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Preface

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave every Christian in every century a commission with eternal significance:

...“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Our calling is very clear: to “make disciples.” This is the greatest work in which to invest our lives! To see spiritual interest awaken, new birth come forth, and then foster to steady steps toward maturity in Christ is Christ’s mandate to us...but it is a mandate wrought with privilege and true joy.

Sadly, in this century we have somewhat lost the meaning of “disciple” and “discipleship.” Churches talk about discipleship. We even have discipleship programs...but there exists a vague notion of what a “disciple” is and little tangible evidence that we are “making disciples.” This is especially true among the children’s programs of the church. Materials are often aimed at conversion, a worthy and necessary part of discipleship, but an inadequate fulfillment of Jesus’ commission to us.

In his book, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, Chap Bettis makes this helpful observation:

Disciple means learner, a person who wanted to learn from and take on the pattern of his rabbi. Interestingly the word Christian only occurs three times in the New Testament, while the word disciple occurs 269 times. Unfortunately, today the word Christian has the connotation of a status our children hold, a card they carry, disconnected from their daily activities. Disciple, on the other hand, implies a lifelong commitment to seek after, learn from, and stay close to our rabbi, Jesus.³

³ Chap Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent: A Comprehensive Guidebook for Raising Your Children to Love and Follow Jesus Christ*. (Cumberland, Rhode Island: Diamond Hill Publishing, 2016), 7.

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Too often perhaps, we encourage our children to be “Christian” and fall short of encouraging lifelong, true discipleship. Are we raising disciples who stand firm in the face of ridicule, temptation, or persecution? Do our children daily, consciously live to bring glory to Jesus Christ, ignoring the pull to be conformed to this world? Can we say that our churches are raising a generation that is faithful to the Word, “rightly handling the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), unwavering in its commitment to defend the gospel? Will this generation be committed to please God by their words, actions, and heart attitudes, brokenly confessing when they fail to do so? In short, will they be true disciples, or merely identify themselves as “Christian” in name?

Though we must preach and teach the gospel faithfully and fully, which is the primary means by which the Holy Spirit converts the soul, we must aim beyond conversion. Jesus challenges us in the Great Commission to make disciples, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). The word “all” makes this sound like a daunting task, but even more daunting is the word “observe.” It implies that a person is not only taught the truth but that he agrees with, embraces, and lives out the teaching—involving the mind, the heart, and the will. This is the ideal and goal of a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

This booklet is an attempt to help churches and parents fulfill Jesus’ Great Commission by contemplating the wisdom of the past. For centuries, the church has disciplined the next generation through the use of catechetical or doctrinal teaching, often but not always employing the use of a catechism. However, we have departed from this mode of instruction...and in many ways, we have departed from any form of intentional instruction. Was this a good departure? Is catechizing out of date, or is it a timeless, effective tool for teaching eternal truths? In order to look forward, we must look at the past.