as well. Although numerous exegetical arguments support these various views, at root, the determination of the normativity of the Great Commission is a hermeneutical issue.

The previous chapter presented a hermeneutic of application that seeks to determine the application of a biblical passage by appealing to the world in front of the text. In brief, the author through the text conveys transhistorical intentions that function as the world in front of the text. By recognizing these intentions, the reader may discern exemplifications that correspond to the author's willed meaning and application. Thus, Hirsch's concept of significance becomes linked to authorial intent in such a way that the text has an intended significance with the reader.

This chapter seeks to utilize the hermeneutic espoused in chapter 2 in order to discern for whom the commission in Matthew 28:19 is intended. Through analysis of both the surrounding verses and the Gospel as a whole, the following

investigation demonstrates that Matthew's purpose for the commission in 28:19-20 was not merely for the original disciples, but extends to every believer. Therefore, verse 19 exhibits a transhistorical intention that establishes an intended significance with the Christian reader such that Matthew's purpose, at least in part, is that all Christians who read this commission will recognize that it is normative for them.

Five Views Regarding the Intended Significance of the Imperative of Matthew 28:19-20

Before arguing that the commission is for every Christian, this chapter first summarizes the main approaches to how interpreters have understood the normativity of the Great Commission. What follows does not attempt to outline every way that scholars or preachers have viewed the normativity of Jesus' command to the disciples, nor does it seek to provide an exhaustive overview of any approach. The summary and analysis of each, however, includes several major proponents, key supporting arguments, and any pertinent hermeneutical assumptions undergirding each approach.¹

The Imperative Was for the Apostles

The first and most prevalent view is that the imperative of Matthew 28:19 was intended only for the apostles who heard the commission of Christ. To those accustomed to a church tradition that includes heavy emphasis on evangelism and missions, arguing that the Great Commission was intended only for the apostles may seem odd, but for much of church history, believers assumed that the normativity of the imperative to make disciples of all nations did not extend beyond

¹These five views, including their proponents, represent general ways of articulating the normativity of the Great Commission. Undoubtedly, the proponents described for each view would have unique nuances to their interpretation. Also, some ways of describing the normativity of this passage exhibit overlap in how Jesus' command applies to the contemporary Christian. However, using this schema of how interpreters have *described* and *emphasized* the normativity of Jesus' command in this passage is a helpful starting point for ascertaining arguments for how one should understand the normativity of the commission.

the apostles who received Jesus' command.² Indeed, the evidence clearly demonstrates the historical commonality of the assumption that the imperative was limited to its original hearers.³

A few examples of those assuming the commission was only for the apostles demonstrate the prevalence of this view throughout church history. In the patristic period, Justin (c. AD 100-165), using the language of the Matthean commission, writes that Jesus would send "certain persons" to make the gospel known, seeming to indicate that he saw Jesus' commands in terms of the apostles.⁴ Likewise, Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150-215) writes of this commission merely in regard to the work of the apostles; although he does not explicitly state that the imperative is not for other believers, his description seems to imply that Jesus' mandate was for the apostles alone.⁵ Although patristic writers do not explicitly state the limited normativity of the commission, that they write of it almost exclusively in the context of the apostles indicates their belief that it was intended for them. Oscar Skarsaune aptly summarizes the patristic understanding of this passage:

²Harry Boer writes of "the apparently complete absence of this motivation [of the Great Commission] as a conscious factor in the missionary life of the church." Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 15. Boer may overstate the case, but his statement demonstrates the general idea that the early church did not cite the Matthean commission as a motive for missions.

³See the following for a sample of some scholarly treatments of the history of interpretation of the Matthean commission: David F. Wright, "The Great Commission and the Ministry of the Word: Reflections Historical and Contemporary on Relations and Priorities," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 25, no. 2 (Autumn 2007): 132-57; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 626-28; David P. Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed New Light on Old Texts* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2006), 121-46; John Jefferson Davis, "'Teaching Them to Observe All That I Have Commanded You': The History of the Interpretation of the 'Great Commission' and Implications for Marketplace Ministries," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25 (January 2001): 65-80. Each of these have contributed to my understanding of the history of interpretation of this passage, and I am especially indebted to Wright and Parris for their citations of several sources, especially from the patristic period and Wright's inclusion of Adolph Saravia as a key figure in the Reformation period.

⁴Justin, *1 Apol.* 31.7.

⁵Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.6

The early Church did not consider the great commission as a standing order for the Church at large, or for future generations following the apostolic generation. The great commission was the personal task of the eleven, later twelve, Apostles. It should not only be begun by them, it should also be completed by them.⁶

Similarly, from the post-Nicean period through the Middle Ages, the primary understanding of the imperative of Matthew 28:19 appears to be that it was intended primarily for the apostles. Rarely did preachers use it as a means for advocating the advancement of the gospel.⁷ Instead, reference to it was not for mission, but Trinitarian orthodoxy or baptismal practices. The assumption appears thus to be that the imperative was for the apostles.

During the Reformation, the standard interpretation prevailed.⁸ However, whereas some such as Luther give little attention to the Matthean commission except for ecclesiological concerns, others during the period explicitly argue that the mandate was intended for the apostles alone.⁹ Theodore Beza (1519-1605) “distinguished between the ‘extraordinary’ ‘commands and activities which were

⁶Oskar Skarsaune, “The Mission to the Jews: A Closed Chapter?,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 72. Indeed, very little overall appeal to any missionary imperative is evident during this period, in part because many seemed to believe that the apostles had completed their task of world mission. For an extensive list of patristic citations that support this conclusion, see *ibid.*, 69-82. For how the church expanded in the first few centuries after Christ, see Reidar Hvalvik, “In Word and Deed: The Expansion of the Church in the Pre-Constantinian Era,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 265-87. One should not assume, however, that Christians had no concern for the advancement of the gospel; the expansion of Christianity argues for an evangelistic and missionary ethos, even if there was little appeal to a missionary imperative. Warneck suggests that in its early period “the whole church was practically a missionary church.” Gustav Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901), 2. Given the conclusions drawn by Hvalvik, however, Warneck may overstate his case; the probability seems that some in the church were actively engaging in mission, but likely not a majority.

⁷David Wright cites John Chrysostom and Gregory the Great as two of the few during this period who concluded that Matt 28:16-20 indicates an ongoing mission. Wright, “Great Commission,” 139.

⁸David Bosch goes as far as to argue that “the Reformers no longer considered the ‘Great Commission’ as binding.” David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 246.

⁹Luther’s focus was primarily on ecclesiological matters, and thus his citations of this passage concern issues such as baptism and the papacy. However, elsewhere in his writings, he addresses the need for missions to the unreached. For examples, see Davis, “Teaching Them to Observe,” 70-71.

restricted to the apostles themselves' and the 'ordinary' ones applying to the whole church, with worldwide mission assigned to the first category."¹⁰ Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) explicitly denied that the command to the apostles continued beyond them. He writes, "There was no successor of the Apostles. The command to preach the Gospel in the whole world ceases with the Apostles."¹¹ Later, in 1651, in response to a question posed by Count Erhardt Truchsess of Wetzhausen about the need for missions, the Wittenberg Faculty of Theology upheld Gerhard's idea, arguing that the command was for the apostles only.¹² Such examples demonstrate the historic commonality of the view that the imperative of the Matthean commission did not extend beyond the apostles.¹³

Two arguments appear to serve as the primary grounds for rejecting the continuing normativity of Jesus' command. First, and most significant, for the majority of church history many Christians have believed that the disciples fulfilled Christ's commission. Justin, writing of the apostles in his *Dialogue with Trypho*,

¹⁰Wright, "Great Commission," 146. Wright's citation is from the Latin tract *Ad tractationem de ministrorum evangelii gradibus*, which was a response to Adrianus Saravia's argument in *De diversis ministrorum gradibus, sicut a Domino fuerunt instituti* for the continuing normativity of the imperative of Matt 28:19-20.

¹¹Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions*, 31. The translation of the Latin of Gerhard's *Loci Theologici* is Warneck's.

¹²Warneck summarizes their response in three points. First, the command was fulfilled by the apostles. Second, those who are in heathen nations have no excuse, because God has revealed himself through the light of nature; their being in darkness is a punishment by God. Third, the duty of the governing authorities is to build churches and appoint preachers to unreached places. *Ibid.*, 27-28. Similarly, Matthew Poole, writing in the mid-1600's, explains, "The apostles were by this precept obliged to go up and down the world preaching the gospel, but not presently. . . . Pastors and teachers who succeeded the apostles were not under this obligation, but were to be fixed in churches gathered." Matthew Poole, *Annotations Upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 3 (New York: Robert Carter and brothers, 1852), 146, accessed November 3, 2014, http://books.google.com/books?id=uN0XAQAIAAJ&source=gbs_book_other_versions.

¹³Ulrich Luz is an example of a modern scholar who suggests that the Great Commission was primarily for the apostles. Upon examining Matt 28:16-20 and giving particular emphasis to the mission described therein, he writes, "I am incapable of inferring traditio-historically from the almost exclusively Matthean text of 28:16-20 a universal baptismal and missionary commission." Ulrich Luz, "Has Matthew Abandoned the Jews? A Response to Hans Kvalbein and Peter Stuhlmacher Concerning Matt 28:16-20," in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 68. He is here cautious in his statement, yet in the end is unwilling to recognize the Great Commission as applying beyond the apostles.

states, “Through their voice it is that all the earth has been filled with the glory and grace of God and of His Christ.”¹⁴ Athanasius (c. 296-373) also affirms the success of the apostolic commission, suggesting that the apostles made disciples of all the nations.¹⁵ In addition, the view that the apostles were successful in reaching the world was not limited to the early church, but was also affirmed throughout the Middle Ages and even into the Reformation by men such as Beza and Johann Gerhard. This predominant understanding, however, does not mean that Christians denied the existence of peoples who did not have access to the gospel. Indeed, some, such as Augustine (354-430), recognized that many did not have the message of Christ; instead, the view was that the apostles had reached their known world and thus had completed their task.¹⁶

The second reason for assuming the Matthean commission had been fulfilled was that the authority necessary for such a mission had not passed beyond the apostles. Some ecclesiastical leaders were operating under a theory “of the apostolic office and its diversity from the office of preaching, from which the inference was drawn, that the church had no call to missions to the heathen, and no authority to impart such a call.”¹⁷ The apostles had the authority to go to the nations, and they appointed elders to remain at the churches they started. Thus, the elders were to stay and oversee the churches, for only the apostles had the commission from Christ to go to the nations. The passing of the apostolic office was

¹⁴Justin, *Dial.* 42.

¹⁵Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Aryans, Discourse 1* 13. A legendary account from the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* claims the apostles cast lots and divided the regions of the world so that each one would evangelize where his lot fell. *Acts Thom.* 1.

¹⁶Augustine, in a letter to Hesychius, writes that the mission of the apostles is not complete, for “there are among us, that is, in Africa, countless barbarian nations where the Gospel has not yet been preached.” Augustine, “Augustine to Hesychius,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. II/3, *Letters 156-210*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 350.

¹⁷Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions*, 27.

a particularly influential idea among the Reformers, for they rejected the succession of apostolic authority through the papacy.¹⁸

In such a broad expanse of Christian history, preaching, and writing, concisely delineating the hermeneutical principles that undergird the view that Matthew 28:19-20 did not extend beyond the apostles is difficult; however, two concepts serve as foundational for this position.¹⁹ First, the most important hermeneutical principle guiding this interpretation of the Great Commission is that the original recipients of a command in their particular context may limit the continuing normativity of the imperative.²⁰ In other words, some holding this view suggest that because the command to make disciples of all nations was given to the eleven disciples, its intended significance does not extend beyond them.²¹ Indeed, such limited normativity is not considered an unusual assumption, for no one considers Jesus' command in Matthew 21:1 to find a donkey to be normative beyond

¹⁸The need for authority for preaching among the nations is clearly evident in Gerhard's *Loci Theologici* 24.5.220. See the translation and summary in Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions*, 31.

¹⁹Here, as with the other views, the purpose is not to delineate all hermeneutical principles of relevance, but only those that are most pertinent for the conclusions drawn by adherents of the view.

²⁰The limiting factor of original recipients is a recognized hermeneutical principle. William Larkin, in seeking to discern what biblical commands or practices are normative for the modern reader, suggests that the original recipients may limit normativity. William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 316. Larkin, however, denies that this principle limits the normativity of the Great Commission. The limiting possibility of the original recipients is closely related to the principle that context determines meaning. Robertson McQuilkin argues, "When the context limits the recipient of a particular teaching or the application of that teaching, it is a violation of the authority of Scripture to make it universal." J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Problems in Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 230-31. Many of the authors cited above appear to have assumed that the original recipients of the commission limits its normativity to them. In this way, the principle of the original recipients (as a principle that is closely related to contextual considerations) was a limiting factor in their view. As this chapter demonstrates, however, the intended significance of Matt 28:19 is for every believer. That some of the principles asserted by Larkin and McQuilkin were used to deny the ongoing normativity of the Great Commission shows the potential limitations of their step-based approach to application through principlization.

²¹Scholars debate whether only the eleven were there or, perhaps, other followers of Christ were with them. The second half of this chapter briefly examines this subject.

those two disciples to whom he addressed. In interpreting the Matthean text, adherents to this view understand it as a command that was for a particular group in a particular context.

Second, the analogy of faith, the Reformation principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, may have influenced this view, at least among some reformers. In his explanation of his reasons for rejecting the continuation of the command to make disciples of all nations, Johann Gerhard argues in part that since present believers do not have the ability to perform miracles, they cannot be qualified to carry out the apostolic mission.²² The text of Matthew 28 does not include a reference to miracles, however, so one may wonder why Gerhard includes such giftedness in his criteria for who may legitimately discharge Jesus' commission. Mark 16, on the other hand, describes miraculous signs that will accompany those who take the gospel to the world. They who proclaim the gospel to all creation "will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover (Mk 16:17-18). Because these signs were no longer present, the mandate of Matthew 28:19-20, considered in the light of Mark 16:17-18, could not be intended for anyone beyond those who had such abilities, namely the apostles.²³

²²See the translation of Gerhard's statement in Warneck, *History of Protestant Missions*, 31.

²³In addition to these hermeneutical grounds, a reason that the missionary imperative received less attention was due to the doctrinal and practical outworking of the text in the light of then contemporary controversies and ecclesiological situations. Scholars note that the majority of citations of Matt 28:18-20 throughout church history have been to make doctrinal or ecclesiological points. Parris, *Reading the Bible*, 122-29; Wright, "Great Commission," 139. John Jefferson Davis states that the church fathers often cited the passage in support of Trinitarian theology, such as in Athanasius' *Four Letters to Serapion of Thmuls* and Augustine's *The Trinity*. See Davis, "Teaching Them to Observe," 66-74. Given the theological primacy of the Trinity and the heresies that repeatedly arose throughout church history, the presence of such references to the Trinitarian formula is not surprising. In addition, writers from the patristic period through the Reformation often referred to the Great Commission pericope in the context of baptism. *Didache*, for example, links both baptism and the Trinity through stating that the proper mode of baptism is Trinitarian (in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). *Did.* 7:1-4. See the following for helpful references to

The Imperative Is for Ministers

The second primary way that interpreters have understood the imperative of Matthew 28:19-20 is that its intended significance continues for ministers, those tasked with teaching and proclaiming the gospel. This view represents a sharp break with the long-standing interpretive tradition that Jesus' commission was for the apostles alone, and its advent is occasionally evident from the time of the Reformation. Indeed, John Calvin describes the Matthean commission in terms of ministers who take the gospel to the nations.²⁴ Jonathan Edwards, a supporter of missions through his famous ministry to Native Americans, writes that the commission given to the apostles in Matthew 28:19-20 "belongs to all ministers," for this passage represents the establishment of the gospel ministry.²⁵

The proliferation of this view is perhaps most indebted to the publication of William Carey's *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*.²⁶ Carey begins his booklet by appealing to the

Trinitarian and baptismal citations: Charles S. Kraszewski, *The Gospel of Matthew with Patristic Commentaries* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 377-82; Harold Smith, *Ante-Nicene Exegesis of the Gospels*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1925), 145-55. Thus, the imperative of the text was relegated to a minor status (if accorded any continuing significance at all) in favor of doctrinal and ecclesiological concerns.

²⁴In his comments on Matt 28:19, Calvin asserts, "The Lord commands the ministers of the gospel to go to a distance, in order to spread the doctrine of salvation in every part of the world." John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 384. Throughout his commentary on Jesus' words in this passage, Calvin repeatedly refers to ministers as those who carry out Jesus' commands. Michael Haykin and Jeffrey Robinson argue that Calvin's interpretation of this verse is primarily in light of its normativity for the apostles; however, Calvin seems to demonstrate at least to some degree his belief that the Great Commission imperative continued beyond the apostles. Haykin and Robinson rightly argue from other writings of Calvin that he was motivated by a missional desire. Michael A. G. Haykin and C. Jeffrey Robinson Sr., *To the Ends of the Earth: Calvin's Missional Vision and Legacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 11.

²⁵Jonathan Edwards, *History of Redemption, on a Plan Entirely Original: Exhibiting the Gradual Discovery and Accomplishment of the Divine Purposes in the Salvation of Man, Including a Comprehensive View of Church History and the Fulfilment of Scripture Prophecies* (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1793), 378, accessed November 4, 2014, http://books.google.com/books/download/History_of_Redemption_on_a_Plan_Entirely.pdf?id=A7FLAAAAYAAJ&hl=en&capid=AFLRE72MIbRLs8nwgBrbpw8xxCiqvLK9uZoPnFJRWCucMt-rFrJB95P-tMetLbeirlpTy1eD3GNdCveJ5hHtGn0eUomgHxlEQg&continue.

²⁶David Wright identifies Carey's publication of this famous work as the point that changed the trajectory of how this passage was viewed. Wright, "Great Commission," 149. Sean Kealy likewise notes the significance of Carey's small book in changing the direction of the interpretation of

command to go make disciples of all nations, refuting the belief among many of his contemporaries that this mandate applies only to the apostles.²⁷ Carey's work famously helped launch the modern missions movement in which the Great Commission has been viewed as the marching orders for taking the gospel to the world.

As Carey argues for the continuing validity of Jesus' commission, however, he repeatedly describes obedience to Christ's command as applying to those in the gospel ministry. Thus, in his argument for men to brave the challenges involved in missions to the nations, he regularly uses the language of "minister" in describing who should go: the "ordinary ministers" must endeavor "to carry the gospel to the heathen."²⁸ He who makes disciples of the nations does not worry about the challenges that accompany such a mission because

a Christian minister is a person who in a peculiar sense is not his own; he is the servant of God, and therefore ought to be wholly devoted to him. By entering on that sacred office he solemnly undertakes to be always engaged, as much as possible in the Lord's work, and not to chuse his own pleasure, or employment, or pursue the ministry as something that is to subserve his own ends, or interests, or as a kind of bye-work. He engages to go where God pleases, and to do, or endure what he sees fit to command, or call him to, in the exercise of his function.²⁹

In his eyes, those who take the gospel to the nations are Christian ministers.³⁰

this passage. Sean P. Kealy, *Matthew's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation: Book 1* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997), 340-41. Carey, however, was not the first to present this interpretation; those in the Puritan tradition had already espoused it for some time. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), for example, writes of the Great Commission in his famous commentary, "It is given to their successors [i.e., the apostles' successors], the ministers of the gospel, whose business it is to transmit the gospel from age to age, to the end of the world in time." Matthew Henry, *The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary*, ed. Leslie F. Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 163.

²⁷William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891), 7-10, accessed June 29, 2014, http://archive.org/details/pts_enquiryintotheobligations_1687_2.

²⁸Ibid., 9.

²⁹Ibid., 72. For another example, see *ibid.*, 82.

³⁰Andrew Fuller, a fellow Baptist contemporary of Carey, held the same view. Fuller came to see Matt 28:19-20 as "the *locus classicus* for missions." Michael A. G. Haykin, "Andrew Fuller on Mission: Text and Passion," in *Baptists and Mission: Papers from the Fourth International*

Yet, Carey is not alone in his conviction that the intended significance of Jesus' commission extends beyond the apostles to ministers, for many in this time period adopt the same idea. Some preachers of the Triennial Convention, formed of Baptist churches in the United States partially as a result of the influence of Carey's missionary endeavors, appear to have viewed the command as applying primarily to ministers.³¹ In his address at the inaugural meeting of the Triennial Convention, Richard Furman preached on the Great Commission; in regard to those who might go, he proclaims,

It becomes us to add, there are here servants of God ready to engage in the arduous, sacred Work; the language of whose souls, as individuals is, "Here am I, send me!" Many more, no doubt, will catch their spirit, and will with them be willing to risk their all in the Cause of the blessed Redeemer.³²

However, when he considers those who might go to the nations, he says, "Let the wise and good employ their counsels; the Minister of Christ, who is qualified for the sacred service, offer himself for the Work."³³ Furman here seems to indicate that

Conference on Baptist Studies, ed. Ian M. Randall and Anthony R. Cross (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2007), 39. On April 27, 1791, Fuller preached a sermon entitled "Instances, Evil, and Tendency of Delay, in the Concerns of Religion" in which he referred to preachers and true ministers as those who take the gospel to different locales. Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller: With a Memoir of His Life, by Andrew Gunton Fuller*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845), 141-51, accessed November 4, 2014, <http://books.google.com/books?id=NRJMAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+complete+works+of+andrew+fuller&hl=en&sa=X&ei=h9NYVM3GJYGogwTwxIOYDQ&ved=0CB0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=the%20complete%20works%20of%20andrew%20fuller&f=false>. David Allen provides a good overview of how this sermon may have impacted Carey. See David L. Allen, "Preaching for a Great Commission Resurgence," in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Charles E. Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 287-90.

³¹Leon McBeth explains that the letters of William Carey were often read at church and association meetings. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 343. For a helpful overview of the formation of the Triennial Convention, see *ibid.*, 344-61.

³²Richard Furman, "Sermon," in *Proceedings of the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States, at Their First Triennial Meeting, Held in Philadelphia, from the 7th to the 14th of May, 1817: Together with the Third Annual Report of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States* (Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814), 24, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/proceedingsofgen00amer>.

³³*Ibid.*, 24. Concerning missions involvement, preachers of the Triennial Convention commonly would call on their congregations to give and pray, but the task of going was primarily for ministers. Thus, Andrew Broaddus associates those who go to the nations with those who are a part of the gospel ministry. See Andrew Broaddus, "Holding Forth the Word of Life," in *The Sermons and Other Writings of the Rev. Andrew Broaddus: With a Memoir of His Life*, ed. Jeremiah Bell Jeter (New York: Lewis Colby, 1852), 79, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/>

ministers are the ones who should go. He, like many other Triennial Convention preachers, would urge the people in the pew to pray and to give, but reserve the task of going for ministers.³⁴

Beyond those in the Triennial Convention, Archibald M'Lean, a Scottish pastor of the late 1700's, contends the commission did not cease with the apostles, but extends to

a succession of faithful men who should be able to teach others. These are the standing and ordinary pastors and teachers whom Christ hath appointed as stewards over his house, and who are to be engaged in executing this commission until his second coming.³⁵

The point of these preachers and scholars is that the gospel ministry, including the command to evangelize the nations, devolves on ministers as the successors of the commission.³⁶

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³⁴Not only Baptists in America used this paradigmatic three-fold sermonic application for missions, but sermons about missions in England in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century likewise “generally focused on a request for prayers, missionaries, or financial support.” Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, “Go Ye Therefore and Teach All Nations.’ Imperial Evangelical and Mission Sermons: The Imperial Period,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901*, ed. Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 551.

³⁵Archibald M'Lean, *The Commission Given by Jesus Christ to His Apostles Illustrated* (London: Peter MacDonal, 1847), 9-10, accessed September 12, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/commissiongivenb1847mlea>.

³⁶Numerous others contend for this view of the Great Commission. Edward Griffin (1770-1837) argues that the commission is for the “whole body of ministers in every age.” Edward D. Griffin, “Arguments for Missions,” in *The Missionary Enterprise: A Collection of Discourses on Christian Missions*, ed. Baron Stow (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1846), 22, accessed August 30, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/missionaryenterp00stow>. Charles Simeon suggests that ministers have the same commission as the apostles. Charles Simeon, *Matthew*, vol. 11 of *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 619. Melville Horne (1762-1841), a Methodist advocate for missions, in his letters contends that the commission is for ministers: “When our Lord spoke these authoritative words [of the Great Commission] he had in contemplation all his ministers of every age and nation, as well as his immediate disciples.” Melville Horne, *A Collection of Letters Relative to Foreign Missions: Containing Several of Melville Horne's "Letters on Missions," and Interesting Communications from Foreign Missionaries* (Andover, MA: Galen Ware, 1810), 11, accessed September 26, 2015, <http://archive.org/details/acollectionlett01horngoog>. David Warner represents the views of many in the Lutheran tradition in arguing that the Great Commission imperative is for ministers as successors of the apostolic office. David M. Warner, “Go’ verbs in Matthew: Implications for the Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20” (MDiv thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 2003), 95-97.

Supporters of this view have put forward several arguments for it. In his *The Commission Given by Jesus Christ to His Apostles*, M'Lean describes two reasons for linking the commission with ministers. First, Jesus' commission is not limited to the apostles, because Jesus promises his presence until the end of the age; since "this promise cannot be restricted to the apostles personally," it must extend beyond them.³⁷ Second, pertaining to who may legitimately apply the normativity of Jesus' command, M'Lean argues,

This commission is given only to *teachers*. All Christ's disciples are not teachers; all have not the scriptural character and qualifications necessary to that office. Though men should think themselves qualified, nay, though they should actually be so; yet, if they are not called and ordained according to the scripture rule, they cannot regularly execute this commission.³⁸

In addition to M'Lean's two reasons, Edward Griffin (1770-1837) adds that ministers are the successors of the apostles.³⁹ He explains,

The injunction in the text was not addressed to the eleven exclusively, but to them as depositaries of the divine commands, and through them to the whole body of ministers in every age. This appears from the promise subjoined, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Indeed the eleven were expressly commanded to transmit to their successors all the injunctions which they themselves received, one of which was to disciple all nations.⁴⁰

³⁷M'Lean, *Commission Given by Jesus*, 10. The connection between ordination and the teaching role of Great Commission obedience is quite common. For example, the Augsburg Confession in article 14 explicitly limits public proclamation in teaching and preaching to those who have been called to the ministry: "Concerning church government it is taught that no one should publicly teach, preach, or administer the sacraments without a proper call." Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 46. Philip Melanchthon further explains this article in stating, "No one should be allowed to administer the Word and the sacraments unless they are duly called" through "canonical ordination." Philip Melanchthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 222.

³⁸M'Lean, *Commission Given by Jesus*, 10-11.

³⁹Griffin was the first pastor of Park Street Church in Boston. He also served as a professor at Andover Seminary and later as president of Williams College from 1821-1836.

⁴⁰Griffin, "Arguments for Missions," 22. This notion of ministers as successors of the apostles is the most common argument for this view. See, also, for example, John Skinner, *The Nature and Extent of the Apostolical Commission. A Sermon Preached at the Consecration of the Right Reverend Dr Samuel Seabury, Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. By a Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Scotland* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers & Co., 1785), 7, 33-50, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroup>

Thus, following the apostles, only ministers are the rightful recipients of the commission.

In examining the sermons, writings, and arguments presented by those contending for this view, two hermeneutical principles of note stand out as foundational. First, they appear to be operating under the principle that a passage's immediate context aids in determining meaning and continuing normativity.⁴¹ Because the surrounding verses of the command to make disciples includes baptizing and the promise of Jesus' presence, William Carey argues that the commission cannot be limited to the apostles; to do so would be to limit the continuing necessity of baptism and the promise of Jesus' presence.⁴² In addition, these verses state that disciple-making must reach all nations, which clearly had not been fulfilled by the apostles.⁴³ The context also leads them to argue that only ministers may rightly fulfill

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⁴¹Hermeneutical guides commonly affirm this principle. For example, Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard ask, "Does the passage contain an explicit or implicit condition that limits its application?" William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 495. Robertson McQuilkin suggests "the guideline of context [is] the most obvious and simplest of guidelines." Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 186. Walter Kaiser urges the necessity of considering a passage in light of the sectional context of where the passage falls in the book, the overall book context, the canonical context, and the immediate context surrounding the passage. Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 69-85.

⁴²Carey, *Enquiry*, 8-9.

⁴³Due to the continuing lostness of the heathen, preachers in this time period often called on their hearers to consider the hopelessness of those without the gospel. Andrew Broaddus proclaimed,

Look, then, beloved friends, over the different regions of the extended earth and mark the shades of moral darkness which distinguish the countries where *Heathenism* holds its gloomy reign. . . . And when you have caught a view of the mental darkness in which they are involved; the tyranny under which they groan; the appalling superstition with which they are bound; their miserable condition in regard to civil society; and the benighted prospect which death and the future state must present to view . . . then turn your eyes on our own favored country . . . let me ask, to what is this difference owing, but to the gospel of Christ and its heavenly influence?

Broaddus, "Holding Forth" 67-68. See also George B. Ide, "The Moral Elevation of the Church Essential to Missionary Success," in *The Missionary Enterprise: A Collection of Discourses on Christian Missions*, ed. Baron Stow (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1846), 241-42, accessed August 30, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/missionaryenterp00stow>; William R. Williams, "Increase of Faith Necessary to the Success of Christian Missions," in *The Missionary Enterprise: A Collection of Discourses on Christian Missions*, ed. Baron Stow (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1846),

the imperative. Because the command to make disciples is further delineated by teaching all that Christ commanded, Archibald M'Lean contends, "This commission is given only to *teachers*. . . . Yet, if they are not called and ordained according to the scripture rule, they cannot regularly execute this commission."⁴⁴ Thus, the limits of the immediate context drive their conceptualization of the normativity of the Great Commission.

Second, the principle of limited recipients also is at work in this view. However, whereas the first position rejected continuing normativity due to this principle, those affirming this second view have modified this principle in such a way that Jesus' command has continuing normativity due to an analogy or correspondence between apostles and ministers. In other words, as with the first view, the apostles as the recipients of Jesus' command limit the intended significance of the commission; this limitation, however, does not nullify continuing normativity. Rather, a correspondence exists between apostles and ministers due to the teaching role that both have. This correspondence, therefore, limits the intended significance to ministers. M'Lean, for example, links the apostles being sent by Christ with the ministers being set apart for the work of the ministry in that he suggests ministers are sent "as the apostles were."⁴⁵ Jonathan Edwards, also asserting that ministers carry out the Great Commission, sees in the command to the disciples "Jesus' appointment of the gospel ministry" such that the apostles and ministers are linked together in this commission.⁴⁶ This view is thus predicated on the limiting factor of

178-81, accessed August 30, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/missionaryenterp00stow>.

⁴⁴M'Lean, *Commission Given by Jesus*, 10-11.

⁴⁵Ibid., 11. This correspondence does not imply, however, an exact identification of the ministerial office with the apostolic office; M'Lean argues that there are no full successors to the apostles. Ibid., 6-8.

⁴⁶Edwards, *History of Redemption*, 378.

the original recipients of the command; the apostles, who received the initial commission, correspond with ministers, who continue to carry out the commission.

The Imperative Is for the Local Church

The third view takes a slightly different approach in that it argues that the intended significance of the Great Commission is for the local church as a whole, not merely for her ministers. This perspective appears more recently in church history than the previous views, and it seems to be most prevalent among Baptists. Two primary avenues stand out in this approach to understanding the continuing validity of the Great Commission.

Robert Plummer, a New Testament scholar who writes of the Great Commission, represents the first way of understanding the imperative in the context of the local church. He explains, “Local congregations *as a whole* inherit this missionary commission from the apostles, and depending on an individual person’s gifts, supernatural leading, and life circumstances, obedience to this commission will be manifested in a variety of ways.”⁴⁷ In Plummer’s missiology and description of the general outworking of the Great Commission, the local church plays a vital role. For him, “local congregations are not churches in distinction from the universal church, but simply manifestations of that universal reality in a localized setting. It is with these localized manifestations of the universal church that we are concerned.”⁴⁸ As the apostles had received the Great Commission, and Paul likewise through the command of Christ, the missionary imperative was passed from them as individuals

⁴⁷Robert L. Plummer, “The Great Commission in the New Testament,” *SBJT* 9, no. 4 (December 2005): 9.

⁴⁸Robert L. Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 44-45. This monograph is a slightly edited version of his dissertation: Robert Lewis Plummer, “The Church’s Missionary Nature: The Apostle Paul and His Churches” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001).

to the churches that they started. Thus, the local congregations as a whole were the recipients of the apostolic exhortation to spread the gospel. Therefore, as the individual congregations received the missionary imperative, so also,

The modern church must be a missionary church. The church must not only take on the mantle of the apostolic mission in a general or abstract way; she must carry out the apostolic mission in concrete tasks. Just like the ancient churches that Paul addressed, modern churches should be active in proclaiming the gospel, suffering for the gospel, authenticating the gospel by their behavior, confirming the gospel through miracles, building-up the church, and praying for missions and the church.⁴⁹

The emphasis is on the activity of the local congregation functioning as an active missionary community.

Landmark Baptists represent the second way of asserting this view, arguing that when the Great Commission was given, “Christ commissioned his church alone to preach his gospel.”⁵⁰ A key Landmark belief is “that one indicator of a church’s validity was its ability to trace itself back to the church Jesus founded during his ministry. Since the disciples were formed into a church by Jesus, the Great Commission was given to the church, not to the disciples.”⁵¹ Therefore, “when Jesus said to go forth and make disciples, he was speaking to the local church gathered

⁴⁹Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding*, 144.

⁵⁰James Robinson Graves, *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?* (Memphis, TN: Baptist Book House: Graves, Mahaffy & Company, 1880), 43, accessed November 5, 2014, http://books.google.com/books/download/Old_Landmarkism_what_is_It.pdf?id=k04NAAAAYAAJ&hl=en&capid=AFLRE73sx3yQtCz48OFvy-Mb7WRNrfuCh4Xmrs0uDDocJjn87Inf5swOfVA3fe_LGR4qGCv76NltwDiaxnxvavhfN9--GDzA&continue=http://books.google.com/books/download/Old_Landmarkism_what_is_It.pdf%3Fid%3Dk04NAAAAYAAJ%26output%3Dpdf%26hl%3Den. For a brief, but helpful, overview of Landmark Baptist teaching and the history of the movement, see McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 447-61.

⁵¹J. Kristian Pratt, “The Association Plan: A Landmark Baptist Alternative to the Convention System,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (September 2006): 294. For this reason, Landmark Baptists argued against a convention’s organizing mission work; because Christ had authorized the local church for the gospel mission, only the local church could rightfully carry on the work of the advancement of the gospel. See, for example, Ben M. Bogard, “A Startling Convention Onslaught Willful Misrepresentation: Shall Our People Be Misled by Falsehood and Killed with Sweetened Poison?,” *Baptist and Commoner*, December 17, 1919.

there, not to the disciples as individuals.”⁵² Thus, one Landmark Baptist explains, “For Christ gave the ‘commission’ (Matt. 28:19-20) to *his church*, composed of Baptist people.”⁵³ Similarly, J. M. Pendleton, in his well-known *Church Manual*, describes the gospel as being in the custody of the local church; the gospel message, as well as the authority for proclaiming it, has passed from Christ to the first local church (the apostles) to the individual congregations.⁵⁴ The intended significance of Jesus’ commission to the disciples extends, therefore, to the local church.⁵⁵

Three foundational arguments lead to this view. First, for Plummer, this supposition appears to be due, at least in part, to the practical consideration that no individual possesses all the gifts and skills necessary for the Great Commission enterprise.⁵⁶ Second, also as Plummer reasons, the church is linked to the apostles in such a way that “all but the unrepeatable aspects of the apostles’ mission (e.g., eyewitness testimony and initial promulgation of authoritative revelation) devolve upon the church *as a whole*.”⁵⁷ The local church, therefore, inherits the Great

⁵²Pratt, “Association Plan,” 294.

⁵³J. D. Brunner, “Stay in the Fight,” *Baptist and Commoner*, July 13, 1916.

⁵⁴J. M. Pendleton, *Church Manual: Designed for the Use of Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1867), 162-63, accessed November 5, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/churchmanualdesi00pend>.

⁵⁵Although Plummer and Landmark Baptists use the same language of the local church as the recipient of the Great Commission, numerous distinctions exist between their views. A key ecclesiological difference concerns the nature of the local church. Whereas Plummer contends (rightly, in my understanding) that the local church is a particularization of the universal church, Landmark Baptists consider Matthew to describe not only the formation of the first local church, but the local church as an *institution*. Jesus gave the Great Commission, therefore, not only to the disciples as the first local church, but to the institution which is the local church. Thus, every true local church has the authority to preach the gospel and carry out the command of Matt 28:19-20. See Graves’ comments regarding the church as an institution in Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 29-31. See also the summary and rebuttal of this view in Bob L. Ross, *Old Landmarkism and the Baptists: An Examination of the Theories of “Church Authority” and “Church Succession”* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1979), 9-10, 21-32.

⁵⁶Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding*, 144. Plummer also writes that para-church ministries have incorrectly moved missions from the local church; he is attempting to articulate missions as primarily the responsibility of the local church.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 144. Plummer’s language of the apostolic commission devolving on the local church as a whole seems to depend on the conclusion of Norbert Schmidt. Plummer approvingly quotes Schmidt: “All apostolic functions that were not unique in time and kind were handed over to

Commission from the apostles. The Spirit, God's command, and the Word of God work together in the church to propel the *local church as a whole* outward in the work of the advancement of the gospel.⁵⁸ Third, Landmark Baptists advocate that the remaining eleven disciples were the first local church; therefore, "if the church alone was commissioned to preserve and to preach the gospel," then the intended significance of the Great Commission is only for the local church.⁵⁹

As with the view that the commission is for the apostles, this one has two hermeneutical assumptions that are of particular importance for contending that the intended significance is for the local church. First, the principle of the interpretive value of the immediate context is essential in determining that the significance continues beyond the apostles. Thus, Plummer argues that baptism, included within the Great Commission, suggests its continuing normativity because baptism did not cease with the apostles.⁶⁰ Second, the principle of limited recipients, as with the previous views, undergirds the correspondence with the original recipients, the apostles; however, advocates of this view, rather than assuming a correspondence between the apostles and ministers, contend for a correspondence between the apostles and the local church.⁶¹ This conclusion is evident in Plummer's

the churches as a whole, rather than to any individuals within or outside the local congregations." Plummer, *Paul's Understanding*, 38. For the original quote, see Norbert Schmidt, "The Apostolic Band: A Paradigm for Modern Missions?" (ThM thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1985), iv.

⁵⁸Plummer, *Paul's Understanding*, 66-67.

⁵⁹Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 45.

⁶⁰Plummer, "Great Commission," 5.

⁶¹In addition to Plummer and the Landmark Baptists, several others assert this correspondence. Geoffrey Harris writes, "Evidently the implication is that mission is to be carried out corporately, in the mutually supportive structures of the Church, rather than by vulnerable individuals working alone or in pairs. It is the group of disciples now representing the Church as a body who respond to Jesus' instructions." R. Geoffrey Harris, *Mission in the Gospels* (London, England: Epworth Press, 2004), 64. Although in some of his writings Ulrich Luz seems to argue that the Great Commission was primarily for the apostles (see Luz, "Has Matthew Abandoned," 68), he elsewhere seems to indicate that the commission is for the local church due to the correspondence between the disciples and the church. He explains, "As the twelve disciples represent the community, the instruction is addressed to the whole community and not just to special preachers. In agreement with almost the entire New Testament, Matthew's Gospel presents proclamation as the task of the

argumentation, for he suggests, “Repeatable functions of the apostles (going, baptizing, teaching, etc.) devolve upon the church as a whole and are manifested through a variety of gifted persons in local congregations (1 Cor 12:4-7).”⁶² The *functions* of the apostles correspond to the *work* of a church that occurs through the gifts of individual members; thus, the corporate body corresponds in *function* to the apostles. With those holding Landmark beliefs, this principle of correspondence is slightly different in that the identification is between the apostles as the first *local church* and each local church thereafter; due to this intrinsic link, local churches have the same authority for preaching the gospel that the apostles had.⁶³ The principle of correspondence between the apostles and the local church thus is the hermeneutical bedrock for this view.

The Imperative Is for the Universal Church

This fourth view considers the imperative of the Great Commission to be directed not only to the original apostles, but also to the universal church. The similarities with the previously described position are clear in that the intended significance extends beyond the eleven. However, distinction is evident in that the command passes on to not just the local church, but all of the church for all time *as a whole*.

whole community and not that of a particular office in the community.” Ulrich Luz, “Discipleship: A Matthean Manifesto for a Dynamic Ecclesiology,” in *Studies in Matthew*, ed. Ulrich Luz, trans. Rosemary Selle (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 150.

⁶²Plummer, “Great Commission,” 5. Plummer again seems to heavily depend on the reasoning of Norbert Schmidt, who observes that “there is a certain continuity between the Apostles and the churches, in which certain Apostolic tasks and privileges are given over to the churches.” Schmidt, “Apostolic Band,” 76. For Plummer’s use of Schmidt’s argument, see Plummer, *Paul’s Understanding*, 38.

⁶³J. R. Graves writes that the local church is “alone commissioned to preach the Gospel.” Local churches are “the only authorized exponents of Christ’s revelation, and of what Christianity is.” Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 43.

Although a number of Christians have assumed this position, two in particular help to illustrate it.⁶⁴ Adrianus Saravia (c. 1532-1613), a Dutch Calvinist, has the notable distinction of being one of the major proponents in the Reformation period of the continuing validity of the Great Commission, and he explicitly links it to the universal church.⁶⁵ As one of the few in the Reformation period arguing for a continuing missional imperative in Matthew 28:18-20, his arguments are helpful for delineating and understanding this view, especially considering that he was explicitly arguing against theologians such as Theodore de Beza who rejected an ongoing normativity for this passage. In writing about the continuing necessity of missions, Saravia explains that the ministry of the apostles “and whatever authority they had received, was given to the Church rather than to any particular individuals.”⁶⁶ For

⁶⁴John J. Owen contends that the commission is for the universal church: “This great and benevolent command is binding on the church now, and always will be, as long as time shall last, and a nation or people remain unevangelized. This command was given, not to the apostles alone, but to all these *five hundred brethren*, proving most manifestly that this is a duty devolving upon the whole church on earth, and the one to which, as long as the necessity in the moral darkness of men exists for its exercise, she is especially to gird herself.” John J. Owen, *A Commentary, Critical, Expository, and Practical, on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, for the Use of Ministers, Theological Students, Private Christians, Bible Classes, and Sabbath Schools* (New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1857), 413, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/commentarycritic00owen>. Peter Stuhlmacher seems to affirm this position in writing, “It remains for the Church of Jesus Christ of all ages.” Peter Stuhlmacher, “Matt 28:16-20 and the Course of Mission in the Apostolic and Postapostolic Age,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 43. H. L. Ellison writes, “The commission was given to the Eleven as the representatives of the Church to be. This is not a command to each individual (more are called to stay at home than to go) but to the Church as a whole. There may be good reasons why this individual or that should not go, but there are never good reasons for the Church’s failing to reach out and go.” H. L. Ellison, “Matthew,” in *New International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 1154. Henry Alford, a nineteenth century Anglican, writes, “The command is to the universal church.” Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers: Containing the Authorized Version* (London: Rivingtons, 1868), 217, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/newtestamentfor01alfogooq>. Alford, however, clarifies that although it is for the universal church, the primary ones who carry out the Great Commission are pastors and teachers. Henry Alford, *Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary*, 5th ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1863), 307, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/GreekTestamentCriticalExegeticalCommentaryByHenry>. Donald Hagner seems to agree with this view in stating that Christ “commissions his disciples and in effect the church of every period of history.” Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC 33b, (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 889.

⁶⁵For an overview of the life and teachings of Saravia, see Willem Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia (C. 1532-1613): Dutch Calvinist, First Reformed Defender of the English Episcopal Church Order on the Basis of the Ius Divinum* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980). Note that his first name is sometimes spelled “Hadrianus.”

⁶⁶Hadrianus Saravia, *A Treatise on the Different Degrees of the Christian Priesthood* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1840), 162, accessed September 12, 2014, <http://books.google.com/>

this reason, he concludes “that their [the apostles’] embassy, and the command they received to preach the Gospel, remains in full force, and perfectly binding on the Church, so long as there shall be nations ignorant of the Lord.”⁶⁷ Willem Nijenhuis summarizes Saravia’s position well:

After the apostles’ death the whole church was placed under the obligation to proclaim the Gospel to all nations until the end of time. Matthew 28:20 applied to the whole church. In this connection Saravia produced the striking statement that the apostolic ministry and authority had been given to the church rather than to individuals.⁶⁸

Adolph Saphir (1831-1891), a Hungarian minister, also assumes that the normativity of the Great Commission extends to the universal church as a whole.⁶⁹ He was an influential pastor, missionary, and writer in Europe during the nineteenth century. His work is especially helpful for considering the normativity of the Great Commission, for he wrote two books about the passage: a thorough analysis of the text in light of the whole canon and a series of sermons on Matthew 28:18-20. Speaking in general about Jesus’ commands, he writes, “But as the words of our Lord refer to the individual, so also and primarily to the whole Church.”⁷⁰ Therefore, when he considers Matthew 28:18-20, he argues that “this great work” is “entrusted to the church.”⁷¹ It was not only for the apostles, and it continues not merely for pastors or

books/about/ A_treatise_on_the_different_degrees_of_t.html?id=8nYEAAAAQAAJ.

⁶⁷Saravia, *Treatise on Different Degrees*, 164. More information about Saravia’s view is available in his *De gradibus, Defensio tractationis*, and *Examen*. Much of Saravia’s articulation of his position is due to his debate with Theodore de Beza in which Beza argued that the imperative of Matt 28:19-20 was only for the apostles.

⁶⁸Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 241.

⁶⁹He produced two volumes on the subject: Adolph Saphir, *Christ and the Church: Thoughts on the Apostolic Commission (Matthew XXVIII. 18-20)* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1884), accessed September 12, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/christchurchthou00saph>; Adolph Saphir, *Christ and the Church: Sermons on the Apostolic Commission (Matthew XXVIII. 18-20)* (London: James Nisbet & Co. Limited, 1874), accessed September 12, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/christchurchserm00saph>.

⁷⁰Saphir, *Thoughts on Apostolic Commission*, 240.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 230-31.

for the local church, but it is intended for the universal church as a whole. Thus, “the Church [is] sent by Christ” to fulfill the Great Commission.⁷²

Two primary arguments undergird this position, one by Saravia and another by Saphir. For Saravia, the key issue is authority, for he argues for a succession of apostolic function such that preaching the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and church government pass on to the church. This continuation of the apostolic function includes the succession of apostolic authority as a result of Christ’s giving the keys of the kingdom to the church.⁷³ Thus, “the church itself was heir to the apostolic commission and authority.”⁷⁴ Saphir, rather than linking the commission with the authority of the apostles, finds the missional imperative in the identification of the universal church with Christ. He argues that “the Church is the representative and the continuation of Christ.”⁷⁵ Therefore, “as Christ was sent by the Father, so is the Church sent by Christ.”⁷⁶ Though they use different means of argumentation, Saphir and Saravia end at the same place—the Great Commission extends to the universal church.

The hermeneutical foundations of this view are quite similar to those undergirding the contention that the intended significance of Jesus’ command in Matthew 28:19-20 is for the local church. First, it similarly stands on the conviction that immediate context determines meaning and applicability, and it thus argues that

⁷²Saphir, *Thoughts on Apostolic Commission*, 161.

⁷³Saravia, *Treatise on Different Degrees*, 165-66.

⁷⁴Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 242.

⁷⁵Saphir, *Thoughts on Apostolic Commission*, 160. Saphir suggests that the correspondence of the church and Jesus is so close that the church becomes the presence of Christ in the world. He writes, “When we, as the mouth and hands and feet and heart of Jesus, as His representatives, as His body filled with His Spirit, go forth speaking His truth, manifesting His character, feeding His poor, comforting His afflicted ones—we have, nay, we are, the real presence of the Lord.” *Ibid.*, 231.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 161.

the context of the passage indicates an intended significance that continues beyond the apostles. Because Jesus promises his ongoing presence, the commission cannot be merely for the apostles. For this reason, Saphir states, “When Jesus said, ‘Lo, I am with you all the days, even to the end of the world,’ He was looking forward to the future, to the Church which He was about to build on the rock of His Divine Sonship.”⁷⁷ Saravia points to the command to disciple the nations as evidence for the continuing normativity of the Great Commission. He argues that it is “perfectly binding on the Church, so long as there shall be nations ignorant of the Lord.”⁷⁸ Because nations still lack the gospel, the commission remains binding on the church.

Second, it also depends on the principle of correspondence. For Saphir, the correspondence is between *Christ* and the church. He explains,

The truth which is thus impressed on us is that our Lord, although ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father, is still on earth, that in His disciples He continues His work and mission, that His Church is identified with Him, that through His believers, as the members of His body, He exerts His power and manifests His grace among the nations of the world.⁷⁹

Because he assumes the universal church is identified with Christ, the mission of Christ continues in the church as a whole. Saravia, on the other hand, and like the other views, predicates his position on the limiting factor of the original recipients; he sees a correspondence between the *apostles* and the universal church.⁸⁰ For this reason, the functions of the apostles—“the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the governing both of the churches and of

⁷⁷Saphir, *Thoughts on Apostolic Commission*, 241.

⁷⁸Saravia, *Treatise on Different Degrees*, 164.

⁷⁹Saphir, *Thoughts on Apostolic Commission*, 160.

⁸⁰Ellison similarly views the eleven disciples “as the representatives of the Church to be.” Ellison, “Matthew,” 1154. From a related viewpoint, John J. Owen contends that the commission devolves on the universal church due to his assumption that the five hundred believers were with the disciples on the mountain, thus “proving most manifestly that this is a duty devolving upon the whole church on earth.” Owen, *Commentary, Critical, Expository*, 413. Owens’ point, therefore, rests on the assumption that the disciples present correspond to the universal church as a whole.

their subordinate ministers of the Word”—continue on in the church.⁸¹ Although they argue for correspondence to different entities, both Saravia and Saphir utilize this principle to determine the continuing applicability of the Great Commission. Thus, the intended significance is, for them, largely predicated on their assumptions of the way correspondence impacts significance.

The Imperative Is for Every Believer

The final view presented here is that the intended significance of the Great Commission is for every believer. This position has noticeable overlap with those of the local church and the universal church; however, distinction is evident in the *emphasis* upon who is to carry out the command to go make disciples. With the local church and universal church views, the imperative is for each *as a whole*; however, the notion that it is for every believer means that the command to make disciples is binding on every Christian. The purpose of this section is not to explain *in what way* it is binding, but merely to summarize the arguments for and hermeneutical underpinnings of this view.

The Anabaptists were the first major group to argue for the continuing validity of the Great Commission for every Christian.⁸² This passage served as a fundamental guide for them, both for ordering the covenant community and understanding its marching orders. For this reason, Anabaptist teaching and documents referred to it quite regularly. Franklin Littell, an Anabaptist historian, cites the refrain “the Master meant it to apply to all believers at all times” as a proof-text that regularly appears in Anabaptist sermons and writings.⁸³ Menno Simons, in

⁸¹Nijenhuis, *Adrianus Saravia*, 237-38.

⁸²For a good overview of the role of the Great Commission in Anabaptist thought, see Hans Kasdorf, “Anabaptists and the Great Commission in the Reformation,” *Direction* 4, no. 2 (April 1975): 303-18.

⁸³Franklin H. Littell, “The Anabaptist Theology of Missions,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 21, no. 1 (January 1947): 12. See also his notes on pg. 12-13 for citations from Anabaptist

referring to the Markan commission, states the Anabaptist view of their mission to spread the gospel: “But after it had all been accomplished according to the Scriptures, and had been made new in Christ, He did not send out the scribes and Pharisees with Moses’ law, but His disciples with His own doctrine, saying: Go ye into all the world.”⁸⁴ In other words, in Anabaptist teaching, Christ’s followers, all believers, are to proclaim his truth to the world.⁸⁵

In contemporary evangelicalism, the ongoing normativity of the Great Commission has been a resounding theme. Many biblical scholars, looking at the text in Matthew, contend that Jesus’ command extends to every believer. Walter Kaiser explains that Jesus’ imperative, directed to the apostles, is not limited to them, but extends to every follower of Christ.⁸⁶ William Mounce, in a lecture on the Great Commission, emphasizes that God’s will for every Christian is to make disciples in obedience to Jesus’ command:

We spend a lot of time in various stages of our life wondering about the will of God. It was the number one question I was asked when I was teaching, “What's the will of God?” Do you want the answer to that question? It is really simple. The will of God is that you make disciples. There. Period. End of discussion. No more wasted time about the will of God. God’s desire is that you be a disciple, that you pursue sanctification, 1 Thessalonians 5. And then you make more disciples. God’s will for your life and mine is that we become learners, that we become followers of Jesus Christ, that we become disciples and then make more disciples.⁸⁷

writings.

⁸⁴Quoted in Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 99.

⁸⁵Wolfgang Schäufele explains that Anabaptists do not generally make a large distinction between laity and the ministry. They were quick, therefore, to recognize that the Great Commission must pertain to all believers. Lay missionaries were quite active in the proclamation of the gospel. Wolfgang Schäufele, “The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984), 70-87.

⁸⁶Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 149-50.

⁸⁷William Mounce, “The Great Commission,” *Biblical Training*, n.d., accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/great-commission/52-major-stories-of-the-bible/william-mounce>.

Yet, not only scholars, but pastors in the pulpit have assumed that the Great Commission is intended for every believer. John Piper has famously argued that there are three options for every believer in regard to Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations: a believer will go, send, or disobey.⁸⁸ In other words, Christ commands every disciple to obey the Great Commission, whether through going to the nations or sending those who go. David Platt has also made the commission a central aspect in his preaching, calling on all believers to obey it. In a sermon on this passage, he urges his congregation to submit to the command to make disciples of all nations, stating, "This is what we do as followers of Christ. We share the Word."⁸⁹ Every Christian stands under the command to go make disciples.

Two primary arguments drive this view, the first of which is that context determines meaning.⁹⁰ Kaiser, in an examination of why some of Jesus' statements are normative for all believers and others are not, specifically appeals to Jesus' promise of his presence as evidence that the commission is for every follower of Christ; because all believers have the promise that Jesus will be with them, so also

⁸⁸John Piper, "The Legacy of Antioch," video of sermon (Minneapolis: Bethlehem Baptist Church, October 25, 2009), accessed November 14, 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-legacy-of-antioch>.

⁸⁹David Platt, "Commissioned by the King," transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, 2012), accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.radical.net/media/series/view/1095/commissioned-by-the-king/video?filter=book&book=32&chapter=28>. See also a similar assertion in David Platt, "By Making Disciples," transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, January 20, 2013), accessed July 12, 2017, <http://www.radical.net/resources/sermons/by-making-disciples-1>. James Montgomery Boice similarly states that the Great Commission is for every believer. James Montgomery Boice, *The Triumph of the King Matthew 18-28*, vol. 2 of *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 646. J. C. Ryle also contends for the ongoing imperative for every believer. He writes, "Let us never forget that this solemn injunction is still in full force. It is still the bounden duty of every disciple of Christ to do all he can in person, and by prayer to make others acquainted with Jesus. Where is our faith, if we neglect this duty? Where is our charity? It may well be questioned whether a man knows the value of the Gospel himself, if he does not desire to make it known to all the world." J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St Matthew* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., n.d.), 409.

⁹⁰Most advocating this position do not present arguments for it, but seem to merely assume that the Great Commission is for all believers. David Platt, for example, in "Commissioned by the King," contends that Christ's authority demands obedience to the Great Commission, but he does not explain why its normativity extends beyond the apostles. Platt, "Commissioned by the King."

they have the command upon them to make disciples of all nations.⁹¹ Mounce takes a slightly different contextual approach in arguing that since the Great Commission occurs at the end of Matthew's Gospel, it is intentionally left open-ended so that the command extends forward to all followers of Christ.⁹²

The second argument is that the disciples represent all Christians. Craig Blomberg contends, "The disciples represent everyone in the church to which he writes and, derivatively, everyone who professes to follow Christ in any age."⁹³ Similarly, Mortimer Arias and Alan Johnson argue that "'the eleven' is a symbolic expression for 'the disciples' in general."⁹⁴ Therefore, the Great Commission is for every follower of Christ.

Two primary hermeneutical principles seem to undergird this view. First, the arguments based on contextual considerations obviously stand on the hermeneutical principle that a passage's immediate context determines meaning and application. The assumption is that context clues provide sufficient information for

⁹¹Kaiser, *Uses of Old Testament*, 149-50. John Mott, one of the major figures in the missions movement of the early twentieth century, used this same argument. He writes, "While this command was given to the disciples of Christ living in the first generation of the Christian era, it was intended as well for all time and for each Christian in his own time. That the command was not intended for the Apostles alone is seen from the promise with which it is linked, 'Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.'" The practice of the Church in the Apostolic Age and Sub-Apostolic Age shows that the command was regarded as binding not only upon the Apostles but also upon all Christians.

John R. Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1901), 22, accessed September 26, 2015, <http://archive.org/details/details/evangelizationw00goog>.

⁹²Mounce, "Great Commission."

⁹³Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 433.

⁹⁴Mortimer Arias and Alan Johnson, *The Great Commission: Biblical Models for Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 32. Another example is John Peter Lange, who writes, "They come forward here as the representatives of the entire band of disciples, and not as the select apostolic college of the Twelve, which makes its first reappearance after the selection of Matthias." John Peter Lange, *The Gospel According to Matthew, Together with a General Theological and Homiletical Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1 of *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, with Special Reference to Ministers and Students*, trans. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1865), 555, accessed October 7, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/CommentaryOnTheHolyScripturesCriticalDoctrinalAndHomilectical.Lange/17.ComHScrip.CritDocHom.NT.v1.Matthew.Lange.Schaff.1865.#page/n585/mode/2up>.

determining the intended significance. Since in the Great Commission the promise of Jesus' presence continues until the end of the age, so also does his command. In addition, because every Christian has the presence of Christ, Christ's commission must be for every Christian.

The principle of correspondence is also at play in this view by those who argue for the identification of the eleven disciples with all believers. However, adherents do not often explicitly state this correspondence, but seem to assume it, for no one offers an argument that the commission is universally binding on *all people*. In other words, the Great Commission mandate is not considered a universal law for everyone, as, for example, would be the case with the prohibition against murder. Rather, this mandate is viewed only as binding *for Christians*. Although some scholars such as Craig Blomberg assert the ongoing normativity of the Great Commission mandate based on a correspondence between the apostles and believers, this correspondence often in sermons and scholarship appears to be assumed rather than argued; in short, the assumption seems to be that since Jesus addresses this command to the disciples, the mandate is for all followers of Christ. Again, as with the hermeneutical analysis of the above views, the intent here is not to ascertain every hermeneutical principle underlying this view. The aim is to delineate those that are most critical for leading to the view. In this case, the most pertinent principles are the immediate context and correspondence.

Hermeneutical and Interpretive Analysis to Determine the Most Viable View

Having presented each of these views and their primary arguments and hermeneutical foundations, the task remains to determine which is most valid based on the hermeneutical premises common to each. According to the above survey, three primary assumptions undergird these five views: the limiting factor of the original recipients (of which the concept of correspondence is a sub-set), the

immediate context of the Matthean commission, and the analogy of faith. However, because the primary concern of this study is to determine *Matthew's* intended significance, the following analysis will consider only the limiting nature of the original recipients and the primacy of the immediate context for determining meaning and intended significance. Each of the five views relied on one, if not both, of these principles, and, as such, their own hermeneutical foundations will be used to test their validity.

Principle of Immediate Context

Within the context of this pericope, several details are pertinent for establishing the intended significance. First, and cited most often, is Jesus' promised presence until the end of the age (v. 20).⁹⁵ Indeed, the above overview of the five views notes that the assurance of Jesus' presence is a key argument for the ongoing normativity of the Great Commission mandate. If the promise were merely that Jesus would be with his disciples, then one could certainly argue that the commission could be limited to only the apostles. However, he qualifies his promise by stating that it is in effect until the end of the age. Unless one were to argue that the age ended with the death of the apostles, Jesus' assertion of his continued presence seems to indicate the ongoing nature of this commission. As there is no reason to separate the command from the promise here, the best conclusion is to affirm that the promise of Jesus' presence continues as long as the command is in effect. Given the commonality of this interpretation, divorcing the imperative of verse 19 from the

⁹⁵In addition to those already cited above, see the following for examples of those who make this argument: Karl Barth, "An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20," in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 29-30; Saravia, *A Treatise on the Different Degrees*, 161-62. Ulrich Luz notes there has been great unanimity throughout church history in interpreting Jesus' promise as being to all believers. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 635.

promise of verse 20 would seem, at best, to be exegetically and hermeneutically deficient. Since the end of this age has not come, the command remains in effect.⁹⁶

A related contextual element is that the rest of Jesus' command in verses 19-20 seems to presuppose the ongoing nature of the commission. The command to make disciples of all nations impacts the intended significance, because all nations have not been reached. Assuming ἔθνη here refers to people groups and not merely geo-political countries, thousands of distinct groups to this day have not heard the gospel.⁹⁷ Thus, one could hardly argue that all the nations have been discipled. Likewise, Jesus' instruction to teach all that he commanded is a contextual clue that suggests an ongoing cycle of disciple-making. D. A. Carson makes this argument in his own inimitable way:

If the Great Commission itself tells the apostles to teach *their* disciples to obey *everything* that Jesus commanded them, presumably the command inherent in the Great Commission should not be excluded. Matthew's version of the Great Commission does not read, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, except for this command to make disciples. Keep their grubby hands off that one, since it belongs only to you, my dear apostles. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."⁹⁸

⁹⁶Matthew refers to the end of the age (αἰώνιος) several times: 13:39-40, 49; 24:3; 28:20. In two places he refers to the present age (12:32; 13:22). He also uses αἰώνιος in the sense of eternal in 18:8; 19:16, 29; 21:19; 25:41, 46. Matthew's eschatology views the time until Christ's return as "this age" (12:32; 13:22); at the point of the Parousia, he ushers in a new age of the fullness of the kingdom. Therefore, I agree with Hagner's helpful summary that the end of the age "refers to the end of the present age through the Parousia of the Son of Man and the experience of the final judgment of the wicked and reward of the righteous. Jesus promises his disciples that he will be with them until the end of time as presently known. The promise thus applies not only to the disciples themselves but to their successors and their successors' successors in the church." Hagner, *Matthew 14-18*, 889. See the same conclusion in David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 690; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 433.

⁹⁷See the discussion in John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 167-218.

⁹⁸D. A. Carson, "Conclusion: Ongoing Imperative for World Mission," in *The Great Commission: Evangelicals and the History of World Missions*, ed. Martin I. Klauber and Scott M. Manetsch (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 179.

Similarly, the need for baptism of converts suggests the ongoing nature of the Great Commission mandate. If baptism is a part of the Matthean commission (which it is) and converts must be baptized (which they must), then the inclusion of baptism in the commission necessitates that the mandate to make disciples of all nations must still be in effect.⁹⁹ These contextual elements undoubtedly demonstrate that the intended significance must extend beyond the apostles.

However, asserting the ongoing normativity of Jesus' command does not solve the dilemma of discerning which of the four other views is correct. One might be tempted to posit that Jesus' promise of his presence could not be for groups as a whole, such as the universal church, local church, or ministers. Seemingly, one could argue that Jesus' presence through the Spirit and through union with him is for each individual Christian, so the promise of the presence of Christ should be construed as to individuals, thus meaning that the commission is for individual believers and not for groups *as a whole*.¹⁰⁰ However, Matthew clearly records Jesus' promise of his presence in the context of the local church in his comments about church discipline in Matthew 18:20. Therefore, one should not assume that Jesus' promised presence *necessarily* negates the possibility of an intended significance for groups.

Perhaps one may find the answer to this difficulty through the reference to teaching and baptism in verses 19-20, for one of the primary arguments that the commission's intended significance is for ministers is that the context of the command to make disciples of all nations includes baptizing and teaching.

⁹⁹William Carey makes this argument in Carey, *Enquiry*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁰Certainly Scripture's teaching on union with Christ demonstrates his presence with believers. See John 6:56; 15:4-7; Rom 8:10; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:17; 12:2; 13:5; Gal 2:20; 3:28; Eph 1:4; 2:10; 3:17; Phil 3:9; Col 1:27; 1 Thess 4:16; and 1 John 4:13. The multitude of addressees in these passages demonstrates that the promise of Christ's presence, as mediated through his union with every believer, is for every Christian. Thus, the promise in the Great Commission of Christ's presence is echoed throughout the rest of the New Testament to every believer in the doctrine of union with Christ.

Supporters of this view suggest that the responsibility of carrying out baptism and teaching means the command is for ministers, not laity. Although this conclusion at first glance seems possible, one should not hastily presume the validity of this supposition, for it may be founded on *non-sequitur* assumptions. First, one need not conclude that an individual believer must necessarily fulfill every element of the Great Commission mandate. A Christian could not disciple all the nations, so the fulfillment of the commission obviously presumes a multiplicity of disciples who make disciples. Even if one were to ignore the context of *all* the nations and consider only the task of discipling one person, would the Great Commission require that one believer entirely carry out disciple-making, going, baptizing, and teaching? Certainly this passage in Matthew does not necessitate this conclusion, nor does the rest of the New Testament.

Second, if one person could not fulfill all the elements of the Great Commission, could not a multiplicity of tasks devolve on different people or even different groups? In other words, a plurality of people, both laity and ministers, could contribute to the discipling of an individual, group, or nation. The vastness of the task of making disciples of all nations, the commission's primacy as Jesus' final command, and the foundational nature of disciple-making for the continuation of Christianity suggest that Jesus' command must have implications beyond only ministers. Indeed, given these considerations, one wonders how the *entirety* of such a fundamental aspect of propagation of the message of Christ could be for any one group, even ministers. One could argue that individual believers, the local church, ministers, or the universal church could contribute to the overall program of discipling the nations.

Third, this passage does not explicitly state that ordained ministers must carry out either baptism or teaching, for it does not mention an office conjoined to these activities. It merely gives baptism and teaching as aspects of disciple-making as

commanded to the apostles, and, seemingly, for believers beyond the original eleven. One could, therefore, plausibly make the case that Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19-20 does not necessitate an intended significance only for ministers. The commission could be for the local church, universal church, or every believer.

In short, the context of the Great Commission pericope suggests the ongoing normativity of Jesus' command, but the context itself does not *undoubtedly* determine whether Matthew's intended significance is for ministers, the local church, the universal church, or every believer. While some may argue that the context suggests normativity for ministers, the above three considerations demonstrate that the inclusion of baptism and teaching in Jesus' command does not require an intended significance in which *μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* is only for ministers. Based on contextual considerations, the other three views remain a possibility as well.

Principle of Original Recipients

Perhaps the most commonly used principle for determining the normativity of Jesus' command is the limiting nature of the original recipients; as each of these five views turn to this principle (whether through articulation as a limiting factor or through a form of correspondence), determining the intended significance of the commission requires an assessment of the way in which correspondence may or may not be evident in this pericope. One method that could be used to reject the historically common view that it was limited to the apostles is to argue that more than the eleven were present when Jesus gave the commission. If more than the apostles were present, then the intended significance would certainly extend beyond them. Also, if others originally heard Jesus' command, the correspondence principle (a corollary of the limiting nature of the original recipients) used by several views would be in doubt.

Indeed, many have argued that more than the remaining eleven disciples were present when Jesus issued the Great Commission.¹⁰¹ The primary reason for this suggestion is that when the disciples came to Jesus (Matt 28:17), some worshiped and some doubted (οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν). That some of the disciples would still doubt after Christ's resurrection seems unusual, which leads Henry Alford to suggest that more people must have been present.¹⁰² Perhaps the 500 who saw Jesus at one time, mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6, are this group. If so, the intended significance could not have been only for the apostles or ministers, because those not associated with a formal preaching ministry, such as women, would have been present.

However, the best reading of the text indicates only the eleven were with Jesus at that time. Donald Hagner persuasively argues that ἐδίστασαν does not refer to unbelief or perplexity, but instead to hesitation or uncertainty. In other words, some of the disciples worshiped, but others hesitated because they did not know precisely how to respond to seeing Jesus, especially as they watched their friends bow down before him.¹⁰³ In addition, the partitive use of οἱ δέ in Matthew 26:67 gives credence to the view that Matthew was indicating that the hesitators of 28:17 were some of the eleven disciples; if another group were present, the typical indication

¹⁰¹For some who argue that more than the eleven were present, see Robert Duncan Culver, *A Greater Commission: A Theology for World Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 148; D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," *BSac* 149, no. 595 (July 1992): 341-42; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), 427, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/cu31924029339755>.

¹⁰²Alford, *Greek Testament Commentary*, 304. See also similar comments in Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1915), 434, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/TheGospelAccordingToSt.Matthew>.

¹⁰³Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 884-85. See also I. P. Ellis, "But Some Doubted," *NTS* 14, no. 4 (July 1968): 577; BDAG, s.v. "διστάζω."

would have been with *οἱ μὲν*, not *οἱ δέ*.¹⁰⁴ Given the pertinent exegetical details, those at the commission were the remaining eleven disciples.¹⁰⁵

If only the eleven disciples were present with Jesus, what should one make of the concept of correspondence, that the original recipients correspond to a later group? As described above, several views depend on this principle. Is a correspondence evident in the passage?

Unfortunately, many of the proponents of these views offer assertions of correspondence without a clearly articulated case for why Matthew intends such an identification with the apostles. J. R. Graves, for example, offers proof texts for the church's function in proclaiming the gospel, but he does not explain how Matthew intends for the reader to understand a correlation between the remaining eleven apostles and the local church as the recipient of the Great Commission.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, some who urge that the commission is for every believer seem to identify the apostles with every Christian without asserting why such a conclusion is correct.¹⁰⁷

The most thorough proposals that depend on the principle of correspondence argue that the functions of the apostles relate to the function of the

¹⁰⁴Several works note this use of *οἱ δέ* and *οἱ μὲν*: R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 1111; BDF §250; Kenneth L. McKay, "The Use of *Hoi de* in Matthew 28:17," *JNT*, no. 24 (June 1985): 71–72.

¹⁰⁵David Scaer observes that Matthew is quite intentional in delimiting those present to Jesus and the eleven. He writes,

Matthew is very careful in identifying the commission's original hearers as the "eleven disciples" (v. 16), a noteworthy distinction, since the original disciples even after the death of Judas were called "the twelve" (I Cor. 15:5), a designation which the evangelist himself knew (10:1-2). Matthew knew his options but chose the restrictive "eleven disciples." Any idea that Jesus was speaking to a huge crowd, such as confronted Him in the giving of the Sermon on the Mount or in the feeding of the four or the five thousand, is simply without support. David P. Scaer, "The Relation of Matthew 28:16-20 to the Rest of the Gospel," *CTQ* 55, no. 4 (October 1991): 249.

¹⁰⁶Graves simply asserts, "The first commission he ever issued on earth was to that body of disciples which John called 'the Bride,' one of the titles of the Christian church." Graves, *Old Landmarkism*, 43-44. He also cites 1 Tim 3:15 that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. However, he fails to connect his correspondence with Matthew's intent. *Ibid.*, 44-45.

¹⁰⁷See Blomberg, *Matthew*, 433; Arias and Johnson, *The Great Commission*, 32.

intended audience. Saphir uses this correspondence of function in contending that the commission is for the universal church, for he correlates the mission of Christ with the mission of the church:

As Christ was sent by the Father, so is the Church sent by Christ. . . . Now Christ sends us into the world that we may show forth His life, that we may be His witnesses, that His light and love may shine, attract, and bless men through us, that men may behold in us Christ, as they beheld the Father in Him.¹⁰⁸

In other words, Christ's mission corresponds with the mission of the church, and thus the Great Commission is intended for the universal church.

Slightly more complex, however, is the argument that the missionary functions of the apostles devolve on the local church as a whole. Robert Plummer makes this assertion in his *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission*, but he bases his argument largely on the conclusion by Norbert Schmidt in his ThM thesis "The Apostolic Band—A Paradigm for Modern Missions."¹⁰⁹ Schmidt's thesis is not primarily about the relationship between the apostles and the church, but how the church (in contrast to parachurch ministries) has the primary responsibility for gospel proclamation. In order to defend his conclusion, he argues, "There are essentially two things that are passed from Christ through the Apostles to the Church. Those are Apostolic authority and Apostolic mission."¹¹⁰ In essence, he notes that the apostles and local churches have similar missional functions, and he thus concludes that the mission of the apostles extends to the mission of the churches. However, Schmidt explains neither *why* the mission of the church necessarily is for the local church as a whole nor *in what way* the mission of the

¹⁰⁸Saphir, *Thoughts on Apostolic Commission*, 161.

¹⁰⁹Plummer affirms Schmidt's argument that apostolic functions that were not unique to the apostles devolved on local churches as a whole, but he does not offer an extended defense of this conclusion. Plummer, *Paul's Understanding*, 38-41.

¹¹⁰Schmidt, "The Apostolic Band," 77.

church relates to the individual believers who comprise the local church. Yet, he seems to accept that the mission in some sense does devolve on all Christians, for, in considering John 17:20-21 in conjunction with John 20:21, he affirms, “It is abundantly clear that being sent is not restricted to the Twelve, but is a commission to all disciples at all times.”¹¹¹ Schmidt affirms both views—the correspondence of Christ with the church means the Great Commission is for the local church as a whole, but also every believer is commissioned to reach the lost. Without offering an explanation for how the mission mandate on the local church as a whole relates to the individual believer, Schmidt affirms both realities at once—both the church and individual believers bear the mandate of the Great Commission. In short, his view represents the challenge of delineating the seemingly simple question of for whom the Great Commission is intended.

Conclusion of Analysis

Through this brief analysis of the hermeneutical principles used to undergird these five views, we may draw at least three conclusions. First, none of the views, by their primary arguments and hermeneutical principles, prove definitively conclusive. Although exegesis of the commissioning pericope argues against the validity of the contention that the commission was only for the apostles, the other four cannot be proven or disproven on the basis of the immediate context or the above hermeneutical principles alone. Enough ambiguity remains, particularly in the use of the principle of correspondence, to suggest the need for further clarification in order to make a stronger case for one of these views.

Second, many of these views shade into one another and lack sufficient clarity in distinguishing them. Specifically, assertions that the Great Commission is

¹¹¹Schmidt, “The Apostolic Band,” 78.

for the local church, universal church, and every believer seem to be quite closely related, for the local church and universal church are composed of individual followers of Christ.¹¹² What distinction exists between these views, and does such a distinction yield any appreciable difference in the preaching of this passage?

Third, the arguments for these views depend primarily on some of the key principles found in the step-based approaches described in chapter 2. Specifically, the principle of immediate context upholds several of these views, yet the immediate context does not seem sufficient to determine decisively the intended significance of the commission.¹¹³ The second primary principle of the limiting factor of the original audience serves as a major criterion in many views;¹¹⁴ however, as the above explanation demonstrates, proponents of diverse views use this principle in their argumentation, yet with widely divergent conclusions. Whereas these methods often serve interpreters well in discerning authorial intent correctly, the importance and complexity of this passage leads to mixed results based on these hermeneutical principles.

¹¹²Undoubtedly, some of the overlap in terminology regarding the normativity of the Great Commission for the church and individuals is due to the way the NT describes the church both in terms of a local entity and a group of individual believers. Paul, for example, in 1 Cor 1:2 writes, “τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὐσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν παντί τόπῳ, αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν.” The dative feminine τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ is singular, describing one church. However, Paul uses the dative masculine ἡγιασμένοις to denote the plurality of believers who comprise the church at Corinth. His use of τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις indicates that the church also includes all those beyond Corinth who call on Christ as Lord. Correctly discerning and describing the normativity of Jesus’ command, therefore, requires precision in delineating the use of terms such as local and universal church in relation to individual believers.

¹¹³Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard urge the use of this principle in asking, “Does the passage contain an explicit or implicit condition that limits its application?” Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 495. See also McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 175-88; McQuilkin, “Problems in Normativeness,” 230-31; Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 69-86; Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 328, 344.

¹¹⁴Larkin notes the limiting factor of the original audience. See Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 316-17, 354. McQuilkin suggests that “the immediate context of a passage may indicate a limited audience. The author may plainly state his intended recipients, or it may be implied in the context.” McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying*, 308.

The World in Front of the Text

As chapter 2 delineates, the hermeneutic of application used in this dissertation's analysis is the world in front of the text. In other words, the means for discerning the intended significance of a passage is not only through articulating principles inherent in the text, but, as Abraham Kuruvilla so often describes the process, understanding what the author is *doing*. Matthew was not merely recording history, but was presenting a message through the medium of a Gospel. In regard to the Matthean commission, the hermeneutical task is to recognize rightly what Matthew seeks to articulate and accomplish in this pericope, not merely through exegeting these few verses, but considering what he is doing in the overall message of the Gospel. Specifically, the task is to discern whom Matthew considered to be the recipients of the commission in 28:19-20. However, as this chapter demonstrates, the Great Commission pericope is the summation and conclusion of the entire message of the Gospel of Matthew. Therefore, discerning the intended significance of Jesus' command in these final verses requires more than mere exegesis of these verses; rather, understanding the world in front of the text necessitates consideration of the overall message of the Gospel in order to determine the normativity that Matthew intends. Through examining this passage and the Gospel as a whole, may an interpreter discern a transhistorical intention for who should carry out the Great Commission mandate? Does Matthew paint a portrait of a world in front of the text in which the text itself gives evidence of his intention that the content of the Gospel, and the commissioning passage in particular, is intended for someone beyond the eleven disciples or even beyond his original audience? The crux of this chapter is that the proper employment of the hermeneutical method of the world in front of the text yields strategic dividends in discerning the audience of the Great Commission.

A number of avenues offer fruitful aids for perceiving Matthew's intended significance *a la* the world in front of the text, such as redaction criticism,¹¹⁵ Matthew's community,¹¹⁶ and the Gospel's genre.¹¹⁷ The massive scope of Matthean

¹¹⁵Another potential avenue of helpful scholarly inquiry is Matthew's use of his sources and redaction of Mark. However, in his analysis of the use of redaction criticism, Robert Morosco is correct in stating that "conclusions reached through a redactional approach are never 'certain' or 'proven.'" Robert E. Morosco, "Redaction Criticism and the Evangelical: Matthew 10 a Test Case," *JETS* 22, no. 4 (December 1979): 331. Although redaction critics may overstate their confidence about conclusions, certain trends in the differences between Mark's account and that of Matthew may help to shed light on what Matthew is seeking to emphasize. A helpful exploration of potential Matthean redaction is Michael Wilkins' analysis of Matthew's use of *μαθητής* and *μαθητεύω*, particularly in contrast to parallel passages in Mark and Luke. His analysis of Matthew's use of these terms helps to highlight Matthew's emphasis on discipleship throughout the Gospel and that he intends for the Gospel to guide *every* reader to be a disciple of Christ. Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής*, NovTSup 59 (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988), 126-72.

¹¹⁶Of course, knowing Matthew's immediate audience aids in discerning his purpose. As Stephenson Brooks contends, "An understanding of the social and historical situation of Matthew and his readers" is "an essential ingredient for understanding the First Gospel." Stephenson H. Brooks, *Matthew's Community: The Evidence of His Special Sayings Material* (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1987), 23. A major aspect of this scholarship about Matthew's community is discerning its ethnic makeup, seeking to determine if it was primarily Jewish, Gentile, or a combination of the two. For a helpful overview of recent scholarly opinions regarding Matthew's setting, see Donald Senior, *What Are They Saying about Matthew?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 7-20; Cedric E. W. Vine, *The Audience of Matthew: An Appraisal of the Local Audience Thesis*, LNTS 496 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 34-45. Despite the confident assertions of many scholars of the general makeup of Matthew's community (which, one should note, often are widely divergent), interpreters should be cautious in firm convictions about the nature of Matthew's community. The evidence available from the text is not conclusive, so caution and humility are necessary for approaching this subject. However, Matthew's writing undoubtedly provides some hints as to audience, even though one may not know for certain whether a specific community was his intended recipient. Indeed, Vine makes a strong argument that Matthean scholars have given too much emphasis to reconstructing Matthew's community, particularly concerning to what degree it was Gentile, Jewish, or a combination of the two. *Ibid.*, 1-32, 118-27. As demonstrated below, perhaps a stronger argument, rather than seeking to discern the cultural makeup of a supposed Matthean community, is to recognize Matthew's audience is not necessarily to a specific community, but to a general audience so that they might follow the Messiah as his disciple.

¹¹⁷The genre of writing undoubtedly influences how to understand Matthew's purpose. For an overview of the various ways scholars explain the genre of Matthew, see Robert S. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew: Background and Rhetoric*, WUNT II 414 (Gomaringen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 71-75. Despite many broad-ranging views, Matthew seems quite similar to Greco-Roman *βίος*. See especially Charles H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, SNTSMS 70 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). Graham Stanton, despite originally rejecting Matthew as an ancient biography, became convinced that it falls into the general category of a *βίος*. Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 64. Some have attempted to further narrow the category of *βίος*, such as the encomiastic proposal of Jerome Neyrey, but with questionable success. See Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*. Jonathan Pennington provides a helpful and nuanced analysis of the genre of the gospels, arguing that they are not identical with Greco-Roman *βίοι*, but that the gospels "stretched and extended the *bios* genre in new, more theological ways. Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 31. Of particular note for the purpose of the present study is that one of the major purposes of *βίοι* is for instruction. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?*, 217. See below for the argument that part of Matthew's overall purpose is to

scholarship and the parameters of this study, however, necessitate limiting the methods used for discerning the intended significance of the Great Commission pericope. For the purpose of expounding Matthew's intent for the normativity of this missions mandate, chapters 3 and 4 primarily utilize two related methods of scholarship (in addition to standard practices of exegetical and linguistic analysis): rhetorical and literary criticism.¹¹⁸ These methods are especially helpful for the world in front of the text analysis because they centrally focus on a text's overall message and how the author conveys that message to an audience.

Rhetorical Criticism

Derived both from the field of classical and contemporary rhetoric, rhetorical criticism is the application of principles of rhetoric to analyze a text. This means of criticism does not necessarily presuppose the author's intentional use of classical patterns of rhetoric, but uses rhetorical principles to understand the author's message in a discourse.¹¹⁹ Thus, George Kennedy, a classics scholar, affirms its use with the New Testament because "the writers of the books of the New Testament had a message to convey and sought to persuade an audience to believe it

present for his readers a picture of how to be a disciple of Christ.

¹¹⁸Although often treated separately, these two forms of analysis are quite similar in that they both view the text as a literary whole that conveys an author's message. Both begin with the presupposition that an author communicates a message through the medium of the text, and both seek to discern that message through an investigation of the evidence of authorial intent in the text. Indeed, David Howell combines these terms to discuss the "narrative rhetoric" in Matthew's Gospel, because Matthew used narrative to transmit a message to the readers. David B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel*, JSNTSup 42 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 14. See also the way literary forms of analysis and rhetoric are linked in Dennis L. Stamps, "Rhetorical and Narratological Criticism," in *Handbook to Exegesis of the New Testament*, New Testament Tools and Studies 25 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 219-40; John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 73-82; Senior, *What Are They Saying*, 3.

¹¹⁹George Kennedy, in writing about the general purpose of rhetoric, notes the close correlation between rhetorical analysis and authorial intent. He explains, "Since effective rhetorical composition was viewed as a conscious, intentional act, rhetorical criticism in this sense has usually focused on discovering the intention of the original author for the original audience." George A. Kennedy, "Historical Survey of Rhetoric," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 B.C.-A.D. 400)*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 5.

or to believe it more profoundly. As such they are rhetorical, and their methods can be studied by the discipline of rhetoric.”¹²⁰

Concerning Matthew’s incorporation of rhetoric, scholars debate the degree to which Matthew was influenced by Greco-Roman rhetorical methods and incorporated them into his Gospel. Craig Keener contends that Matthew’s style is that of a Jewish sage rather than the classical rhetoric of the Greco-Roman world.¹²¹ He cites such examples of Jewish rhetoric as Matthew’s use of beatitudes, incorporation of the phrases “you have heard it said” and “to what shall I compare,” and employment of hyperbole.¹²² Despite Keener’s cogent argumentation, Robert Kinney in *Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew* makes a strong case that Matthew was influenced by and incorporated Greco-Roman principles of rhetoric. Through his analysis of Matthew’s use of Greek, widespread Hellenistic education in the ancient world, the influence of Socratic concepts in the Gospel, Matthew’s use of Greek education terminology, the evidence of rhetorical structure in the Sermon on the Mount, and even Homeric resonances, Kinney concludes that Matthew gives evidence of Greco-Roman rhetorical influence.¹²³ His argument resonates well with Jerome Neyrey’s conclusion that Matthew’s sophistication of writing “presumes a

¹²⁰George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 10. For others who apply rhetorical criticism to the New Testament, see Burton L. Mack and Vernon K. Robbins, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1989); Duane Frederick Watson, ed., *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy*, JSNTSup 50 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991). The thousands of citations by Duane Watson of the use of rhetoric in recent New Testament studies demonstrates the widespread use of this discipline. Duane Frederick Watson, *The Rhetoric of the New Testament: A Bibliographic Survey* (Blandford Forum, England: Deo Publishing, 2006).

¹²¹Keener argues that one should not push too far Matthew’s incorporation of classical rhetoric in his Gospel. Rather, his writing exhibits far more characteristics of a Jewish sage. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009), xxv-1; Craig S. Keener, “Suggestions for Future Study of Rhetoric and Matthew’s Gospel,” *HvTSt* 66, no. 1 (March 2010): 1–6.

¹²²Keener, “Suggestions for Future Study,” 3.

¹²³Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions*.

degree of literacy that could only be achieved by some formal education, which was most likely based on the mastery of conventional rhetorical material.”¹²⁴ Neyrey suggests that a writer with Matthew’s literary skill would have been “trained in the compositional skills listed in the *progymnasmata*, that is, the handbooks of rhetorical education.”¹²⁵ In spite of the debate about the particular form of rhetoric present in Matthew’s Gospel, his both Jewish and Greco-Roman background suggests the potential influence and presence of both forms.¹²⁶ No matter the conclusion that one draws, the bottom line remains the same—Matthew undoubtedly incorporated rhetorical strategies in his composition of this Gospel.¹²⁷ Therefore, since his Gospel exhibits rhetorical strategy in delivering his message, rhetorical criticism is a justifiable and useful method for explicating Matthew’s intent in his Gospel.¹²⁸

¹²⁴Neyrey, *Honor and Shame*, 4.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁶Although not writing about rhetoric *per se*, Davies and Allison contend a cultured Jew like Matthew would have experienced the deep interpenetration of both Judaism and Hellenism. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, vol. 3 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (New York: T & T Clark, 1997), 709. Due to this overlapping of cultures, Richard Burrige recognizes the likelihood that Matthew incorporates both Jewish and Greco-Roman rhetoric: “His arrangement and composition of five main discourses shows definite rhetorical ability, drawing on both the Hellenistic and Jewish backgrounds.” Richard A. Burrige, “The Gospels and Acts,” in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 B.C.-A.D. 400)*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 530. Jonathan Pennington also notes the likely convergence of Second Temple Jewish tradition with Greco-Roman rhetoric. Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 24.

¹²⁷Richard Burrige rightly cautions against viewing the gospels as formal rhetoric as would be found in the law court or assembly. Rather, they exhibit general rhetorical tendencies that would be expected of writers in a culture in which rhetorical skill was highly valued and a part of general education. Burrige, “The Gospels and Acts,” 510.

¹²⁸Dennis Stamps notes a distinction between rhetorical criticism as a defined method and as an interpretive strategy. When used as a method, it applies the categories of Greco-Roman rhetoric to the examination of a text. Its use as an interpretive perspective, however, is an “attempt to identify the textually-embedded strategies that seek to persuade the reader, to assess the effectiveness of these strategies, and then to evaluate the ideological positions to which the reader(s) is being moved.” Dennis L. Stamps, “Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament: Ancient and Modern Evaluations of Argumentation,” in *Approaches to New Testament Study*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs, JSNTSup 120 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 167. The use of rhetorical criticism in this dissertation is a *via media* between these two categories of analysis. The following investigation uses Greco-Roman categories as a way to discuss rhetorical strategies Matthew used, whether or not he intentionally incorporated these rhetorical forms. At minimum, Matthew wrote

This method offers numerous approaches for studying Matthew, but the canon of arrangement proves sufficient for demonstrating, at least in part, his rhetorical purpose.¹²⁹ Indeed, because the arrangement of a discourse functionally undergirds and advances the author's intent, exploring the structure of a text allows an interpreter to understand more fully the author's purpose and strategy.¹³⁰ Although a full-orbed explanation of Matthew's structure goes beyond the purpose of this chapter, a brief overview of his organization demonstrates a general picture of his overall purpose.

Scholars posit various macrostructures for Matthew, yet what characterizes these proposals is not a general consensus, but a broad array of possibilities.¹³¹ However, in spite of the lack of uniformity in approaches, scholars

with particular strategies to convey his message, and the application of general rhetorical principles from Greco-Roman rhetoric provides a means for analyzing Matthew's message.

¹²⁹The five canons of classical rhetoric are invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. The arrangement of the discourse functions to provide the order and outline for presenting the author's persuasive strategy. To emphasize the importance of the role of arrangement, Corbett and Connors cite an oratorical contest between Demosthenes and Aeschines. Aeschines urged the judges to constrain Demosthenes to follow his own order; Demosthenes, however, observed that using Aeschines arrangement would be highly disadvantageous to his own argument. Thus, arrangement of material may be decisive for a speaker's (or in the case of the present study, an author's) purpose. Edward P. J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 259.

¹³⁰Wilhelm Wuellner, in his overview of the canon of arrangement, defines it as "the ordering of the substance of what was accomplished in the process of *εὑρεσις/invention* for the purpose of serving the partiality/*utilitas* in the discourse's aim. Arrangement is the necessary complement to *εὑρεσις/invention* with focus on arrangement of thoughts or ideas, but also of the order and choice of words, both as to their style (*λέξις/electio*) and their delivery (*ὑπόκρισις/actio*)—in terms of their appropriateness (*aptum*) for the adopted partiality, and in terms of the 'parts of speech'." Wilhelm Wuellner, "Arrangement," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.-A.D. 400*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 51.

¹³¹David Bauer provides a helpful categorization of macrostructure proposals as those based on geography or chronology, topical structures, and conceptual arrangements. David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, JSNTSup 31 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1988), 21-56. For examples of geographical and chronological macrostructure proposals, see Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9; McNeile, *Gospel According to Matthew*, xii. For topical structures, see especially Benjamin Wisner Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), accessed November 6, 2015, http://archive.org/details/MN41459ucmf_0. He is the primary originator of this approach. However, others have formulated a topical structure based on chiasm, such as Charles H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ* 23, no. 4 (October 1961): 424-34. Jack Kingsbury has been quite influential in modern scholarship with his topical outline in which he argues that Matthew divides the Gospel into three sections based on the statement "from that time Jesus began" (4:17 and 16:21). Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 38-40.

broadly recognize at least three characteristics about Matthew’s arrangement. First, he has taken great care in his organization.¹³² According to Eusebius, Papias noted the arrangement of Matthew, stating that Matthew had organized the sayings of Jesus.¹³³ Recognizing Matthew’s organization, scholars affirm that careful literary artistry characterizes the Gospel. Second, the structure clearly incorporates the alternation of narrative with discourse, primarily with the five main discourses. The obvious nature of this organizational principle leads Davies and Allison to conclude, “The alternation in Matthew between narrative and discourse is firmly established, as is the number of major discourses. . . . These two certainties constitute the foundation stone upon which all further discussion must build.”¹³⁴ Third, Matthew

Proponents of conceptual structures suggest that Matthew organized the Gospel around an overarching theme, such as the salvation-historical approach advocated in John P. Meier, *Matthew, New Testament Message 3* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980). David Garland takes the difficulty of understanding Matthew’s structure too far in suggesting that Matthew may not have had a broad structure in mind when he wrote the Gospel. David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, Reading the New Testament (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), 9.

¹³²The evidence of careful organization is unsurprising given Matthew’s similarity to Greco-Roman βίος. Richard Burrige explains that “it is inevitable that there will be rhetorical influence, at least in arrangement and style of most bioi, and in specific rhetorical forms and patterns in those Lives which seek to persuade the reader to take a certain view of the subject.” Richard A. Burrige, “Biography,” in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 B.C.-A.D. 400)*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 374.

¹³³Papias states, “Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, ἡρμήνευσε δ’ αὐτὰ ὡς ἦν δυνατὸς ἕκαστος.” Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.16. Kirsopp Lake translates this sentence as “Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could.” Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, LCL 153 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 297. Although Lake translates συνετάξατο as “collected,” the verb more correctly has the meaning of ordering or arranging. BDAG cites this quote from Papias as an example for the use of συντάσσω to mean “to arrange various parts in an organized manner.” BDAG, s.v. συντάσσω. Louw and Nida suggest it falls into the category of ordering and commanding. The relationship to arrangement is obvious. L & N §33.325. The patristic use of this word clearly also has the idea of ordering and arranging. G. W. H. Lampe and Henry George Liddell, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), s.v. συντάσσω.

¹³⁴W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Introduction and Commentary on Matthew I-VII*, vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 61. The importance of the discourses to Matthew’s overall structure and purpose has been a topic of academic inquiry since at least B. W. Bacon’s theory that the five discourses and narratives correspond to the books of the Pentateuch. For his argument, see Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*.

arranges his material so that the Great Commission pericope functions as the climax of the Gospel.¹³⁵

Because Matthew structures the Gospel around five major discourses, a rhetorical analysis of the subject matter of these teaching blocks should give insight into Matthew's rhetorical purpose. The Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29) is the most prominent of the discourses, and its message is quite clear in that Jesus explains the characteristics of righteous living in the kingdom.¹³⁶ To be a follower of Christ demands the life described by Jesus in these chapters.¹³⁷ Scholarship of the mission teaching of the second discourse (10:5-42) often focuses on the issue of why Jesus tells the disciples to go only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" rather than the Gentiles or Samaritans (10:6). However, one should not miss that Jesus' instructions to the twelve are filled with exhortation that concerns how they function as disciples as they carry out this mission.¹³⁸ The third discourse (13:1-53) consists of parables

¹³⁵Scholars often consider 28:16-20 to be the ideal ending of the Gospel and the key to understanding Matthew's purpose. See Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 165; Oscar S. Brooks, "Matthew 28:16-20 and the Design of the First Gospel," *JSNT* 10 (January 1981): 2; Culver, *A Greater Commission*, 1984, 11; Andrew Ryder, *Following Christ: Models of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 1999), 52; Peter F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1974), 19; Scaer, "Relation of Matthew," 246; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 66; Stanley P. Saunders, *Preaching the Gospel of Matthew: Proclaiming God's Presence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 299; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 687; Benjamin Jerome Hubbard, *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20*, Dissertation Series 19 (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974), 98; Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology*, *JSNTSup* 8 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1985), 170; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 416; Paul S. Minear, *Matthew: The Teacher's Gospel* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 141.

¹³⁶Jonathan Pennington describes the Sermon as "casting a vision for a way of being in the world in accord with God's coming kingdom." Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 77.

¹³⁷For this reason, R. T. France calls the Sermon the "discourse on discipleship" which describes the radical lifestyle expected of Jesus' followers. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 153.

¹³⁸Jesus addresses such issues as how to respond to welcome and rejection (10:11-14), the necessity of wisdom and innocence (10:16), persecution for Christ's sake (10:17-19), and fear (10:26-31). Key for understanding this discourse's connection to discipleship is Jesus' words in 10:25: "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master." In other words, carrying out this mission and the experiences that come through it are part of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Luz rightly, therefore, contends that "the disciple discourse reveals itself as a *discourse on the way of life of the disciples which corresponds to that of the master.*" Luz,

primarily related to the kingdom of heaven. However, keeping in mind the significance of arrangement for conveying authorial purpose, Matthew has organized this material in such a way that the key to understanding this discourse comes at the end through Jesus' final words to the disciples in this chapter: "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (13:52). One of the three times Matthew uses the verb μαθητεύω is in this verse (here as the participle μαθητευθείς),¹³⁹ and he here indicates that their understanding of the kingdom means that they have been trained in the kingdom as scribes so that they can now also teach others about the nature of the kingdom of heaven.¹⁴⁰ The fourth discourse is 18:1-35, and its subject matter largely concerns the relationships of disciples to one another in the community, such as the need for humility (18:4), not causing others to stumble (18:6-7), pursuing errant brothers (18:12-14), confronting unrepentant sin in the church (18:15-20), and forgiving the sinning disciple (18:21-35). The final discourse (24:1-26:1) includes both the destruction of the temple and the end of the age.¹⁴¹ Without delving into the complexities of this passage, it broadly describes Jesus' message regarding how the disciples should be prepared for these two events. In very general terms, a pattern emerges in regard to the subject matter of the discourses—they largely concern how one lives as a follower of Jesus. Although one of Matthew's primary purposes of his Gospel is undoubtedly the proclamation of

"Discipleship," 159.

¹³⁹The other occurrences are in 27:57 and 28:19.

¹⁴⁰Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 544.

¹⁴¹Some scholars suggest that the fifth discourse begins in Matt 23. See Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 108; Jason Hood, "Matthew 23-25: The Extent of Jesus' Fifth Discourse," *JBL* 128, no. 3 (2009): 527-43.

Christ as the Messiah, his arrangement of the discourses leads to the conclusion that one of his major intentions is to articulate what it means to be a disciple of Christ.¹⁴²

Further analysis of the arrangement within the discourses yields additional evidence of Matthew's concern to stress the theme of discipleship, particularly in that the concluding section of each usually portrays a generalized discipleship that extends beyond only the twelve.¹⁴³ The Sermon on the Mount, written primarily with second person instruction, switches toward the end to a generic third person description of the one who follows Christ. The final pericopes repeatedly use *πᾶς* (7:17, 24, 26) or a substantival participle (*ὁ ποιῶν* in 7:21) to generalize regarding who is a disciple. Similarly, the missions discourse in chapter 10 begins with second person and imperative address, while the latter verses include third person references to unspecified disciples through *πᾶς* (10:32), substantival participles (*ὁ δεχόμενος* in 10:40-41), and *ὁς ἄν* (10:42). Jesus' third teaching block ends in 13:52 by describing a disciple as one who has been trained (*πᾶς γραμματεὺς μαθητευθείς*), providing an open-ended view of those who would follow him. The fourth discourse does not follow this pattern, but the context of the church (18:15-18) seems to extend Jesus' parable at the end of his teaching beyond merely the

¹⁴²Scholars consistently note the discipleship function of the discourses. David Scaer argues that they have a catechetical function in preparing catechumens for baptism and the Eucharist. David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 11-32. Luz writes, "Discipleship is always related to the teaching of the earthly Jesus." Ulrich Luz, "The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew," in *Studies in Matthew*, ed. Ulrich Luz, trans. Rosemary Selle (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 125. David Bauer contends that Jesus' presence (as he promised in Matt 28:20) continues to all disciples through his teaching in these discourses: "The teachings and commands of Jesus to his disciples that have special bearing on the post-Easter existence of the church tend very definitely to be clustered in these five great discourses." Bauer, *Structure of Matthew's Gospel*, 133. Jean Zumstein explains, "Dans les grands discours mt, les disciples sont l'auditoire privilégié de Jésus." Jean Zumstein, *La Condition Du Croyant Dans L'Evangile Selon Matthieu*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 16 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Editions Universitaires, 1977), 36.

¹⁴³I am heavily indebted to David Howell's insightful analysis in Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story*, 221-25. He similarly argues that the generalization evident in the discourses points to Matthew's intent to depict discipleship beyond the twelve to any who would read the Gospel and follow Christ. Several of my conclusions in this paragraph derive from his scholarship, although I often expand his work through my citation of the various generalizing techniques Matthew uses both for those who follow Christ and those who reject him.

twelve. Finally, Jesus' Olivet discourse concludes with the comprehensive inclusion of all the redeemed as sheep (25:32-33). The eschatological setting, coupled with the general description of Christ's followers as sheep (τὰ πρόβατα in 25:32, 33), the blessed (οἱ εὐλογημένοι in 25:34), and the righteous (οἱ δίκαιοι in 25:37, 46), indicates teaching that is not specific to only the twelve, but to all disciples. In summary, Matthew's arrangement of the concluding focus of the discourses demonstrates his intent to convey a picture of discipleship that is universal to all who would follow Jesus.¹⁴⁴

One final point of Matthew's arrangement serves to further solidify his concern to expound the nature of discipleship, namely his placement of the call of the disciples in correspondence to two of the discourses. Jesus calls the first disciples (Peter, Andrew, James, and John) in 4:18-22, he immediately begins his ministry of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom (4:23-25), and then Matthew records Jesus' words in the Sermon. Matthew's organization here intriguingly links a disciple's call with the kingdom, particularly with discipleship in the kingdom.¹⁴⁵ Matthew's

¹⁴⁴Conversely, the conclusion of the discourses typically conveys negative examples of discipleship in a similarly generic manner. The Sermon on the Mount ends in this way through using πᾶς (7:19, 21, 26), generalized substantival participles (ὁ λέγων in 7:21, οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι in 7:23, and ὁ ἀκούων and ποιῶν in 7:26), and ὅστις (7:26) to describe those who do not believe and adhere to Jesus' words. The end of the mission discourse uses ὅστις (10:33) with those who deny Christ, substantival participles for those who love their family more than Christ (ὁ φιλῶν in 10:37) and find their life (ὁ εὐρῶν in 10:39) rather than losing it, and ὅς for the one who does not take his cross and follow Christ (10:38). Those who are outside the kingdom in chapter 13 are τὰ σαπρά (13:48). In the Olivet discourse, unbelievers are specified in broad terms as goats (25:32-33) and the cursed (κατηραμένοι in 25:41). The open-ended nature of the discourses leads to the realization for the reader that unbelief is not simply a category for the crowds and Jewish leaders who reject Christ, but is a danger for all who would fail to follow him and keep his commands.

¹⁴⁵John Riches writes about the way the call of the disciples immediately leads into the Sermon on the Mount:

What is now striking is the way that the whole Gospel becomes a commentary on discipleship. This is achieved by the simple device of tying the Sermon on the Mount into the call-narrative as its commentary and also of tying the subsequent discourses in the Gospel to the Sermon on the Mount, in such a way that the Sermon is itself only the beginning of what Jesus has to say about discipleship. In this way, Matthew can emphasize different aspects of discipleship at different points of the Gospel.

John Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 186. See also his comments in John Riches, "Matthew's Missionary Strategy in Colonial Perspective," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Its Roman Imperial Context*, ed. John Riches and David C. Sim, JSNTSup 276 (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 135.

second calling of the disciples in 10:1-4 occurs prior to the mission discourse in 10:5-42. Again, his arrangement is quite telling—Matthew links the call of the disciples with their missionary role, namely how they function as disciples as Christ sends them out to the Jews. Clearly, Matthew’s placement of the calling of the disciples immediately prior to these discourses links the call to discipleship with Jesus’ teaching. Given that the rhetorical intent of arrangement is to aid in conveying the author’s message, we may conclude from these brief observations that part of Matthew’s purpose is to demonstrate to his readers the nature of living and serving as a disciple of Christ.¹⁴⁶

Narrative Criticism

Having briefly expounded one way that rhetorical criticism is beneficial for understanding Matthew’s purpose, we turn now to a second method for ascertaining Matthew’s transhistorical intention—narrative criticism, a form of literary criticism. For the past fifty years, literary criticism has played a major role in New Testament studies.¹⁴⁷ Rather than interpret primarily through pure exegesis, literary analysis applies forms of modern literary interpretation to the biblical text in

¹⁴⁶Krister Stendahl undoubtedly takes the discipleship dimension of the discourses too far in postulating a Matthean school. Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew, and Its Use of the Old Testament* (Uppsala, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954). However, Grant Osborne observes that Matthew likely in part was written to have a catechetical function in training believers; although he does not use the terminology of discipleship, Osborne rightly recognizes that “the centrality of the five discourses does relate” to training believers in what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Osborne, *Matthew*, 33.

¹⁴⁷The rise of literary methods of analysis represents a shift in scholarship from primarily redaction studies to a greater interest in understanding the literary quality and message of the texts as a unified whole. Donald Senior explains,

Where redaction criticism remained interested in the historical context that helped shape a gospel, pure literary criticism suspends historical questions and focuses on the “world” created by the text itself. Put another way, one could say that historical criticism (including redaction criticism) was interested primarily in the relationship between the biblical text and the historical context that produced it, while literary criticism is interested primarily in the relationship between the text and the reader.

Senior, *What Are They Saying*, 2-3. For an overview of recent literary critical methods of reading the New Testament, see Stanley E. Porter, “Literary Approaches to the New Testament: From Formalism to Deconstruction and Back,” in *Approaches to New Testament Study*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs, JSNTSup 120 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 77-128.

order to understand what the author was crafting literarily in the text.¹⁴⁸ Topics such as plot analysis, characterization, and setting often are subjects of inquiry in the examination of a passage or the text as a whole.

Literary criticism of the gospels varies widely and includes numerous avenues of analysis,¹⁴⁹ but perhaps the most pertinent and useful for the present study is narrative criticism.¹⁵⁰ Like its umbrella of literary criticism, narrative analysis is quite diverse and represents a wide variety of methodologies and even definitions.¹⁵¹ Mark Powell, in summarizing narrative criticism, explains that most narrative methods are primarily concerned with “meaning that may be ascribed to a text’s implied reader, interpreting the work from the perspective of readers who receive the text in the manner that appears to be expected of them.”¹⁵² Although narrative approaches may often place the greatest stress on the implied reader or

¹⁴⁸One of the criticisms leveled against literary interpretations of Scripture, such as narrative criticism, is that such methods are an anachronistic imposition of modern literary ideals on ancient texts that were not written in accordance with such standards. However, the use of modern methods does not necessitate that ancient writers utilized formal, contemporary writing techniques; rather, literary analysis (at least as used in this dissertation) recognizes that the employment of writing methods is transhistorical and transcultural. When authors seek to convey a message, they use the means at their disposal of describing that message in written form; literary analysis, therefore, seeks to discern the author’s message through what is written in the text. Literary criticism is thus not an imposition of later methods, but is a heuristic device for discerning the authorial message.

¹⁴⁹Literary critics include a broad swath of methodological approaches and presuppositions. Mark Powell represents one end of the spectrum that de-emphasizes the biblical author while stressing the role of the reader. He writes, “Literary methods tend to approach the Bible from the perspective of readers rather than from the perspective of authors.” Mark Allan Powell, “Literary Approaches and the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Methods for Matthew*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45.

¹⁵⁰Although narrative criticism is a subset of literary criticism, some consider the two terms to be interchangeable. See James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 18n4. Stanley Porter also notes the overlap of literary criticism and narrative criticism in observing that both emphasize the importance of narrative in discerning the text’s meaning. Porter, “Literary Approaches,” 103.

¹⁵¹For an overview of narrative criticism and some of its methods, see Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*; David E. Aune, “Narrative Criticism,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric*, ed. David E. Aune (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 315–17; David Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 3 (1982): 411–34.

¹⁵²Powell, “Literary Approaches,” 59.

implied author, a more generalized understanding of narrative methodology is helpful for ascertaining how the biblical author constructs a text for the purpose of delivering his message. Indeed, Terence Donaldson's description of narrative is a helpful baseline for beginning the process of narrative analysis of the Gospel: "A narrative consists of a story, told in a particular way in order to produce a desired effect in the reader."¹⁵³

In light of the hermeneutic of application driving this study of the Great Commission, Donaldson's supposition about narrative is a key premise for a narrative analysis of the Gospel—Matthew wrote through the media of narrative to convey a message to the reader.¹⁵⁴ Exposition of Matthew's intended audience and purpose, therefore, must include an investigation of the way in which the story serves as a vehicle for communication of a message. Although a variety of narrative approaches are available to scholars, the methods used in this dissertation include Matthew's employment of characterization, plot, thematic development, and the implied reader. The goal is that, through the use of these methods, what Matthew is *doing* (to use Kuruvilla's language) and his transhistorical intentions will become apparent so that the preacher may discern application that corresponds with Matthew's intent.

¹⁵³Donaldson uses this fundamental understanding of narrative in his analysis of Matthew's portrayal of discipleship. Terence L. Donaldson, "Guiding Readers—Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew's Narrative Strategy," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 31. The primacy of the text as a unitary narrative is essential to narrative criticism. Dennis Stamps explains, "In its focus on the final form of the text, narrative criticism not only concentrates on the coherence of the text but on the text as an end in itself. In this sense, the text is not primarily a source to recover the events and persons associated with the original writing and reception of the text, but an event in itself. The focus is on the experience of the text as a communication event within a specified context." Stamps, "Rhetorical and Narratological Criticism," 229.

¹⁵⁴Mark Powell notes the dependence of literary criticism on communication theories, especially speech act theory. Narratives are the communication of a message to the reader through the medium of the text. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 8-9. This understanding of narrative as communication coheres well with the hermeneutical methodology described in chapter 2. A text conveys an author's message, and narrative analysis provides a tool for discerning what the author intended through the narrative.

As characterization is one of the major tools of narrative analysis for discerning the author's message, a brief examination of Matthew's portrayal of characters yields helpful benefits for recognizing his intended audience. Characterization often involves distinguishing round from flat characters, respectively, those who are three-dimensional and complex versus those who are two-dimensional and exhibit primarily a singular trait.¹⁵⁵ In general Jesus and the disciples function as round characters. Jesus is fully man (born of a woman in 1:25), fully divine (God with us in 1:23 and 28:20), and the teacher *par excellence*. Dorothy Weaver is, therefore, correct in asserting that Jesus is the "most nearly round character within the story."¹⁵⁶ Undoubtedly, as the God-man and divine teacher, he is the primary character and the one to whom the reader is to look and follow.¹⁵⁷ The disciples also are round characters, yet they exhibit both positive qualities in their obedience and negative examples of discipleship in their occasional failure to understand and follow (8:25-26; 13:10; 14:26; 16:7-11, 22-23; 17:19-20; 19:13; 26:40, 43, 44, 56, 69-75; 28:17). They function primarily as a single character, the twelve who hear Jesus' teaching and follow him, although often quite imperfectly.¹⁵⁸

This *modern* form of analysis aids to discern Matthew's purpose through his description of the characters, but one should not fail to recognize the *ancient* role

¹⁵⁵Round and flat characterization derives primarily from E. M. Forster. See E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1927), 67. See also Richard Edwards' description of the elements that contribute to characterization. Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait of Disciples: How the Text-Connnoted Reader Is Informed* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 12-13.

¹⁵⁶Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis*, JSNTSup 38 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 58. She explains that his roundness is primarily evident in that everyone else in Matthew is depicted *via* their relation to him.

¹⁵⁷Robert Vogel, in his rhetorical analysis of conflict themes in Matthew, writes, "Matthew carefully portrays Jesus as good, without fault, a teacher without peer, and one with divine authority. This image leaves the reader with no doubt concerning with whom he or she should identify in the story." Robert Allan Vogel, "Against Your Brother: Conflict Themes and the Rhetoric of the Gospel according to Matthew" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1989), 204.

¹⁵⁸Jack Kingsbury writes, "Though a group, the disciples may be treated as a single character." Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 13.

of characterization in narratives. Mary Ann Tolbert explains that Greek literature often used characterization “as the practice of particularizing the universal or individualizing the general.”¹⁵⁹ Such particularizing the universal is evident in the portrayal of the disciples, for Matthew often simply describes them as disciples or the twelve, emphasizing their generic nature as disciples of Christ. Likewise, they are the primary recipients of the teaching of Jesus, as is evident through the five discourses and the additional teaching material Matthew records. The disciples, therefore, in part function to generalize the recipients of Jesus’ teaching and characterize following Jesus (in both their negative and positive portrayals). Taken together, therefore, modern and ancient methods of character analysis point to Jesus as the divine teacher and the disciples as his followers and recipients of his teaching.

Plot analysis is another narrative tool that allows the reader to discern the author’s purpose through considering how plot development conveys the author’s message. Broadly understood, the plot of a narrative is “the sequence of events or incidents that make up a narrative,” and how the plot unfolds, develops, and is described is a window into what the author seeks to convey through the story.¹⁶⁰ Although several ways of plot examination in Matthew may be beneficial, the most pertinent for this study is the function of the Great Commission pericope in Matthew’s storyline. Obviously, it provides the conclusion for the narrative in that it records the disciples’ encounter with the resurrected Christ and his final words to them, including his promised presence (28:20). It also brings together and culminates key themes that Matthew has interwoven throughout the narrative: Jesus’ authority over all things (particularly in light of his conflict with the religious leaders

¹⁵⁹Mary Ann Tolbert, “How the Gospel of Mark Builds Character,” *Interpretation* 47, no. 4 (October 1993): 348.

¹⁶⁰Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 197.

and his victory over death), the nature of discipleship as a replicative process (in Jesus' command μαθητεύσατε), and the mission to the ἔθνη (which culminates Matthew's allusion to the Gentiles throughout the Gospel).¹⁶¹

However, Matthew appears intentionally to leave his Gospel open-ended, for it concludes with a command from Jesus that points forward to the future.¹⁶² Three elements in particular demonstrate that Jesus' final words to the disciples in this Gospel denote a continuation of Matthew's storyline beyond the final verse: the command to make disciples (which includes baptizing and teaching), the mission to the nations, and the promise of Jesus' presence. Because the Gospel ends with a completed storyline yet a forward-projecting command and promise, Matthew leaves his conclusion open to the continuing story of making disciples of all nations as Jesus fulfills his promise of his presence. The reader, therefore, recognizes that Matthew's message, through Jesus' command, does not end at 28:20 but anticipates the continued work of making disciples of all nations.

Finally, one of the major methods employed by narrative critics is the search for the implied reader. Unfortunately, most of these approaches either presuppose a reader response criticism or spiral toward that conclusion.¹⁶³ Yet, the

¹⁶¹For an analysis of μαθητεύσατε and Matthew's portrayal of the Gentiles, see chap. 4.

¹⁶²Several scholars note the open-ended nature of Matthew's conclusion. Donald Senior writes, "Through the final words of Jesus to his disciples, Matthew projects the gospel story out into the time and space of the reader's world, and even farther, to those in the future who would accept the message of Jesus' missionaries, be baptized by them, and through them be schooled in the way of Jesus." Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 177. Mark Powell explains, "Even at first blush, Matt 28.16-20 reads more like a new beginning than an ending: it initiates goals and conflicts that remain unresolved within this story." Mark A. Powell, "The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel," *NTS* 38, no. 2 (1992): 191.

¹⁶³James Resseguie describes three ways a reader may stand in relation to the text: "(1) The reader can be *in the text*, i.e., a construct of the text; (2) the reader can be a real reader with complete dominance *over the text*; or (3) the reader can have a dialectical relationship *with the text*." Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 30. Each of these approaches allows the reader to influence the meaning of the text, which, of course, is incongruent with an author-oriented hermeneutic. This reader-orientation is one of the major weaknesses of narrative criticism in its common use. Rightly employed, however, narrative analysis functions as a helpful interpretive tool for discerning the author's message and how the author intended that message to impact the reader.

notion of an implied reader need not be moribund in the quagmire of reader response theories, for a key tenet of literary approaches is that an author writes to communicate a message. Therefore, a conceptual use of an implied reader is to discern through the text whom the author is addressing. Given the presupposition of an author-oriented hermeneutic and that Matthew intentionally wrote for an audience, the tools of narrative criticism may aid in ascertaining whom Matthew had in mind in crafting his Gospel.¹⁶⁴ Concerning the subject of this chapter, the necessity of understanding an implied reader is obvious. For whom did Matthew intend the Great Commission mandate to apply? Does his Gospel give evidence that the reader he had in mind was more than the apostles?

Answering the question of the implied reader necessitates bringing together the conclusions discerned through rhetorical and narrative criticism. Matthew's arrangement of the narrative and discourses evidences his concern to emphasize the nature of discipleship as a key purpose of his Gospel. His characterization views the disciples primarily as a unitary character or group who hear and receive Jesus' teaching. Yet, Matthew's aim is not merely to provide a record of the twelve and *their* discipleship, but he intends to convey through Jesus' teaching (such as the generic endings of the discourses) a picture of discipleship for *all* who would follow Christ.¹⁶⁵ In other words, he invites all disciples to hear the

¹⁶⁴The concept of an implied reader typically does not refer to a real reader, but is a construct used to consider any person who might read the text. As such, Mark Powell describes the implied reader as "distinct from any real, historical reader." Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 19. Similarly, see Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 38; Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait*, 8. However, one need not resort to viewing the implied reader as a construct of the author's mind, but rather as an intended audience. Although Matthew may not have known every person who would read his Gospel, he undoubtedly had readers in mind: followers of Christ or those who would read it and become his disciples. This understanding of the implied reader runs contrary to the approach of many critics who too often divorce the world of the story from the real world. Mark Powell follows this understanding in writing, "All expectations of an implied reader apply to the 'story world' of the narrative—not to the actual world outside the story." Powell, "Literary Approaches," 66. This dissertation affirms that Matthew intends for his message to apply to real world readers as they seek to live as disciples of Christ.

¹⁶⁵Ben Cooper, utilizing communication models as his methodology, comes to a similar conclusion. He suggests that the readers through the ears of the disciples should "hear what Jesus

words of Jesus and obey Christ's commands.¹⁶⁶ The open-ended concluding pericope, therefore, summons the reader to hear Jesus' command as extending beyond the disciples to a continuing command for all followers of Christ to make disciples of all nations. Bringing together all these elements, Matthew's implied reader is anyone who would follow Christ. Matthew's intent, therefore, seems to be that the reader would recognize Jesus' authority as the risen Son of God, hear Jesus' teaching, and obey his commands. At least in part, therefore, the Gospel of Matthew functions as a manual of discipleship.

To clarify, the evidence in the text indicates that Matthew's intended audience is anyone who would hear Jesus' teaching and follow him.¹⁶⁷ The reader is

says as if they were there." They are then "expected to translate what they hear to apply to their actual situation." Ben Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood: Commitment and Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew*, LNTS 490 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), 57. Although he briefly mentions this conclusion in the context of the Great Commission, he explicates neither the meaning of the terms in 28:19-20 nor how the reader should respond in obedience.

¹⁶⁶My conclusion that the implied reader is anyone who would follow Christ runs counter to those who suggest that Matthew was written as a manual for church leaders. Paul Minear, for example, writes that Matthew had in mind a small audience "composed mainly of *leaders* in the local churches." Minear, *Matthew*, 9. For similar views, see Andrew T. Lincoln, "Matthew—A Story for Teachers," in *Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter, JSOTSup 87 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 103–25; David E. Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal*, JSNTSup 25 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 162-63; M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 120-27; Paul S. Minear, "Disciples and the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew," *Anglican Theological Review. Supplement Series* 3 (March 1974): 31. *Contra* those who would argue that Matthew was intended for church leaders, R. T. France rightly explains, "To describe the gospel (or even any part of it) as primarily a manual for church leaders or teachers seems far too restrictive, however appropriate some of its contents might be for their needs." R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1989), 112. In addition to the above argumentation that the Gospel of Matthew is for anyone who would follow Jesus, the contention that it is for teachers seems to be an odd purpose for the gospel genre. One would anticipate a different genre for such a didactic purpose.

¹⁶⁷This conclusion coheres well with the contention by a growing (yet still small) cadre of scholars who argue that the authors of the gospels wrote not for a single community, but for a broad audience. Richard Bauckham has been one of the primary promoters of this view, arguing that a community-oriented reading too often views the gospels like epistles that address a particular issue. The gospel genre, however, does not cohere well with addressing specific problems in a community, for the function of discourse is "to communicate widely with readers unable to be present at its author's oral teaching." Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were the Gospels Written?," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 29. As βιοί, however, they have a wider audience than their author's community. He concludes, "Whatever the influences on an evangelist's work may have been, its *implied readership* is not a specific audience, large or small, but an indefinite readership: any or every church of the late first century to which his Gospel might circulate." *Ibid.*, 45. The other chapters in this volume helpfully explore the plausibility of the circulation of the gospels, the

to hear Jesus' teaching about discipleship and recognize that this instruction about discipleship applies to him or her as well.¹⁶⁸ Rather than simply identifying with the disciples as exemplars (for Matthew does not consistently portray them as fully obedient or understanding),¹⁶⁹ the reader should hear Jesus' words to them about discipleship not only as a record of Jesus' teaching to the twelve, but instruction to all followers of Jesus about what it means to follow him.¹⁷⁰ Jesus is thus the source of how one learns to be a disciple, and his instruction often flows through his teaching of the twelve; the reader hears from Jesus, through his teaching to the disciples, about what he expects of his followers.¹⁷¹ Given this conclusion about Matthew's

production of copies of manuscripts, the genre of the gospels, the challenge of fully identifying the communities of the gospel writers, and the interpretive errors that may befall the exegete who makes the community thesis a guiding principle for understanding the gospels. Unsurprisingly, Bauckham's thesis has met some resistance. For a helpful overview of some of the major points of discussion on this topic since the publication of *The Gospels for All Christians*, see Edward W. Klink, III, ed., *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity*, LNTS 353 (New York: T & T Clark, 2010).

¹⁶⁸The contention of this chapter is that Matthew's purpose is for Jesus' teaching about discipleship to extend beyond Matthew's original readers to all followers of Christ. In this way, the intended significance is for all believers. This intended significance is especially evident in the Great Commission. However, one should not construe the conclusion of this chapter to mean that every command of Jesus necessarily is for every follower of Christ, for some of his obviously historically-situated imperatives could only be fulfilled by the disciples (such as the command for the disciples to prepare the Passover meal in 26:18). Rather, Jesus' teaching about discipleship extends to all followers of Christ.

¹⁶⁹Some scholars have been too quick to affirm that Matthew intends the reader to identify with the twelve disciples. Matthew Overman, for example, writes, In his idealizing of the disciples and their emergence in the Gospel as followers of Jesus who truly learn, understand, and now *teach* others, Matthew provides a model of the life and behavior of the community member. While Jesus is the hero and agent of God in Matthew's story, it is really the life and ministry of the disciples, centering as it does on learning, understanding, and instruction, which constitutes the primary focus of the member's own ministry in the present. The community members are to identify and emulate the disciples of Jesus as they are portrayed in the Gospel. J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 135-36. Likewise, Cedric Vine calls the disciples "transparent exemplar figures." Vine, *The Audience of Matthew*, 32.

¹⁷⁰David Howell provides a helpful caveat in discerning the role of the disciples: The readers implied or 'included' in the story, however, are not to be equated with the disciples or any other character group. . . . Discipleship does not mean membership in a character group, but acceptance of the norms and values voiced by Jesus and the implied author. The disciples provide the link between the implied reader and Jesus' teaching which is to be obeyed, but they at times fail to live up to the standards in Jesus' teaching. Jesus, however, embodies these values in his own life, so he can be seen to be a model for the demands of discipleship. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story*, 53.

¹⁷¹Jeannine Brown rightly explains, "The disciples' portrayal then functions in Matthew's

purpose for his Gospel, the intended significance of the Great Commission is clear: Jesus' command is to be heard through the eleven disciples to all followers of Christ. The Great Commission, therefore, is for every believer.

Excursus: Ecclesiology in Matthew

The above rhetorical and narrative analysis demonstrates that Matthew intends to convey a picture of discipleship through his Gospel that extends to every follower of Christ. However, the association of the Great Commission with both the local and universal church merits further consideration of Matthew's conceptualization of the church in relationship to the individual disciple. In what way does Jesus' command to the disciples (which has normativity for every Christian) relate to the local church or the universal church? Does Matthew give evidence of an ecclesiology that helps further delineate the relationship between the church (both local and universal) and the individual in the context of Great Commission obedience?

Ἐκκλησία in Matthew

In general, Matthew does not devote much of his Gospel to ecclesiological concerns that help to answer these questions.¹⁷² The lack of extensive explanation about the function and structure of the church, however, is unsurprising given the

symbolic world as one aspect of how he communicates his vision of discipleship." Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, Academia Biblica 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 138. Similarly, Joel Willitts suggests that later generations of readers are Jesus' students through hearing his instruction to the disciples. Joel Willitts, "The Twelve Disciples in Matthew," in *Jesus, Matthew's Gospel and Early Christianity: Studies in Memory of Graham N. Stanton*, LNTS 435 (New York: T & T Clark International, 2011), 175.

¹⁷²Several scholars note that Matthew does not describe a highly-developed ecclesiology. See, for example, Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Meaning of Ἐκκλησία in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17," *BSac* 167 (September 2010).; Senior, *What Are They Saying*, 88; John P. Harrison, "Matthew's Vision for Jesus' Community of Disciples," in *The New Testament Church: The Challenge of Developing Ecclesiologies*, ed. John P. Harrison and James D. Dvorak, McMaster Divinity College Biblical Studies Series 1 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 9.

genre of the Gospel and its relationship to βίος; the primary purpose is to describe the life of Jesus and the nature of following him, not establish an ecclesiology. However, Matthew is unique in that it is the only Gospel to use the term ἐκκλησία. As such, consideration of his depiction of the church may aid in understanding how the individual believer's responsibility to make disciples relates to the church.

The word ἐκκλησία appears three times in Matthew, the first of which is in the well-known passage of Peter's confession in chapter 16.¹⁷³ Scholars have spilled much ink in examining this pericope, but, for the purpose of this dissertation, we need not consider the full passage, but only two primary considerations: Jesus' building of the church and the keys of the kingdom. Concerning the building of the church, Jesus' use of ἐκκλησία in this verse must refer to the universal church, for the context cannot refer to his building of only one local church, but the totality of all his followers.¹⁷⁴ His will for the church shall continue, for not even the gates of Hades can prevail against it.

In response to Peter's confession, Jesus states he will give to Peter the keys of the kingdom. Although scholars have posited numerous interpretations of the meaning of the keys, the best view is that Jesus means the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom.¹⁷⁵ Peter, therefore, as the rock on which Christ will build the

¹⁷³Despite the claims by some that the presence of ἐκκλησία in Matthew is an anachronistic insertion in Jesus' speech, one need not resort to the conclusion that the word is a Matthean redaction. Rather, as France asserts, "Jesus could expect his disciples to understand [the meaning of ἐκκλησία] on the basis of its OT background." France, *Matthew*, 624n30. The disciples would understand that Jesus was speaking of God's people. Richard Ascough helpfully explains that Matthew's choice of ἐκκλησία rather than συναγωγή highlights the demarcation of the church from the synagogues. The use of ἐκκλησία thus emphasizes the association and assembly of individual believers that are fundamental aspects of the church. Richard S. Ascough and David E. Aune, "Matthew and Community Formation," in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study: Studies in Memory of William G. Thompson, S. J.* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2001), 111-14.

¹⁷⁴Merkle, "Meaning of Ἐκκλησία," 284; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 362.

¹⁷⁵For a good overview of the history of interpretation of this verse, see Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 370-75. Carson likewise draws this conclusion in Carson, *Matthew*, 373.

church, has a unique role in the founding and early growth of the church (see especially Acts 2-4, 10-11).¹⁷⁶ However, Luz is correct in asserting that Peter here also functions “as a model for every disciple” in that every follower of Jesus must confess that he is the Christ and carry forward the message of the kingdom.¹⁷⁷ In this passage, therefore, Matthew shows that Jesus builds the church through the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom. Considering the Great Commission mandate in light of this passage, we see that Jesus grows the universal church by means of the spread of the gospel message by individual disciples.

The other two occurrences of *ἐκκλησία* are in the context of church discipline in Matthew 18:17 in which Jesus tells the disciples that they should make known the sin of the individual to the church if he or she refuses to repent. Jesus’ reference to the church in this verse gets to the heart of the community and assembly aspect of *ἐκκλησία*, for he describes church discipline in the context of a local community. Commentators, therefore, widely agree that Jesus is describing the function of the *local church* in addressing the unrepentant sin of its members.

Intriguingly, Jesus explains to the disciples in this context of church discipline that what they bind or loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven (18:18). Jesus uses the same terms for binding and loosing in this verse as he did in 16:19 (*δέω* and *λύω*), indicating a similarity in concept. Although scholars debate the exact correspondence between these two verses, Carson is likely correct in

¹⁷⁶Although many evangelicals argue that Peter’s confession is the rock on which Christ builds the church, the most natural way to read the text is that Jesus is speaking of Peter. Many scholars affirm this interpretation: Carson, *Matthew*, 368-69; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 362; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 620-22; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 470; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 251-52.

¹⁷⁷Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 365. See also Luz’s assertion of Peter as a type of every disciple in Ulrich Luz, “The Primacy Saying of Matthew 16:17-19 from the Perspective of Its Effective History,” in *Studies in Matthew*, ed. Ulrich Luz, trans. Rosemary Selle (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 172-76.

contending that “18:18 is a special application of 16:19.”¹⁷⁸ The proclamation of the message of the kingdom functions as keys to the kingdom, and, therefore, the church’s use of this message to demarcate who stands inside and outside the limits of the church is an application of the keys. Eduard Schweizer, therefore, rightly argues that the binding and loosing in these two passages indicates the authority given by Jesus to the individual and the local church. Every disciple has the authority for proclaiming the message of the kingdom (because Peter typifies every disciple in 16:19) and the local church as a whole has the authority of determining membership in the community (because 18:15-18 is for the local church).¹⁷⁹

This passage thus plays an important role in ascertaining the ecclesiology of Matthew, particularly in understanding the lived-out reality of discipleship in the context of community.¹⁸⁰ Foundationally, if church discipline is Jesus’ expectation for dealing with unrepentant sin, the underlying, yet unvoiced, expectation is that every follower of Christ should be a member of a church. Concerning the role of the local church, Jesus indicates that it has functions that belong to the congregation as a whole in demarcating those who are members of the community. Although the congregation as a whole has oversight over membership, individual believers contribute to the overall function of the church’s handling of the sin of its members, for the first two steps involve individuals, and the final phase necessarily includes the participation of the members of the church in declaring the unrepentant sinner to be a Gentile or tax collector (18:17).¹⁸¹ Therefore, Matthew’s ecclesiology expects

¹⁷⁸Carson, *Matthew*, 374.

¹⁷⁹Eduard Schweizer, “Matthew’s Church,” in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton, *Issues in Religion and Theology* 3 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 135.

¹⁸⁰Hagner describes the church in Matt 18 as an “eschatological community—the community of the kingdom.” Donald A. Hagner, “Holiness and Ecclesiology: The Church in Matthew,” in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 173.

¹⁸¹Some argue that the disciples in chapter 18 represent pastors: Harrison, “Matthew’s

a close-functioning membership in which the individual members hold one another accountable for sin, and the local church as a whole has authority over membership.¹⁸²

Baptism and the Church

The reference to baptism in 28:20 is an additional aid in discerning Matthew's view of the church. As stated above, this commission is the marching orders for Christ's disciples, and, as such, it represents not only the *peroratio* of the Gospel, but the *exordium* of the mission of all followers of Jesus. Baptism functions as an identification with the triune God, particularly with Christ who was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (Matt 3:15).¹⁸³ However, baptism not only identifies the believer with Jesus, but also with the community. Lars Hartman is correct in writing, "Obviously baptism has an ecclesiastical aspect, for when the evangelist presupposes that Christ's dominion will include more and more disciples, those who are so gathered form 'his' church (Matt 16.18)."¹⁸⁴ As chapter 18 demonstrates, Matthew's depiction of ecclesiology assumes the connection of the believer to a local assembly, the church. As Christ grows the universal church, believers should form together into local communities as a necessary aspect of kingdom living and discipleship. Although Matthew does not explicitly state the relationship between baptism and the

Vision for Jesus' Community," 13; Michael Goulder, "Matthew's Vision for the Church," in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J. P. M. Sweet*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 22. The role of individual believers in the process of church discipline, however, argues against viewing the disciples as representative only of ministers.

¹⁸²The intimacy and connectedness of followers of Christ in the local church may also be evident in Jesus' description of Jesus' followers as family in Matt 12:48-50.

¹⁸³George Beasley-Murray asserts that "in the name of" indicates "the idea of appropriation, dedication, submission, belonging, that attaches to the Greek use of εἰς τὸ ὄνομα perfectly accords with the major motif of making disciples." G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1988), 90.

¹⁸⁴Lars Hartman, *"Into the Name of the Lord Jesus": Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 153.

local church, baptism would seem naturally to connect the follower of Christ to both the local church as the community of believers and the universal church as the whole body of the redeemed.¹⁸⁵

Synthesis of Ecclesiology in Matthew

Although Matthew's purpose is not to depict ecclesial structures, Matthew gives evidence of an intent to delineate, at least in brief fashion, the nature of the church.¹⁸⁶ As the above demonstrates, the Gospel shows discipleship and ecclesial community in an individual, local church, and universal church context. This chapter, as well as the above excursus (particularly concerning the keys of the kingdom), explains that every individual has a role in gospel proclamation. However, Matthew's inclusion of the pericope about church discipline shows the expectation of the individual's membership in and close relationship to a local assembly of believers. A disciple is also part of the universal church built by Christ (16:18), and the growth of the church necessarily occurs through the verbal testimony of disciples. In summary, although Matthew's portrayal of ecclesiology is quite limited, he provides enough detail to give a sufficient understanding of the relationship between the individual, local church, and universal church in regard to the Great Commission. The local church is the gathering of disciples who minister together,

¹⁸⁵Beasley-Murray, writing of the holistic picture of baptism in the NT, explains, There can be no question of the doctrine of baptism having been formulated by the New Testament writers with a view to its suiting the concept of the Church as both the Body and the Bride of the Risen Christ in the Spirit and the empirical community of his professed followers on earth, for those writers were not interested in such a distinction, but there is no doubt that the twofold aspect of baptism as an external, visible rite, yet having an essentially spiritual (one is tempted to write transcendental) significance, admirably fits it for being the means of entry into the Church in both senses. In the will of God the outward act of baptism, witnessing the outward entry into the Church, should coincide with the baptism of the Spirit and incorporation of the believer into the Body of Christ. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 284.

¹⁸⁶Don Carson writes that scholars often over-emphasize the ecclesiology of Matthew due to the appearance of *ἐκκλησία*. Carson, *Matthew*, 31. However, one should conversely not de-emphasize what Matthew has written regarding the nature of the church.

and the congregation as a whole has oversight over the foundational matters of membership and discipline (which seems to include baptism), thus indicating the fundamental role of the local church in mission. Individual members within the church carry out the mandates of discipleship, such as obedience to Christ in matters of holding one another accountable for sin and carrying forward the message of the kingdom. The growth of the church and fulfillment of the Great Commission occur only through Christ's building of the church throughout church history as disciples in local congregations carry out his mission.¹⁸⁷

Conclusion

Concerning the thesis of this dissertation, this chapter demonstrates that Jesus' command in 28:19 applies to every believer. In terms of the hermeneutic of application delineated in chapter 2, Matthew presents a world in front of the text in which he invites the reader to hear Jesus' words about discipleship and follow him in obedience. The seeming self-replicating nature of the Great Commission mandate, coupled with how Matthew draws the reader into the story in hearing Jesus' teaching, demonstrates that Matthew exhibits a willed futurity for his Gospel that extends beyond the original disciples or even the initial audiences of the Gospel. The hermeneutical problem of distancing, at least in terms of an intended normativity, therefore, is effectively annulled through Matthew's intent. Using Kuruvilla's terminology, Matthew's transhistorical intention is that the follower of Christ who

¹⁸⁷The purpose of this dissertation is to delineate the sermonic application of Matt 28:19, primarily through understanding Matthew's overall message and the implications for obedience to Jesus' command in this pericope. Therefore, the above consideration of the relationship of the individual to the church is primarily concerned with the Gospel of Matthew. However, I affirm the use of the *analogia fidei* as a hermeneutical guideline, so consideration of the rest of the NT, especially the Pauline epistles, helps to elucidate how the individual functions missionally in the context of the local church. For an excellent analysis of Paul's letters in the context of mission, see especially Robert Plummer's *Paul's Understanding of the Church's Mission*. He rightly argues that Paul expected local churches to engage in mission, and every member of a church has a role to play in the advancement of the gospel.

reads this Gospel would hear Jesus' mandate as applying to himself or herself.

Sermonic application, therefore, must take into account that the authorial intent of this passage is that every Christian has a mandate from the risen Christ to make disciples.

However, before proceeding to consider the sermonic implications for the remainder of the Great Commission mandate, a point of clarification may help to shed light on the language used to describe the normativity of Jesus' command in 28:19-20. Several of the views about the normativity of the commission in varying ways describe the imperative's ongoing significance for Christians, but the terminology used results in uncertainty about precisely to whom the mandate applies. Those who assert that Jesus' command extends beyond the original disciples often suggest that Christians in one way or another have a responsibility to obey Jesus' words in the Great Commission. Even preachers who assume the missions mandate is for ministers have articulated a role for Christians in general, particularly through prayer and giving.¹⁸⁸ In addition, those who hold that the mandate applies to the local church and universal church seem to assume that Christians in general have a role in the fulfillment of the Great Commission, for believers make up these groups as a whole. Of course, those who argue it is for every believer affirm the mandate's extension to every follower of Christ.

¹⁸⁸Andrew Broaddus, in a sermon about missions, states, "Some have the talent for preaching, and are marked out by Heaven for the work of the ministry; but they are not angels, but human creatures, and must be supported by human means. Well, and others who may not have that talent, possess the means for aiding in the necessary support. Let them freely and liberally contribute of their earthly substance for this purpose. This is the treasury of the Lord, and who will refuse to honor the draft of the King of Heaven? And then, again, you can show yourselves in other ways the advocates for the cause of Christ; all can make an offering of their prayers—their earnest cries to God for the salvation of dying sinners, and the prosperity of Zion." Andrew Broaddus, "The Universal Spread of the Gospel," in Andrew Broaddus and Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *The Sermons and Other Writings of the Rev. Andrew Broaddus: with a Memoir of His Life* (New York: Lewis Colby, 1852), 121, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/sermonsoterwrit00broa>.

Unfortunately, those affirming these views do not always clearly specify how Jesus' command relates to the individual. If the imperative devolves on the local church as a whole, in what sense is it a requirement for every Christian? Similarly, if it is for the universal church or every believer, what aspect of the commission devolves on an individual believer? Is disciple-making a fundamental command for every Christian? Or, would a person's obedience to the Great Commission also require seeking to reach the nations? What role do baptizing and teaching play in a Christian's responsibility?

Given the above excursus about Matthew's ecclesiology, perhaps several of these views offer important contributions to understanding the normativity of the Great Commission, as well as how practical obedience to this command occurs throughout church history. As demonstrated above, Matthew's portrayal of discipleship and the open-ended nature of the commission indicate that the imperative is for every believer. Therefore, the command to make disciples is incumbent on every follower of Christ. However, in order to be obedient to this command, would a Christian have to go to every nation, perform baptism, and teach *everything* that Christ taught? Such would not be feasible for any one person. Thus, the command to go make disciples is for every believer, but the success of the entirety of the Great Commission will only occur as all believers work together in making disciples.¹⁸⁹

The mandate is for every Christian, and the local church is the vehicle God has established for individual believers to function together in discipleship, ministry, and mission. Robert Plummer is correct in contending that Jesus'

¹⁸⁹This involvement of many different Christians for carrying out different aspects of the Great Commission mandate was evident in Anabaptist missiology. They often viewed every Christian as a missionary, although each would carry out different roles. See Schäufele, "Missionary Vision," 72-73, 85.

command devolves on the local church as a whole in the sense that God designed the local church for carrying out mission. Unfortunately, the language of “devolving on the local church as a whole” may lead to confusion, particularly whether the imperative is for every believer and how the preacher should explain the application in a sermon.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, such confusion may occur with describing the Great Commission as for the universal church. Rather, in consideration of Matthew’s ecclesiology, a better way to bring together these different descriptions of the normativity of Jesus’ command is that the Great Commission is for every believer, the local church is the ordained avenue for carrying out Jesus’ mandate, and the task of discipling the nations will be fulfilled by the universal church.¹⁹¹

Answering this question of the normativity of the Great Commission, however, only scratches the surface of applicational implications, particularly for how a preacher explains the application in a sermon and describes exemplifications that correspond to authorial intent. Before attempting to clarify these homiletical difficulties in chapter 5, three related interpretational challenges remain: the meaning and translation of *πορευθέντες*, what Matthew intended by the imperative *μαθητεύσατε*, and the identification of the *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. To these subjects we now turn in chapter 4.

¹⁹⁰Of the writers cited above who contend that the commission is for the local church, few clarify that it is also for the individual Christian. Schmidt and Plummer, however, note that evangelism is expected of every believer. See Schmidt, “The Apostolic Band,” 78; Plummer, “Great Commission,” 9. In addition, in an email with Robert Plummer on June 12, 2017, he confirmed his belief that the Great Commission is for every Christian. He explains, “Depending on one’s gifting and life situation, how the Great Commission is lived out will vary. A mother may be in a stage where the primary setting where she obeys the GC is in her own family or with 2-3 moms in a ‘play group.’ Gifting and life situations can change. Thus, dimensions of how one fulfills the GC vary through one’s life. But, it’s a commission that is incumbent upon all Christians.”

¹⁹¹A. T. Robertson, who suggests the five hundred were present at the giving of the Great Commission, makes a similar statement in writing, “The command is addressed to all the five hundred. It is primarily an individual responsibility. The church is the chief means for pushing on the work of the kingdom, but not the only means. The failure of the church to do its duty does not absolve the individual Christian from his responsibility.” Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Bible for Home and School (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1911), 285, accessed September 12, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/commentaryongosp00roberich>.

CHAPTER 4

EXEGETICAL DECISIONS

The aim of this dissertation is to discern the sermonic application of Jesus' command *πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. Expository preaching, by its very definition, requires that the preacher not merely explain the meaning of the text, but demonstrate how the author's meaning has practical implications for the contemporary hearer.¹ Because application should flow out of authorial intent, accurate preaching depends on rightly understanding the author's meaning of the text.

In the analysis of this portion of the Great Commission, three interpretive

¹Definitions of expository preaching often include the necessity of application. Haddon Robinson defines it as "the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers." Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 21. Albert Mohler provides a more expansive definition: "Expository preaching is that mode of Christian preaching that takes as its central purpose the presentation and application of the text of the Bible. All other issues and concerns are subordinated to the central task of presenting the biblical text. As the Word of God, the text of Scripture has the right to establish both the substance and the structure of the sermon. Genuine exposition takes place when the preacher sets forth the meaning and message of the biblical text and makes clear how the Word of God establishes the identity and worldview of the church as the people of God." R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 65. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix suggest it is "a discourse that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions which issue forth from the given text, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners." Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 29. Bryan Chapell suggests that an expository sermon "is a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text." Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 31. More concisely, Hershael York defines expository preaching as "any kind of preaching that shows people the meaning of a biblical text and leads them to apply it to their lives." Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 33. For a defense of the necessity of expository preaching's inclusion of both the explanation of the text's meaning and application for the hearers, see Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?," *SBJT* 3, no. 2 (June 1999): 70–84; Scott Avery Blue, "Application in the Expository Sermon: A Case for Its Necessary Inclusion" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001).

difficulties require the preacher's careful examination in order to expound the text's meaning and then articulate application that properly corresponds to both that meaning and the author's intended purpose for the text. These three interpretive issues are the translation of *πορευθέντες*, the meaning of *μαθητεύσατε*, and the translation and referent of *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. This chapter will attempt to explain the meaning of these terms, not merely through lexical or grammatical analysis, but also by considering what Matthew is *doing* with them. Keeping in mind the hermeneutic of application delineated in chapter 2, what follows seeks to understand and articulate how Matthew uses these words to convey his larger purpose for the transhistorical intentions of the world in front of the text.

The Meaning of Πορευθέντες

Although only one word, the translation and meaning of *πορευθέντες* is surprisingly problematic. Both Greek grammarians and New Testament exegetes offer varying views of what Matthew intends to convey through this word. Yet, if *πορευθέντες* is a challenge for scholars, it is more so for preachers, as is evident through the differing ways they conceptualize its meaning and how it impacts obedience to the Great Commission. However, preachers need not be uncertain regarding how best to interpret this participle. The following analysis of this term seeks to summarize the primary ways of understanding the participle and then provides several arguments for affirming its imperatival function in the Great Commission. Proper understanding of *πορευθέντες* has broad implications for how to preach the application of this passage.

Summary of Views

The most common translation of *πορευθέντες* is “go,” thus interpreting the

participle with an imperatival force.² English versions of the New Testament evidence the priority of an imperatival translation, for, beginning with Tyndale, “go” by far has been the predominant choice.³ The most common grammatical designation of this use of the participle is attendant circumstance, a subcategory of the circumstantial (adverbial) participle. Daniel Wallace’s definition of the participle of attendant circumstances is perhaps the most cited among contemporary grammarians. He writes,

The attendant circumstance participle is used to communicate an action that, in some sense, is coordinate with the finite verb. In this respect it is not dependent, for it is translated like a verb. Yet it is still dependent *semantically*, because it cannot exist without the main verb. It is translated as a finite verb connected to the main verb by *and*. The participle then, in effect, “piggy-backs” on the mood of the main verb.⁴

²For scholars who affirm an imperatival translation, see Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 1096; Hal Freeman, “The Great Commission and the New Testament: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20,” *SBJT* 1 (December 1997): 17; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 746n30; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 719; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 625; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 640-42, 645; K. L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: An Aspectual Approach* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 83; Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 386; Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “The Great Commission,” *BSac* 130, no. 519 (July 1973): 259-62; Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 431; D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: With the New International Version*, ed. Frank A. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 595; William Mabry Lunceford, “The Problem of the Aorist Participle in the New Testament” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1951), 271; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 356; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1080; Barbara Friberg, Timothy Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker’s Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), s.v. “*πορεύομαι*,” electronic edition.

³Nearly all English versions translate *πορευθέντες* in this way: Tyndale, ESV, KJV, NKJV, NASB, ASV, NIV (all editions), NRSV, RSV, NLT, HCSB, NET, Amplified Bible (AMP), Christian Standard Bible (CSB), CEB, CEV, GNB, LB, Geneva Bible, International Children’s Bible, Lexham English Bible, and New Century Version.

⁴Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 640. In addition to Wallace, numerous scholars cite this occurrence of *πορευθέντες* as a participle of attendant circumstances. See Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* (B & H Academic, 2016), 336-37; K. L. McKay, “Aspect in Imperatival Constructions,” *NovT* 27, no. 3 (1985): 225; Harold Francis Hanlin, “Circumstantial Uses of the Participle in Paul’s Letters to the Churches” (ThD diss, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1942), 270-71; Wesley J. Perschbacher, *New Testament Greek Syntax: An Illustrated Manual* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 403.

He goes on to suggest five characteristics that usually are present in these participles:

1. The tense of the participle is usually *aojist*.
2. The tense of the main verb is usually *aojist*.
3. The mood of the main verb is usually *imperative* or *indicative*.
4. The participle will *precede the main verb*—both in word order and time of event (though usually there is a very close proximity).
5. Attendant circumstance participles occur frequently in narrative literature, infrequently elsewhere.⁵

According to this view, because *πορευθέντες* is coordinate with the aorist imperative *μαθητεύσατε*, the participle semantically carries the mood of the verb and is thus translated “go.”⁶

A second perspective is that the participle indicates time that is antecedent to the head verb, resulting in the translation “having gone.” This translation appears quite infrequently in Bible versions, but occasionally in sermons.⁷ John MacArthur is perhaps the most prominent preacher to make this claim.⁸ He asserts,

Now let’s talk about that first participle, going, *πορευθέντες*. Actually, in the Greek it could be translated better “having gone—having gone.” It isn’t a command—go ye, that’s not a command in the Greek. In the Authorized they put it in the imperative mode but in the Greek it’s an assumption, having gone. I mean, it’s basic that if you’re going to make disciples of all nations, you’ve got to have gone. Having gone is assumed. It’s obvious. It’s natural. It’s a corollary.⁹

⁵Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 642.

⁶A few scholars, noting the imperatival function of *πορευθέντες* and its connection to the missionary imperative of the Great Commission, suggest the participle here functions as a technical term for mission. See David M. Warner, “Go’ Verbs in Matthew: Implications for the Interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20” (MDiv thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 2003), 19-38; Jacques Matthey, “The Great Commission According to Matthew,” *International Review of Mission* 69, no. 274 (1980): 167; Jean Zumstein, “Matthieu 28:16-20,” *Revue de Theologie et de Philosophie* 22, no. 1 (1972): 26. Although Matthew here uses *πορευθέντες* in conjunction with an imperative for mission, to view the word itself as a technical term for mission reads a concept into the lexeme that is not evident from usage in the New Testament or Septuagint.

⁷I found only two English versions that have this translation: Berean Literal Bible and Young’s Literal Translation.

⁸For another contemporary preacher who offers this translation, see Paul Washer, “As You Go, Make Disciples,” audio of sermon (Laurel, MS: Audubon Drive Bible Church, February 28, 2010), accessed August 7, 2015, <http://www.heartcrymissionary.com/sermons-en#!sid=292>.

⁹John MacArthur, “The Making Disciples of All Nations (Part 2),” transcript of sermon (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Community Church, June 9, 1985), accessed July 18, 2014, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/2405/the-making-disciples-of-all-nations-part-2>. See also his commentary on this verse in which he makes a similar assertion. John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 342.

MacArthur suggests that the participle indicates that going to the lost is assumed: “the assumption [is] that you’re not going to do this until you’ve gone somewhere it needs to be done. . . . It all starts with going.”¹⁰ His point is that making disciples is predicated on going to where evangelism needs to occur, and the Great Commission assumes that such going will take place.

The translation of *πορευθέντες* as “having gone” is primarily due to the commonality of the aorist participle’s indicating action that occurs prior to the time of the head verb. A. T. Robertson explains that a participle does not indicate time in and of itself, but only its contextual relationship to the verb.¹¹ However, he notes that an antecedent translation is “the most common use of the aorist participle.”¹² Due to the commonality of the aorist participle’s temporally antecedent relationship to the action of a clause’s verb, many interpreters suggest this translation. Craig Evans is representative of many in asserting, “Literally, the Greek reads ‘having gone.’ In other words, the going precedes the making of disciples.”¹³ This translation, therefore, rejects the imperatival function of the participle, instead affirming that going is assumed as a part of disciple-making.

A third major way of viewing the participle is that it means “as you go,” thus functioning as an adverbial participle indicating time that is contemporaneous

¹⁰John MacArthur, “Reaching the World,” transcript of sermon (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Community Church, January 14, 1990), accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/80-66/reaching-the-world>.

¹¹A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1124.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 483. For this interpretation, see also Harold M. Parker, Jr., “The Great Commission,” *Interpretation* 2, no. 1 (January 1948): 74–75; R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1932), 1172; Ernest Munachi Ezeogu, “The Purpose of the Great Commission: A Historical-Critical Exegesis of Matthew 28:16–20” (PhD diss., University of St. Michael’s College, 2004), 41.

to the head verb. This translation appears in only two English versions,¹⁴ but is a common interpretation among preachers and popular-level writings.¹⁵ However, some scholars have adopted this translation, such as Michael Brands who contends that “it represents an essential assumption” that the disciples will go.¹⁶ More pertinent to sermonic application, Mike Graves and David May in their preaching guide on Matthew suggest that it means “as you are going.”¹⁷ This view of the participle thus emphasizes that disciple-making occurs as one goes through life.

Whereas the preceding translations of πορευθέντες denote the way the participle impacts the command to make disciples, some scholars contend that it is pleonastic and has little or no bearing on the interpretation of the passage. Max Zerwick, for example, cites in his grammar this occurrence of the participle as a pleonasm that offers no additional meaning to the verb.¹⁸ Although not using the

¹⁴The International Standard Version has “as you go,” and the Douay-Rheims simplifies the participle as “going.”

¹⁵For example, see Steve Gaines, “Multiplying Disciple Makers,” video of sermon (Memphis, TN: Bellevue Baptist Church, November 24, 2013), accessed July 10, 2014, http://www.bellevue.org/messages#!/swx/pp/media_archives/140663/episode/44858; Mike Glenn, “As You Go, Make Disciples,” video of sermon (Nashville: Brentwood Baptist Church, July 14, 2013), accessed July 18, 2014, <http://www.brentwoodbaptist.tv/index.php?id=507>; Alvin L. Reid, *As You Go: Creating a Missional Culture of Gospel-Centered Students*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2013), 21.

¹⁶Michael Brands, “The Kingdom Commission, Light for the Nations: The Expanding Mission of Matthew 28:16–20 in Its Literary Context within Matthew’s Gospel” (PhD diss., Luther Seminary, 2007), 38. See also Mitzi Smith, “Knowing More than Is Good for One: A Womanist Interrogation of the Matthean Great Commission,” in *Teaching All Nations: Interrogating the Matthean Great Commission*, ed. Mitzi Smith and Jayachitra Lalitha (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 145. Edgar Krentz similarly considers the participle to indicate a time that is contemporaneous to the main verb μαθητεύσατε, but his interpretation is due to his incorrect identification of πορευθέντες as a present participle. Edgar Krentz, “‘Make Disciples’: Matthew on Evangelism,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 33, no. 1 (2006): 29.

¹⁷Mike Graves and David M. May, *Preaching Matthew: Interpretation and Proclamation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 137. Similarly, in his commentary for preachers and teachers, Myron Augsburger suggests the best translation is “while going in the world.” Myron S. Augsburger, *Matthew*, The Communicator’s Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 330.

¹⁸Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek* (Rome: Iura Editionis et Versionis Reservantur, 1963), 127. See also the same conclusion in Zumstein, “Matthieu 28:16-20,” 17. David Bosch likewise suggests it is a pleonasm, and “it serves to reinforce the action of the main verb and adds a note of urgency to it.” David J. Bosch, “The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20,” in *Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 77. Bosch elsewhere argues that it has an “unaccentuated meaning” and “could even have been omitted.” David Jacobus Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta: John

terminology of pleonasm, Bruce Malina draws a similar conclusion: “This participle is essentially an auxiliary, with no force of its own at all. Since the main verb in this case is an aorist imperative, the preceding participle simply serves to reinforce the action of the main verb.”¹⁹ According to this understanding of *πορευθέντες*, therefore, the participle does not add anything to the command to make disciples.²⁰

Imperative Function of the Participle

Although scholars offer four primary conceptualizations of the function of this participle in the Great Commission, the following argues that *πορευθέντες* has an imperatival role in coordination with *μαθητεύσατε*. Before proceeding to the argument, however, establishing the lexical parameters of *πορεύομαι* is necessary. Apart from a few figurative uses, in both Classical and Koine, the verb primarily conveys the idea of going, journeying, or traveling.²¹ As is common in English translations, the gloss “go” usually adequately conveys the lexical concept inherent in the word group when used as an imperative. However, BDAG suggests that the aorist of *πορεύομαι* sometimes functions pleonastically and thus serves not to indicate movement or traveling, but “to enliven the narrative.”²² Therefore, in addition to

Knox Press, 1980), 69. Nigel Turner, although not citing this occurrence of the participle in Matt 28:19, argues that similar uses of *πορευθέντες* with an imperative are pleonasms. Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 154. Similarly, BDAG does not cite 28:19, but refers to *πορευθέντες* in Matt 9:13; 11:4; and 28:7 as examples of pleonastic participles. BDAG, s.v. “πορεύω.”

¹⁹Bruce J. Malina, “Literary Structure and Form of Matt 28:16-20,” *NTS* 17, no. 1 (October 1970): 89-90. Malina here heavily relies on Matthew Black’s understanding of auxiliary participles. See Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 91.

²⁰For this reason, Peter O’Brien suggests “the word ‘go’ is better left untranslated.” Peter Thomas O’Brien, “The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20: A Missionary Mandate or Not?,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* (October 1978): 73.

²¹In the Classical period, it appears commonly in the active form *πορεύω*. In the New Testament and other early Christian literature, the word appears only in the middle and passive. BDAG, s.v. “πορεύω”; Friedrich Hauck and Siegfried Schulz, “Πορεύομαι,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 6:566-78; L & N §15.14, 18. LSJ, s.v. “πορεύω.”

²²BDAG, s.v. “πορεύω.”

determining the participle's relationship to *μαθητεύσατε*, the analysis below also considers whether *πορεύομαι* as a participle with an imperative verb continues to indicate the idea of going.

As well as understanding the semantic range of *πορεύομαι*, a correct view of its participial function in the Great Commission necessitates a brief overview of the Greek participle. As a verbal-adjective, the participle has both adjectival (through attributive, predicative, and substantival uses) and verbal characteristics.²³ Because of the adverbial role of the participle in Matthew 28:19, our concern here is primarily with the verbal function of participles. Grammatically, adverbial participles almost always depend on a verb and in some way modify it; however, in its connection to the head verb, a participle also retains a relationship to the subject of the verb and thus has relevance for the way the subject carries out the action of the verb.²⁴ Because adverbial participles are syntactically dependent on a verb, they do not grammaticalize time, but exhibit temporality only in their contextual relationship to a coordinate verb (which does grammaticalize time).²⁵ In other words, any temporal reference from a participle is due not to its tense-form, but to its contextual relationship to the head verb.

Although temporality is not inherent in participles, their tense-form encodes and grammaticalizes aspect. Without delving into the complexities of current aspectual theory, participles (like verbs) in their verbal function show the

²³Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 613-17; Rodney J. Decker, *Reading Koine Greek: An Introduction and Integrated Workbook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 387-91; Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: JSOT Press, 2005), 181-82; Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer, *Going Deeper*, 321-23.

²⁴Porter, *Idioms*, 187.

²⁵For the atemporality of participles, see *ibid.*; Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer, *Going Deeper*, 323; Robert E. Picirilli, "Time and Order in the Circumstantial Participles of Mark and Luke," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 17, no. 2 (2007): 241-43; Robert E. Picirilli, "Order and Relative Time in the Participles of the Greek New Testament," *JETS* 57, no. 1 (March 2014): 99; Robertson, *Grammar*, 1124. Contrary to Stanley Porter, K. L. McKay, and Rodney Decker, I contend that Greek verbs are not merely tense-forms, but encode time.

viewpoint of the action of the participle. This viewpoint may be either holistic and thus outside the action (perfective aspect) or internal to the action as it occurs (imperfective aspect).²⁶ An aorist participle thus encodes perfective aspect and a present participle encodes imperfective aspect.²⁷ Most important for understanding the meaning of *πορευθέντες* (as demonstrated below), an adverbial participle encodes aspect and semantically coordinates with its verb to modify the verb and, consequently, the action of the subject. Interpretation of a participle, therefore, includes properly understanding both the semantics of the participle and its pragmatic function in its context.

Given these foundational matters, the task remains to understand what Jesus intends through the use of *πορευθέντες*. At root, the issue is whether this aorist participle in conjunction with an imperative conveys a temporal relationship (whether of antecedent or contemporaneous time), semantically coordinates with the head verb to denote an imperatival concept, or is merely a pleonasm. A brief survey of examples aids in sorting out this difficulty.

The aorist participle of *πορεύω* or *πορεύομαι* with an imperative is not common in extrabiblical literature.²⁸ Other aorist participles with an imperative, however, are not altogether infrequent, especially in works referencing the Old

²⁶One of the most debated contemporary topics in Greek scholarship is the nature of aspect. Increasingly, grammarians suggest *Aktionsart* is an outdated theory of the semantics of the Greek verb, contending rather that Greek is an aspect-oriented language. For a helpful overview of the major issues and scholars in verbal aspect study, see Constantine R. Campbell, *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 105-33.

²⁷Grammarians widely agree on the aspect of the aorist and present tenses. The aspect of the future and perfect, however, is a subject of much debate. Some, such as Constantine Campbell and Buist Fanning, argue that there are only two aspects: perfective and imperfective. Others, such as Stanley Porter, suggest that the perfect is stative in aspect. The aspect of the future elicits a number of proposals, ranging from a quasi-fourth aspect to imperfective. For an overview of the primary views of the aspect of the perfect, see Campbell, *Advances*, 117-19. For a brief discussion of the aspect of the future tense, see Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer, *Going Deeper*, 269.

²⁸My reference to the imperative includes not only second and third person imperatives, but also first person hortatory subjunctives. Wallace rightly contends that a hortatory subjunctive is “*semantically* equivalent to an imperative.” Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 644.

Testament.²⁹ This construction also appears several times in the Apocrypha, such as Judith’s command in Judith 14:1: λαβόντες τὴν κεφαλὴν ταύτην κρεμάσατε αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐπάλλξεως τοῦ τείχους ὑμῶν (Take this head and hang it on the parapet of your wall).³⁰ Whether with the πορεύω word group or another participle, these instances typically require an imperatival translation of the participle, for the action inherent in the participle does not convey a primarily temporal relationship to the verb or mere pleonasm, but is a concomitant requirement of the imperative verb. For example, in 1 Maccabees 2:33, the king’s soldiers instruct a righteous remnant of Jews to follow the wicked orders of the king: “ἐξελθόντες ποιήσατε κατὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ βασιλέως” (Come out and obey the word of the king). Coming out (which, one should note, is lexically similar in domain to πορεύομαι) is coordinate with the command to do what the king demands—both elements are necessary for obedience to the command.³¹

In both the Septuagint and New Testament, this construction occurs somewhat frequently.³² Many of the participles are not from πορεύομαι, but they consistently do not simply reiterate the lexical concept of the verb, but modify what

²⁹For examples of this construction in the Apostolic Fathers, see *1 Clem.* 10:4; *Did.* 13:5, 6; 14:1 (possibly also *Pol. Phil.* 2:1, which seems to be attendant circumstance, but could be means). For Josephus, see *Jos. Ant.* 4:202, 209, 242; 8:10. For Philo, see *Agr.* 1:93; *Plant.* 1:47; *Migr.* 1:208; *Congr.* 1:57; *Fug.* 1:23, 48; *Somn.* 1:46; *Somn.* 2:266; *Mos.* 1:283; *Spec.* 3:56; *QG* 4:131; *Det.* 1:5, 11.

³⁰Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in parentheses in this section are mine.

³¹For additional examples in the Apocrypha, see 1 Esd 8:91 (8:95 in the NRSV); 9:51; Jdt 3:4; 14:1; Tob 8:12; 1 Macc 2:33; 5:12; 7:7; 16:3; Bel 1:37. For a couple of examples in pseudepigrapha, see 3 *Bar.* 15:4; 16:2.

³²For uses of this construction in the LXX, see Gen 13:14, 17; 19:15, 34; 24:51; 27:43; 28:2; 29:7; 35:1; 37:14; 42:33; 43:13; 44:4; 45:9, 13, 19; Exod 3:16; 5:18; 8:21; 12:21, 32; 14:2; 15:17; 17:9; 19:10, 21; 35:10; Numb 20:26 (probably, although possibly indicating antecedent time); 22:20; Deut 1:8, 21; Josh 1:2; 5:2; 7:13; 8:1; 18:4; 22:4; Judg 7:9; 8:20; Ruth 4:1; 1 Sam 20:38 (although possibly manner); 2 Sam 1:15; 18:21; 19:8; 2 Kgs 2:16; 5:10; 9:26; 10:25; Esth 4:16; Prov 3:28; Job 2:5; 21:5; Isa 21:5, 6; 30:8; 55:1; Jer 4:6; Dan 3:5. For occurrences in the New Testament, see Matt 2:8, 13, 20; 5:24; 9:6, 13, 18; 11:4; 17:27; 21:2; 28:17; 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 5:14, 24; 7:22; 9:60; 10:10; 13:32; 14:10; 16:6; 17:7, 8, 14, 19; 19:30; 22:8, 46; Acts 5:20; 9:11; 10:13, 20; 11:7; 16:9, 15, 36; 21:24; 22:10, 16; 2 Tim 4:11; Heb 12:1. Wallace identifies Heb 12:1 as attendant circumstance, but it could also be means. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 644.

the imperative requires. For example, in their report to their father about what happened in Egypt, Jacob's sons in Genesis 42:33 explain to him that the man in charge of the food distribution told them “τὸν δὲ ἀγορασμὸν τῆς σιτοδοσίας τοῦ οἴκου ὑμῶν λαβόντες ἀπέλθατε” (Take the purchased distribution of grain for your household and depart). Not all participles and coordinate verbs are as distinct in their semantic domains as in this verse, but each participle includes a concept that adds to what the entire command requires. This nuance is sometimes slight, but evident, in the uses of *πορευθεῖς* and *πορευθέντες*. In Luke 22:8, Jesus tells John and Peter, “πορευθέντες ἐτοιμάσατε ἡμῖν τὸ πάσχα” (Go prepare the Passover for us). In this verse, *πορευθέντες* rounds out what the instruction requires by specifying the location required for completing the imperative. An aorist participle conjoined with an imperative is particularly prevalent in Matthew's Gospel, with his use of participial forms of *πορεύομαι* occurring nearly as many times as other participles with the imperative.³³

Based on the evidence, what conclusions may we draw about an aorist participle conjoined with an imperative as in Matthew 28:19? First, the action of the participle is necessary for the fulfillment of the command in the imperative.³⁴ Thus, for example, Herod's charge to the wise men (Matt 2:8) to search (*ἐξετάσατε*) cannot happen unless the wise men go (*πορευθέντες*). Second, and closely related, the nature of what the verbal imperative requires precludes temporal or pleonastic translations of the participle. The necessity of an imperative translation of the participle is quite clear in Acts 16:9 in which Paul has a vision of a Macedonian man imploring him, “διαβὰς εἰς Μακεδονίαν βοήθησον ἡμῖν” (Come over to Macedonia and help us).

³³For participial forms of *πορεύομαι* conjoined with an imperative, see Matt 2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 17:27; 28:7; 28:19. For the use of the imperative with other participles, see Matt 2:13, 20; 5:24; 9:6, 18; 17:27; 21:2; 22:13.

³⁴Cleon Rogers draws a similar conclusion in Rogers, “The Great Commission,” 261.

Because Paul had not planned to go to Macedonia, contemporaneous or antecedent time translations of the participle cannot be possible—certainly the vision could not assume he would have or had traveled to that region (as an antecedent time translation would suggest) or that he was on his way there (as a contemporaneous time translation would suggest).³⁵ Also, pleonasm does not sufficiently account for the necessity of travel to help the Macedonians. Third, any temporal association of the verb with the participle depends not on the tense-form of the participle itself, but on the participle’s necessity for the completion of the verbal imperative. For example, the angel’s command in Matthew 28:7 “ταχὺ πορευθεῖσαι εἶπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ” (Go quickly and tell his disciples) predicates telling on going; the completion of the imperative cannot occur without going, so going must happen chronologically prior to telling. Fourth, the semantic weight of πορευθέντες in its coordination with an imperative is not less than the semantic weight of another participle;³⁶ the slighter distinction of how a πορεύομαι participle impacts the verb (as compared to κλείσας with πρόσευξαι in Matt 6:6) does not mean its semantic relationship to the verb is less. In other words, πορεύομαι participles are not mere pleonasms, but contribute to the overall imperative of the clause, just as does any other participle conjoined with an imperative verb. Fifth, the aspect of the participle plays a role in determining its function. When the angel tells Peter in Acts 9:11, “ἀναστὰς πορεύθητι ἐπὶ τὴν ῥύμην τὴν

³⁵Since participles do not grammaticalize temporal reference, their temporal relationship to the verb is primarily a function of context, not semantic encoding in tense-forms. For example, in Luke 22:32, Jesus states, “ἐγὼ δὲ ἔδεήθην περὶ σοῦ ἵνα μὴ ἐκλίπῃ ἡ πίστις σου· καὶ σὺ ποτε ἐπιστρέψας στήρισον τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου.” His use of ποτε here indicates a temporal reference frame, so the participle requires a translation that indicates a temporal relationship (after or when) rather than an imperatival sense.

³⁶Stanley Porter uses the concept of semantic weight to refer to the emphasis that is evident in a text through the author’s choice of one aspect over another in conjunction with other semantic choices. I am appropriating this concept of semantic weight to describe the degree to which the participle coordinates with the imperative. My argument is that the semantic weight of πορευθέντες is similar to that of other participles. See Porter’s use of this term in Stanley E. Porter, “Time and Aspect in New Testament Greek: A Response to K. L. McKay,” in *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 162.

καλουμένην Εὐθείαν” (Rise and go to the street called Straight), the aorist ἀναστὰς indicates that the aspect is perfective. The angel’s command is viewed from a whole, not as in the process of Peter’s rising. Finally, although the participle does not grammatically share the mood of the imperative, they are so closely aligned that their translation into English often requires both verbs to share the same mood.³⁷

Before determining the interpretation of πορευθέντες in Matthew 28:19, a few comments about the context are in order. Concerning the narrative storyline, Jesus had previously issued an injunction to the disciples against mission to the Gentiles (Matt 10:5). In 28:19, however, he replaces the former ban with a command to make disciples of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. The commission, therefore, establishes a new direction of ministry for the disciples that moves them out of their previous avenue of mission. Also, the syntactical context includes two additional participles, βαπτίζοντες and διδάσκοντες, both of which are present tense.

Based on the above conclusions about this participial construction and the context of the commissioning pericope, Matthew intends for πορευθέντες to convey an imperatival force. Although grammatically subordinate to the primary command to make disciples, πορευθέντες conveys a critical requirement for the completion of the Great Commission. Several concepts bear expansion in expounding this conclusion.

First, keeping in mind Matthew’s transition from a Jewish to a universal mission, a temporal translation cannot account for the message Jesus gives to the disciples. They are neither on their way nor planning to disciple the nations (as a

³⁷This close correlation of the aorist participle is also occasionally evident with other moods, such as the subjunctive. In a letter to Polycarp, Ignatius writes that he should assemble a council to elect a messenger “ἵνα πορευθεῖς εἰς Συρίαν δοξάσῃ ὑμῶν τὴν ἄοκνον ἀγάπην εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ” (in order that he may go into Syria and glorify your untiring love, to the glory of God) (Ign. *Pol.* 7:2). The ἵνα clause indicates purpose, and the subjunctival purpose function of δοξάσῃ extends to πορευθεῖς so that the best English translation indicates the corresponding subjunctive idea for the participle.

contemporaneous or antecedent time translation would suggest), which thus necessitates the imperatival sense of the participle. Richard Young, therefore, is correct in stating, “The exegete must ask whether the Lord assumed that the disciples were ready to depart or whether the disciples needed the added command.”³⁸ Because the disciples were not already moving toward a universal mission, the imperatival force of the participle seems necessary.

Second, the semantic weight of *πορευθέντες* in this construction precludes the likelihood that it is a mere pleonasm. The discourse analysis dictum that choice implies meaning is a helpful reminder at this point.³⁹ Jesus could have used only the command *μαθητεύσατε* to convey the mission of the disciples, but he chose instead to add the participle *πορευθέντες*. Also, the choice of the participle rather than the imperative *πορεύεσθε* indicates a semantic choice to highlight *μαθητεύσατε* as the primary imperative with the participle indicating an action that is concomitant with the verb. While not grammatically an imperative, the choice of a participle conjoined with an imperative demonstrates that *πορευθέντες* functions as a necessary component of what must happen for disciple-making to occur.⁴⁰ The participle thus does not indicate redundancy, but adds to the overall picture of what Jesus was

³⁸Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 158.

³⁹Stephen E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 5-7.

⁴⁰An aorist participle conjoined with an imperative mood verb has nearly an imperatival force. Seemingly, for this reason, some manuscripts interchange the aorist participial and imperatival form in these constructions. For example, in Acts 8:26, Codex Bezae (D) has *ἀναστὰς πορεύθητι* rather than *ἀνάστηθι καὶ πορεύου*. Similarly, the same codex has *πορεύεσθαι* for *πορευθέντες* in Matthew 28:19, which seems more likely to be a misrepresentation of *πορεύεσθε* than *πορευθέντες*. See Ezeogu, “Purpose,” 22n27. Tischendorf lists several manuscripts that have *πορεύεσθε* in Matthew 28:19, such as Origin 4262 and Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus. Constantinus Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece: Ad Antiquissimos Testes Denuo Recensuit Apparatum Criticum Omni Studio Perfectum*, 8th ed., vol. 1 (Leipzig, Germany: Giesecke & Devrient, 1869), 211, accessed May 29, 2017, <https://archive.org/stream/Tischendorf.I.GreekNewTestament.NovumTestamentumGraece.various/04.NovumTestamentumGraece.v1.MtMkLkLn.Tischendorf.8thcritmaj.1869.#page/n267/mode/2up>.

commanding his disciples to do.⁴¹

Third, concerning the role of aspect, K. L. McKay is correct in asserting that the imperatival force of the aorist participle with the imperative *μαθητεύσατε* is “an overall programme” of going and making disciples.⁴² Because *πορευθέντες* and *μαθητεύσατε* are both in the aorist and are syntactically linked, they function together in their aspect to present the big picture of what Jesus commands: for the disciples to go make disciples of all nations. The imperfective aspect of *βαπτίζοντες* and *διδάσκοντες*, therefore, highlight that these participles are “explanatory details” in this overall mission.⁴³

Fourth, the participle indicates the *intentionality* of going that is necessary for making disciples of all nations. The primary command is to make disciples, with the nations as the context of this disciple-making. The only way such disciple-making will occur is through the going of the disciples to those who constitute the nations. Ernest Ezeogu, therefore, is correct in asserting, “The act of going itself does not satisfy the required command but only places the messenger in the *locus* where the command can be fulfilled.”⁴⁴ In this way, *πορευθέντες* functions to clarify the imperative by emphasizing that obedience to the command to make disciples will

⁴¹Runge explains,

If a writer chose to use a participle to describe an action, he has at the same time chosen not to use an indicative or other finite verb form. This implies that there is some meaning associated with this decision. Representing the action using a participle communicates something that using a different mood would not have communicated. Defining the meaning associated with the choice is different from assigning a syntactic force or from determining an appropriate translation. It requires understanding what discourse task is performed by the participle that would not have been accomplished by another verb form.

Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 6. See also Porter’s two axioms of structural linguistics in Stanley E. Porter, “Verbal Aspect and Synoptic Relations,” in *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 257-58.

⁴²McKay, “Aspect in Imperatival Constructions,” 225.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Although he mistranslates *πορευθέντες* as “going,” Ezeogu rightly states, “The command given in the imperative is not a command that the speaker expects to be fulfilled there and then.” Ezeogu, “Purpose,” 38.

require the disciples to go to the nations.⁴⁵ Therefore, obedience to the Great Commission requires going in addition to discipling in that a disciple must go to those who constitute πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in order to disciple them.

Make Disciples

Clearly, the topic of discipleship is a major subject in the Gospel of Matthew and correspondingly so in Matthean scholarship.⁴⁶ A full-orbed discussion of Matthew's depiction of discipleship is a monograph-level topic (or several monographs), so a comprehensive treatment of all that the imperative μαθητεύσατε involves is far more than space constraints of the present inquiry allows. However, one need not expound every conceivable Matthean concept inherent in discipleship

⁴⁵In this conclusion, I partially agree with two discourse analyses of πορευθέντες in Matt 28:19. Runge considers this participle to be an example of a nominative circumstantial frame in which an adverbial participial clause precedes the main verb. In such a frame, the participle backgrounds the verbal idea of the participle since the verb is the primary action of the clause. According to Runge's analysis of this verse, "The participle backgrounds the action of going, relegating it to a supportive role and thereby keeping the attention focused on the main action of the sentence." Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 251. However, Runge's description of the participle as backgrounding the action, while rightly emphasizing the syntactical priority of μαθητεύσατε, does not give enough attention to the imperatival role the participle naturally plays in this clause. Stanley Porter, although similarly not describing the participle in terms of an imperatival force, explains that its "discourse function involves setting the stage for the making of disciples by Jesus instructing his followers to move in a certain direction. The movement is a necessary concomitant circumstance to the process of the primary clause." Stanley E. Porter, "The Grammar of Obedience: Matthew 28:19-20," in *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 251. Porter, therefore, suggests that "going" is the best translation of the participle. Although his translation rightly conveys that going is grammatically subordinate to the imperative, this English rendering fails to convey how closely the participle coordinates with the imperative and is functionally necessary for the completion of the command to make disciples. As always, translation is a difficult task and risks the possibility of failing to convey fully and accurately the meaning of a word or phrase. Porter's rendering of the participle, unfortunately, leaves much ambiguity regarding the role of πορευθέντες and its functional necessity for obedience to the imperative of the clause. Therefore, the best translation remains "go."

⁴⁶For some of the major works related to discipleship in Matthew, see Jean Zumstein, *La Condition Du Croyant Dans L'Évangile Selon Matthieu*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 16 (Fribourg, Switzerland: Editions Universitaires, 1977); Mark Sheridan, "Disciples and Discipleship in Matthew and Luke," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (October 1973): 235-55; Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait of Disciples: How the Text-Connotted Reader Is Informed* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997); Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής*, NovTSup 59 (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988); Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples*, Academia Biblica 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002); Ulrich Luz, "The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew," in *Studies in Matthew*, Issues in Religion and Theology 3 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 115-42; Martin H. Franzmann, *Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961).

to understand what this command entails. Rather, because this dissertation concerns the sermonic application of the Great Commission, the delineation of μαθητεύσατε requires an accurate understanding of what this imperative requires of the follower of Christ.

Lexical and Grammatical Analysis

Properly interpreting the meaning of this word in its Great Commission context necessitates a brief overview of the semantic domain of μαθητεύω and its usage in Matthew. In the Classical period, μαθητεύω was only intransitive, and it had the denotation of being or becoming a pupil, disciple, or adherent of a teacher.⁴⁷ In connection with its morphological relation to μανθάνω, the noun form μαθητής often referred to a learner or adherent in Classical and Koine Greek, although the concept of adherent became more predominant in the Hellenistic period.⁴⁸ Concerning the meaning of μαθητής at the time of Christ, Michael Wilkins helpfully explains,

The progression to “adherent” in Hellenism at the time of Christ and the early church made μαθητής a convenient term to designate the followers of Jesus. . . . A “disciple” of Jesus, designated by the Greek term μαθητής, was one who adhered to his master, and the type of adherence was determined by the master himself.⁴⁹

Although originally intransitive, μαθητεύω also came to have a transitive use that in effect was causative, meaning to make a disciple.⁵⁰

Other than in 28:19, this verb appears two times in Matthew. The first of

⁴⁷BDAG, s.v. “μαθητεύω;” LSJ, s.v. “μαθητεύω;” L & N §36.31.

⁴⁸Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, 11-42. See also Robert S. Kinney, *Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew: Background and Rhetoric*, WUNT 414 (Gomaringen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 216-80.

⁴⁹Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, 42. Wilkins too stringently demarcates the notion of learning from the concept of adherence in μαθητής, particularly in light of Matthew’s use of the term for the twelve disciples. The preponderance of instruction to the disciples about the nature of discipleship indicates his concern to demonstrate that a disciple is one who is not only an adherent to Jesus, but learns from and obeys him (such as Matt 5:19; 12:50).

⁵⁰BDF §148; Gerhard Rengstorf, “Μαθητής,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:461.

these is in 13:52 to describe the relationship of a scribe to the kingdom (πᾶς γραμματεὺς μαθητευθείς). Some English versions indicate an intransitive translation, denoting scribes who have been trained or instructed.⁵¹ Others translate it as a transitive, indicating that a scribe is one who has been made a disciple.⁵² Wilkins suggests that since Jesus is speaking to the disciples about their understanding of the kingdom, the best interpretation is as a transitive; however, he rightly notes that the Matthean emphasis on discipleship necessitates that the verb here also includes an element of having been instructed.⁵³ Alan McNeile, therefore, is correct in viewing the evidence of both intransitivity and transitivity in this usage, so that the scribe refers to one who has been instructed as a disciple.⁵⁴ The other use of μαθητεύω (27:57) describes Joseph of Arimathea as one who was ἐμαθητεύθη τῷ Ἰησοῦ, which has similar ambiguity regarding its transitivity or intransitivity. As in 13:52, however, ἐμαθητεύθη may refer to being a disciple who has been instructed about following Jesus, thus including elements of both instruction and becoming a disciple.⁵⁵ Given that the other uses of μαθητεύω exhibit a confluence of both adherence to Jesus as a disciple and instruction about discipleship, the imperative in 28:19 denotes not merely a mandate to teach about Jesus (*contra* the KJV) but instruction that urges adherence to and learning from him.

A brief analysis of the grammar of the other elements of Jesus' command

⁵¹ESV, KJV, HCSB, International Standard Version, NET, NKJV, NRSV, RSV.

⁵²ASV, Christian Standard Bible, NASB, NIV.

⁵³Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, 160.

⁵⁴Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1915), 205-06, accessed April 28, 2017, <http://archive.org/details/TheGospelAccordingToSt.Matthew>. Other commentators also note that the verb here includes both elements of instruction and being a disciple: Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC 33a (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 401; Carson, *Matthew*, 332; Osborne, *Matthew*, 544n26.

⁵⁵Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, 161; Osborne, *Matthew*, 1049; Carson, *Matthew*, 584.

in the Great Commission bears out this conclusion concerning the duality of adherence and instruction that are concomitant components of being his disciple. In addition to πορευθέντες, two other participles conjoin with μαθητεύσατε to encompass the whole command issued by Jesus: βαπτίζοντες and διδάσκοντες. Whereas πορευθέντες is a participle of attendant circumstances, these other two participles have a different syntactical relationship to the imperative. Daniel Wallace identifies them as participles of means, indicating that they describe the way that “the disciples were to make disciples was to baptize and then to teach.”⁵⁶ However, Carson rightly explains that these participles do not syntactically function as means for discipleship, but rather “characterize it.”⁵⁷ Thus, making disciples includes both baptism and teaching, but disciple-making does not entail *only* baptism and teaching.

A brief consideration of the aspectual relations among the verb and the participles in the Great Commission helps to shed light on the way baptizing and teaching relate to making disciples. Both πορευθέντες and μαθητεύσατε are aorist and thus perfective in aspect; as such, going and making disciples constitute the overall program of what Jesus commands.⁵⁸ The following participles, βαπτίζοντες and διδάσκοντες, are present tense, indicating they are imperfective in aspect. Porter is probably correct in noting that these participles “occur as closely related (note similar syntax) but sequential events; that is, baptism occurs first and is then followed by teaching, just as the two secondary embedded clauses are syntactically

⁵⁶Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 645.

⁵⁷Carson, *Matthew*, 597. Similarly, R. T. France writes that the command to make disciples “is ‘unpacked’ in the two following participial clauses.” R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1989), 261.

⁵⁸McKay, “Aspect in Imperative Constructions,” 225. This conclusion is *contra* Brands’ assumption of an *Aktionsart* interpretation in which the aorist imperative “represents simple action.” Brands, “Kingdom Commission,” 181.

ordered.”⁵⁹ As imperfective aspect participles that cotextually connect with *μαθητεύσατε*, baptizing and teaching describe what disciple-making entails.⁶⁰ Porter’s conclusion about the role of the aspectual relations of these participles to the main verb helpfully summarizes Matthew’s intent:

The process that “baptizing” is conceptualizing could be the single initiatory event found elsewhere in the New Testament (even using the present participle), while “teaching” indicates a continuous pattern of teaching and instruction of those who have been baptized.⁶¹

Baptism represents the response of a person to the proclamation of the gospel and thus his or her adherence to Christ. Teaching refers to the process in which the disciple is instructed according to the teaching of Jesus regarding how to be a disciple. Although not grammatically imperatival, these two participles function as elements that comprise the overall program of discipleship, and, therefore, are necessary components of obedience to the command to make disciples.

Considering the above lexical and exegetical analysis, we may state two summary concepts concerning Matthew’s use of *μαθητεύσατε* in 28:19. First, his reference to *βαπτίζοντες* and his incorporation of the transitive function of *μαθητεύω* in 13:52 and 27:57 indicate that *μαθητεύσατε* includes guiding someone to become an adherent or follower of Jesus. This process necessarily includes proclamation of who Jesus is and his message of repentance and belief in order that the hearer might become his disciple.⁶² In common terminology, *μαθητεύσατε* requires evangelism of

⁵⁹Porter, “Grammar of Obedience,” 250.

⁶⁰Cotext is Porter’s preferred linguistics term for the context of the surrounding verses.

⁶¹Porter, “Grammar of Obedience,” 250. He also notes the weakness of using only *Aktionsart* for understanding the relations between *βαπτίζοντες* and *διδάσκοντες* in this verse. If both convey a continuous temporal idea (as *Aktionsart* suggests for the present tense), both participles would indicate an ongoing process. Undoubtedly, however, *βαπτίζοντες* is a singular event, while *διδάσκοντες* is ongoing. Appealing to the aspectual nature of Greek provides a better understanding of the relationship between these two participles as components of disciple-making. Ibid.

⁶²See Carson, *Matthew*, 597. One may wonder why the commission includes baptism but does not explicitly include gospel proclamation. Peter Ellis suggests that the reference to baptism “takes for granted the preaching of the kerygma and the subsequent act of faith in Jesus which is the *sine qua non* of discipleship.” Peter F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegetown, MN:

those who are not yet followers of Christ. Second, the inclusion of διδάσκοντες in the commission, along with Matthew's incorporation of an intransitive concept in his use of μαθητεύω in 13:52 and 27:57, indicates that μαθητεύσατε requires instruction of a disciple so that he or she becomes increasingly versed in and committed to all that Jesus taught (28:20). As Porter correctly asserts, "Teaching' indicates a continuous pattern of teaching and instruction of those who have been baptized."⁶³ The lexical and exegetical evidence, therefore, leads to the conclusion that Jesus' command requires both the proclamation of the gospel so that hearers might become his followers and ongoing teaching of these converts.

Rhetorical and Narrative Analysis

Beyond this fundamental conclusion regarding the meaning of μαθητεύσατε, may we further refine Matthew's intent regarding the command to make disciples? In other words, given the hermeneutic of chapter 2 and the narrative and rhetorical analysis introduced in chapter 3, does the picture of discipleship that Matthew presents throughout his Gospel support the evangelistic and instructional elements that appear to be evident in the command to make disciples? If so, does Matthew's overall message provide additional nuance to understanding the world in front of the text in this commission to make disciples?

Keeping in mind the close connection between rhetorical and narrative criticism, as well as Matthew's conveyance of his rhetorical message through narrative, what follows seeks to articulate Matthew's message of discipleship through his rhetorical arrangement of the narrative. Although numerous aspects of Matthew's portrayal of discipleship could be subjects of inquiry, the primary purpose of this

The Liturgical Press, 1974), 135.

⁶³Porter, "Grammar of Obedience," 250.

analysis is to consider how Matthew depicts the dual aspects of the command to make disciples: to call others to follow Jesus and instruct them in all Jesus taught.⁶⁴

Whereas chapter 3 introduces the rhetorical role of arrangement in Matthew's Gospel, further refinement of his use of organization yields dividends in understanding what he is doing in his narrative portrayal of discipleship. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the foundational elements of Matthew's arrangement are his alternation of the major discourses with narrative, as well as the concluding role of the Great Commission pericope. Additionally, he seems to have structured the Gospel through his use of large narrative blocks to introduce (1:1-4:25) and conclude the Gospel (26:1-28:20). In broad terms, therefore, chapters 1 through 4 are the *exordium*, and chapters 26 through 28 are the *peroratio*.⁶⁵

According to classical rhetoric, the *exordium* and *peroratio* play an integral role in delivering the author's message. The *exordium* would introduce key themes for the message, and then the body of the discourse would develop the themes and lead to the *peroratio* that would summarize key concepts of the message and seek to elicit a response from the hearer or reader. An author, therefore, could, in a rhetorically powerful way, drive home his message by culminating the elements of the discourse in the *peroratio*.⁶⁶

Within these larger introductory and concluding units, however, 1:1-17

⁶⁴Matthew describes numerous facets of discipleship, such as suffering (10:24-25), doing the will of God (12:49-50), understanding Jesus' teaching (13:11, 52), denying one's self (16:24-25), and addressing sin (18:15-18), not to mention the many topics included in the Sermon on the Mount.

⁶⁵Although Kingsbury has become quite influential in his assertion that 4:17 is a key verse in Matthew's arrangement (along with 16:21), he places too much structural warrant on the repetition of ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς. Rather, Matthew seems to have utilized corresponding introductory and concluding units.

⁶⁶For a helpful overview of the elements of arrangement in classical rhetoric, see Edward P. J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 256-92. See also Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle: An Expanded Translation with Supplementary Examples for Students of Composition and Public Speaking*, trans. Lane Cooper (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 3.13-19.

seems to be the *exordium* proper in that the genealogy introduces the Gospel by delineating the origin of Jesus.⁶⁷ At the end of the Gospel, 28:16-20 appears to function as the *peroratio* proper, for it succinctly concludes the entirety of Matthew’s message.⁶⁸ Since an *exordium* “informs the audience of the end or object” of a discourse, the major themes of the *peroratio* should be in the *exordium*.⁶⁹ Therefore, a rhetorical analysis of the Gospel should demonstrate that Matthew introduces the themes of the *peroratio* in the *exordium* (1:1-17) or introductory unit (1:1-4:25) and then brings them to a fulfillment in the *peroratio* (28:16-20) or concluding unit (26:1-28:20).⁷⁰ The figure below depicts the *inclusio* between these introductory and concluding sections.⁷¹

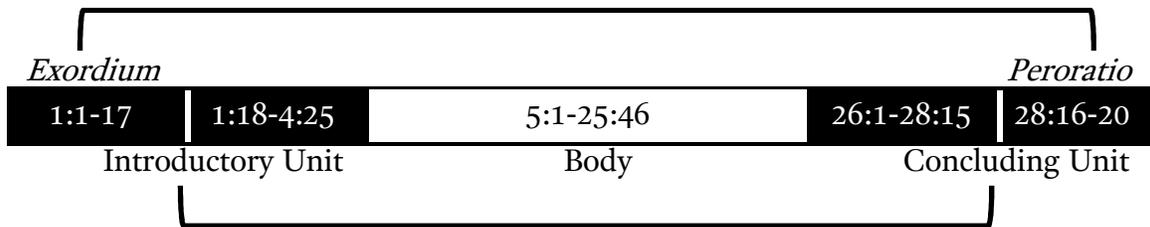


Figure 2. *Inclusio* in Matthew’s arrangement

⁶⁷David Bauer notes the correspondence between the *exordium* and Great Commission pericope, although he isolates the *inclusio* to the concept of Jesus’ presence in 1:23 and 28:20. David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew’s Gospel*, JSNTSup 31 (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1988), 109, 124-27. His conclusion, however, too narrowly construes the *inclusio* to be the concept of “God with us” rather than the units 1:1-17 and 28:16-20. The amalgamation of themes in these passages, coupled with their fulfillment in the *peroratio*, argue for an *inclusio* organized by the structure of the Gospel rather than only one thematic element.

⁶⁸Henceforth, “*exordium*” refers to 1:1-17 and “*peroratio*” refers to 28:16-20.

⁶⁹Corbett and Connors, *Classical Rhetoric*, 260. Aristotle states that the “superlative function of the proem” is “to make clear the end and object of your work.” Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 3.14.

⁷⁰Jason Hood rightly contends that “the beginning and the end of Matthew [are] crucial vehicles likely to carry important freight for the author.” Jason B. Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and the Nations (Matthew 1.1-17)*, LNTS 441 (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 6.

⁷¹Many affirm a chiasmic structure throughout the entire Gospel. My purpose here is not to argue for such a chiasm, but to emphasize the *inclusio* evident in the introductory and concluding units, particularly in the *exordium* and *peroratio*.

Such organization is evident in Matthew's Gospel. The *exordium* provides an introduction to the Gospel by establishing key themes for the remainder of the book.⁷² The first verse of chapter one in particular declares who Jesus is and his mission: he is the Christ, the hope for Israel and the authoritative messianic king as the son of David, and the hope for the world as the son of Abraham (an allusion to Gen 12:1-3). The remainder of the genealogy establishes these assertions by connecting him with Abraham (1:2), showing his kinship with David (1:6), and announcing that he is the Messiah (1:16).⁷³ Matthew goes on to show the fulfillment of these themes in the *peroratio*.⁷⁴ He thus proves that Jesus as the resurrected Christ is the true Messiah with all authority (28:18) and that the promise to the nations begins its fulfillment with the missions mandate in 28:19.

The introductory unit as a whole also exhibits careful correlation with the concluding unit in several thematic elements.⁷⁵ Concerning Jesus' authority (28:18),

⁷²Warren Carter suggests that the genealogy "provides an interpretive framework which shapes the understanding of the rest of the story." Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, The Bible and Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 55. Bauer similarly argues that the genealogy serves as an introduction and guide point for the Gospel. He writes, "The genealogy introduces the reader to the Gospel in two ways: (a) it establishes Matthew's point of view regarding Jesus; and (b) it facilitates entry into the narrative world of Matthew's Gospel." David R. Bauer, "The Literary Function of the Genealogy in Matthew's Gospel," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 29 (1990): 464.

⁷³Even the organization of the genealogy demonstrates Matthew's extreme care in arrangement. Verse 1 introduces the genealogy by announcing Jesus as the Messiah, the son of David, and the son of Abraham. Each of the following genealogical blocks prove these declarations of Jesus' origin. Verse 17 then provides a summary of his connection to Abraham and David. Undoubtedly, Matthew is highly concerned with the arrangement of his Gospel.

⁷⁴Matthew's Gospel follows the pattern of *βίος* in its conclusion, which again demonstrates its close affinity with this genre. Richard Burrige explains, "The epilogue in formal rhetoric is meant to recapitulate the major points of speech and arouse the desired response from the audience. Most bioi conclude with an account of the subject's death, burial and subsequent events or honours, but do so in a way which sums up their lives." Richard A. Burrige, "Biography," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 B.C.-A.D. 400)*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 382.

⁷⁵Several scholars note the correlation between the concepts found in chapters 1-4 and 26-28. Although he considers the introductory unit to be only through 4:17, H. J. Bernard Combrink suggests that there are a number of correspondences between these sections. H. J. B. Combrink, "The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative," *TynBul* 34 (1983): 84. See also the charts of Matthew's chiasmic structure in Ellis, *Matthew*, 12; Marcia Krump, "Turning Matthew's Gospel Inside Out: Re-Visioning Matthew's Concept of Discipleship" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2003), 7. My concern is not to demonstrate a thorough chiasm throughout Matthew (for I do not consider a full chiasmic structure to be evident), but to note the *inclusio* Matthew develops in the introductory

Matthew reveals his divinity through being conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit in 1:18-20 and the Father's declaration of him as the divine son at his baptism (3:17).⁷⁶ He fulfills prophecy (1:23), is recognized as the King of the Jews (2:2), is worshiped (2:11), is the authoritative judge (3:12), overcomes the temptations of Satan (4:1-11),⁷⁷ effectually calls disciples to follow him (4:18-22), and heals the sick and afflicted (4:23-24). Despite Jesus' divine authority, Matthew shows that human authorities oppose him (both Herod and the Jewish leaders in 2:3-4).⁷⁸ Regarding the statement of Jesus' presence (28:19), Matthew reveals that Jesus is "God with us" (1:23), which clearly prefigures Jesus' promise to the disciples. Concerning the mission to the nations (28:19), the initial worship of Jesus by Gentile magi foreshadows the hope that the universal mission brings to all the nations of the world.

The concluding unit culminates these themes. Here, the conflict between the authority of Jesus and the religious leaders comes to a head as they plot against him (26:3-4), lead a mob to arrest him (26:47), try him before the whole council (26:57-68), sentence him to death (27:1), persuade the crowds to ask for the release

and concluding units, especially in the *exordium* and *peroratio*.

⁷⁶Oscar Brooks contends that this scene is "the formal declaration of Jesus' identity" in which a "voice from heaven climaxes the acclamation of Jesus' authoritative position being presented in the opening chapters." Oscar S. Brooks, "Matthew 28:16-20 and the Design of the First Gospel," *JSTNT* 10 (January 1981): 6. Jack Kingsbury is also correct in asserting that the baptism account "serves as a reference point for understanding the 'authority' with which Jesus discharges his public ministry (7:29; 11:27; 21:23-27). Empowered by God's Spirit, Jesus speaks as the mouthpiece of God (7:28-29) and acts as the instrument of God (12:28)." Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 49.

⁷⁷One of the temptations in Matt 4 was for Jesus to gain earthly authority by submitting to Satan (4:8-10). This juxtaposition with Jesus' gaining all authority by submitting to the will of the Father (26:39; 28:18) seems to be a Matthean means to demonstrate the divine source of Jesus' authority.

⁷⁸The theme of conflict with these leaders is evident throughout the Gospel as Matthew depicts them as "flat characters" who emphasize only the "single dimension" of their opposition to Jesus. Robert Allan Vogel, "Against Your Brother: Conflict Themes and the Rhetoric of the Gospel according to Matthew" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1989), 72. Black makes the same assertion in C. Clifton Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel: Theological Artistry in the Gospels and Acts* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 24.

of Barabbas (27:20), mock him on the cross (27:41-43), and place guards at his tomb (27:62-66). A similar pattern plays out with rulers of Rome. Pilate questions whether he is the king of the Jews (27:11) and orders soldiers to scourge him in the “governor’s headquarters” (27:27), the soldiers mock him as the king of the Jews (27:29, 37), and other soldiers guard his tomb (27:62-66). His death on the cross seems to signal that ultimate authority lies not with him, but with the Roman and Jewish leaders. Yet, the resurrection declares that the decisive victory belongs to Jesus. Accompanied by the signs of the earthquake (28:2) and resurrected saints (27:53), Jesus’ resurrection demonstrates his ultimate authority over all things—the Roman and Jewish leaders, Satan, sin, and death itself. Similarly, the themes of Jesus’ presence and the nations culminate in the *peroratio* as Jesus promises his ongoing presence and establishes a mission to the nations. Therefore, the world in front of the text carries forward the culmination of the *peroratio*: Jesus’ authority is universal and unending, the mission to the nations continues until his return, and his presence will abide with his followers.

Given Matthew’s rhetorically powerful use of arrangement to bring together key themes in the *peroratio*, an examination of how he uses arrangement to depict the theme of discipleship may yield insights into what the Great Commission task of disciple-making involves. As demonstrated above, chapters 1-4 form an *inclusio* with 26-28, with the *exordium* and *peroratio* forming a more precise *inclusio* within these corresponding units. Since disciple-making is a key concept of the *peroratio*, one might expect to see references to the disciples or discipleship in the *exordium*. However, the first statement about the disciples or following Jesus does not occur until the end of chapter 4. Undoubtedly, this delay is intentional, for the primary purpose of a gospel is to portray the life of Jesus as the Christ. Discipleship *per se*, therefore, is not the central concern of Matthew, but, rather, the one whom disciples are to follow. Therefore, Matthew’s primary purpose in the *exordium* and

introductory section is to portray the nature and authority of Jesus. Thus, the first four chapters describe his origin, authority, divinity, and the beginning of his ministry.

However, the introductory unit concludes with the call of the disciples, so further consideration of how Matthew organizes this call provides a helpful picture of how he conceptualizes discipleship. First, that Matthew mentions the disciples only after a lengthy introduction of Jesus establishes the central concern of discipleship, namely that being a disciple is about being an adherent and follower of Jesus. The primary aspect of discipleship, therefore, is that one adheres to Christ, who is the Messiah and Son of God. This conclusion coheres well with Wilkins' assertion that adherence (here to Christ) is a key lexical idea inherent in *μαθητής*.⁷⁹ Second, and closely related, Jesus' call to follow him in 4:18-22 further demonstrates that the core component of discipleship is adherence to him; however, as his command to Peter and Andrew (4:19) was to follow him (*δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου*), discipleship is not *merely* adherence, but also a close *fellowship* with Jesus that entails learning from him.

Third, Matthew places the call of the first disciples (4:19) in close connection to Jesus' ministry. Immediately prior to the call of the disciples, Jesus begins his ministry with the proclamation of the necessity of repentance in light of the nearness of the kingdom (4:17). After their call, Jesus (presumably with the disciples) goes throughout Galilee teaching and healing (4:23-25). Given that Matthew places this call between accounts of Jesus' ministry, David Bauer is correct in asserting, "The calling of the four fishermen is sandwiched between these two statements regarding the ministry of Jesus. At the very outset, therefore, Matthew

⁷⁹Wilkins, *Concept of Disciple*, 41-42.

links the mission of Jesus to that of the disciples.”⁸⁰ Fourth, Jesus’ words to Peter and Andrew indicate that following him means involvement in his ministry, for he tells them that they will be fishers of men (4:19). By his arrangement of the call narrative, therefore, Matthew gives the reader hints that following Jesus means involvement in his missional ministry.

Based on the message Matthew conveys through this arrangement, therefore, discipleship includes both following Jesus (inclusive of both adherence to and learning from him) and involvement in his ministry. Throughout the remainder of the Gospel, Matthew further expounds these twin concepts inherent in discipleship. The first, following Jesus, is a recurring theme throughout the subsequent chapters. Because Jesus’ discourses are an organizing structure of the Gospel, Matthew’s explicit presentation of the disciples as present for each is no accident; by noting their presence at each, Matthew demonstrates that learning from Jesus is a component inherent in discipleship. As they were called to follow Jesus, they sit under his teaching in order to learn the way of their teacher. In this way, they become “scribes” who are “trained for the kingdom of heaven” (13:52).

Their instruction, however, does not come only from hearing his teaching, but also from being with him. For this reason, Kingsbury rightly asserts that Matthew “highlights the close association the disciples have with Jesus.”⁸¹ Matthew depicts them as being with Jesus throughout both his ministry and teaching, following him in all he does. Indeed, Jesus specifies that this relationship transcends that of a rabbi and disciples, for he calls the disciples his “mother and brothers” (12:49); in this way, the “disciples have a new family constituted by assent to the call

⁸⁰Bauer, *Structure of Matthew’s Gospel*, 58.

⁸¹Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 105.

of Jesus and expressed in obedience to the will of God.”⁸² Through being with Jesus, they both hear from him in his teaching and learn from what he does.

The second element of discipleship, involvement in Jesus’ mission, is most evident later in the Gospel in Jesus’ sending out the twelve in chapter 10. Again, Matthew’s employment of arrangement is critical for understanding what he is doing, for he places the calling of the twelve (10:1-4) in conjunction with mission (10:5-42). Until this point in the narrative, the disciples have little involvement in Jesus’ ministry; undoubtedly, they have been following him as he went throughout Galilee, but Matthew noticeably does not highlight their participation in his ministry other than their being with him. Dorothy Weaver perceptively notes this lack of missional involvement, for the disciples, after the initial call in 4:19, carry out their role of following Jesus, but they do not engage in the mission of being fishers of men. Regarding the function of the disciples in chapters 5-9, she writes,

Nowhere throughout 4.23-9.34 do they take any initiatives towards the crowds in general or towards individuals out of the crowds. Instead they play a subordinate role in the story, remaining in Jesus’ presence as those who are seen but seldom heard. . . . Further, Jesus does not appear to need their assistance. Instead he carries out his own ministry with great effectiveness in the authority bestowed on him by God at the time of his baptism.⁸³

The role of the disciples changes, however, after 9:35. As Figure 3 shows, this verse is nearly identical to 4:23, indicating that Matthew uses this description of Jesus’ ministry as a summary statement to transition to another topic of ministry. This shift is evident in the concluding verses of chapter 9, for Jesus begins linking the disciples with mission. Specifically, he notes the needs of the crowds and urges

⁸²Warren Carter, “Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective,” *CBQ* 59, no. 1 (January 1997): 69-70. Kingsbury, emphasizing the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, states, “Jesus and his disciples form a ‘family’ that stands apart from the rest of Israel.” Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 86.

⁸³Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Matthew’s Missionary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis*, JSNTSup 38 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 71.

the disciples to “pray for the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (9:38). Immediately following this prayer for laborers in the mission, Matthew includes the call of the disciples, stating that Jesus “gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction” (10:1). Notably, the ministry described with their call is similar to the summary of Jesus’ ministry in 4:23 and 9:35 in that the disciples also are also to heal “every disease and affliction” (10:1). Then, after Matthew lists the twelve, he immediately states that Jesus sent them out proclaiming that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (10:7).

4:23	Καὶ περιῆγεν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν ἐν τῷ λαῷ.
9:35	Καὶ περιῆγεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὰς πόλεις πάσας καὶ τὰς κώμας διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν.

Figure 3. Summary statements in 4:23 and 9:35

Matthew, therefore, creates a sandwich effect with the disciples’ call and Jesus’ mission in order to highlight their role in participating in Jesus’ ministry. That Matthew arranges their call between statements of mission (Jesus’ ministry in 9:35-37 and theirs in 10:5-15) indicates that mission is fundamental to their calling as his disciples. In addition, their calling specifically links what they are to do with what Jesus has already been doing. Matthew places the summary statement of Jesus’ ministry in 9:35 immediately prior to their calling, and he describes Jesus’ ministry as consisting of both proclaiming the gospel and healing the sick. Then, in 10:1 Matthew states that Jesus calls them to cast out demons and heal afflictions, and in

10:7 he tells them that they are to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew's arrangement, therefore, places the names of the disciples between the summary of Jesus' ministry of healing and proclaiming the kingdom and their role in healing and proclaiming the kingdom. In other words, Matthew's arrangement of the disciples' call highlights that they are involved in the same ministry that Jesus has already been doing.

Intriguingly, although the summary statements of Jesus' ministry in 4:23 and 9:35 describe Jesus' ministry in terms of teaching (*διδάσκων*), Matthew does not use *διδάσκω* or *διδάσκολος* to describe the ministry of the disciples until 28:20 when Jesus tells them to teach (*διδάσκοντες*) all that he commanded them.⁸⁴ Indeed, besides 28:20, the only use of these terms for someone other than Jesus is in 15:9, in which he negatively describes the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. Matthew is thus showing that Jesus is the teacher *par excellence*, and part of his mission is to teach the fullness of everything that people need to know about the Christ and living under God's authority in the kingdom. While Jesus is on earth, therefore, Matthew does not describe the disciples as having a teaching role. They are to be with Jesus, follow him, learn from him, and participate in his ministry. Their teaching function, however, does not come until after the supreme teacher has completed his teaching and ministry among them.⁸⁵ Matthew's arrangement, therefore, highlights that teaching is part of their participation in Jesus' ministry, but this aspect of their missional involvement does not occur until after Jesus' resurrection.

⁸⁴Matthew uses either *διδάσκω* or *διδάσκολος* twenty-three times, once in reference to the disciples (28:20) and once to describe the Pharisees and scribes (15:9). The other 21 occurrences are with Jesus. Of these, 12 describe Jesus as a teacher (8:19; 9:11; 10:24, 25; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 23:8; 26:18), highlighting his teaching role.

⁸⁵Of course, the disciples' preaching of the kingdom in a sense involves teaching in that they would explain that the Messiah's coming was inaugurating the arrival of the kingdom. However, their *full* teaching role could not begin until after Jesus' death and resurrection, for they did not yet fully understand his nature and mission.

Interpretation of Analysis

Based on the above analysis, at least four conclusions are pertinent to the command in 28:19 to make disciples. First, disciple-making is contingent on following Jesus. This point may appear to be a given supposition, but one should not neglect to note that adherence to Jesus and learning from him are prerequisites to making disciples. Matthew's depiction of the disciples as following Jesus before they engage in ministry indicates that hearing his instruction and seeing his example are necessary for proclaiming the gospel and carrying out his mission. Similarly, that Matthew does not describe the disciples as teaching until the *peroratio* indicates that their readiness for disciple-making is not complete until they have already been discipled by Jesus. They follow him, hear his teaching, see his example in ministry, and recognize the truth of who he is through his crucifixion and resurrection. Only then are they ready to carry out the teaching role required in the Great Commission. Although slightly tautological, the truth remains—one cannot make disciples without being a disciple.

Second, disciple-making includes an evangelistic component of proclaiming the gospel so that those who are not disciples might become followers of Christ. In its similarity to the βίος genre, in large measure Matthew's overarching purpose is to herald the subject of the narrative—the Davidic Messiah who is the hope of the seed of Abraham (1:1) and the resurrected Lord with authority over all (28:18). A central function of the narrative is thus for readers to become followers of Christ. Unsurprisingly, therefore, in recording Jesus' call of the disciples to become followers of Christ and Jesus' command for them to make more disciples, Matthew depicts disciple-making as exhorting unbelievers to become followers of Christ.⁸⁶

⁸⁶Robert Smith rejects an evangelistic component in μαθητεύσατε, arguing that the Great Commission is an ethical command to be a good disciple rather than to make disciples. He writes, 'The GC lacks all the usual early Christian words associated with evangelism. Nothing is said of 'sending, apostleship, or missions.' Nothing about 'the word' or 'the gospel,' nothing about

Martin Franzmann, therefore, is correct in writing,

The essence of the apostle is that he is a disciple, a disciple in whom and through whom Jesus' cry of "Follow Me" is multiplied and extended. The apostolate is therefore quintessential discipleship and has its legitimate "succession," not in more apostles but in men who become disciples through the apostolic witness. What Jesus tells His apostles consequently concerns all men who are members of the one holy apostolic church and is designed to make missionaries of them.⁸⁷

This evangelistic element inherent in μαθητεύσατε is thus dissimilar to the rabbinic practice of discipleship. A rabbinic student's goal would often be to become a rabbi himself and have students learning from him.⁸⁸ However, as Jesus tells the disciples, they are not to be called rabbi, for only he is the true rabbi (Matt 23:8). Rather, because Jesus is the Messiah, the disciples are figuratively to bring others to him who will become his disciples. Matthew's depiction of Jesus highlights him as always the one the disciples are to follow, and thus their efforts are not to create followers of themselves, but followers of Christ.⁸⁹

Third, disciple-making also requires instruction. This conclusion is evident from both the intransitive function of μαθητεύω and the participle διδάσκοντες in 28:20.⁹⁰ However, analysis of Matthew's narrative rhetoric demonstrates that the

'reaching' or 'proclaiming.' Nothing of 'repenting, believing, and confessing,' or of receiving the divine benefactions of 'forgiveness and peace with God.' As the story closes, Jesus is speaking on a mountain, not directing a fishing expedition at the lakeside. The GC is not about missionaries venturing forth with a message of grace in quest of converts.

Robert H. Smith, "Matthew 28:16-20, Anticlimax or Key to the Gospel," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 32 (1993): 593. He correctly notes that the Great Commission lacks these words. However, he fails to see the overall picture that Matthew presents of discipleship as adhering to and learning from Jesus. Given the totality of the content of Matthew, making disciples necessarily includes proclaiming the need for repentance and belief in Jesus.

⁸⁷Franzmann, *Follow Me*, 82.

⁸⁸Hans Kvalbein, "Go Therefore and Make Disciples: The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament," *Theology & Life*, no. 9 (December 1986): 12. See also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2009), 718.

⁸⁹For this reason, Kvalbein writes, "He is always the supreme teacher." Kvalbein, "Go Therefore," 12.

⁹⁰Scholars often recognize that disciple-making includes both evangelism and teaching. See Osborne, *Matthew*, 1080; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431. The dual nature of disciple-making as both evangelism and continuing instruction is contrary to the view that μαθητεύσατε primarily refers to the process of discipleship. Frederick Bruner, for example, contends,

didactic element of instruction is not merely word, but also includes deed. Matthew's rhetorical arrangement emphasizes the word-deed duality of teaching in the alternation of discourse with narrative.⁹¹ Not only are the disciples present for Jesus' teaching in the discourses, but they also follow him in ministry and observe what he does. Jesus' instruction of the disciples, therefore, includes both orthodoxy and orthopraxis, for they hear from Jesus about life in the kingdom and see his example of perfect kingdom living. In consideration of the instruction element in μαθητεύσατε, the disciples must convey all that Jesus taught them, meaning that they must impart to other followers both word (the oral teaching of Jesus) and deed (the demonstration of kingdom living in the practical outworking of life).

Fourth, disciple-making includes *mimesis* of Jesus. Indeed, a degree of mimetic function is unsurprising given the similarity of Matthew to the βίος genre, for one of the purposes of ancient biography was "the moral imitation of the subject."⁹² Similarly, imitation is inherent in the Greek concept of μαθητής, for a

To disciple means "to make students of," "bring to school," "educate" (Streck., 212; cf. Hubbard, 84). The word pictures students sitting round a teacher more than it does penitents kneeling at an altar—an educational process more than an evangelistic crisis, a school more than a revival. The word's prosaic character relaxes and says in effect, "Work with people over a period of time in the educative process of teaching Jesus." Only the Cosmocrator can do the big things like convert, win, bring repentance, or move a person to decision—all authority is his alone. But disciples can, must, and will do the little thing of "discipling" others—that is, they will spend good time with people—in the confidence that sooner or later the Cosmocrator will create in these people the decision for baptism (or, in Christianized cultures, the decision to own baptism) and so to follow Jesus. Bruner, *Matthew*, 1096-97.

⁹¹I am indebted to Mortimer Arias and Alan Johnson for this concept of word and deed in Matthew. They write, "The didactic structure of Matthew already alternates Jesus' *teachings* on the kingdom (chaps. 5-7) with Jesus' *actions* in the kingdom (chaps. 8-9). This integration of *word* and *deed* is epitomized in the revealing summary of his holistic proclamation of the kingdom: 'Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, *teaching* in their synagogues, and *proclaiming* the good news of the kingdom, and *curing* every disease and every sickness' (9:35)." Mortimer Arias and Alan Johnson, *The Great Commission: Biblical Models for Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 20. Burrige helpfully relates the importance of both word and deeds in βίος, arguing that "we have to take Jesus's *deeds* as seriously as his *words*." Richard A. Burrige, "Imitating Mark's Jesus: Imagination, Scripture, and Inclusion in Biblical Ethics Today," *Sewanee Theological Review* 50, no. 1 (2006): 27.

⁹²Burrige, "Imitating Mark's Jesus," 27. Burrige offers a few examples: "Thus Philo and Lucian want their readers to know what kind of person their subject was: τοιοῦτος μὲν ὁ βίος, Philo, *Moses*, 2.292; οἷοιός ἐκεῖνος ἀνὴρ ἐγένετο, Lucian, *Demonax*, 67. Plutarch wants people to imitate his subjects' virtues and avoid their vices (*Pericles* 1, *Aem. Paul* 1). Similarly, Xenophon's picture of

disciple would learn from a master.⁹³ Matthew's incorporation of explicit and implicit appeals to imitation of Jesus,⁹⁴ however, is undoubtedly a consequence of who Jesus is as the divine Messiah.⁹⁵ As the epitome of moral perfection, his life is an example of kingdom living in the present world.⁹⁶ Indeed, Jesus' prayer that God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven (6:10) is the recognition that life in the kingdom on earth is to be transforming toward a reflection of the kingdom reality of heaven.⁹⁷

Agesilaus is an example, παράδειγμα, for others to follow to become better people, ἀνδραγαθίαν ἀσκεῖν (Ages., 10.2)." Burridge, "Imitating Mark's Jesus," 27.

⁹³Kvalbein notes that "a disciple learns by (a) hearing his Master, and (b) doing like his Master." Kvalbein, "Go Therefore," 12. See also Rengstorf's description of the μαθητής as an apprentice in Rengstorf, "Μαθητής," 416.

⁹⁴Jason Hood provides a helpful list of several ways Matthew connects Jesus' teaching with the example he provides in what he does. He thus is the example *par excellence* of the lived-out reality of both word and deed. Jason B. Hood, *Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 77-79, accessed June 28, 2017, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=2029853>.

⁹⁵Davies and Allison write, "Matthew went out of his way to demonstrate that the twelve emulated their Lord in numerous particulars." W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Introduction and Commentary on Matthew I-VII*, vol. 1 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 716. See also their discussion in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, vol. 2 of *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 197.

⁹⁶The notion of the moral imitation of Christ has been a debated subject, particularly in the Reformed tradition. See the discussion in Clarence DeWitt Agan III, "Toward a Hermeneutic of Imitation: The Imitation of Christ in the Didascalia Apostolorum," *Presbyterion* 37 (Spring 2011): 31. Alister McGrath, for example, rightly cautions "that there is a danger that speaking of Jesus as an example may lead some astray into the shallow waters of Pelagianism and an unacceptably low Christology." Alister E. McGrath, "In What Way Can Jesus Be a Moral Example for Christians?," *JETS* 34 (September 1991): 296. However, the danger of the misuse of imitation does not preclude the acceptability of a degree of *mimesis* in following Jesus. McGrath is correct in asserting that Christ is an example in the sense that he "discloses the pattern of obedience to God that will be the end result of our sanctification as we become more and more like him through the God-worked process of conformation to Christ." *Ibid.*, 297. Agan helpfully cites B. B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen as two Reformed theologians who affirm a limited role for imitation of Christ. See Agan, "Toward Hermeneutic of Imitation," 33n8. Jonathan Pennington affirms the role of the imitation of Christ in the life of a disciple, for he contends that Matthew presents Jesus as a model to emulate. Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 303; Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 161-62.

⁹⁷Andrew Overman, although interpreting Matthew as written to a specific ecclesial community, notes the relationship between the kingdom in heaven and its manifestation on earth. He writes, "The Matthean community understands itself in certain respects as the reflection and embodiment of the kingdom which is in heaven." J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 131. Similarly, Jonathan Pennington writes,

The essence of the Prayer is that these overlapping ideas [that God's name would be honored,

Concerning the subject of disciple-making, Matthew indicates in his narrative rhetoric an intentional degree of *mimesis* of Jesus' ministry by the disciples, which is most evident in chapter 10.⁹⁸ As stated above, the disciples follow Jesus and learn from him in chapters 5-9, but they actively engage in neither his ministry nor their calling to be fishers of men. Chapter 10, however, shows that the mission of the disciples is in large measure to have the same features as that of Jesus—both proclaim the kingdom and heal the sick and afflicted (4:23; 9:35; 10:1, 7).⁹⁹ In addition, Jesus' instructions for them to “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (10:8) reflects what the disciples observed Jesus doing: cleansing a leper (8:1-4), healing the sick (8:5-17; 9:1-8, 27-31), casting out demons (8:16, 28-34; 9:32-34), and raising the dead (9:18-26). Even the location of Jesus' ministry in these chapters gives hints of the disciples' imitation of Jesus' ministry. In 4:23 Matthew records that he went throughout all of Galilee, whereas 9:35 states that he went through all the cities and villages. As most commentators agree, the location of Jesus' ministry in 4:23 and 9:35 is likely the same place: the region of Galilee.¹⁰⁰ If

that his will would be done, and the coming of his kingdom], which *are* the full reality now in the heavenly realm, would become patently and fully so on the earth. It is not as if God is *not* the King over the earth, but the reality in this broken and rebellious age is that while God is sovereign, his perfect, peaceful righteousness has not yet consumed all of his creation. This heavenly age, time, space, and experience are what every believer is looking forward to and what provides the fundamental orientation for the Christian life.

Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 224.

⁹⁸The subject of the imitation of Christ usually concerns ethics and moral example, such as Hood's summary in Hood, *Imitating God in Christ*, 211. Few works give extended attention to how *mimesis* relates to μαθητεύσατε, and those that do so seem to be popular-level treatments, such as Robert Emerson Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Westwood, NJ: F. H. Revell Co., 1964).

⁹⁹Describing the mission in chapter 10, Kingsbury writes, “The mission Jesus gives them is plainly an extension of his own: he endows them with the authority on which they are to act (10:1); it is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that they are to go (10:6; 15:24); the nearness of the Kingdom is to be their message (10:7; 4:17); and they, like him, are to heal every disease and every infirmity (10:1; 9:35).” Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 110.

¹⁰⁰Carson, *Matthew*, 235; Osborne, *Matthew*, 364-65; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 308; Morris, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 238. Although the location is Galilee, one should not assume that Jesus' ministry during this period was exclusively in Galilee, for the healing of the Gadarene demoniac (8:28-34) evidences at least an occasional excursion beyond this region.

the locations are the same, why would Matthew use different words, since he clearly in 9:35 is alluding to 4:23? The likely answer is that his use of τὰς πόλεις πάσας καὶ τὰς κώμας in 9:35 foreshadows the mission of the disciples as Jesus tells them in 10:11 they will enter cities and villages (εἰς ἣν δ' ἂν πόλιν ἢ κώμην εἰσέλθητε).¹⁰¹ Their mission in chapter 10, therefore, parallels all that Jesus has been doing in chapters 8-9.

Indeed, the only passages in these chapters that do not explicitly concern what Jesus commanded the disciples to do in 10:7-8 are 8:18-22; 8:23-27; 9:9-12; and 9:14-17. However, each of these passages also relates to the mission of the disciples. The cost of following Jesus in 8:18-22 parallels the itinerant mission of the disciples in 10:9-11. The calming of the storm in 8:23-27 demonstrates that Jesus has authority over nature to bring about the success of their healing ministry (10:7). The call of Matthew shows the mission of Jesus to tax collectors and sinners, which points forward to the universal mission of 28:19. Finally, Jesus' response to the question about fasting (9:14-17) hints at the new reality of the incoming kingdom that his ministry inaugurates and in which the disciples participate. Chapters 8-9, therefore, serve as an effective literary bridge between the Sermon's exposition of life in the kingdom and the mission of the disciples in chapter 10.¹⁰²

In short, the disciples' mission parallels that of Jesus in that they carry out a similar ministry to what they have been observing Jesus do. The element of *mimesis* here is unmistakable. Robert Gundry is thus correct in stating that Jesus

¹⁰¹France explains, "The further specification here of the 'towns and villages' as the scene of Jesus' mission prepares the disciples' itinerant mission around the 'towns and villages' (v. 11) and the expectation that they will be working their way through the 'towns of Israel' (v. 23)." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 372.

¹⁰²Weaver helpfully describes several additional correlations in the rest of chapter 10 between Jesus' ministry and that of the disciples, such as suffering persecution (10:16), the similarity between a disciple and teacher (10:24-25), and losing one's life (10:39). Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse*, 71-126.

gives to the disciples “authority to replicate his ministry in word and deed.”¹⁰³ The disciples have sat at Jesus’ feet and learned from him, and they have watched as he carried out ministry. Now, in the mission of chapter 10, they are to do as he did.¹⁰⁴

This note of *mimesis*, therefore, leads to the question of the relationship of the imitation of Jesus to the command *μαθητεύσατε* in 28:19. Based on the preceding analysis and the conclusion of chapter 3 that the implied reader should hear Jesus’ instructions about discipleship through his teaching of the disciples (both in word and deed), making disciples should involve an imitation of the discipling method of Jesus.¹⁰⁵ Of course, the divine nature of Jesus limits the *mimesis* to what is transferrable from the ministry of Jesus to his followers. At the least, however, both the evangelistic and discipling elements of his ministry serve as a foundational guide for understanding what making disciples involves. First, obedience to *μαθητεύσατε* and *mimesis* of Jesus’ method necessitate calling unbelievers to repent and follow Jesus. Most fundamental to the concept of making disciples is that a disciple must be an adherent of Jesus, so following Jesus’ example means urging others to follow him. Second, the instructional component of making disciples includes training through both word and deed. Here, again, Jesus’ method serves as an example to follow in that he taught the disciples, walked through life with them, and demonstrated for

¹⁰³Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 8.

¹⁰⁴Writing of the way the disciples are to imitate the ministry of Jesus, Kvalbein correctly asserts, “The Sermon on the Mount and the many stories about Jesus’ healings are in fact followed by an instruction for the disciples to do the same as their Master: to preach the message of the kingdom and to heal the sick (Mt. 10:7-8). The total mission of the disciples is in this way put under the heading: They should do like their Master. Jesus is an example to be imitated by his disciples.” Kvalbein, “Go Therefore,” 13. This understanding of learning from both Jesus’ word and deed is contrary to Martin Hengel’s incorrect conclusion that Jesus’ call to discipleship did not involve learning from what he did, but only how he pointed to the reality of the kingdom. Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 53.

¹⁰⁵Donald Senior draws a similar conclusion. He writes, “Matthew gives content to the mission of the community. They are to ‘make disciples,’ that is, form followers of Jesus in the manner affirmed throughout the gospel of Matthew.” Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew*, *Interpreting Biblical Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 176.

them both kingdom living and kingdom ministry. Undoubtedly, human discipleship will not be identical to that of the divine Messiah, but he set the example for key elements that it must include: an evangelistic component (calling unbelievers to be his disciples) and instruction that includes both word (teaching all that Jesus commanded) and deed (demonstrating by example how to live and carry out ministry).

Nations

The next phrase in the Great Commission, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, is a hotbed of scholarly attention and diversity of opinion, for it reflects the challenge of discerning the relationship between Judaism and the Gentiles in Matthew's Gospel.¹⁰⁶ Based on the above analysis, the content of the mission is clear, namely making disciples; however, the context in which this mission is to occur remains highly disputed, for scholars debate several views regarding the meaning of ἔθνη. The following four categories lay out the landscape for understanding the varying interpretations of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

First, some contend that it means only Gentiles.¹⁰⁷ Daniel Harrington and

¹⁰⁶The scholarship concerning this issue is massive, and the following are some of the major works concerning the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles in Matthew: Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); James LaGrand, *The Earliest Christian Mission to "All Nations" in the Light of Matthew's Gospel*, International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism 1 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000); Overman, *Matthew's Gospel*; Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988); Paul Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, WUNT II 77 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

¹⁰⁷Stephen Hre Kio, "Understanding and Translating 'Nations' in Mt 28:19," *Bible Translator (Ap, O Practical Papers)* 41, no. 2 (April 1990): 230–38. Kio argues that Matthew depicts the ἔθνη to be Gentiles in preaching contexts (although his argument is not convincing). Luz falls in this group as well, although his view is that the mission could theoretically include Jews, but they have effectively forfeited their place as God's people. For this reason, Luz writes, In 28:16-20 Matthew does not categorically exclude a continuation of the mission to Israel. Neither does he make a dogmatic, salvation-historical statement claiming that Israel has in principle forfeited its election. However, as he looks back on the painful separation of his congregation from the synagogue, he realizes that for himself and his congregation there are not any longer particularly hopeful prospects for a mission to Israel. He therefore regards the mission to the Gentiles as their present task.

Douglas Hare are representative of those who make this assertion on lexical grounds, for their primary argument is that “when Matthew’s church was taking shape *gôyîm* and *ethnê* referred to that collective of nations other than Israel and also to those individuals who were not Jews.”¹⁰⁸ Others argue that Matthew here refers only to Gentiles because the nature of the mission has shifted from Israel to the Gentiles. Herbert Bassler and Marsha Cohen suggest the Great Commission indicates this change in mission trajectory:

The Jews have been written off. Jesus had been sent to the lost sheep of Israel, but henceforth they are removed from the kingdom as a whole since they refused to heed Jesus’ message. Now Jesus’ disciples, who are themselves Jews, are instructed to spread his message only to the nations, the new flock. The mission to the Jews, having failed, is replaced by the mission to the Gentiles.¹⁰⁹

In effect, the mission to the Gentiles supersedes that to the Jews.

Second, the majority position is that the mission is universal and thus includes both Israel and the Gentiles. Ulrich Luz summarizes the general consensus in stating, “The ancient church, the medieval exegesis, and the interpreters of the early modern period almost uniformly interpret *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* in the universal sense of ‘all nations.’”¹¹⁰ Kukzin Lee and Francois Viljoen suggest that Matthew’s usage of

Ulrich Luz, “Has Matthew Abandoned the Jews? A Response to Hans Kvalbein and Peter Stuhlmacher Concerning Matt 28:16-20,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 65. See also his comments in Ulrich Luz, “Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of Matthew as a Historical and Theological Problem: An Outline,” in *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 243–64. In a different twist, Amy-Jill Levine uses feminist and ethnographic analysis that *ἔθνη* should be translated “Gentiles.” She argues that the Great Commission does not abrogate the mission to the Jews, but instead the two missions exist side-by-side. Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 191–92. See also A. J. Levine, “‘To All the Gentiles’: A Jewish Perspective on the Great Commission,” *RevExp* 103, no. 1 (2006): 139–58.

¹⁰⁸Douglas R. A. Hare and Daniel J. Harrington, “Make Disciples of All the Gentiles (Mt 28:19),” *CBQ* 37, no. 3 (July 1, 1975): 359–60. They argue that the standard usage of *ἔθνη* in both the LXX and in common Jewish parlance would have been to refer to nations who were not Jewish.

¹⁰⁹Herbert W. Bassler and Marsha B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-Based Commentary* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 720. See also Kenneth W. Clark, “The Gentile Bias in Matthew,” *JBL* 66, no. 2 (June 1947): 165–72. Clark suggests that Matthew was a Gentile Christian who believed that God had rejected the Jews, thus leaving only a Gentile mission.

¹¹⁰Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 629. See n. 111 on this page for a list of historical sources.

this phrase requires the translation “nations.” They explain, “In Matthew, the meaning of the Greek word ἔθνος seems to differ according to whether it is singular or plural and whether it is modified by the adjective πᾶς.”¹¹¹ They suggest that when it is plural and joined with πᾶς, it refers to all nations including Israel, not merely Gentiles (Matt 24:9, 14; 25:32). Since the Great Commission uses the plural of ἔθνος with πᾶς, Matthew most likely is referring to both Israel and the Gentiles as the target of the Great Commission. Also, some point to the ongoing nature of the Jewish mission from chapter 10, meaning that Jesus is emphasizing in 28:19 that his commission is not only to the people of Israel, but to all peoples.¹¹² The mission, therefore, is universal in scope.¹¹³

¹¹¹Kukzin Lee and Francois P. Viljoen, “The Target Group of the Ultimate Commission (Matthew 28:19),” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66, no. 1 (2010): 10. Much of this paragraph is indebted to the article by Lee and Viljoen.

¹¹²Kvalbein includes this argument in his reasons for affirming that the Great Commission is to both Jews and Gentiles. Hans Kvalbein, “Has Matthew Abandoned the Jews? A Contribution to a Disputed Issue in Recent Scholarship,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 55.

¹¹³For others affirming that ἔθνη in 28:19 refers to both Jews and Gentiles, see Arias and Johnson, *The Great Commission*, 30; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 719; Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 92; Carson, *Matthew*, 596; Richard De Ridder, *Discipling the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 184; Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 252; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 595; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 1265-66; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), 429, accessed July 24, 2014, <http://archive.org/details/cu31924029339755>; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 689; Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 312; Martin Goldsmith, *Matthew and Mission: The Gospel Through Jewish Eyes* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2001), 201; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), 360; Krentz, “Make Disciples,” 33; Eckhard J. Schnabel, “The First Gospel and Matthew’s Mission Narrative, Theological and Historical Perspectives” (presented at the Society of Biblical Literature, Philadelphia, 2005), 11, accessed June 5, 2017, https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/schnabel_first.pdf; Franzmann, *Follow Me*, 220; J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament in Context (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 407-8; John P. Meier, “Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19,” *CBQ* 39, no. 1 (January 1977): 94-102; Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 158; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, 684; Matthias Konradt, “Die Sendung Zu Israel Und Zu Den Volkern Im Mattheusevangelium Im Lichte Seiner Narrativen Christologie,” *ZTK* 101 (2004): 397-425; Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel*, 719-20.

Third, and quite similar to the second view, is that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη refers to all nations in the sense of people groups, meaning distinct ethno-linguistic groups.¹¹⁴ John Piper advocates this understanding, arguing that the combination πάντα τὰ ἔθνη usually refers to people groups, not individual people or nations.¹¹⁵ Piper explains,

In all likelihood Jesus did not send his apostles out with a general mission merely to win as many individuals as they could, but rather to reach all the peoples of the world. . . . And when Jesus says, “go and make disciples of all *the nations (panta ta ethne)*,” there is no good reason for construing this to mean anything other than that the missionary task of the church is to press on to all the unreached peoples until the Lord comes.¹¹⁶

Thus, the Great Commission focuses primarily on making disciples among people groups that have not heard the gospel so that eventually all people groups will have disciples among them.

Fourth, Graham Stanton expands the Jew and Gentile inclusivity of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη by suggesting that Matthew presents the people of God as a new people, what he calls a “third race (*tertium genus*).”¹¹⁷ Using both sociological and literary

¹¹⁴Definitions of “people group” vary, but a helpful way to think of them is as distinct ethnolinguistic groups. Patrick Johnstone defines a people group as “a (significantly large) sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combination of these. From the viewpoint of evangelization this is the largest possible group within which the gospel can spread without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.” Patrick Johnstone, “People Groups: How Many Unreached?,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 7:2 (April 1990): 36-37. Johnstone also lists several variations of this definition.

¹¹⁵Although Piper was not the first to present this view, he perhaps provides the most well-known, thorough, and cogent argument for the position. This viewpoint has its genesis in the Lausanne movement, particularly Ralph Winter’s indictment of mission’s blindness to people groups. For overviews of the movement toward people groups in missions, see *ibid.*, 35-40; Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 19-36; John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 170-73. For Piper’s argument, see *ibid.*, 167-218. In addition to lexical and sociological arguments, he contends from Rom 15:18-21 that Paul viewed his missionary task as taking the gospel to distinct people groups, not just to individuals; for this reason, Paul writes that he has fulfilled the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum (Rom 15:19). Likewise, he suggests that the emphasis on nations in Revelation implies that ἔθνη must refer to people groups (Rev 7:9-10; 14:6-7; 15:4; 21:3).

¹¹⁶Piper, *Let the Nations*, 204-05.

¹¹⁷Stanton, *Gospel for New People*, 12. Stanton does not mean that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη refers to a *tertium genus*, but that the church (drawn from all the nations) is a new people. This line of

analysis, he concludes that neither “Jew” nor “Gentile” satisfactorily denote the church, for God has created a new people through the gospel. He takes Matthew 21:43 as a key support for this conclusion, for Jesus states to the chief priests and Pharisees, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people (ἔθνῃ) producing its fruits.” Pennington applies this concept of a *tertium genus* to Matthew’s depiction of Gentiles, suggesting that “‘gentile’ has come to mean any Jewish or (ethnic) gentile who does not follow Christ; the Jew-gentile distinction still exists, but the lines are now eschatologically drawn based on a faith-response to Jesus rather than ethnicity.”¹¹⁸ Concerning the meaning of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, the goal of the Great Commission is to reach out to both Jews and Gentiles so that they might become part of the *tertium genus* who are followers of Christ. From this viewpoint, therefore, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη refers to all those who are not followers of Jesus.

Lexical and Syntactical Analysis

As with the examination of πορευθέντες and μαθητεύσατε, lexical analysis of the ἔθνος domain aids in the elucidation of the meaning of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη by providing a framework from which to consider Matthew’s usage of ἔθνος to convey his message.¹¹⁹ BDAG notes a duality presented by ἔθνος, defining the term both as a distinct group (when used in the singular) “united by kinship, culture, and common

scholarship moves the focus of interpretation from ethnic distinction (Jew versus Gentile) to religious distinction (disciples of Christ in contrast to those who are not his followers).

¹¹⁸Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*, 96.

¹¹⁹Because the primary consideration at hand is to determine to whom πάντα τὰ ἔθνη refers, what follows need not exhaustively explicate the lexical roots of ἔθνος, explain its use in the LXX, ascertain Hebrew lexical equivalents, or discuss the meaning of other εθ- root words. Many other sources provide this information. Rather, understanding the referent of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη necessitates determining the lexical range of ἔθνος and then examining Matthew’s Gospel to assess what he conveys through this term. For further lexical analysis that explores some of these additional technical details, see Georg Bertram and Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “ἔθνος, ἔθνικός,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 2:364-72; Brands, “Kingdom Commission,” 94-113.

traditions” and people groups (when used with the plural) that are “foreign to a specific people group.”¹²⁰ Louw and Nida offer a similar distinction between the singular and plural use of the term. In a socio-political understanding of the word, they define ἔθνος as “the largest unit into which the people of the world are divided on the basis of their constituting a socio-political community—‘nation, people.’”¹²¹ They view the plural, however, from a socio-religious context, suggesting that τὰ ἔθνη refers to “those who do not belong to the Jewish or Christian faith—‘heathen, pagans.’”¹²² The definitions of both BDAG and Louw and Nida, particularly the denotation of the plural, seem to lend credence to a translation of “all the Gentiles” in 28:19.

However, closer examination of Matthew’s use of the term suggests a syntactical influence that may indicate an idiolectical use of ἔθνη (or perhaps even a set phrase) that is inclusive of Jews as well as Gentiles. In particular, the meaning of ἔθνος in Matthew seems to differ based on its usage. In the plural without πάντα, it appears to always mean Gentiles (Matt 4:15; 6:32; 10:5; 10:18; 12:18, 21; 20:19, 25). When used in the singular, it refers to a people or nation in a collective sense (Matt 21:43; 24:7), not necessarily Gentiles. Matthew’s conjoining of πάντα with ἔθνη seems to demand an inclusivity that cannot preclude any group, thus demanding a translation of “all the nations” (24:9, 14; 25:32; 28:19).¹²³ The best understanding of Matthew’s use of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, therefore, is that he means all nations, not only the Gentiles.

¹²⁰BDAG, s.v. “ἔθνος.”

¹²¹L & N §11.55.

¹²²Ibid., 11.37.

¹²³My conclusions are in agreement with Lee and Viljoen, “Target Group.” The ESV also follows this schema of translation. For discussions of varying interpretations of the appearance of ἔθνος in Matthew, see *ibid.*, 10-11; Meier, “Nations or Gentiles,” 94-102; Piper, *Let the Nations*, 174-81.

Concerning the syntax surrounding πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, two additional observations are in order. First, τὰ ἔθνη functions as an accusative direct object, thus denoting who should be discipled. The target of the mission, therefore, is all nations. Second, αὐτούς (in conjunction with βαπτίζοντες in 28:19 and διδάσκοντες in 28:20) further defines the context of disciple-making, for the neuter τὰ ἔθνη cannot be the antecedent of the masculine αὐτούς. The Great Commission, therefore, cannot refer to a national disciple-making in the sense of attempting to reach an entire group of people, but individuals within people groups.

In summary, the lexical and grammatical evidence indicates that the object of disciple-making is universal—no nation is outside the scope of this command. As Jesus is the universal Lord with all authority, he sends his followers on a universal mission to all nations. However, the object of this mission is “national” not in the sense of seeking to make disciples of a group as a whole, but evangelizing and discipling individuals within those groups. Further, the ἔθνη are not geo-political nations, but include groups divided along ethnolinguistic lines.¹²⁴

Rhetorical and Narrative Analysis

Lexical and grammatical evidence provide the parameters for understanding Matthew’s meaning for πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. However, although Matthew’s usage of ἔθνη indicates a universal mission to all peoples, word studies and grammatical analysis cannot fully ascertain the depths of what Matthew was seeking to convey concerning the universal mission of the Great Commission. Keeping in mind his presentation of the world in front of the text for the readers, consideration

¹²⁴One must be cautious in stretching the idea of people groups too far. To underscore the missionary imperative of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη *only* as people groups would be anachronistic, defining the Great Commission by modern sociological categories rather than ancient usage in both biblical and extrabiblical literature. However, this caution does not override the conclusion that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη refers to culturally distinct groups, not geo-political nations.

is necessary of Matthew's larger purpose for describing the mission as to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. As rhetorical and narrative criticism provide helpful windows into discerning what an author was doing with his message, the purpose of this section is to offer a brief examination of Matthew's narrative rhetoric to aid in shedding light on the disciple-making context of the commission. Although many subjects within Matthew's Gospel could serve to further define his depiction of the nations, what follows focuses on the *exordium* and the mission of chapter 10. Specifically, as with μαθητεύσατε, consideration of Matthew's employment of arrangement is especially helpful for elucidating Matthew's depiction of the nations in the Great Commission.

Given the above evidence concerning the correlation of themes in the *exordium* and *peroratio*, a brief examination of the introductory (chapters 1-4) and concluding units (chapters 26-28) provides insight into Matthew's emphasis on mission to the ἔθνη.¹²⁵ Indeed, the *exordium* reveals Matthew's interest in the nations. First, the designation of Jesus as the son of Abraham is not merely to provide a genealogical reference to a famous forefather, but to link Jesus with the Abrahamic covenant that promised God's blessings on all nations (Gen 12:2-3). Given the *peroratio's* command to reach the nations, Matthew is undoubtedly signaling the universal scope of Jesus' mission as the fulfillment of Genesis 12:2-3. Second, the women in the genealogy hint at a mission that extends beyond Israel, for their common link is "their Gentile ancestry: Tamar of Canaan, Rahab of Jericho, Ruth the Moabitess, and the ex-wife of Uriah the Hittite."¹²⁶ Although some argue that the intent of Matthew's citation of these women is not to point to their Gentile

¹²⁵Bauer rightly notes the limited attention that scholars have given to the literary function of the genealogy in Matthew's overall purpose. Bauer, "Literary Function," 451. Whereas he focuses on Matthew's use of this passage to emphasize Jesus' authority, I intend to demonstrate how Matthew foreshadows the mission to the nations. Jason Hood provides an excellent chapter that briefly explains the link between the Great Commission pericope and genealogy by describing both the parallels and contrasts evident in these passages. Hood, *Messiah, Brothers, Nations*, 139-56.

¹²⁶Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 79.

background,¹²⁷ the best conclusion is that Matthew's purpose is to highlight that they are Gentiles.¹²⁸ Keener is correct: if "Matthew merely meant to evoke the history of Israel in a general way, one would have expected him to have named the matriarchs of Israel: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel."¹²⁹ Instead, in linking the women of the genealogy with Jesus, the Son of Abraham, Matthew foreshadows the mission to the ἔθνη that the Great Commission explicitly announces.

The remainder of the introductory unit presents hints that one of the major issues of the Gospel is a mission to the Gentiles. In the infancy narrative, Matthew portrays Gentiles quite positively, for "wise men from the east" (2:1) recognize and worship Jesus as king of the Jews (2:2); they understand that he fulfills prophecy (2:5-6), and they offer him gifts befitting a king (2:11). Whereas Herod seeks to put him to death, Jesus finds safety in the Gentile land of Egypt. Then, after returning to Israel and finding that Archelaus was reigning in Judea (2:22), Jesus' family finds refuge in Galilee, a region associated with Gentiles in Matthew (4:15). In considering the arrangement and narration of these events, one must remember that Matthew did not have to include them in his Gospel; in doing so, however, he makes a statement about his rhetorical purpose, namely the mission to the ἔθνη.

¹²⁷Levine argues that "the women represent people oppressed by dominant political, religious, and social systems. While the genealogy does foreshadow the inclusion of gentiles in the Christian community, it does more than address ethnic concerns. Jesus' lineage symbolizes the welcome of his church to the marginal and excluded, to all denied status or privilege by members of elite groups, to all whose higher righteousness is undervalued by structures of patriarchy." Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 62. Although most of these women experienced oppression, Levine reads more into the text than Matthew intended.

¹²⁸Hood persuasively argues that Matthew's inclusion of Uriah in 1:6 is also an intentional foreshadowing of the mission to the nations. He also suggests that Matthew focuses on these Gentiles not only because of their ethnicity, but because they are praiseworthy Gentiles. He contends that Matthew's inclusion of believing Gentiles throughout the Gospel gives evidence that his concern is not only their ethnicity, but that they are praiseworthy. See Hood, *Messiah, Brothers, Nations*, 119-38. Hood may be correct in this assertion, but for the purposes of this analysis, the common denominator of their Gentile background is sufficient to demonstrate Matthew's foreshadowing of the universal mission.

¹²⁹Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 78.

At the end of the introductory section, Matthew describes Jesus' fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah by withdrawing to Galilee of the Gentiles. The citation of the Isaiah prophecy foreshadows "the Gentile mission that Matthew keeps urging on his audience."¹³⁰ The reader should not miss Matthew's careful arrangement. He strategically cites this passage at the beginning of Jesus' ministry to depict its role in his overall ministry, and its occurrence at the end of the introductory unit helps to indicate that the rest of the Gospel will take up this vital theme.

The concluding unit (chapters 26-28) picks up on the themes that Matthew presents throughout the Gospel, bringing them to their fulfillment. Of course, he also includes a negative depiction of the Gentiles in that the Roman authorities execute Jesus, but Matthew also emphasizes the recognition by individual Gentiles that Jesus is more than a mere Jewish prisoner. Prior to the crucifixion, Pilate's wife sends word to him to "have nothing to do with that righteous man," for she had dreamed about him (27:19). Matthew's point is not to present her as a true believer, but to demonstrate that a Gentile discerns (by God's work through a dream) the innocence of Jesus.¹³¹ She, as a Gentile, recognizes truth that the religious leaders fail to understand. Even clearer regarding Matthew's rhetorical purpose is the belief of the Roman soldiers watching Jesus at the crucifixion, for when they saw the signs that took place at Jesus' death, "They were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (27:54). R. T. France explains the scene well:

But as they stood on guard, they have heard Jewish people, and even their religious leaders, mocking Jesus for having claimed to be God's son (vv. 40, 43), and while they may have had little understanding of how momentous a claim

¹³⁰Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 146. Here ἔθνη refers to Gentiles, not all nations. Matthew's intent is to point forward to the universal mission in the Great Commission that will include the Gentiles.

¹³¹Although some traditions arose that considered her a Christian saint called Claudia Procula, the evidence in Matthew provides little explanation about the extent of her understanding or belief. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1054.

this would be in a Jewish context, they have seen enough now to conclude that the truth is on the side of Jesus, rather than on that of his mockers.¹³²

Thus, all the allusions to the ἔθνη throughout the Gospel pave the way for Jesus' final command to the disciples in the *peroratio*—they are to go to all the ἔθνη to make disciples of them.¹³³ Given Matthew's portrayal of the ἔθνη throughout the Gospel, one can hardly imagine a more elegantly constructed narrative that accomplishes his aim of emphasizing the mission to the nations.¹³⁴

Matthew's literary artistry in leading up to a mission to the Gentiles is unmistakable. However, does his design give evidence of a corresponding co-mission to the Jews? Indeed, this question is the fundamental issue for determining the meaning of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. Does Matthew's narrative rhetoric demonstrate the universality of the kingdom mission of the disciples? If so, does understanding his

¹³²France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1084.

¹³³In addition to these citations from the introductory and concluding units, Matthew includes many references to Gentiles in the body of his Gospel. For the purpose of this chapter, the above analysis establishes Matthew's rhetorical interest in the nations. However, briefly articulating Matthew's portrayal of the Gentiles in chapters 5-25 aids in discerning Matthew's depiction of the Gentiles. Donald Senior provides a helpful three-fold schema of ways Matthew depicts the Gentiles in these chapters: negatively, positively, or in regard to the mission to the nations. Senior, *Gospel of Matthew*, 45-47. For negative portrayals, see 5:47; 6:7; 6:32; 20:19, 25. Despite these few instances, Matthew also positively describes individual Gentiles: both a Roman centurion (8:10) and a Canaanite woman exhibit great faith (15:28). The reason for including the faith of these individuals leads to the third category, namely that he uses references to Gentiles to indicate that the kingdom will include the ἔθνη. In the narrative of the centurion, Jesus states that "many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (8:11), a clear allusion to the inclusion of Gentiles along with Jews in the kingdom. Similarly, the faith of the Canaanite woman indicates that even those whom the Jews view as dogs (15:26) will enter the kingdom. This portent of the Gentile inclusion is evident in the mission of chapter 10 in which Jesus declares that the disciples later will bear witness before Gentiles (10:18). Similarly, the citation of Isaiah 42:1-3 by Matthew in 12:21 explicitly states the hope the Gentiles will have in the Messiah. Perhaps nothing in Matthew more picaresquely indicates Gentiles entering the kingdom than the parables: the field of the kingdom is the entire world (13:38), the kingdom is like a net that gathers fish of every kind (13:47), prostitutes and tax collectors will enter the kingdom of God (21:28-32), "other tenants" will dwell in God's vineyard (21:41), and "both bad and good" from the highways are invited to the wedding banquet (22:10). Then, in the Olivet discourse, Jesus explains that the gospel "will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (24:14). All nations will stand before the Son of Man at the judgment (25:31-46), their fate not based on their ethnicity, but on their belief in and obedience to the Son. Further hints of the Gentile mission abound throughout the Gospel: 5:13-14; 8:11-12; 12:41-42; 21:12-13, 42-43; 22:1-10; 26:13. In this way, Matthew increasingly portrays the kingdom as open to all nations.

¹³⁴Given the above lexical and narrational analysis, Andries van Aarde's assertion is not an over-statement: "There is no convincing argument, whether semantic or contextual, that the phrase 'all the people' (*panta ta ethnē*) in Matt 28:19 refers only to non-Israelites." Andries G. Van Aarde, "Jesus' Mission to All of Israel Emplotted in Matthew's Story," *Neotestamentica* 41, no. 2 (2007): 419.

overall portrayal of the universal mission provide additional nuance to the Great Commission?

The mission to the Jews in chapter 10 provides an essential key for understanding how Matthew depicts the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile mission.¹³⁵ As explained above, Matthew clearly links Jesus' call with the mission of the disciples in this chapter, so Matthew's arrangement highlights how critical this chapter is for understanding their ministry to the Jews. Jesus' instructions to them in 10:5-6 demarcate their boundaries in this work—they are only to go to the house of Israel. In the following verses, he explains to them how they are to carry out their proclamation and healing ministry (10:7-15), and he warns them about the persecution they will experience (10:16-23). However, noticeably absent in this chapter is a record of the disciples' carrying out Jesus' instructions. Matthew does not describe where they went, what happened, or the results of their mission.¹³⁶

Indeed, the temporal reference frame of the missions discourse seems to shift at the end of verse 23 as Jesus declares that the disciples' completion of the mission would not occur until the coming of the Son of Man. The meaning of this reference has elicited numerous interpretations, but the most straightforward reading of the text is that Jesus is speaking eschatologically, referring to his return.¹³⁷

¹³⁵This passage, of course, is not the only text in Matthew that helps to define the mission to the Jews. From the beginning of his Gospel, he describes Jesus in terms of his Jewish role, for he calls him the son of David (1:1). Matthias Konradt is correct in linking this reference and the entire genealogy as a condensed "history of God and his people Israel—a history that, for Matthew, leads to Jesus." Matthias Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. Kathleen Ess, Baylor-Mohr Siebeck Studies in Early Christianity (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 24. From the outset of the Gospel, therefore, Matthew intends to show that Jesus' incarnation is for Israel.

¹³⁶For a similar observation, see Schnabel, "First Gospel," 11; Kvalbein, "Has Matthew Abandoned," 55.

¹³⁷Carson provides a helpful overview of the major interpretations in Carson, *Matthew*, 250-53. Despite the diversity of opinions concerning the meaning of the coming of the Son of Man, one may make a good defense of the conclusion that it refers to the return of Christ. Jesus' words here are clearly an allusion to Dan 7:13-14, and the context in Daniel suggests an eschatological setting for this phrase in Matt 10. Although certainly not all references to Son of Man in Matthew are associated with the Parousia, the explicit description of the coming of the Son of Man strongly suggests an eschatological reference. The sudden switch from second to third person starting in 10:24 also leads

Obviously, the return of Christ does not happen during the mission of the disciples. Rather, Matthew employs his literary skill to demonstrate the ongoing nature of the disciples' mission to the Jews in chapter 10. Jesus' reference to the coming of the Son of Man shows that reaching the Jews with the message of the kingdom does not cease until his return. This conclusion is further evident through the switch in person that occurs at this point in the discourse. In the preceding verses (10:5-23), Jesus addresses the disciples in the second person concerning the work that they will do. Beginning with verse 24, however, Jesus increasingly uses the third person, and the topic is predominantly suffering in mission, not specifically the work of the disciples among the Jews.

In short, Matthew portrays a world in front of the text in which the mission to the Jews in chapter 10 does not end with the disciples, but continues forward until the return of Christ. Matthew's open-ended depiction of this chapter, namely that he does not describe the actual work of the disciples or their results, literarily suggests that the need for outreach to the Jews continues until the Parousia.¹³⁸ Similarly, as chapter 3 argues that the reader is to hear Jesus' teaching about discipleship through his instruction to the disciples, Jesus' increasing generalization and use of the third person in the last half of the discourse suggests that the reader should also hear this teaching as addressed to himself or herself as a disciple.¹³⁹

the reader to understand that Jesus' words are not descriptive of merely the work of the twelve in this excursion to the Jews (see below for further explanation). For others who affirm this interpretation, see Turner, *Matthew*, 277; Osborne, *Matthew*, 391; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 175; Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse*, 202n139; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, 190.

¹³⁸See similar observations in Kvalbein, "Has Matthew Abandoned," 55; Schnabel, "First Gospel," 11. Interestingly, Luz draws the same conclusion, although he argues that the Matthean community has abandoned any hope of Israel's turning to Christ. Luz, "Has Matthew Abandoned," 65.

¹³⁹This supposition opens the issue of what instructions and commands given to the disciples pertain also to every believer. As demonstrated in chapter 3, in general the reader should hear the teaching of Jesus about discipleship through his instruction of the disciples. Given the difficulty of this issue and its importance for this dissertation, we may address it briefly through

Interpretation of Analysis

Based on the above analysis, we may draw several conclusions regarding Matthew's employment of the concept of nations throughout his Gospel and particularly concerning the Great Commission. First, the mission that Jesus commands in 28:19-20 is universal in scope, including all people groups. Although anachronistically pressing a modern sociological understanding of people groups on an ancient concept of "nations" is dangerous, a general conceptualization of "all the nations" in terms of the totality of all people groups is a helpful way of describing the object of *μαθητεύσατε*.¹⁴⁰ In particular, in light of Matthew's foreshadowing of the inclusion of the Gentiles throughout his Gospel, the Great Commission mandates a

considering Jesus' directives to the disciples in 10:5-15. He, in these verses, strictly limits what they may take with them as they go throughout the towns and villages of Israel. Do these limitations apply to every Christian today when they undertake a particular mission? Key for answering this question is applying the hermeneutic of chapter 2 to this passage. Rather than establishing a universal rubric for determining normativity (other than fundamentals such as the authority and inerrancy of Scripture), the interpreter may approach the text through considering what the author is doing in the passage and whether it presents a world in front of the text that clearly provides a solution to the interpretive challenge. As demonstrated above, the context of chapter 10 indicates a Jewish mission that is open-ended, which later in chapter 28 incorporates the Gentiles in a universal mission. The open-ended nature of the discourse and that Matthew does not record the work of the disciples lead to the conclusion that the mission to the Jews continues. However, the specific commands in 10:5-15 are entirely second person and do not exhibit the generality and third person evident in 10:24-42. Additionally, the requirements of Jesus for this task do not reflect what he expects at other points in the Gospel. For example, he does not allow the disciples to take along a bag (*πήραν*) or anything extra (10:9-10). However, in 16:5 Matthew records that they forgot to bring along bread on their journey, seeming to indicate that Jesus did not always prohibit their traveling with sustenance. Therefore, Jesus' point in 10:9-10 seems to be that they are to depend on God's provision for this particular mission; he does not preclude taking provisions at other times. Having established this conclusion based on the overall picture from Matthew, we may now turn to other passages in the New Testament to confirm this understanding. Luke records this instruction from Jesus: "And he said to them, 'When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack (*πήρας*) or sandals, did you lack anything?' They said, 'Nothing.' He said to them, 'But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack (*πήραν*). And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one'" (Luke 22:35-36). This passage in Luke presents an explicit shift from the earlier mission to the Jews (described by Jesus in Luke 22:35). The universal mission of Matt 28:18-20, therefore, does not fall under the restrictions of the mission of Matt 10:5-6. Similarly, Paul's mission does not evidence such minimal supplies as the mission of Matt 10:5-6. In conclusion, Matthew does not intend the reader to view the restrictions of 10:5-15 as binding for all missional endeavors, but only for the disciples in this instance.

¹⁴⁰For example, what sociological or ethnological definition demarcates what constitutes a people group? David Sills writes, "Virtually every person or agency calculates the number of people groups in the world differently." M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 18. He goes on to question whether our modern understanding of people groups, therefore, corresponds precisely with what Jesus means by *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. Ibid., 229n1. His conclusion demonstrates the challenge and danger of assuming to know precisely the parameters of what counts as a people group.

universal mission to all people groups, regardless of ethnicity.

Second, the command *μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* does not mean two separate avenues of mission (Jew and Gentile), but one task—the inclusion of all people groups in disciple-making. This conclusion is *contra* to the way that several of the Gentiles-only interpreters of the commission seem to view the mission to the nations as the replacement of outreach to the Jews.¹⁴¹ Rather, Jesus' command presents a singular task (*μαθητεύσατε*) that encompasses all the nations. The discourse of chapter 10 introduces the mission to the Jews, and then 28:19-20 incorporates the Gentiles, resulting in a singular, world-wide disciple-making commission. The open-ended nature of both chapters 10 and 28 thus invites the reader to submit to Jesus' words and enter the world in front of the text by participating in this mission.

This conclusion of a singular mission necessitates considering Stanton's contention that the object of the task is the creation of a *tertium genus* that is neither Jew nor Gentile. At root is the issue of whether Matthew intends to portray the church as a new entity and thus distinct from both Jews and Gentiles or as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. Stanton bases much of his argument on 21:43 in which Jesus proclaims that the kingdom will be given to a people (*ἔθνη*) who produce the fruit of the kingdom.¹⁴² Although Stanton takes *ἔθνη* as referring to a *new* people (neither Jew nor Gentile), one should not so quickly propose an entirely new group. Rather, the literary context suggests that the kingdom is taken away from the religious leaders (those who do not give evidence of kingdom fruit) and given to those who produce this fruit. Jesus' reference to a people does not suggest a new nation, but explicitly demarcates this group (*ἔθνη*) as those who produce fruit in

¹⁴¹See Basser and Cohen, *Gospel of Matthew*, 720; Luz, "Has Matthew Abandoned," 65.

¹⁴²Stanton, *Gospel for New People*, 10-12.

accordance with the nature of the kingdom.¹⁴³ Given Matthew's concern to present both a Jewish and Gentile mission, the inclusion of this statement does not indicate a *tertium genus*, but rather emphasizes the unitary nature of the people of God—they are neither fundamentally ethnic Jews nor Gentiles, but members of the kingdom who produce its fruit.¹⁴⁴ His emphasis throughout the Gospel on the inclusion of the Gentiles demonstrates that Matthew is not depicting a new race, but shows that God's promises from the Old Testament find their fulfillment in the kingdom ushered in by Christ. Ultimately, the members of the kingdom (both Jews and Gentiles) are the fulfillment of God's promise to make Abraham into a great nation (ἔθνος μέγα in Gen 12:2 of LXX).¹⁴⁵

Third, although the Great Commission uses the language of “nations” as the context of disciple-making, the emphasis is on individuals within those groups. The mission is universal in scope, but it does not require reaching a nation *in toto*. Jesus' mandate thus requires an intentional effort to reach the nations, but the specifics of disciple-making occur on an individual basis. Hans Weerstra thus rightly states, “We must see that this [disciple-making] needs to occur in terms of and in the context of the people groups to which individual men and women belong.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³The common conclusion that God gives the kingdom to the Gentiles does not adequately take into account the context of the preceding parable and the chief priests and elders to whom Jesus was speaking. He was not declaring a transfer of the kingdom from the Jews to the Gentiles, but that the kingdom was being taken away from the religious leaders due to their failure to submit to the Son (21:38-39). If Jesus meant that the kingdom would be given to the Gentiles, the more natural wording would have been the plural ἔθνεσιν.

¹⁴⁴See above for the lexical analysis which concludes that the singular ἔθνος may refer to a group as a whole. Here, it indicates those who are members of the kingdom.

¹⁴⁵Wesley Olmstead similarly argues that ἔθνεσιν in 21:43 points to the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Wesley G. Olmstead, “A Gospel for a New Nation: Once More, the ἔθνος of Matthew 21.43,” in *Jesus, Matthew's Gospel and Early Christianity*, LNTS 435 (London: T & T Clark International, 2011), 131.

¹⁴⁶Hans Weerstra, “Mission to the Nations: A Biblical Word Study of Ethnos,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 9, no. 3 (1992): 101.

Conclusion

We may now bring together the above conclusions to form a cohesive picture of what Jesus commands in 28:19. Keeping in mind the assertion in chapter 3 that the Great Commission is for every follower of Christ, the totality of the commission extends to everyone who is a disciple. Also, utilizing the hermeneutic of chapter 2, Matthew is intentionally projecting a world in front of the text in this passage. He does not merely write for an immediate audience, but depicts a mission that projects forward into the future until the return of Christ.¹⁴⁷ In this way, he invites the reader to participate in the world in front of the text by submitting to and participating in the universal mission commanded by the risen Christ who has universal authority.

The first element of the commission, *πορευθέντες*, indicates an intentionality that is necessary for obedience to the Great Commission. This word does not refer to disciple-making that merely occurs as one goes about the routine of everyday life, nor does it merely indicate the assumption that the disciples will go to the nations.¹⁴⁸ Instead, *πορευθέντες* specifies the necessity of an intentional effort to go to those who are to be evangelized and discipled.

The second concept is the central command issued by Jesus, *μαθητεύσατε*. As demonstrated above, this imperative includes both evangelism (the proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers) and discipling (guiding other believers toward increasing maturity as a disciple). Because this word includes both concepts, a Christian should not understand his or her task to be either evangelizing or

¹⁴⁷Eschatologically, Matthew's portrayal of the mission undoubtedly ends with the return of Jesus. This conclusion seems evident from Jesus' reference to the end of the age in 28:20. His description of his return at the final judgment (25:31-46) additionally requires that the mission ends at the Parousia.

¹⁴⁸Of course, *πορευθέντες* does not preclude disciple-making in the context of one's daily routine, but the accusative object *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* requires more than just reaching those within one's normal circumstances.

discipling, but both. Since the Great Commission devolves on every believer, both are necessary components for obedience to Jesus' command.

Matthew's portrayal of *mimesis* of Jesus throughout the Gospel provides essential instruction for how disciple-making should occur. Just as Jesus demonstrated discipling through both word and deed, so also must his disciples follow this pattern. Obedience to *μαθητεύσατε* requires the evangelistic proclamation of the good news of Christ and the repentance, faith, and kingdom living that corresponds to submission to Christ the king. Discipling similarly follows the example of Christ in his word-deed discipling of the twelve. Not only did he instruct them, but he demonstrated kingdom life and obedience through his consistent example and guidance as he walked through life with them. So also, a believer's disciple-making should include instruction and example, both of which occur best through intentional involvement and guidance in the lives of those whom one is discipling.¹⁴⁹

Jesus' reference to *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* demarcates the scope of the Great Commission, which, as demonstrated above, is universal. For the eleven who received this command, Jesus' mandate ushered them into a new avenue of mission, one that includes all people groups, both Jew and Gentile. In their context, the extent of the command was both "here" and "there"—the mission to their fellow Jews was to continue, but they were also to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to all the

¹⁴⁹On a missiological side note, the dual aspect of disciple-making advocated in this dissertation has missiological implications, for disciple-making does not end with conversion. Instead, it requires a lengthy process of guiding the new believer toward maturity in Christ so that he or she may then in turn become a disciple-making disciple. One of the dangers of a missiology driven primarily by reaching as many people groups as possible is that this method may emphasize evangelism at the expense of the long process of training that is required for sustained spiritual growth that leads to maturity and disciple-making replication. Sills highlights this danger and argues for the implementation of extensive training of national believers so that they may be mature disciples who in turn may lead their churches and disciple others. Sills, *Reaching and Teaching*. See also Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Need for Theological Education in Missions: Lessons Learned from the Church's Greatest Missionary," *SBJT* 9, no. 4 (2005): 50–59.

nations. Reading the commission from their context, therefore, results in understanding that the universal mission is not an either/or choice between areas that have some access to the gospel (such as the Jews, many of whom had heard Jesus' teaching) and the nations (who had little access to Jesus' message). Rather, the Great Commission includes both. The church must continue disciple-making efforts in regions that are already "reached," while at the same time being intentional about going to people groups who do not have access to the gospel.¹⁵⁰

However, as the thrust of Jesus' mandate was for the disciples to engage in the mission to the nations, the contemporary disciple must remember that Jesus' purpose is the ever-expanding progress of the kingdom to all the nations. As demonstrated above, Matthew's narrative rhetoric portrays God's intent to bring the nations into the kingdom. The outward movement of the message of the kingdom throughout the Gospel, culminating with the command to go make disciples of all the nations, indicates the priority of gospel advance to all the nations. As long as nations (people groups) remain who do not have the kingdom message of the hope and authority of Christ, the urgency and priority of Jesus' mandate must drive the church (inclusive of all Christians) outward to make disciples of the nations.

This dissertation argues in light of a careful hermeneutic of application that preaching the Great Commission necessitates exhorting every believer in the congregation to go and engage intentionally in both evangelism and discipling less

¹⁵⁰One may wonder how Jesus' words in 24:14 cohere with the necessity of both proclamation of the gospel and continued discipling. Since Jesus states that the end will come after "this gospel of the kingdom [is] proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations," should gospel proclamation be the only concern of Christians rather than the long process of discipling? Seemingly, the church might be able to usher in the return of Jesus by ensuring that all the nations hear the gospel. However, regarding this verse, at least two concerns drive disciple-making that includes both evangelism and continued discipling of those who become converts. First, the above evidence demonstrates that Jesus' command requires both gospel witness and the process of discipling, so undoubtedly Jesus is not here advocating a missiology driven by preaching the gospel that is divorced from instruction and guidance in all he commanded. Second, as Osborne explains, Jesus is not describing a way to speed his return, but is explaining to the disciples that "the universal proclamation will continue until the end." Osborne, *Matthew*, 877.

mature believers among all the nations of the earth. Chapter 3 presents arguments that Matthew intends that Jesus' command in 28:19-20 devolves on every follower of Christ, thus demonstrating that sermonic application of this passage is directly for every Christian. Chapter 4 seeks to further define the content of the application by analyzing the phrase *μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. Fundamentally, this chapter affirms the contention of the thesis that disciple-making includes both evangelism and discipling. It also explains that the context of disciple-making includes all people groups and that obedience to the Great Commission requires intentionally going to those who need to be disciplined or evangelized.

The world in front of the text, therefore, presents 28:19 as the command for every follower of Christ intentionally to make disciples of all the nations. Matthew, in this way, invites the reader to hear Jesus' words and follow him in obedience to this command. The fulfillment of all that Jesus commands in this passage occurs through individual believers, working in conjunction with the local church, through all of church history until he returns. Specifically, however, how does the individual believer practically obey the command to go make disciples of all nations? And, closely related, how should the preacher articulate application in a sermon in order to help the individual congregants understand how they are to live in light of what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission? Having laid the foundations for answering these questions in chapters 2-4, we now turn in chapter 5 to the subject of the application of Jesus' command to make disciples of all the nations.

CHAPTER 5

APPLICATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT

A major *lacuna* in Matthean scholarship of the Great Commission pericope is the applicational implications for preaching the passage, particularly in light of a robust hermeneutic that drives and expounds key interpretive challenges from the passage. The four major issues addressed in this dissertation are the continuing normativity of Jesus' command, the translation of *πορευθέντες*, the meaning of *μαθητεύσατε*, and the meaning and referent of *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. Chapters 3 and 4 seek both to synthesize the major approaches to these areas of interpretation and argue a position for each by considering not only the exegetical issues, but the hermeneutical questions that lie at the heart of many of these decisions.

The hermeneutic used for examining these interpretive issues and offering a proposed solution to each derives in large measure from the world-projection proposals of Paul Ricoeur and Abraham Kuruvilla. I argue that Matthew did not compose his Gospel merely as a message to an ecclesial community, and thus have in mind only a small, ancient audience. Matthew's writing throughout instead indicates an intentionality in conveying a message that is universal in regard to both its portrayal of Jesus as the divine Messiah and the call to discipleship.¹ In this way, Matthew projects a world for the reader to inhabit (to use the terminology of Ricoeur) in the sense that he intends the reader to hear Jesus' words and follow him

¹A careful examination of the Gospel also evidences a similarity to the Greco-Roman genre form *βίος*, which characteristically does not function as a document only to an individual community.

as a disciple. This world in front of the text, therefore, removes the hermeneutical problem of distancing, for both the divine and human author intend the message of this Gospel to extend to all who read it.²

This chapter, therefore, using a hermeneutic of the world in front of the text, builds on the conclusions of chapters 3 and 4 in order to expound the sermonic application that flows out of the author's intended meaning for these four issues in 28:19. However, remembering the world in front of the text, the discussion of application that follows seeks to describe practical implications in terms of both the sense and reference of the passage. In other words, not only did Matthew intend the sense of the specific meaning of the words he wrote (the noematic content, to use Wolterstorff's language), but also a reference that extends beyond mere locution to an illocutionary force regarding kingdom discipleship for all those who might read his Gospel.³ Using Kuruvilla's terminology, the sense of the text is its meaning and the reference is the transhistorical intention of the sense that is evident in the text.⁴

Kuruvilla's method provides a helpful means for articulating application that corresponds with the transhistorical intention, for he explains application in terms of exemplification and significance. He describes exemplifications as "valid applications arising from [the] transhistorical intention," meaning they are generalizations of application that correspond to what the biblical author intended.⁵

²The general evangelical assumption, flowing out of 2 Tim 3:16-17, is that God intends the applicability of Scripture to all people. A contribution of this hermeneutic for Matthean studies is that the *human* author Matthew intends for his message to extend beyond the initial readers to all followers of Christ who read it (or all who might read it and become a follower of Christ).

³Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 138-39, 149.

⁴This method exhibits some similarities to Jay Adams' telic preaching. He argues that preachers should not merely explain the meaning of the text, but ascertain and describe application in light of the divine purpose inherent in the passage. See Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1990), 36-44; Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: A Comprehensive Textbook on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 27-34.

⁵Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*

Significances are specific ways of carrying out contemporary exemplifications of the transhistorical intention.⁶ Because Matthew's world in front of the text in this pericope projects a commission that is generally the same for all believers (make disciples of all the nations), the transhistorical intention for the original reader and the modern reader is quite similar. Distinction largely occurs in exemplifications and, especially, significances for the individual.

This chapter offers an explanation of sermonic application that flows out of the four major aspects of interpretation in 28:19. Most of these explanations include an overview of the transhistorical intention, potential exemplifications that the preacher may describe in the sermon, and (where pertinent) significances that aid in further delineating the application that corresponds with Matthew's intended meaning and application. However, the full picture of contemporary exemplifications and significances may not be adduced except in consideration of *πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as a whole*. Therefore, although each section below provides an explanation of application, only in consideration of these four elements as a whole may the preacher understand the sermonic application of Jesus' command to go make disciples of all the nations.

The purpose of this chapter is not to explain the mechanics of applying this passage (how to deliver the application, such as using illustrations, tone, or gestures), but the *what* of application, namely the general expectation for obedience to the Great Commission that is evident from Jesus' words and Matthew's intent for

(Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 44.

⁶Kuruvilla describes a significance as "a *means of accomplishing* the exemplification" from the author's transhistorical intention. Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 62. For example, considering the command in Eph 5:18 not to get drunk with wine, he suggests the transhistorical intention is not to get drunk on any alcoholic drink. The modern exemplification, therefore, is that a follower of Christ should not get drunk with vodka, beer, Scotch, or any other alcoholic beverage. A potential significance (which is a way to carry out the exemplification) would be to cancel a subscription to *Wine Spectator* in order to reduce the temptation to drink. Ibid., 63-64.

πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.⁷ The chapter discusses specifics of *how* the preacher should convey the *what* of application only when such information is necessary for a preacher's accurately conveying the meaning and implications of the text.

As an additional caveat, this chapter operates under the assumption that a preacher who faithfully expounds the Great Commission pericope in a sermon would include the content of the remainder of the passage (28:16-20).⁸ As such, an exposition of the text would also explain the pericope's contextual setting (both as the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel and the historical setting after the resurrection), the doubt of the disciples, Jesus' universal authority and how that authority relates to the universal mission, the relation of baptizing and teaching to the overall commission, and the promise of Jesus' presence. Because the delimitation of this dissertation is πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, this chapter assumes that a preacher would incorporate into his sermon the rest of the content from the pericope in order to explain accurately and faithfully the meaning and application of the whole passage.

⁷Many preaching primers describe the need for application, but few provide extensive guidance in the practical matters of how to explain in a sermon the application of each point in a way that connects with the hearers and helps them to know the next steps of how they could walk in obedience to the text. Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* is a notable exception, for he provides a chapter that outlines several ways the preacher can craft application to delineate real-world implications of the text for the congregation: Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 209-36. See also the advice in John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870; repr., Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 197-205.

⁸Normally, the best practice in the selection of a text for a sermon is to choose an expository unit. Bryan Chapell defines such a unit as "a large or a small portion of Scripture from which a preacher can demonstrate a single spiritual truth with adequate supporting facts or concepts arising within the scope of the text." Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 61. The length of a text, therefore, does not define an expository unit. Rather, a preaching passage should be a text that contains a unit of thought, whether a paragraph (or smaller) or a larger pericope. Concerning this passage, 28:16-20 is clearly an expository unit, so a sermon would typically be on the passage as a whole. However, a preacher could conceivably preach multiple sermons on this text, such as one that focuses on Jesus' authority and another on the commission itself.

The Intended Significance of the Great Commission

As explained in chapter 3, neither scholarship nor preaching have demonstrated a uniform understanding of the normativity of the Great Commission. At least five varying views are evident throughout church history concerning for whom it was intended: the apostles alone, ministers, the local church as a whole, the universal church, and every believer. Although several of these views exhibit a degree of overlap, each represents a different conceptualization of the application that corresponds to Jesus' command.

Chapter 3, however, argues that Matthew exhibits an intended significance in such a way that the reader should hear Jesus' teaching about discipleship through his words to the disciples.⁹ Through the use of both rhetorical and narrative criticism, this chapter gives evidence that Matthew's intended audience was not only a specific group of individuals from the time of his writing, but all who would read the Gospel and follow Jesus. This dissertation, therefore, shows that what Matthew was *doing* with his Gospel extends to all disciples. This willed futurity nullifies the hermeneutical challenge of distanciation and establishes an *intended* significance with the reader. Concerning the Great Commission pericope, the transhistorical intention is that Matthew aims for every Christian to read it as normative to him or her.¹⁰

⁹The use of "significance" here correlates with Hirsch's understanding of significance as a relationship between the text and the reader. My contention is that Matthew establishes an *intended* significance with the reader, meaning that Matthew purposefully wrote so that the reader would understand and submit to Jesus' teaching. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on the intended significance that Matthew purposed for the reader to hear Jesus' teaching about discipleship through his teaching and ministry with the disciples. One should not confuse this understanding of significance with Kuruvilla's related notion of a significance as a specific point of application that flows out of an exemplification of the transhistorical intention of the text. For the remainder of the chapter, description of significances refers to practical ways that the congregation could apply the exemplification of the text. For Hirsch's explanation of significance, see E. D Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 8. For Kuruvilla's explanation of a significance as a point of application, see Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 61-64.

¹⁰This section does not include potential exemplifications and significances, for the practical outworking of the ongoing normativity of Christ's command can only occur in the context of

Despite this conclusion, however, a preacher should not assume that the average church member accepts its implications. Undoubtedly, most evangelicals affirm the authority and normativity of Scripture, particularly the commands of Jesus. However, because the Great Commission text is often synonymous with foreign missions, the hearers may automatically presume that the missional content of the passage excludes them from its normativity.¹¹ They may accept it as a text primarily for missionaries, thus viewing it in terms of others, rather than themselves.

For this reason, the preacher should impress upon the congregation that the Great Commission extends to every follower of Christ. The primary way of doing so must be to demonstrate this truth from the text of Matthew, for the hearers must understand both that the text itself is the foundation of application and how the preacher arrives at his assertions.¹² Obviously, the technical analysis described in chapter 3 precludes inclusion in a sermon; however, the general concept of

the other three interpretive elements of this portion of the Great Commission.

¹¹The association of the Great Commission with world missions is quite common. The following sermons do not necessarily assume Jesus' command *only* includes what is popularly termed foreign missions, but they demonstrate the tendency to consider it primarily in that context: Edward D. Griffin, "Arguments for Missions," in *The Missionary Enterprise: A Collection of Discourses on Christian Missions*, ed. Baron Stow (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1846), 22–36, accessed August 30, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/missionaryenterp00stow>; John Piper, "The Lofty Claim, the Last Command, the Loving Comfort," transcript of sermon (Minneapolis: Bethlehem Baptist Church, November 1, 1998), accessed November 19, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-lofty-claim-the-last-command-the-loving-comfort>; Jerry Rankin, "Fulfilling the Great Commission," in *The Challenge to Great Commission Obedience: Motivational Messages for Contemporary Missionaries* (B & H Publishing Group, 2006), 15–19; Charles Spurgeon, "The Missionaries' Charge and Charta," in *The New Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Containing Sermons Preached and Revised by the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon*, vol. 7, *During the Year 1861* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1995), 281–88; John T. Seamands, "Our Marching Orders," in *The Supreme Task of the Church: Sermons on the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 46–58.

¹²The preacher's intentional explanation of the application from the text serves two important functions in preaching and pastoring. First, doing so helps the congregation to understand that both meaning and application must derive from the text. Second, explicitly describing the process (in layman's terms) of *how* the preacher discerned the meaning and *how* the application flows out of the passage trains the congregation how to study the Word. The explanation that happens in the sermon, therefore, functions as a form of disciple-making by the preacher as he guides the congregation in learning how to interpret and apply Scripture. In essence, a well-preached sermon that describes how to discern meaning and application is in itself a *mimetic* form of discipling. Without explicitly stating so, the sermon invites the hearers to follow the method of the preacher.

Matthew's open-ended conclusion to the Gospel is readily accessible to the average layman. The preacher may thus explain that Jesus' instruction to the disciples is often generalized and open-ended, addressing not just the original disciples, but all who would follow him. Those who read Matthew, therefore, should hear Jesus' teaching directed to themselves. Regarding the Great Commission pericope, the preacher may explain that just as Jesus addresses the eleven disciples, so also he speaks to everyone who follows him.¹³ The preacher must thus make clear to the congregation that the Great Commission is for every disciple of Jesus.

Make Disciples

An additional way to impress upon the congregation that Jesus' words in this passage have bearing upon their lives is to explain the meaning of *μαθητεύσατε*, for this command contains elements that the congregation can readily understand as having practical application for their lives. Indeed, understanding what this imperative encompasses as the grammatically governing verb of 28:19-20 is critical for grasping both the content of the commission and its application. Due to the crucial function of the imperative for this pericope, the explanation of textual application now turns to how the preacher may expound the implications of this command, rather than to the first word of the commission, *πορευθέντες*. However, in the exposition of the text, the preacher need not follow the order described in this chapter, for other concerns may lead him to follow a different pattern, such as

¹³Another avenue of addressing the congregation would be concerning the correlation of Jesus' mission and that of his disciples. Jesus became incarnate to fulfill the Father's kingdom purposes. In the Great Commission, Jesus calls his followers to join in this kingdom mission. In other words, just as Jesus was sent, so also he sends the disciples. For the correlation of Jesus' being sent and his sending, see John D. Harvey, "Mission in Matthew," in *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach*, American Society of Missiology Series 27 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 129. A preacher may, through the many riches of the text of Matthew, explain that Matt 28:18-20 addresses every believer, as long as he faithfully explains Matthew's intended meaning and application.

specific congregational needs or a desire to follow the original word order.¹⁴

The lexical, rhetorical, and narrative analysis from chapter 4 results in discerning two primary ideas inherent in Matthew's use of μαθητεύω: the exhortation for others to follow Christ (evangelism) and instruction of believers in how to live as a disciple (discipling). The command to make disciples includes both elements, so the imperative on every Christian is both to engage in evangelism and disciple those who are less spiritually mature.¹⁵ In addition to this conclusion, however, chapter 4 describes an emphasis on *mimesis* that is evident in Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' discipling of the twelve. When Jesus commanded the remaining eleven to make disciples, undoubtedly they would have thought of the way that Jesus disciplined them. In following his example, therefore, disciple-making must initiate a call for

¹⁴Homileticians debate the role of textual structure in determining the order of sermonic arrangement. Some argue that an expository sermon, to be faithful to the Spirit's inspiration of the text, should follow the order of the elements in the passage. Although following the textual arrangement of a passage is often a wise way to structure a sermon, I do not believe that such an ordering principle is always necessary for at least two reasons. First, and most important, the sequence of words in a sentence or ideas in a passage does not necessarily determine their priority in the author's message. As the hermeneutic of chapter 2 explains, the central concern of biblical interpretation is not only to ascertain the meaning of the words in a passage, but what the author is *doing* with those words. Disciplines such as discourse analysis, rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism, and speech act theory have helped demonstrate that word order is not primary for determining the author's message. An author may use chiasmus, *inclusio*, or many other organizational methods that contribute to his overall message, thus indicating that exposition that follows the author's intended meaning may not need to follow the sequential arrangement of the passage. Rather, the preacher's choice of organization should serve to highlight the overall meaning and message of the passage. Second, I define expository preaching as a message that explains the meaning of the text and how it applies to the hearers. The central concerns of the sermon, therefore, are textual meaning and application that flows out of that meaning. A preacher has freedom in sermonic structure so that he may best articulate these elements in a way that addresses the specific needs of the congregation. This definition of expository preaching derives largely from Hershael York's definition in Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 33.

¹⁵For the purpose of this dissertation, I define evangelism in accord with the Lausanne Covenant of 1974: "To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe." John Stott, ed., "The Lausanne Covenant," in *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974-1989* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 20. I define discipling as the process of intentionally guiding a less mature Christian toward spiritual maturity in Christ. This definition is less expansive, but coheres well with, that of Greg Ogden. He defines discipling as "an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well." Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2003), 129.

unbelievers to follow Jesus by explaining who he is, what he accomplished, and how they must respond in repentance and belief.¹⁶ Likewise, obedience to this command means that his followers should practice a word-deed discipling that teaches all that Jesus commanded (28:20) and demonstrates through example how one lives as a disciple. Matthew, therefore, in his portrayal of Jesus' discipling and the command to make disciples, presents the world in front of the text in which he urges the reader to carry forth this disciple-making mission by learning from the method of Jesus. Matthew's transhistorical intention is thus that every follower of Christ will make disciples through evangelistic proclamation and discipling other believers. Because the transhistorical intention is fully transferable to a modern audience, the general contemporary exemplification is also to make disciples through evangelism and discipling.¹⁷

Given these conclusions about *μαθητευσατε*, the preacher should exhort the congregation to both evangelism and discipling.¹⁸ First, he must explain that Jesus'

¹⁶This exhortation to follow Jesus is evident both in Jesus' example and in the Gospel as a whole. Jesus called others to follow him in repentance, explaining to them the coming of the kingdom (Matt 4:17, 19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24). Likewise, Matthew, in its *βίος* genre, presents the life of Jesus so the reader may follow him as a disciple. Matthew, therefore, acts as the disciplined scribe of 13:52 who brings out the treasure of the teaching he received from Jesus in order to pass on the message of Christ to the reader. In this way Matthew carries out (at least in part) disciple-making through his writing of the Gospel. I am indebted to a forthcoming chapter by Patrick Schreiner concerning this insight about Matthew as a disciplined scribe.

¹⁷This understanding of disciple-making as including both evangelism and discipling may seem tautological to many readers. However, interpretive scholarship and especially sermons demonstrate a lack of uniformity in viewing evangelism and discipling as necessary components of disciple-making. Therefore, careful inclusion of both elements is necessary for faithful exposition of the text.

¹⁸Often sermons on this passage give attention to either evangelistic efforts or discipling rather than both. For example, Robert Smith, in an article about how to preach the Great Commission pericope, suggests, "What [Matthew] stresses is that Jesus commissioned the church to make disciples out of believers and confessors." Robert H. Smith, "The End in Matthew (5:48 and 28:20): How to Preach It and How Not To," *Word & World* 19, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 311. Similarly, Scott Gibson describes it primarily in the context of discipling. Scott M. Gibson, "The Great Commission to Discipleship," CD of sermon, Pulpit Talk 10, no. 4 (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, Summer 2012). More sermons, however, suggest that evangelism is the primary command of the Great Commission without also addressing discipling. See J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St Matthew* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., n.d.), 409; John Stott, "The Great Commission, Part II" (World Congress on Evangelism, 1966), accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/Berlin66/stott2.htm>; Henry Martyn, "Christ's Grand Commission to His Apostles," in *Twenty Sermons*, 3rd ed. (London: L. B.

command to every Christian is that he or she should proclaim the gospel so that others might follow Christ. Just as Jesus called others to repent and follow him, so must his followers take up this evangelistic message. Although a lived-out example of kingdom life was undoubtedly evident as an aspect of Jesus' ministry, the core application of this facet of the command is verbal proclamation of the gospel. Obedience, therefore, must include verbal evangelism that explains the fundamentals of the gospel and urges unbelievers to become his disciples. A preacher may mention numerous legitimate significances, such as sharing the gospel with co-workers, friends, and family.¹⁹

Second, the world in front of the text portrays disciples who disciple, so preaching that is faithful to authorial intent means the preacher should explain that obedience to the Great Commission includes guiding others toward spiritual maturity in Christ. Because Matthew depicts a *mimesis* in which the disciples learn from and replicate (in part) the pattern of Jesus' ministry toward his followers, the preacher's explanation of the application should briefly show from Matthew that just

Seeley & J. Hatchard and Son, 1822), 391–412, accessed November 19, 2015, <https://books.google.com/books?id=4ZphAAAACAAJ&pg=PA391&lpg=PA391&dq=henry+martyn+christ%27s+grand+commission&source=bl&ots=rJcm0kDSEo&sig=F2TPgyKaS1IRitvgbQopnsYUp6Q&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCAQ6AEwAGoVChMIoc7FhpmdyQIVgiceCh1CiAxd#v=onepage&q=henry%20marty%20christ%27s%20grand%20commission&f=false>; James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2, *The Triumph of the King Matthew 18-28* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 648; John MacArthur, "Reaching the World," transcript of sermon (Sun Valley, CA: Grace Community Church, January 14, 1990), accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/80-66/reaching-the-world>. For sermons that emphasize both elements, see Jonathan F. Stearns, *The Great Commission: A Sermon before the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, at Their Meeting in Brooklyn, N.Y., October 4, 1870* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1870), 6, accessed August 7, 2015, <http://archive.org/details/greatcommissions00stea>; David Platt, "Two Simple Words: Make Disciples," transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, February 11, 2007), accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.radical.net/resources/sermons/two-simple-words-make-disciples>.

¹⁹Based on the needs of the congregation, a preacher can and should mention significances that address key needs of the people in the pews. For this point of application and each of the following, this chapter affirms the necessity of exegeting the congregation to develop significances that both flow out of the world in front of the text and speak to key issues for the church. For an explanation of the relationship between sermon preparation and exegeting the audience, see Haddon Robinson, "Preaching to Everyone in Particular: How to Scratch Where People Niche," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 115–21; Adams, *Truth Applied*, 131–37.

as Jesus taught the disciples by word and deed, so also should his followers disciple others in both word and deed. This replicative process means that disciple-making includes not only the proclamation of the gospel, but also instructing converts to obey all that Jesus taught (28:20) through both explanation of Jesus' teaching and demonstration of kingdom living by intentionally walking in close fellowship with the person being discipled so that he or she may observe an example of what it looks like to be a disciple of Christ in daily life.

Perhaps more than the applicational implications of evangelism, this facet of Great Commission obedience requires careful explanation and description of potential significances, for it is not commonly a major thrust of preaching on this passage.²⁰ Similarly, many in the congregation may not have experienced intentional discipleship, so the concept may be somewhat foreign to them.²¹ Their potential ignorance about discipling, therefore, dictates the need for explaining it. Of particular note, therefore, is the need to show briefly from the text how Jesus taught the disciples, spent time with them, demonstrated kingdom living, and guided them in ministry. Having explained Jesus' pattern, the preacher may then provide significances for how the hearers may engage in this kind of disciple-making.²² Such significances include regularly meeting a newer believer for Bible study and accountability, mentoring one of the youth of the church, or helping to train someone to carry out the kind of ministry in which the discipler is currently engaged. Certainly, a preacher could describe many other examples of the practical

²⁰Of the sermons I surveyed on Matt 28:16-20, only a few included discipling as a major component of application. See, for example, Smith, "End in Matthew," 311; Gibson, "Great Commission to Discipleship."

²¹Michael Wilkins notes that when he teaches about discipling, he rarely encounters Christians who have been discipled or have discipled someone else. Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 123.

²²This explanation need not be expansive, but merely indicate that Jesus demonstrated a pattern for his disciples to follow through intentionally teaching and guiding them.

outworking of discipling.²³ However, key to faithful explanation of the application of this command is that the exemplifications and significances should include the word-deed confluence of life involvement with another believer that exhibits both instruction and demonstration of a life that seeks to submit to Christ.²⁴

A final point of application for *μαθητεύσατε* flows out of the seemingly tautological assertion from chapter 4 that disciple-making is contingent on following Jesus. In other words, the unbeliever in the audience cannot obey this command without first becoming a disciple. Two significances thus derive from this conclusion. First, the preacher should call on those who are not believers to become followers of Christ.²⁵ In doing so, he sets an example to the congregation of his own attempt to be faithful to the command to urge others to repent and believe. More important, however, he articulates the foundational application of the Gospel (and thus the Great commission pericope) for the unbeliever—to follow Christ. Second, the preacher may suggest that some in the congregation should seek out mature believers to disciple them. A recent convert (or other spiritually immature person) may have such little knowledge of life in obedience to Christ that he or she is too poorly versed in discipleship to carry out a discipling role. In such a case, being disciplined may be an important foundational step that needs to occur prior to discipling others.²⁶

²³One of the most helpful practical resources for discipling that is currently available is Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

²⁴Of course, no disciple teaches or sets an example in a perfect way. The imperfect example of the disciples in Matthew is a reminder and encouragement that discipleship is by its nature an imperfect process in fallen people. The preacher may need to remind the congregation of this truth.

²⁵Such an application is not an altogether infrequent occurrence in sermons on this passage. Henry Martyn, for example, makes his final exhortation a plea for the lost to turn to Christ. Martyn, “Christ’s Grand Commission to His Apostles,” 412. Martyn was a missionary to India in the late 1700’s.

²⁶Indeed, the twelve spent several years learning from Jesus before they carried out their discipling role of baptizing and teaching. This delay was in part due to the unfolding of salvation

All Nations

Chapter 4 discusses varying interpretations of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, considering whether the phrase refers to Gentiles only, both Jews and Gentiles, or people groups. Based on lexical analysis and a consideration of Matthew's narrative rhetoric, chapter 4 concludes that this phrase means "all the nations." It does not refer to geo-political nations, but, in broad terms, to sociologically distinct ethno-linguistic groups. Part of Matthew's rhetorical purpose is to describe a universal Christian mission which includes the mission to the Jews from chapter 10 and then in chapter 28 incorporates all the nations into a singular, universal mission. Concerning Graham Stanton's broad assertion of a *tertium genus* (in contrast to the distinction between Jew and Gentile), Matthew's purpose is not to articulate a new people of God, but to stress the unitary nature of God's people as members of the kingdom who produce its fruit (21:43). Chapter 4 concludes that the target group of the Great Commission is members of all people groups of the world.

In consideration of the world in front of the text and its concomitant application, Matthew invites the disciple who reads this Gospel to hear and submit to Jesus' mandate to make disciples of all the nations. Because the Great Commission is for every believer, the transhistorical intention for the modern Christian is essentially the same as that of the original eleven who heard Jesus' command. Making disciples is an imperative that devolves on every Christian, and the context of that disciple-making is the nations.

The practical outworking of this conclusion in exemplifications and significances, however, is perhaps the most difficult aspect to articulate of the application of the Great Commission. In particular, the confluence of the

history and the necessity of Jesus' death and resurrection before their mission to the nations. However, the principle holds true—they learned from Jesus before they began the missions of either Matt 10 or 28.

normativity of the command (it is for all Christians) with the universality and singularity of the mission (it is to all nations as a holistic mission, not separate strains of distinct Jew and Gentile outreaches) results in the difficult supposition that the imperative to make disciples of all nations falls on every believer.²⁷ The resulting conclusion that an individual believer's obedience to the Great Commission requires a universal mission that includes baptizing and teaching all that Jesus commanded seems to be an impossibility. How could an individual disciple obey all that these final words of Jesus' command?

However, careful consideration of the findings from the analysis of chapters 3 and 4 provides a way forward for discerning the implications for the contemporary disciple. One of the difficulties identified in chapter 3 is the differing terminology used to describe the normativity of Jesus' command, such as articulating it in terms of being for the local church, universal church, and every believer. The conclusion of chapter 3 was that the commission is for every believer, the context of the local church is the vehicle for missions, and the fulfillment of the Great Commission occurs throughout church history by means of God's work through the universal church. The world in front of the text, therefore, depicts every Christian engaged in making disciples of the nations until the return of Christ. The difficult question, therefore, centers on how a singular, universal mission to all the nations finds practical outworking in the life of the individual believer. In other words, does one Christian have a responsibility to seek to make disciples among all the nations? Or, to put the question more succinctly, does a believer living in one nation also have a responsibility to make disciples in other nations?

To answer this question, two streams of analysis must converge into a

²⁷This conclusion is most evident in the grammar of *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* as the accusative object, for grammatically the object of disciple-making is all the nations.

cohesive missional picture. First, the conclusion from chapter 3 states that one disciple cannot fulfill all the obligations of the Great Commission; such occurs only in the context of all of church history by the universal church as individuals minister in and through the local church for mission under the kingdom authority of Jesus.²⁸ Therefore, one disciple cannot have a responsibility for reaching *every* nation. Second, Matthew's depiction of a universal mission that comprises Jewish and Gentile outreach as components of a *unitary* mission provides a clue to understanding the individual's responsibility to the nations. The eleven remaining disciples were Jews, and their previous mission and ministry had primarily been among fellow Jews.²⁹ Jesus' ministry had become quite well-known among the Jews, and even his resurrection undoubtedly became known by many. Yet, despite the already three-year ministry among the Jews, which was accompanied by supernatural signs that drew thousands of spectators and testified to Jesus' divinity and messiahship, Jesus' command to the disciples was to make disciples among the Jews *and* among the nations. The mission of these eleven men, therefore, comprised two targets—members of their own Jewish nation (some of whom had already heard about Jesus) and people of all the other nations (most of whom were ignorant of Jesus).

A contemporary applicational conclusion, therefore, is that mission to the nations is not derivative of two individual streams of mission of which only one choice is available—one nation in opposition to another. Rather, Matthew's world in front of the text is for the reader to hear Jesus' command through the ears of the

²⁸For a good overview of the role of the local church in making disciples of the nations, see Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 237-52. For a sermon that explains the role of the local church in missions, see Conrad Mbewe, "You, the Church, and the Great Commission," video of sermon (Indianapolis: Cross Conference, December 2016), accessed July 21, 2017, <http://crossforthenations.org/media/2017/01/you-the-church-and-the-great-commission/>.

²⁹See especially the disciples' ministry with Jesus in Matt 8-9 and their mission of Matt 10.

disciples. Their disciple-making was to be not only to their Jewish ethnological kin or to outside nations, but to both. At least two applicational emphases flow out of this conclusion. First, in direct correspondence with Jesus' commission, the Great Commission includes the target of both Jews and all other nations. Based on this interpretation, an exemplification would be to engage in mission to both Jews and Gentiles.

However, a second applicational emphasis derives from the conclusions of chapters 3 and 4, which is that contemporary disciples are not consigned to a mission that is only in one location, but the missionary imperative of Jesus directs every follower of Christ to disciple-making that occurs both in their context and also among the nations. In order to demonstrate this exemplification, we must consider both Matthew's transhistorical intention and how to articulate what he is doing in his Gospel in terms of modern exemplification. The transhistorical intention of this pericope is a universal mission of disciple-making that is normative for all followers of Christ. A helpful means for considering more specifically how this transhistorical intention results in a modern exemplification is through the use of a ladder of abstraction. Haddon Robinson describes such a tool for application, explaining its utility in discerning how to describe contemporary textual implications that legitimately correspond to the biblical author's intent.³⁰ As figure 4 illustrates below, a one-to-one correspondence at the bottom of the ladder is the precise application the biblical author intended for his readers. However, abstraction of the original textual application allows the preacher to apply the *author's intent* in the text to a contemporary audience in a way that remains faithful to what the author is seeking to accomplish in and through the text. In using this process of abstraction, the

³⁰Haddon W. Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Craig Brian Larson and Haddon W. Robinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 306–11.

preacher seeks to generalize application so that it addresses the same core issue or concept that the biblical text addresses. The closer the contemporary application corresponds to the author's original application, the greater confidence the preacher may have that he is explaining the textual implications in the way that the Spirit intended.³¹

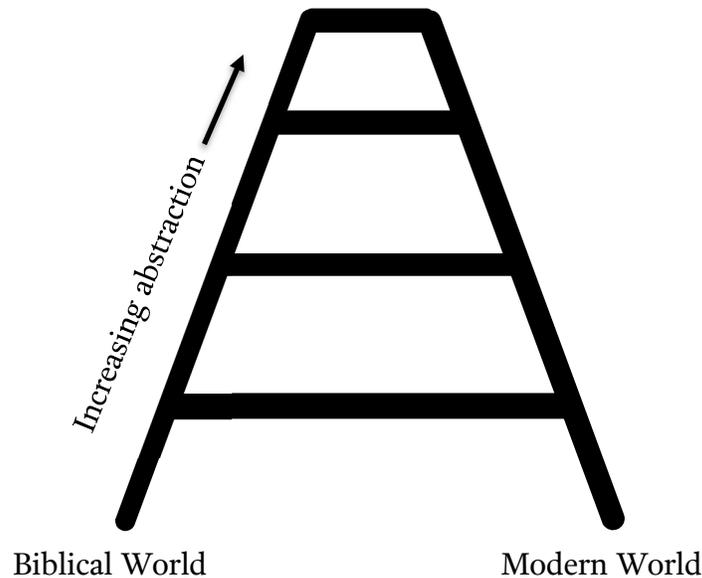


Figure 4. Ladder of abstraction

Source: Adapted from York, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 81.

Further consideration of what Matthew is *doing* in his depiction of the universal mission aids the preacher in discerning how to articulate sermonic application. From the beginning of the Gospel, Matthew shows that the message of

³¹Hershael York has a helpful illustration to demonstrate the necessity of linking the sermon's application to the author's intent. He writes, Picture the authorial intent of the passage like a flowing river. It proceeds from the source, the author, and flows to his ultimate goal—the behavior and belief of his readers. When we preach the text and address our sermon to the *same kind of problem* that the author intended, we find ourselves in the main channel of the river, carried along by the strongest flow possible. We experience the maximum force of the passage and feel the blessing of the Holy Spirit as his Word is used as he intended. When we preach the text with an intent foreign to the original author, we fail to enjoy the maximum flow, even though everything we say may indeed be true. York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance*, 78.

the kingdom is advancing *outward* from Israel to the rest of the nations. Indeed, Matthew's narrative rhetoric in the *exordium* and *peroratio* indicates his concern to demonstrate that Jesus as the Davidic messiah makes possible the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise to bless the nations. The Great Commission is thus the culmination of Matthew's portrayal of the advancement of the kingdom outward from Israel to the nations. However, the *peroratio* is not the conclusion of the mission, but serves as a new *exordium* in the outward expansion of the gospel.

One way to conceptualize the mission, therefore, is that it progresses outward from Israel, a people who had God's Word and had experienced the Messiah's ministry, to nations that did not have Scripture or the message of the Messiah. In terms of the disciples' mission, the conclusion that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη includes both Jews and Gentiles means that their disciple-making was to both a people (the Jews) who at least partially had heard the message of the kingdom and to peoples (the nations) who did not have the message of the kingdom. In short, their disciple-making task included both a "here" and "there" component. Matthew, therefore, shows that the mission of the Messiah is outward to the nations. But in its outward movement, the mission is not *only* for nations without the message of the gospel, but includes all. Disciple-making continues among those who have heard the gospel through evangelizing and discipling individuals among those nations so that they may grow to be mature disciples who make disciples. It also strains forward to those nations and regions that do not have disciples in order that they may hear the message of the gospel, turn to Christ, and be replicating disciples. In this way, the Great Commission is both "here" and "there"—where people have already heard, but always moving outward to those who do not know the King.

An exemplification, therefore, is that the commission points to disciple-making that is both local and to other nations. For this reason, Ed Stetzer, in considering the choice between either local outreach or foreign missions, is correct

in asserting, “We don’t need merely one or the other. We need both.”³² A preacher’s explanation of the practical outworking of the Great Commission, therefore, may expound application in terms of the exemplification that disciple-making occurs both here and there—both where the hearers are and among the nations.³³ David Platt describes this duality well in speaking to his congregation in Birmingham, Alabama. In a sermon on this passage, he explains,

Here is the biblical truth, and I pray that you are convinced of this in your heart. The biblical truth, you were created. You, not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you, you were created to impact Birmingham and all nations for the glory of Christ. It’s not an either or. We take this missions thing and think, “Well, I am going to stay in Birmingham, other people will go over there.” No, it’s a both and. We are involved in a global mission. All of us created to impact Birmingham and all nations for the glory of Christ.³⁴

His articulation of both the local and nations context of obedience to the Great Commission is an exemplary model for preaching that Jesus commands his disciples to a “both/and” mission.

Given this exemplification, the preacher needs to explain to the congregation how Matthew’s transhistorical intention and exemplification is for both contexts—one’s own location and the nations. As with the description of Matthew’s portrayal of *mimesis*, demonstrating the universality of the commission (particularly in terms of both a local and nations context) necessitates clarifying from Matthew that the target of the Great Commission includes both the Jews (the disciples’ own

³²Ed Stetzer, “To Our Neighbors and the Nations,” in *Finish the Mission: Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 121.

³³One should note that this conclusion assumes preaching that occurs in a reached context such as in the United States. However, the conclusions drawn in this chapter would apply to preaching that occurs in an area of little gospel witness. Disciples in such a context would have the command to make disciples of all nations, thus meaning that their target would be their own nation as well as others.

³⁴David Platt, “The Christ-Directed Mission,” transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, March 12, 2006), accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.radical.net/sermons/sermons/a-christ-directed-mission/>. See a similar assertion in David Platt, “Of All Nations,” transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, February 22, 2009), accessed July 19, 2017, http://www.radical.net/files/uploads/Impact_TS4_Web.pdf.

people group) and the nations. Explaining that “all the nations” includes both home and foreign missions is an important applicational necessity since reference to the Great Commission often is only in the context of foreign missions.³⁵ Given this popular conception, the preacher should explain that “nations” is inclusive of all peoples, not just foreign or unreached nations. Similarly, the commonality of considering “nation” in terms of a geo-political entity necessitates explaining that Jesus’ mandate refers to people groups.

The exemplification of the Great Commission’s both local and nations context establishes the foundation of where disciple-making is to occur. Articulation of application that aids the congregation in discerning how to obey Jesus’ command necessitates further explanation by the preacher to help them understand *how* they can obey *both* contexts. Specifically, the preacher should provide further clarification of the context of their disciple-making and significances that offer examples of Great Commission obedience. However, properly understanding the total picture of application for Jesus’ command in 28:19 cannot occur through the isolation of these four interpretive issues in the verse to produce four separate sets of implications. Instead, the preacher must understand and articulate *πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε*

³⁵Since the rise of the modern missions movement, the evangelical tradition has often understood the Great Commission as primarily a mandate to reach foreign nations with the gospel. See especially the history of interpretation in David P. Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed New Light on Old Texts* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2006), 128-35. Therefore, many works and sermons over the past two centuries consider the text primarily in the context of foreign missions, particularly to unreached peoples. Although the following preachers may not all affirm that this passage is exclusively about foreign missions, these sermons describe the application of the commission primarily in the context of missions: Piper, “The Lofty Claim, the Last Command, the Loving Comfort;” John Piper, “All Authority in Heaven and Earth: The Sovereignty of Jesus and His Unstoppable Mission” (Greenville, SC, October 8, 2015), accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/all-authority-in-heaven-and-earth>; Griffin, “Arguments for Missions;” Spurgeon, “The Missionaries’ Charge and Charta.” Although a foreign missions focus generally has been predominant in preaching this passage in the modern missions era, some preachers have noted that its application includes disciple-making in reached areas as well. William MacLaren, for example, explains in a sermon on this passage, “The commission knows nothing of the distinction between home and foreign missions.” William MacLaren, *The Great Commission: A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the General Assembly in Crescent Street Church, Montreal, June 10th, 1885* (Toronto: Presbyterian News Co., 1885), 4, accessed August 7, 2015, http://archive.org/details/cihm_04636.

πάντα τὰ ἔθνη holistically. Therefore, to round out the significances for disciple-making among the nations, we must consider also *πορευθέντες*. In doing so, we may bring together these four streams into one cohesive picture of Great Commission obedience.

Go

The participle *πορευθέντες* has been a notoriously difficult interpretational and translational challenge for this passage, not only for scholars, but also for preachers. Chapter 4 summarizes four primary ways of interpreting this word: as indicating an imperatival idea, time that is antecedent to the head verb, time that is contemporaneous with the head verb, and a pleonasm that offers no additional meaning to the imperative *μαθητεύσατε*. After considering the usage of an aorist participle with an aorist imperative in biblical and extrabiblical literature, the aspect of both the verb and participle, and the logical function of *πορευθέντες* in relationship to the nations, I conclude that the participle is attendant circumstance. The correlation of the aorist participle with the aorist imperative is of such a closely-connected nature that the action of the participle is necessary for the fulfillment of the imperative. The participle *πορευθέντες*, therefore, has an imperatival function in this construction.

This conclusion is especially important given the applicational implications for how one understands the meaning of *πορευθέντες*. If the participle is contemporaneous with the verb, then the implication is that disciple-making happens “while going,” or as one goes about life. Such an interpretation is both translationally deficient (as chapter 4 demonstrates) and fails to take into account the nations context of Jesus’ command to the disciples. They were not already going to the nations, so a contemporaneous translation (“as you go”) does not adequately recognize the going that was required for their obedience. The notion of making

disciples as one goes about life, of course, is not antithetical to the New Testament picture of disciple-making, and such an applicational idea makes for easy sermonic application. However, this interpretation misses the fundamental point of the participle, that making disciples requires going to those who need to be evangelized and discipled.³⁶

Similarly, the contention that the participle indicates antecedent time (“having gone”) and thus *assumes* that going takes place is an incorrect understanding of both the function of the participle in this construction and Jesus’ command to the disciples. Matthew’s depiction of the ministry of the disciples indicates that the incorporation of Gentiles into a universal mission is a new missional direction for them. Therefore, the participle certainly does not assume that they were already going. Likewise, a preacher should not describe πορευθέντες as an assumption of going, for many in the congregation undoubtedly are not “going,” either to the nations or anyone around them.

Rather, the semantics and context of the participle indicate that going is a requirement of obedience to the command to make disciples. However, the full implications of the participle come into view only in consideration of μαθητεύσατε and πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. The accusative object determines the location of where going is to occur, and the verb indicates what one is to do—make disciples. In other words, πορευθέντες denotes the intentionality that is necessary for obedience to the command to make disciples—one must seek out and go to those who are to be discipled. Given the above explanation about the application of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, the application of the imperatival idea of the participle suggests that obedience requires

³⁶Robert Plummer, in a video describing this interpretational error, suggests that pastors make this assertion because they know a little Greek, “but not enough.” He explains that making disciples in the routine of life is a biblically correct idea, but not what Matt 28:19 describes. Robert Plummer, “Great Commission, Croteau,” video, Daily Dose of Greek, September 3, 2015, accessed July 14, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/138266471>.

intentionally seeking out and going to those who are the target of the universal mission. Also, given the continuing normativity of the commission for all Christians, every disciple is to seek out people to evangelize and disciple. Keeping in mind the “going” denotation of the *πορεύομαι* lexeme, obedience to the Great Commission requires intentionally seeking out and going to those who need the gospel or need to be disciplined. The transhistorical intention, therefore, is that all Christians are purposefully to *go* make disciples.

Synthesis of Application for “Go” and “All the Nations”

The exemplification and significances of this participle, in conjunction with the imperative and context of the nations, require careful nuance.³⁷ The above explanations of *μαθητεύσατε* and *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* provide the context required to understand the implications of *πορευθέντες* for sermonic application. The core concept of the commission is the command to make disciples, which is grammatically evident since *μαθητεύσατε* is the only verb. This disciple-making for the individual believer is to occur among all the nations, which include people in both one’s own location and the nations. The Great Commission, however, does not require *every* follower of Christ to leave his or her location, for then many areas that once had a gospel witness would no longer have a Christian presence.³⁸ Therefore, not every believer should leave their current context to move to a foreign mission

³⁷Unfortunately, sermons sometimes do not carefully explain how the hearer should discern where to go or how going corresponds with the command to make disciples. For example, in the sermon “Go with the Gospel,” David Preus leaves the location of going undefined; he simply states, “God asks *you* to go with the gospel.” David W. Preus, “Go with the Gospel,” in *Go with the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), 20. Conversely, some sermons describe going only in the context of foreign missions rather than also including a local context. See, for example, Spurgeon, “The Missionaries’ Charge and Charta,” 281-88.

³⁸David Sills makes a similar assertion. He writes, “I believe that God has called every Christian to the task of international missions. Of course, I do not think we are all to sell the farm and go. If we did, there would be none left to send.” M. David Sills, *The Missionary Call: Find Your Place in God’s Plan for the World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 30.

field. Instead, *πορευθέντες* in its connection with *μαθητεύσατε* directs the disciple of Christ to move forward in making disciples. The participle indicates the intentionality, effort, and movement toward those to be disciplined that is necessary for disciple-making.

The above explanation of the applicational implications of *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* describes the context in which this disciple-making is to occur—both in one’s location and among the nations. The precise way “going” takes place, however, is not straight-forward. Discerning how one determines where and how to engage in disciple-making is a complex decision that includes consideration of one’s life circumstances, giftedness, calling, and many other variables.³⁹ Fully expounding how one makes these decisions goes beyond the purpose of this dissertation. However, in general, a Christian seems to have two possible options. He can stay in his own nation’s context, make disciples there by intentionally going to those who need to be evangelized and disciplined, and aid discipling the nations through other endeavors. Or, he could go to another nation to make disciples there. In other words, making disciples of the nations is not optional, but is the command of Christ. The only variable is the primary context in which this disciple-making will occur—either in one’s own national context or in another nation. Using the language of calling, J. D. Greear is, therefore, correct. He explains that God calls every Christian to obey the command to make disciples of the nations, whether disciple-making occurs in one’s own nation or in another. He states, “The question is not if you are called. The only question is where.”⁴⁰ Explaining the applicational implications of these conclusions

³⁹Robert Plummer rightly states that not all will move to a different nation. He writes, “Depending on an individual person’s gifts, supernatural leading, and life circumstances, obedience to this commission will be manifested in a variety of ways.” Robert L. Plummer, “The Great Commission in the New Testament,” *SBJT* 9, no. 4 (December 2005): 4–11.

⁴⁰J. D. Greear, “Go, Send, or Disobey,” video of sermon (Indianapolis: Cross Conference, December 2016), accessed July 21, 2017, <http://crossforthenations.org/media/2017/01/go-send-or-disobey/>.

is not easy. However, the following description of potential exemplifications and significances attempts to provide an overview of sermonic application that flows out of the Great Commission's command to go make disciples of all the nations.

First, describing the conclusion of chapter 3 may aid the congregation in understanding their obedience in the context of the local church and universal church. One individual cannot fulfill the entire Great Commission. God has sovereignly placed each person in a specific location, local church, and era. Each Christian is to contribute to the fulfillment of the Great Commission by his or her own obedience to making disciples of all nations. This disciple-making occurs best through the context of the local church, and the overall fulfillment occurs by means of God's sovereign work through the universal church. Thus, each follower of Christ contributes a part in God's kingdom work. Recognizing this truth helps the individual believer see his or her contribution in God's larger plan, rather than becoming overwhelmed at the seemingly impossible task of one person reaching all the nations.

Second, the sermon should explain clearly and practically how disciple-making occurs in both contexts. Concerning the local context, the preacher should describe application as exemplifications that include both evangelism and discipling. Giving examples of specific significances of each exemplification would aid the congregation in understanding precise ways they could engage in local disciple-making. Specifically, these significances should convey ways that the hearers could *intentionally go* evangelize unbelievers and disciple the less spiritually mature (such as the examples described above).

Regarding disciple-making among the nations (meaning other than one's own location), the preacher may describe potential exemplifications such as the

triadic application of praying, giving, and going.⁴¹ Some may make disciples in their own nation's context while participating in indirect disciple-making among the nations through prayer and giving. Others may go to the nations to make disciples there. By explaining each of these means, the preacher provides the congregation with an understanding of general ways they can engage in reaching the nations, whether through indirect (prayer and giving) or direct (going) means of disciple-making.

Those who stay in their location should understand the critical role they still play in disciple-making among the nations. Prayer, for example, is not an alternative to the necessity of the proclamation of the gospel to all nations, but is a vital necessity for the success of foreign missionary endeavors. Piper, in urging his congregation to pray for the advancement of the gospel, states,

Not only has God made the accomplishment of his global purposes of salvation hang on the preaching of the Word; he has also made the success of the preaching of the Word hang on prayer. God's goal to be glorified in a world full of white-hot worshippers from every people and tongue and tribe and nation will not succeed without the powerful proclamation of the gospel by people like you and me. And that gospel will not be proclaimed in power to all the nations without the persevering, earnest, global, faith-filled prayers of God's people. This is the awesome place of prayer in the purposes of God for the world.⁴²

⁴¹For examples of sermons using this triadic formula, see Francis Wayland, "The Moral Dignity of the Missionary Enterprise," in *Occasional Discourses, Including Several Never Before Published* (New York: American Tract Society, 1830), 37-38; Andrew Broaddus, "The Universal Spread of the Gospel," in *The Sermons and Other Writings of the Rev. Andrew Broaddus: With a Memoir of His Life*, ed. Jeremiah Bell Jeter (New York: Lewis Colby, 1852), 121, accessed October 21, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/sermonsotherwrit00broa>; Richard Furman, "Sermon," in *Proceedings of the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States, at Their First Triennial Meeting, Held in Philadelphia, from the 7th to the 14th of May, 1817: Together with the Third Annual Report of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions for the United States* (Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814), 24, accessed September 14, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/proceedingsofgen00amer>.

⁴²John Piper, "Prayer: The Work of Missions," transcript of sermon (Denver: APMC Annual Meeting, July 29, 1988), accessed October 30, 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/prayer-the-work-of-missions>. For more sermons that emphasize the role of prayer in mission, see Furman, "Sermon," 24; Broaddus, "Universal Spread of the Gospel," 119; David Platt, "Global Prayer in the Local Church," transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, August 28, 2011), accessed July 24, 2017, http://www.radical.net/files/uploads/FirstTimothy_TS3_Web.pdf; Paul Washer, "Missions and Prayer," audio of sermon, September 25, 2013, accessed July 24, 2017, <http://www.heartcrymissionary.com/sermons-en#!sid=899>.

Monetary support for missionary endeavors also serves as an important aspect of the individual's role in global mission. The material blessings that have been bestowed by God are to be used to support the cause of missions around the world. Thus, prayer for the nations and giving for the support of missions are exemplifications of obedience to the nations context of the Great Commission for those whom God leads to stay in their own location. In order to convey application that aids the congregation in knowing how to apply the exemplifications of prayer and giving, the preacher should offer significances for each, such as prayer for specific missionaries and giving for a missions offering or organization.⁴³

However, not all should stay in their location—some should go to other nations to make disciples there. Given the implications of the exemplification of *going* to the nations, the congregation would benefit from additional explanation of how this aspect of obedience relates to them. Part of Matthew's rhetorical emphasis throughout the Gospel is the mission to those outside of Israel, and his focus on *all* the nations reminds both the reader and the preacher of the necessity of disciple-making among all the nations. However, missiologists recognize that numerous people groups have no access to the gospel, and many others have a very small

⁴³A helpful significance for prayer would be encouraging the church to read and pray through *Operation World*, a book that provides information about all the countries of the world and prayer suggestions for the people groups within the countries. Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*, 7th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010). W. A. Criswell provides a helpful example of a significance for giving in his encouragement of the church to give to the Lottie Moon missions offering. See W. A. Criswell, "What Christ Has Commanded: The Great Commission," transcript of sermon (Dallas: First Baptist Church, November 29, 1959), accessed August 7, 2015, <http://www.wacriswell.org/index.cfm/FuseAction/Search.Transcripts/sermon/3576.cfm>. For other sermons that urge giving to the nations, see David Platt, "Radical: What the Gospel Demands," sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, September 7, 2008), accessed November 15, 2013, http://www.radical.net/media/series/series_list/?id=2; David Platt, "Chapter 18: Giving in the History of Redemption," sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, May 23, 2010), accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.radical.net/media/series/view/379/chapter-18-giving-in-the-history-of-redemption>; Baron Stow, "The Efficiency of Primitive Missions," in *The Missionary Enterprise: A Collection of Discourses on Christian Missions*, ed. Baron Stow (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1846), 109, accessed August 30, 2013, <http://archive.org/details/missionaryenterp00stow>. Stow (1801-69), an influential Baptist pastor in Boston, states that Christians should reject the "baptized covetousness" that has been prevalent in so much of Christian history and rather practice "habitual contribution" in which the liberality of their generosity overflows for the sake of the missionary enterprise.

percentage of confessing believers.⁴⁴ The continued prevalence of groups that have little to no access to the gospel reminds the congregation of the continued need for intentional gospel engagement among these people groups.⁴⁵ Indeed, since Matthew emphasizes the gospel's progression to the nations (see especially 24:14 and 28:19), mission to them must be a priority.

Concerning the exhortation for going to the nations, a preacher should offer significances that aid the congregation in understanding how they could engage in the exemplification of going to a different nation. First, a potential significance is participation in short-term mission trips. David Platt utilizes this point of application as part of his strategy for preaching the necessity of missional involvement, for he encourages his hearers to take one week out of the year to go to the nations.⁴⁶ As David Sills explains, encountering the nations “teaches us about the

⁴⁴Two major sources of information regarding people groups and their access to the gospel are the International Mission Board (IMB) and Joshua Project. They provide useful research on the number of people groups and the percentage of believers in each group. They use differing methodologies to determine what constitutes a people group, so they yield different total numbers. The IMB identifies 11,747 people groups with 7,030 that have 2% or fewer evangelical Christians; of the total people groups, 3,182 have no current evangelical witness with any church planting strategy. For the research of the IMB, see “Global Status of Evangelical Christianity,” Global Research, International Mission Board, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://public.imb.org/globalresearch/Pages/default.aspx>. The Joshua Project identifies 16,818 total people groups, 6,956 of which are less than 2% evangelical. For the research of the Joshua Project, see “Global Statistics,” Joshua Project, accessed July 19, 2017, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/statistics.

⁴⁵Several caveats should guide the use of people groups as a principle for missiology. First, as stated in chapter 4, the noble attempt to reach all the nations with the gospel should not overshadow the concomitant need for discipling believers in all people groups so that they can be replicating disciples who form disciple-making churches. Reaching without teaching produces immature disciples who do not replicate healthy churches. Second, one should use caution in determining a missions strategy based solely on the demarcations of specific terms of missions (such as people groups, reached, unreached, and unreached and unengaged). Pratt, Sills, and Walters note this potential problem: “Another temptation is to forget that a people-group approach to missions is designed to make us inclusive and not exclusive in our gospel witness. The point is not to decide what people we care about and what people we don't care about, nor is it to reinforce barriers between different people groups themselves. The point is to make sure no group of people is neglected, ignored, or left out of hearing the gospel in a way they can understand.” Pratt, Sills, and Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions*, 259. Third, a people groups approach should not neglect the importance also of reaching *places*. Paul often went to specific cities, and a valid missions strategy is to seek to make disciples in key cities or among people groups within major cities. See the IMB's caveat about reaching places as well as people in “Key Terms,” International Mission Board, accessed July 19, 2017, <https://www.imb.org/beliefs-key-terms/>.

⁴⁶Platt states this strategy in a roundtable discussion in “A Conversation with the Contributors,” in *Finish the Mission: Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged*, ed.

needs and opportunities awaiting us around the world. . . . Developing international friendships and traveling the world are often beginning points of the missionary call.⁴⁷ Such a trip may awaken the church member to the gospel need around the world and thus stir a greater desire for reaching the nations. Also, done correctly, short term missions can provide effective ministry in reaching and teaching the nations.⁴⁸

Second, due to the lostness of the world and the nations context of the Great Commission, the preacher should encourage the hearers to consider whether God may be leading them to long-term missions to the nations.⁴⁹ Certainly, Jesus' words do not command every person to leave their home and move to a place that has not heard the gospel, for then all Christians would have departed from a place, leaving it with no gospel witness. However, Jesus told the disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send workers into the field, and he then sent *them* as the laborers (Matt 9:37-38; 10:5-6; 28:19-20). In a field of nations that either lacks access to the gospel or has few followers of Christ, perhaps the Lord of the harvest might send out laborers from the preacher's flock. The nations context of the commission thus suggests that preachers should present exemplification that includes the

David Mathis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 159-60.

⁴⁷Sills, *The Missionary Call*, 16. For a discussion of the potential benefits of short-term missions, see Michael S. Wilder and Shane W. Parker, *Transformission: Making Disciples through Short-Term Missions* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010).

⁴⁸See a few cautions about short-term missions in Sills, *The Missionary Call*, 86. For the concept of reaching and teaching as components of missions obedience to the Great Commission, I am indebted to M. David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010).

⁴⁹The issue of discerning a missionary call to cross-cultural missions or missions to another nation is a topic too vast to adequately describe in the context of this dissertation. However, David Sills provides a very helpful exploration of how one can discern such a call. See Sills, *The Missionary Call*. For an example of how to present in a sermon ways to discern a call to cross-cultural missions, see Mack Stiles, "The Call of Christ: Inspired, Informed, Confirmed (Session VI)," video of sermon (Louisville: Cross Conference, December 2013), accessed July 21, 2017, <http://crossforthenations.org/media/2014/01/the-call-of-christ-inspired-informed-confirmed-session-vi/>.

possibility of long-term missional engagement of the nations. At the least, a significance of this exemplification is to ask the members of the congregation to consider whether God might be leading them to the nations.⁵⁰ Platt provides a helpful example of such a significance. Speaking in terms of viewing one's life as a blank check to God, he says, "I want to call every follower of Christ to put the blank check on the table and ask, sincerely ask, 'Lord, are you leading me to go?'"⁵¹

In a sermon on the Great Commission, John Piper provides additional significances for those who are interested in missions or are seeking to discern if God might be leading them to become missionaries. He suggests six ways the members of the congregation may follow in obedience to world mission, the first three of which include prayer, giving, and reading about missions. The final three are excellent examples of specific significances a pastor may provide that aid those with an inclination toward mission to take the next steps in going to the nations:

4. Come to Missions in the Manse at my house this Friday at 7:00 PM. We will find out what God is doing among us and stir each other up to the fullest engagement in missions. Noel and I will pray for you by name each day the rest of the year.
5. Two hundred of you should register to take the Perspectives Course on the World Christian Movement to be offered here as part of TBI [The Bethlehem Institute], Monday evenings, January 18-May 3. This course will give you certificate level or college level or graduate level credit. It gives Biblical, historical, cultural and strategic perspectives on the world Christian movement. Get the brochure as you leave or call the church.
6. Come forward to signify that you believe that God has been awakening in you both a willingness to go and a desire to take practical steps to be prepared to go—including being prayed for here at the front and filling out a card, so that Kurt Swanson [the church's missions director] can be in touch with you and help you think through the steps to take to test your calling and find your place.⁵²

⁵⁰The perusal of many sermons on this passage reveals a shockingly small number that explicitly exhort the hearers to consider the possibility of whether God might be leading them to long-term mission.

⁵¹David Platt, "Commissioned by the King," transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, 2012), accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.radical.net/media/series/view/1095/commissioned-by-the-king/video?filter=book&book=32&chapter=28>.

⁵²Piper, "Lofty Claim." Each of these significances relate to ways Piper's church, Bethlehem Baptist, provided an outlet for missional engagement or instruction. Mission at the Manse

Given the complexity of a call to missions in a different nation, providing such significances is a helpful way for hearers from the congregation to take the next steps of application.

Go, Send, or Disobey

As a final point of clarification, consideration of the common exhortation “go, send, or disobey” may help to elucidate the applicational implications of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as the object of disciple-making. In this method of preaching the Great Commission, every Christian is a sender, goer, or disobedient.⁵³ The goer is the person God calls to go to the nations and serve as a missionary to different people groups. However, because not every Christian has the call to go to the nations, the sender participates in gospel engagement by supporting the person who goes to the mission field, a support role that primarily occurs through prayer and giving. This view rightly recognizes the importance of those who send and support missionaries.

However, articulating the response to the Great Commission as “go, send, or disobey” does not adequately encapsulate what the Great Commission requires. First, every Christian is to go make disciples of all the nations; the only question is where the *primary* context of this disciple-making will occur. By articulating Great

was an evening once a year in which Piper and his wife Noel would meet with men and women who were interested in the possibility of becoming missionaries. He and his wife then committed to praying for these people throughout the year. The Perspectives Course was an opportunity to learn about missions through the church’s Bible college. In addition to being an excellent example of significances for missions engagement, Piper demonstrates the importance of the local church in Great Commission obedience.

⁵³John Piper popularized this phraseology. See the following for examples of his use of this phrase: John Piper, “The Legacy of Antioch,” video of sermon (Minneapolis: Bethlehem Baptist Church, October 25, 2009), accessed November 14, 2013, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-legacy-of-antioch>; John Piper, “Driving Convictions Behind Foreign Missions,” *Desiring God*, January 1, 1996, accessed, July 10, 2014, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/driving-convictions-behind-foreign-missions>. For others who have used the terminology of being a sender, goer, or disobedient, see Michael Oh, “Come Be a Nobody for Christ,” *Desiring God*, August 26, 2011, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/come-be-a-nobody-for-christ>; Greear, “Go, Send, or Disobey.”

Commission obedience as *either* going or sending, one might conclude that if he were involved in sending (whether through prayer or financial support) his obedience to Jesus' command would be complete. However, the Great Commission does not mandate merely the support of disciple-making, but that every believer must make disciples. In this sense, every Christian is to go or disobey. Second, this statement places the only emphasis on foreign missions, although the Great Commission includes both one's own nation and other nations. Disciple-making must occur in both a here and there context. Third, by dichotomizing those who send versus those who go, this statement may unnecessarily bifurcate obedience to the Great Commission. May not a Christian both send and go? If a person desires to go on a yearly trip to a people group to share the gospel, is that person a sender or a goer? The majority of the time, he may function in a sending capacity (at least in regard to foreign missions), but for a week out of the year, he goes to proclaim Christ in a region that has only marginal access to the gospel. Defining Great Commission obedience as going or sending does not fully articulate the imperative for every Christian to make disciples, because it is impossible to be obedient to Jesus' command and merely be a sender. Every believer must intentionally engage in disciple-making that includes both gospel proclamation and discipling less mature believers.

Conclusion

This chapter attempts to bring together the conclusions of chapters 3 and 4 in order to describe the sermonic application of Jesus' command to go make disciples of all the nations. Although each of the four interpretive issues from these chapters provides a unique aspect to the requirements of the Great Commission, one may only understand the full picture of the applicational implications of Jesus' command in considering them as a whole. A preacher, therefore, must converge the

complexity of the analysis into a unified portrayal of exemplifications and potential significances that flow out of the transhistorical intention of the Great Commission. For an example of a sermon that models a way to incorporate the interpretive and applicational conclusions drawn from this dissertation, the reader should refer to the appendix.

In summary, the preacher must explain that obedience to the Great Commission means that every Christian has the obligation to go make disciples of all the nations. No believer is exempt from Jesus' command—the mandate to evangelize the lost and disciple converts falls on everyone who follows Christ. The only question is the primary context in which this disciple-making will occur. Through the complex consideration of one's giftedness, life circumstances, and God's leading, every disciple must seek to discern whether disciple-making will primarily take place in his or her current location or among other nations. Whichever place God leads, however, the "here and there" context of the nations requires a continuing outreach to both where one lives and to the nations. To be faithful to the meaning of the Great Commission and its transhistorical intent, a preacher who expounds this passage must present exemplifications and significances that challenge his congregation to step out in obedience to the command to make disciples—both where they are and among the nations. Yet, given the lostness of the nations and the Matthean emphasis on the outward movement of the gospel to the nations, the continual emphasis must be on taking the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world and discipling those who become believers in those locations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Since William Carey's *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, Matthew 28:16-20 has been one of the primary texts driving the modern missions movement. It has been the subject of countless sermons and writings that have urged the necessity of reaching the nations with the good news of Christ. However, the history of the interpretation of this passage has been far from monolithic, and sermons in turn evidence a variety of both interpretations and applications. Considering the lack of uniformity in preaching the Great Commission pericope, what application should a preacher expound in a sermon? Specifically, what is the application for the central imperatival phrase *πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*? Answering this question is the focus of this dissertation.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the landscape surrounding the preaching of the application of the Great Commission. It explains the diversity of interpretive and sermonic treatments of four key issues from this passage: its normativity, the meaning of *πορευθέντες*, the meaning of *μαθητεύσατε*, and the translation and referent of *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. Many of these interpretive challenges (and thus their corresponding application) are fundamentally hermeneutical in orientation. Therefore, three streams of academic investigation coalesce in preaching the proper application of this phrase from the Great Commission: Matthean scholarship, hermeneutics, and homiletics. However, no scholarly work has sought

to bring together these three disciplines to provide a hermeneutically-grounded, academically-informed, and application-oriented treatment of this passage. In doing so, this dissertation argues the thesis that preaching the Great Commission necessitates exhorting every believer in the congregation to go and engage intentionally in both evangelism and discipling less mature believers among all the nations of the earth.

Chapter 2 describes the hermeneutical foundation that drives the interpretation and application in the rest of the dissertation. Its aim is to expound a method of application that overcomes the problem of distancing through ascertaining a properly significant application (in Hirschian terms of significance) based on the author's intended meaning. It begins by summarizing several methods of principlization, which is the most basic and well-known means of deriving sermonic application. Three of these are "step-based approaches" (the methods of *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Robertson McQuilkin, and William Larkin), meaning that they espouse a series of steps or guidelines that an interpreter may use to determine a text's application. The other is the "world behind the text" approach of Walter Kaiser. Although principlization offers general utility and often provides a helpful means of ascertaining contemporary implications from biblical texts, its recourse to principles from the text may not always be as adept as other methods of identifying an author's *intended* significance for later readers.

This dissertation instead utilizes the world in front of the text to ascertain the author's intended application. Building on Ricoeur's foundational conceptualization of a world in front of the text, Abraham Kuruvilla presents a hermeneutic of application that seeks to understand a passage's transhistorical significance and the exemplifications that correspond to it. Slightly modifying Kuruvilla's method, this chapter argues for a hermeneutic that overcomes distancing and establishes an intended significance for later readers through the

biblical author's willed futurity of the text. Using this hermeneutic, a text has a sense (the noematic content of the author's meaning) and reference (futurity of corresponding application) that extends to the contemporary reader.

Chapter 3 considers the question of the normativity of Jesus' command in 28:19-20, asking the question, "For whom is the Great Commission intended?" Through a brief overview of the history of interpretation of this passage, five primary views become evident: its normativity is for only the apostles, only ministers, the local church as a whole, the universal church, or every Christian. Through considering the arguments for each of these views, this chapter demonstrates that, at root, determining the answer to this question is a hermeneutical issue.

In applying Kuruvilla's hermeneutic of the world in front of the text, chapter 3 seeks to determine what Matthew was *doing* (a key concept for Kuruvilla) with the Great Commission pericope. I argue that rhetorical and narrative criticism provide helpful means for ascertaining the world in front of the text, because they centrally focus on the text's overall message and how the author conveys that message to his audience. The application of these tools of analysis to Matthew's Gospel results in the conclusion that he establishes an intended significance with the reader through Jesus' teaching and demonstration of kingdom discipleship to the disciples. In other words, the reader should hear Jesus' instruction about life as a disciple through his teaching and example. Therefore, Matthew intentionally writes with future readers in mind; in essence, he establishes a world in front of the text in which the readers are to live out Jesus' kingdom demands of discipleship. From this viewpoint, the Great Commission is for every disciple of Christ. However, this conclusion does not mean that Jesus' command is *only* for every believer. Rather, the imperative devolves on every Christian, the local church is the avenue for Great Commission ministry, and the fulfillment of the commission occurs throughout the remainder of church history as Jesus works through the universal church.

Chapter 4 presents the crux of the exegetical decisions that comprise the interpretive foundation for application. In this chapter I consider three issues, the first of which is the translation of *πορευθέντες*. Interpreters have offered four differing views of this participle: it is attendant circumstance (and thus imperatival), it indicates antecedent time, it indicates contemporaneous time, or it is a pleonasm. Through consideration of its grammatical relationship to the verb, the semantics of the participle, its relationship to discipling the nations, and its usage in biblical and extrabiblical literature, I conclude that *πορευθέντες* is attendant circumstance and thus has an imperatival meaning. Along with nearly all English versions, I translate it as “go.” It especially refers to the intentionality and movement toward *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* that obedience to the commission requires.

The second major issue is the meaning of *μαθητεύσατε*. A brief survey of Matthew’s use of *μαθητεύω* indicates that the imperative in 28:19 includes both evangelism and discipling. However, consideration of Matthew’s narrative rhetoric reveals a fuller picture of what *μαθητεύσατε* entails. Examining Matthew’s arrangement, particularly concerning the commission pericope as a *peroratio* and the call of the disciples in relation to mission, affirms the lexical conclusions and exegetical analysis of his use of *μαθητεύω*. However, Matthew’s narrative rhetoric adds two additional concepts to his depiction of disciple-making: the word-deed duality of Jesus’ disciple-making and Matthew’s emphasis on *mimesis* of Jesus’ method. Obedience to the Great Commission, therefore, includes not only proclamation of the gospel so that others might follow Jesus, but also discipling less mature Christians. This discipling involves both instruction and walking alongside the person to guide him or her toward maturity in Christ. Following Jesus’ example will not look precisely like his disciple-making, but his method establishes the elements necessary for obedience to his command: evangelism (urging unbelievers to follow Christ) and discipling that includes both word (instruction) and deed

(showing how to live and minister as a disciple).

The third challenge that this chapter addresses is the meaning of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. I consider several primary interpretations concerning to whom this phrase refers: Gentiles only, both Jews and Gentiles, or people groups (as well as the role of *tertium genus* in understanding the commission). A lexical and syntactical examination of the phrase results in the conclusion that the target group of the commission is all people groups, including both Jews and Gentiles. A brief examination of Matthew's narrative rhetoric reveals a literary artistry that depicts an outward-progressing mission to the Gentiles, but that also includes the Jews. Matthew's portrayal of the open-ended mission in chapter 10 indicates that the commission in 28:19-20 incorporates the Gentiles into a universal mission. The Great Commission, therefore, does not emphasize the creation of a *tertium genus*, but rather emphasizes the unitary nature of the people of God as followers of Christ who produce kingdom fruit (21:43). The universal mission centers on the authority of Christ, seeking to make disciples of people from all people groups so that they in turn may be replicating disciple-makers.

Bringing together the hermeneutic of chapter 2 with the conclusions of chapters 3 and 4, Matthew projects a world in front of the text in which the mandate given to the disciples continues forward until the return of Christ. He thus invites every disciple who reads the Gospel to submit to Jesus' command and go make disciples of all the nations. As chapter 3 states, every disciple has a role in making disciples, particularly through the function of the local church as God fulfills the Great Commission through the universal church. The task, therefore, is for each Christian to both evangelize and disciple, and the context of this disciple-making is all the nations.

Chapter 5 draws from the analyses and conclusions of the preceding chapters to expound the thesis of chapter 1: preaching the Great Commission

necessitates exhorting every believer in the congregation to go and engage intentionally in both evangelism and discipling less mature believers among all the nations of the earth. In order to explain the application of the passage, I utilize Kuruvilla's concepts of exemplification (an application that flows out of the transhistorical intention) and significance (a way to carry out an exemplification). For each interpretive issue, I provide a brief discussion of how the preacher may explain it to the congregation, as well as exemplifications or significances where appropriate. Although the dissertation individually addresses the major interpretive challenges to *πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*, I argue that the full picture of application for this passage may only be viewed through understanding the command holistically. Therefore, understanding the application of this imperative requires bringing together all of the interpretive and applicational elements into a cohesive whole.

In summary, preaching that is faithful to the transhistorical intention of this passage requires the preacher to exhort every hearer who is in the audience to make disciples of all the nations. He must urge them to go intentionally to the lost and evangelize them, as well as go to and disciple the less spiritually mature through a word-deed discipling that guides the person toward growth in Christ. The context of this disciple-making is both “here and there,” meaning that it should occur in one's own context and among the nations. J. D. Greear, using the language of calling, is, therefore, correct in stating, “The question is not if you are called. The only question is where.”¹ Preaching this passage thus requires the preacher to urge the congregation to consider where the primary location of their disciple-making will occur—either in their context or among the nations. The individual in the audience

¹J. D. Greear, “Go, Send, or Disobey,” video of sermon (Indianapolis: Cross Conference, December 2016), accessed July 21, 2017, <http://crossforthenations.org/media/2017/01/go-send-or-disobey/>.

must make this decision based on the complex factors of his or her life circumstances, giftedness, and God's leading. However, every follower of Christ has the responsibility to participate in making disciples among the nations, if not directly by going then at minimum indirectly through prayer and giving. Sermonic application of the Great Commission, therefore, follows the transhistorical intention of the text by urging the congregation to go make disciples of all the nations—both here and there.

Suggestions for Additional Study

The delimitations of this study on the preaching of the Great Commission suggest several areas of further research. First, the amount of material available in Matthean studies and the space limitations of this dissertation necessitated focusing only on a small portion of the passage: Jesus' command to make disciples of all the nations. Homiletical scholarship would benefit from an examination of the world in front of the text for the entire pericope (28:16-20). Such a study would include analysis of several additional interpretive issues and their concomitant impact on application: the doubt of the disciples, the role of the mountain in Matthew's writing, Jesus' authority, the relationship of the participles βαπτίζοντες and διδάσκοντες to the individual's responsibility, and the role of Jesus' promised presence in disciple-making. Examination of Matthew's narrative rhetoric concerning each of these issues would undoubtedly help to shed light on and further refine our understanding of not only the overall purpose of the commission, but also its application.

Second, since the subject of this dissertation is sermonic application of the Matthean commission, scholarship for preaching about missional engagement would benefit from examining the other New Testament commissioning passages (Mk 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-47; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8). Each of these books present a

nanced, complementary picture of the disciples and mission. Through examining the world in front of the text, what would be the specific applicational emphases of these passages, and how would preaching these texts compare with preaching the Matthean commission? Applying the hermeneutic from chapter 2 would provide a beneficial addition to understanding the sermonic application for these passages.

Third, to my knowledge, no one has written a treatment of preaching the Greek participle, especially the participle of attendant circumstances. The semantics of the Greek participle are quite complex, and their pragmatic function in the text often are similarly difficult to discern. Many of the errors in contemporary preaching of the Great Commission passage are a result of the difficulty of transferring the meaning and semantics of the participle to application in a sermon. Both homiletics and Greek scholarship would benefit from an in-depth treatment of the relationship between the participle of attendant circumstances and the applicational implications for the contemporary preacher or reader.

Preaching the Great Commission

For the past two hundred years, the Great Commission pericope has been a key passage in understanding the mission of the church. Rightfully, many have viewed it as the marching orders for the church, for the mission that Jesus gave to the disciples extends forward from them to all who would follow after him. Every Christian has the mandate to go make disciples of the nations, and this commission remains in effect until Christ returns. From every preacher who steps into the pulpit to preach this passage, the charge must ring forth clearly and boldly—the crucified Christ is the resurrected king who sends his people forth with the mission to make disciples of all the nations. May God grant that this dissertation would serve in some small way to aid preachers in exhorting their congregations to obey the commission of Christ to go make disciples—both where they are and among all the nations.

APPENDIX

GO MAKE DISCIPLES

We come to one of the most well-known passages in the New Testament—the Great Commission in Matthew 28.¹ If you have been in an evangelical church for much time, you have undoubtedly encountered this passage. You have heard it in sermons, heard it in Sunday school, and heard it in the context of missions—and rightfully so. Some have called this passage the marching orders for the church. It is Jesus’ last words to the disciples, his final command to them.

Although many could probably quote the passage, I want you to hear it afresh. Sometimes a well-known passage becomes so familiar that we stop listening to it. It can become so common that we almost tune out its message. As you listen to these verses, hear the words of Jesus through the ears of the disciples, and hear Jesus’ command in the context of your own life.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:16-20).

These verses are the final words from Jesus to the disciples in Matthew,

¹The reader should note several caveats about this sermon on the Great Commission pericope. First, I have written it as much for the ear as for the eye. The style is more colloquial to represent the content of a sermon rather than formal academic writing. Second, the sermon includes application that is specific to my current church, such as a class on discipling and church planting in Canada. Third, this sermon represents one way to organize and apply the content discussed throughout the dissertation. Certainly, a preacher could organize the sermon or give additional emphases while remaining true to the intended meaning and application of the biblical text; my attempt, however, is to articulate the application described in chapters 3-6 in a way that describes the ongoing normativity for every believer to make disciples of all the nations.

but they are also the final command given to *us*. It is a charge to go make disciples, a command for the gospel to go forth to all the nations, and a commission for everyone who follows Christ. My aim today is for you to hear the words of Christ in this passage and step out in obedience to go make disciples. First, notice that Christ sends us by his authority.

Christ Sends Us by His Authority

This passage occurs shortly after Jesus has risen from the grave. Matthew tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (probably Mary the mother of James and Joseph from 27:56) went to the tomb and found that Jesus had risen. As they left to go inform the disciples, Jesus appeared to them and told them to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee (28:10). Here is where we pick up in the narrative. Jesus, who they thought was dead, has risen. He had evidently specified a certain mountain, so the disciples go to meet him there.

What we see next is both expected and surprising. Matthew tells us that the disciples worshiped Jesus, which is what we would expect. The word used here for “worship” means to prostrate oneself, so the disciples bow down before the risen Jesus. We read about this reaction and we say, “Yes, bowing before Jesus and worshiping him makes sense. He died on the cross and rose again. He is the risen Son of God, so of course they would bow before him!”

However, Matthew throws in a detail that we do not expect—some of the disciples doubted. Some scholars look at this passage and suggest that more people than the disciples must have been there, because surely the eleven would not doubt. How could they? Jesus is alive, so all he said must be true. He must be the Messiah, the Son of God. Despite the suggestion that others were there, I do not believe that Matthew means that other men or women were present; he is very intentional to mention the eleven, which indicates that probably these were the only disciples with

Jesus when he gave the Great Commission. How could some of them doubt?

The word that is used here for doubt often has the idea of hesitation or uncertainty. Matthew is not indicating that the disciples did not believe who Jesus is or that he had risen, but some were uncertain about how to respond. Put yourself in their shoes. The man with whom you have been traveling has been crucified as a criminal, entombed for three days, and now stands in front of you alive again. You can imagine how shocking and intense this scene must be for them. As some of the disciples fall down before Jesus, others hesitate, uncertain how to respond.

We have to wonder, “Why did Matthew include their hesitation?” Of course, the answer is because it happened. However, Matthew did not have to include this part of the story. By mentioning their hesitation, he is showing us something we need to remember, which is that our following Jesus is often very imperfect. These men had seen Jesus, heard him teach, and watched as he performed miracle after miracle before them. Yet, even when they saw him risen from the dead, some still struggled to know how to respond. This small detail in the story is a major encouragement to me, because it reminds me that God uses imperfect people for his purposes. You and I are like these disciples. We struggle, fail, and often are slow to understand. Church, understand this truth—God uses those who are imperfect, struggle, and slow to understand to carry out his perfect plans.

Notice next how Jesus addresses the disciples by declaring that all authority has been given to him. Do you remember somewhere else in Scripture that uses the phrase “heaven and earth?” My mind immediately turns to Genesis 1:1 where we read, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Why does Genesis begin this way? It shows that God created everything; all that exists, whether on earth or in heaven, has been created by him. Jesus’ statement to the disciples has the same idea. He has an all-encompassing authority over the entire universe. As the Son of God, he has accomplished the mission the Father sent him to

carry out, and now he reigns supreme over all of creation.

Matthew does not record Jesus' saying anything to the disciples prior to his declaration of his authority. We have to ask ourselves, "Why is this the first thing he says? Why does he not greet them first?" The reason is because the disciples have been slow to understand. They did not recognize who Jesus is until Matthew 16 when Peter confessed that he is the Messiah. Yet, even after recognizing who he is, all the disciples fled when he was arrested. Even now, some of them have hesitated, uncertain as to how they should respond to Jesus.

The disciples needed to hear about the authority of Jesus. They had seen everything and everyone try to have authority over Jesus: the Jews, the Roman leaders, and even death itself. They needed to understand that he reigns over all things and that his authority is unsurpassable—and so do we. Most of us, at least intellectually, know and believe that Jesus has all authority. If I asked you if Jesus is sovereign and if he has authority over your life, I have no doubt that most would answer, "Yes. Of course." But knowing this truth in our minds and living according to it are two different realities. If Jesus has all authority, then he has authority *over everything*. As one pastor said, "My friends, the implications of that are staggering."²

If Jesus has all authority, then he reigns over everything in the created order. Nothing happens and nothing exists over which he is not supreme and in control—and that includes our lives. His universal authority means that he has the right over every aspect of your lives: your time, marriage, children, retirement, money, priorities—everything. Again, in our minds we know this truth. Most of us probably do not say, "Well, Jesus cannot have authority over this part of my life. This part is mine." No, in our minds we know that he reigns supreme. Although we

²J. Ligon Duncan, "The Great Commission," transcript of sermon (Jackson, MS: First Presbyterian Church, March 26, 2000), accessed August 7, 2015, <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/the-great-commission>.

believe this theologically, we probably do not live this way in every facet of our lives.

All of us, in one way or another, understand what it means to live under authority. Whether the authority is from a boss, a parent, or some other figure, everyone lives under the authority of another person. Sometimes those authorities are kind and benevolent; other times they are nothing but frustration. When I was nineteen, I spent the summer after my freshman year of college working at a car wash. A song from the 1970's called the "Car Wash" makes the job sound like it could be a fun way to spend the summer. No matter how upbeat that song sounds, working at the car wash was miserable. The heat was blazing, I had to vacuum cars on the hot concrete, and it was not the most prestigious job, as you can imagine. To make matters worse, the managers of this car wash were never going to be voted boss of the year. They did not show concern for the employees, their only priority was making the most money the easiest way, and they abused what little power they had. However, they were in charge, so I did what they said, but only so I could receive my weekly paycheck.

The authority of Jesus is not like the authority of the managers at that carwash or like any other boss, leader, or figure in this world. The authority of Jesus is the authority of the king who not only created the universe, but became a man and died so that rebellious sinners might be forgiven and live for eternity with him in heaven. Think about what he did—the Son of God in love came to those who rejected him to die for them and give them life with him forever. Matthew is not describing the kind of authority of a boss you begrudgingly work for—he is showing us the authority of the one who demonstrated more love to us than we can ever fully understand. This Jesus who died for us also reigns over us. And when we grasp the depth of his love, what he accomplished for us, and how undeserving we are, the only response that makes sense is to submit to him joyfully in whatever he commands. That is the response that we need to him now, because just as Jesus

came on mission, so now he sends us on mission.

Christ Sends Us to Make Disciples

Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (28:19). The “therefore” tells us why we go make disciples. Because of Jesus’ authority over all things, we follow him in the mission that he commands. His supremacy and authority drive us forward in joyful obedience to the one who died for us.

I want us to pause for a moment to think about what Jesus says in this verse and ask ourselves a question: “Is this command for me?” This question may seem silly, but it is critical that we answer it correctly. For much of the past two thousand years, many Christians have believed that what Jesus says here was only for the disciples. Others have said that it is only for ministers. However, Matthew is not only recording Jesus’ command to the disciples, he wants us to hear this command as if it were spoken to us. All throughout this Gospel, Matthew is painting a portrait of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. When Jesus teaches the disciples, Matthew is writing in such a way that he wants us to hear Jesus’ teaching. If you read Jesus’ teaching closely throughout this Gospel, you will notice that often he begins by speaking in the second person to the disciples. However, as his teaching continues, he usually switches to the third person, describing discipleship in a way that applies to anyone who follows him. Matthew wants us to hear Jesus’ teaching about being a disciple through the ears of these disciples. Matthew does not intend for these final words that Jesus speaks to be the end of the book, so to speak. Rather, they are a new beginning. Jesus gives the disciples a command that continues forward for every follower of Christ until he returns. That command is to make disciples of all the nations until the end of the age, which means his return.

As you hear this command from Jesus, therefore, do not merely listen to words that you have heard or read a hundred times before. Instead, hear Jesus

speaking to you. Hear that the risen savior who has all authority speaks these words to *you*: “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (28:19).

Before we dig into the full picture of what the Great Commission entails, we need to understand the grammar of this passage. The Great Commission in 28:19-20 has one verb that is the primary command and three participles that explain how to carry out the commission: go, baptizing, and teaching. The imperative is one word that we translate “make disciples,” which is the heart of what Jesus commands. The mandate of Jesus for everyone who follows him is to make disciples.

If this is what Jesus tells us to do, then what is a disciple? A disciple is a follower of Jesus. In essence, we are talking about someone who has become a believer through hearing the gospel, repenting of sin, and trusting in Christ for salvation. If the Great Commission tells us to make disciples, then it means that we must tell people how to become followers of Jesus—it is a command for us to share the gospel, for no one can be a follower of Jesus without first hearing and believing.

We see this truth at the end of 28:19, for Jesus commands us to baptize disciples “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” We baptize those who trust in Christ as a public declaration that they are following Jesus. Baptism is a picture of someone who has died and risen to new life in Christ. John Piper explains the symbolism well: “If becoming a disciple means dying to your old life and walking in newness of life with Christ as Jesus taught, then it’s almost inevitable that the symbolic act of that conversion should come to signify a death and resurrection.”³ It is a picture of regeneration, of a person going from being spiritually dead to alive in Christ.

When Jesus says that we are to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and

³John Piper, “Go and Make Disciples, Baptizing Them . . .,” transcript of sermon (Minneapolis: Bethlehem Baptist Church, November 14, 1982), accessed July 31, 2017, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/go-and-make-disciples-baptizing-them>.

Holy Spirit, he reminds us that salvation is a work of every member of the Trinity. The Father planned salvation, the Son accomplishes all that we need for salvation, and the Holy Spirit applies salvation. Notice how this part of verse 19 impacts how we obey Jesus' command. We are to make disciples by proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers, but we do so knowing that the Father has from eternity planned for sinners to know him, Jesus has already made the way for sinners to be saved, and the Spirit makes people alive in Christ. This verse is good news for us as we think about the Great Commission. The work of salvation has been accomplished by the Triune God. Our job is to obey and make Christ known. We are to be faithful to proclaim the gospel, and God does the work of bringing someone to life in Christ.

However, evangelism is not the only aspect of making disciples. The word that Jesus uses here includes the idea of *discipling* someone who becomes a follower of Jesus. Notice what Jesus says in verse 20: disciple-making includes "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." The command is not only to make Christ known, but to teach those who become believers all that Jesus taught. Therefore, the picture of the Great Commission is *both* sharing the gospel and then guiding less mature believers toward maturity in Christ.

When the disciples heard Jesus tell them to make disciples, they would have immediately thought of how Jesus disciplined them. He called these men to follow him, and then he spent the next three years with them. During that time, Jesus taught them, walked beside them, ministered with them, and showed them all that they would need to go and make more disciples. Where were the disciples when Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7)? Where were they when Jesus healed and forgave the paralyzed man (Matt 9:1-8)? Where were they when Jesus explained how to handle sin in the church (Matt 18)? Throughout the gospels, we see Jesus with the disciples, teaching them and showing them what kingdom living and discipleship looks like in daily life. The point is that Jesus shows through his

ministry with the disciples that making disciples is not a one-time conversation. It is not a class. It involves walking with someone over time to help that person grow toward maturity in Christ.

From what I have observed, most of us have not experienced this kind of discipling. I was blessed to have someone walk beside me for several years to teach me and guide me toward growth in Christ. When I was sixteen years old, God did a powerful work of grace in my life. I had been a fairly nominal Christian, attending church regularly, but not living in close fellowship with the Lord. However, shortly after I turned 16, I went to a weekend youth retreat in which God dramatically changed me. Terry, my youth minister at that time, was at the retreat and noticed how God was working in my life. For the next three years, Terry spent countless hours discipling me. Most of this process was very simple—we prayed, talked about Scripture, and spent time together. Sometimes the way he disciplined me was more organized, such as the times we read books and talked about them. At other times, I learned simply by watching how he lived, ministered, and loved the Lord. The point is that he showed me how to follow Christ both by example and teaching.

This kind of disciple-making can happen in many different ways. It could include regularly meeting with someone to read and discuss Scripture together. It might involve intentionally walking alongside a new convert to help him or her learn how to live as a follower of Christ. It could include meeting a co-worker every week for coffee and prayer so you can help this person understand how to grow in Christ. The point is that we are intentionally to invest our lives in others so that they might grow to become mature followers of Christ.

The Great Commission gives us a picture of disciples who make disciples. It describes a process of replication in which we make Christ known, unbelievers become followers of Christ, those new Christians are baptized into the local church as a declaration of their faith in Christ, and then we disciple them so that they can

go make disciples. We are to make disciples who then make disciples who then also make disciples. These are the marching orders from Christ—make disciples. My fear, however, is that we all too often give our time and attention to religious activity rather than kingdom productivity. Is it possible for some of us to have been in the church for years, maybe decades, and have never made a disciple? Jesus never commanded us to be baptized, join the church, and sit. The Great Commission that has been given to all of us is to make disciples, so the business that we are to be about is going and making disciples.

Christ Sends Us to the Nations

Before we consider more specifically how we make disciples, we first need to notice where Jesus commands his disciples to carry out this mission—all the nations. “Nations” here does not mean geo-political countries in our modern idea of nations. Instead, it refers to ethnic groups or people groups (the Greek word is *ἔθνη*, which is related to our modern term “ethnic”). Scholars debate whether Jesus means all nations, including Jews and Gentiles, or if he refers only to Gentiles.

As we look at the Gospel of Matthew, we see clearly that Matthew wants us to understand that the message of the kingdom is to be expanding outward. From the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew identifies Jesus as “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1). He is the true king, and he fulfills the promise to Abraham. In Genesis 12, God told Abraham that all the earth would be blessed through him. The coming of the Messiah is the means for that blessing, for as the message of Christ goes outward from Israel, all the nations are to hear the good news. Ultimately, Revelation shows that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will worship God (Rev 7:9). However, Matthew does not want us to read his Gospel as only including a mission to the Gentiles. In chapter 10, he describes a mission to the Jews, but just as in chapter 28, he presents that mission as open-ended. What

Matthew is doing, therefore, is showing in the Great Commission that both these missions come together into one objective, which is to make disciples of all peoples, whether Jew or Gentile.

At first, understanding whether “nations” includes Jews and Gentiles may not seem to matter. However, the practical implications are huge. Jesus was telling the disciples to continue making disciples among the Jews *and* to go out to the nations to make disciples there also. In other words, their disciple-making was to occur both among their own people group (many of whom had already heard of Jesus) and to other people groups (who had not heard the gospel).

The bottom line for us is that obedience to the Great Commission means that the risen Lord commands us to make disciples here and there—both where we live and among the nations. The mission to which God has called you is to make disciples both where you are and to all the peoples of the earth. The commission is not an either/or, but a both/and.

David Platt, the president of the International Mission Board, preached a sermon on this passage when he was the pastor of the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. He told his congregation,

Here is the biblical truth, and I pray that you are convinced of this in your heart. The biblical truth, you were created. You, not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you, you were created to impact Birmingham and all nations for the glory of Christ. It's not an either or. We take this missions thing and think, “Well, I am going to stay in Birmingham, other people will go over there.” No, it's a both and. We are involved in a global mission. All of us created to impact Birmingham and all nations for the glory of Christ.⁴

The same is true for every follower of Christ. God did not create you only for where you live. He created you to impact where you live *and* the nations for his glory.

The Great Commission is a mandate for the message of Christ to go forth

⁴David Platt, “The Christ-Directed Mission,” transcript of sermon (Birmingham, AL: Church at Brook Hills, March 12, 2006), accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.radical.net/sermons/sermons/a-christ-directed-mission/>.

to all the nations. However, when we consider the statistics, we see that people in many nations have little or no access to the gospel. Missiologists identify 11,747 people groups in the world today. Of those, 7,030 have a population that is less than 2% evangelical. More than three thousand people groups are unreached and unengaged, meaning that no one is taking the gospel to them.⁵ More than three billion people live in people groups that have a population that is less than 2% evangelical.⁶ We must not overlook these statistics and the individuals they represent—billions of people live in a context in which they are unlikely to hear the gospel. The need is immense, and the command still stands—just as Jesus told the eleven disciples to make disciples among all the nations, so also he commands us.

At the same time, the need here is also great. The United States has a population of 325 million, but only 26% of the people claim to be evangelical. Even if all of that 26% consists of true believers, nearly 250 million people in the United States are outside of Christ.⁷ Recently I went with a few church members to a local car show to share the gospel. In the hour that we were there, we met two people who had not heard of Jesus and another who had never heard the gospel. Even in one of the most church-ed regions of the United States, many are without the message of Christ, and countless thousands or even millions more need discipling. The task remains—Christ sends us to the nations, both where we are and among all the nations of the world.

The risen Lord of the universe commands us just as he did the disciples to go make disciples of all the nations. The full authority of our Lord who created all

⁵“Global Status of Evangelical Christianity,” Global Research, International Mission Board, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://public.imb.org/globalresearch/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁶“Global Statistics,” Joshua Project, accessed July 19, 2017, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/statistics.

⁷Ibid.

and who conquered sin and death sends us on mission for his glory. But this mission is not a command that demands begrudging obedience—it is a call from our beloved king who died for us and leads us in his purposes. No greater love exists in the universe than what God has for us, and our loving response is to follow him wherever he leads and to do whatever he commands. No matter what the cost, obedience to our king is always worth it. Our king who died for us commands us to go make disciples, and the only question is where we will go in obedience.

In examining this passage, we have already noticed that disciple-making has both a “here” and a “there” aspect. God did not create us only to impact where we live for his glory, but also to reach the nations. The question remains, however, of *how* we do both. First, we need to recognize that the Great Commission does not mean that every Christian should sell all they have and move to an unreached area. To do so would mean that the gospel witness would entirely leave a location. Rather, God in his sovereignty has placed each believer in a particular location. Undoubtedly, therefore, every one of us has a responsibility to make disciples where we are. We proclaim Christ where we live and we seek to disciple less mature Christians so that they may become disciples who make disciples. Yet, at the same time, God’s purpose is for the fame of his name to spread through all the earth, and we have the indescribable honor of being part of his global disciple-making purposes.

There are at least three ways you can live here and be involved in reaching the nations. You can pray for the advancement of the gospel throughout the world. Doing so is part of what it means to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). Ultimately, the kingdom comes when Jesus returns, but now the expansion of the kingdom occurs through the gospel as men and women come to faith in Christ, follow him in obedience, and then in turn go make disciples. Pray for missionaries, pray for the advancement of the gospel, and

pray for people in nations around the world to come to faith in Christ. A helpful resource is the book *Operation World*, which lists all the people groups of the world and specific prayer needs for each. Use this book as a tool to help you pray for the nations.

Another way you can support making disciples of all nations is through giving. There are currently thousands of gospel-centered organizations that are seeking to take the message of Christ to areas that desperately need the gospel. By your giving, you contribute to the work of missionaries and pastors in very dark and unreached places throughout the world. One way of giving is through the annual Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, which uses 100% of all proceeds to support missionaries of the International Mission Board. Another way to give is by sponsoring a child through Compassion International. For \$38 a month, a child in desperate circumstances will receive education, food, healthcare, and the gospel; for many of these children, their only access to the good news of Christ is through this organization.

The third way we can engage in making disciples among the nations is by *going* to them. A way that some of us should go is through short term mission trips. If you have the physical ability, would you consider going for a week this year to one of our church plants in Canada? You will have the opportunity to make Christ known in the most unreached area of North America, where Montreal and Quebec City are less than 1% evangelical.

Although God does not call all Christians to leave their homes, he does call some to do so. Perhaps God is leading some in this church to move to a different nation for the advancement of the gospel. Discerning this kind of call is not easy, but if you have questions about what missions might involve or sense the Spirit's leading in this direction, please come talk to the pastors. We want to pray with you and discuss how you can discern where God is leading you.

Charles Spurgeon preached several sermons on the Great Commission when he was the pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. As he came to the end of the sermon one Sunday morning, he urged his congregation to consider the plight of the lost in dark areas around the world. He said,

The heathen are perishing; they are dying by the millions without Christ, and Christ's last command to us is "Go ye, teach all nations:" are you obeying it? "I cannot go," says one, "I have a family and many ties to bind me at home." My dear brother, then, I ask you, are you going as far as you can? Do you travel to the utmost length of the providential tether which has fastened you where you are?⁸

Church, I ask you and myself the same question: are we going the full extent to the nations that God's providence allows in our lives? If his calling and providence do not allow us to physically go, are we praying and giving to the utmost of our ability?

Christ Sends Us and Goes with Us

The Great Commission is the marching orders for the church, but it is a command that is not easy. Jesus told the disciples to *go* make disciples of all the nations. There has been a lot of debate about how best to understand the participle, but there is a reason that almost all English versions of the Bible translate it as "go"—it means go! Jesus was not telling the disciples to make disciples of the nations as they happened to go throughout their daily lives. He was commanding them to take the message of the gospel outward to other peoples who had not heard so that they might become disciples of Christ who then go on to make more disciples.

The same is true for us—Jesus commands us to *go* make disciples, meaning that we are intentionally to go to those who need to hear the gospel or be discipled and carry out his command. We have already seen that making disciples

⁸C. H. Spurgeon, "The Power of the Risen Saviour," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 20, *Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon during the Year 1874* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1981), 612.

includes both evangelism and discipling. Obedience to this command means that we intentionally go to those who need to hear the message of Christ and those who need to be discipled so that we can carry out Jesus' mandate to make disciples.

We need to ask ourselves two questions. First, who do you need to go to in order to share the gospel? God has sovereignly placed you where you are for the purpose of his glory. Who needs to hear the gospel where God has placed you? Think about those in your context: family members, co-workers, classmates, teammates, neighbors, or others in this area. Who will you go to this week to make Christ known? However, God may be working in the lives of some of you to draw you to mission other than where you live. Is he leading you to go to the nations?

Second, who will you disciple? If you have grown in Christ and walked in fellowship with him for years, who will you invest in so that you can help that person grow in Christ? Think of those who fall within your sphere of influence and consider how you might be able to walk with that person in Christ. If you are uncertain about how to go about discipling someone, I encourage you to sign up for our "Disciple" class that we offer; you will learn practical ways that you can intentionally invest in a new believer's life to help that person grow toward spiritual maturity. However, perhaps you look at your life and see that you are not spiritually mature enough to disciple another believer; you may need someone to disciple you. A good first step toward your becoming a disciple-maker may be to ask someone to disciple you. Having this kind of guidance would aid your growth in Christ so that you can later carry on this process with someone else.

The Great Commission is a daunting task. Jesus commands his followers to go make disciples of all the nations. Individually, every believer has a responsibility to make disciples. However, God uses believers in the local church who covenant together for the purpose of advancing the gospel, and he fulfills the Great Commission by means of the universal church. Each of us, therefore, has a

part to play in his overarching kingdom purpose of redeeming people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Knowing that God has sovereignly chosen to use us as part of his kingdom plan is humbling, exciting, and intimidating. Nearly every Christian is nervous about the idea of sharing their faith or discipling another believer. Perhaps nothing else is more intimidating to the average Christian than the thought of evangelism. The good news, however, is that the same one who issues the command is the one who promises to be with us as we go in obedience

When I was a boy, my father and I often would go camping and hunting. Many times our exploits took us far into the woods, literally miles from any road or other person. I remember more than one instance when we got a vehicle stuck in mud when no one was around and with no way to get someone to help us. I remember walking with him through the woods as we went hunting, going over one hill and then another as we walked through the forests of eastern Kentucky. One thing I never remember, though, is being afraid. Not one time in all the adventures that I had with my father do I remember being scared, because my father was with me. I knew that no matter what happened, he would take care of me and make everything right.

The Great Commission is the marching orders for the church in which our king sends us on a mission that stretches from where we are to the ends of the earth. Our king, however, does not send us alone. He goes with us as we make disciples where we are. He goes with us as we follow him in obedience to other nations. He never leaves his people as he upholds the church and propels the gospel forward to all the world. If you are in Christ, you have everything you need for following the king in obedience. You have the Word which does the work, the Spirit who empowers, the Father who ordains, and the Son who accomplished salvation and goes with you.

Conclusion

A pastor named S. M. Lockridge preached a sermon entitled “That’s My King.” Throughout this message, he describes who Jesus is and repeats the refrain, “That’s my king.” At the end of the sermon, he says, “The Pharisees couldn’t stand him, but they found out they couldn’t stop him. Pilate couldn’t find any fault in him. Herod couldn’t kill him. Death couldn’t handle him. The grave couldn’t hold him. That’s my king!”⁹

That unstoppable king is the same king who stood before the disciples and said, “Go make disciples of all the nations.” That same king who sent the disciples is the same king who sends his followers today. Not only does he send, he goes with us and provides everything that is needed for the advancement of the gospel.

For those who hear this message but are not followers of Christ, the response is simple—turn to him in repentance and faith. He is the king, and he paid the penalty of sin by his sacrificial death on the cross. If you do not know Christ, turn from your sin and trust him. Submitting to him as Lord is how you need to respond to the God who created you and died so that your sins may be forgiven.

For those who are followers of Christ, the command is straightforward—go make disciples of all the nations. The context of where that happens is part of God’s supernatural work in your life through the leading of the Spirit and how he orchestrates the circumstances of your life. Will you honestly and sincerely ask God where he wants you to make disciples? Will you say to him that you will go wherever he leads to obey his command? For many, obedience will mean sharing the gospel and discipling others where you currently live. For some, obedience may entail following his leading to somewhere different to reach the nations for his glory.

⁹S. M. Lockridge, “That’s My King,” audio of sermon (San Diego, CA: Calvary Baptist Church, n.d.), accessed August 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BhI4JKACUs>.

Wherever he leads, let us go and make disciples, that our king will be glorified here and around the world.

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ABSTRACT

GO MAKE DISCIPLES: SERMONIC APPLICATION OF THE IMPERATIVE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

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This dissertation argues in light of a careful hermeneutic of application that preaching the Great Commission necessitates exhorting every believer in the congregation to go and engage intentionally in both evangelism and discipling less mature believers among all the nations of the earth. Chapter 1 states the thesis and explains the need for this study.

Chapter 2 establishes the hermeneutic of application used in the dissertation. Rather than principlization, this chapter argues for the advantageous use of Abraham Kuruvilla's conceptualization of the world in front of the text for determining sermonic application.

Chapter 3 begins the interpretive analysis of verse 19 by attempting to answer the question of for whom the Great Commission is intended. After summarizing five main views, the chapter argues that Matthew intends the imperative to apply to every believer; this conclusion derives not only from interpretation of the pericope, but also from Matthew's overall narrative and rhetorical purpose in the gospel.

Chapter 4 seeks to answer three remaining exegetical decisions which are necessary before determining contemporary application: what Matthew means by "make disciples," the best translation of *πορευθέντες*, and the meaning of *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. Using linguistic analysis, rhetorical criticism, and narrative criticism, the

chapter concludes that Matthew's conceptualization of "make disciples" involves both evangelism and discipling less mature believers, *πορευθέντες* has an imperatival function, and *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* includes both Jews and Gentiles.

Chapter 5 takes the conclusions drawn from chapters 3 and 4 to explain the transhistorical intentions and contemporary exemplifications that a preacher may extrapolate from Matthew's intended meaning. The imperative is for every believer, obedience requires intentionality, disciple-making includes both evangelism and discipling less mature believers, and the context is both one's community and the nations.

The final chapter summarizes the preceding material and offers a brief explanation of how a preacher can apply this passage in a sermon. It also suggests additional lines of inquiry for further study of preaching the pericope. In order to further illustrate the homiletical implications of the conclusions of this dissertation, an appendix provides a sample sermon of Matthew 28:16-20.

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