

## Intro; the Great Commission, Mt 28:19-20: Since “Baptism” Is Not an “Attendant Circumstance” Participle It Is Not a Mandate

### BAPTISM: Controversies & Schisms

#### I. Introduction

This week we will take up a study of water baptism, a ritual that has been an extremely divisive doctrine throughout the history of the Church Age. The reasons for its practice vary with virtually every denomination of Protestant Christianity.

The manner of performing the ritual also varies. Some prefer **aspersion** or sprinkling the individual with water, others opt for **affusion** or pouring, and still others require total **immersion**.

Some groups claim that baptism is necessary for salvation while others claim that one’s sins are not forgiven until he is baptized. Catholic doctrine maintains that if an infant dies before he is baptized he cannot enter into heaven but is instead retained in Limbo, a place where the souls of all those without baptism are assigned.

The Baptists require baptism for membership. Believers in Jesus Christ are allowed to attend services but they cannot join the church unless they submit to baptism by immersion.

There are varied positions taken on the significance of baptism. There are those who view it as a **sacrament** through which sins are forgiven. The Catholics claim that this ritual must be administered by the church for it to be efficacious while Lutherans contend that the faith expressed by the individual is the deciding factor.

Some denominations believe that salvation is not dependent upon baptism but that the ritual is a “**sign of God’s covenant**” to save the elect. Through this covenant God promises forgiveness of sins and regeneration to the elect alone and baptism is the means by which the elect person enters into this covenant.

There is also the **symbolic** view which holds that baptism is an outward profession of an inner conversion and is therefore a ritual that commemorates publicly the believer’s identification with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

It is this last position that is biblically sound but needs clarification since both this church and the one I pastor assert that water baptism was deemphasized during the development of the New Testament epistles.

Therefore the purpose of this study is to examine the origin of the ritual, the various reasons for its practice, and some of its categories. In doing so we will establish from Scripture our position that contends there is no longer a need for the practice of water baptism in the churches but that it is not wrong to do so if the doctrine it illustrates is understood by the candidate.

This conclusion is controversial because all mainline Protestant denominations as well as the Catholic Church include this ritual among the sacerdotal functions of their clergy and most, to one degree or another, make it a requirement for membership in their congregations, some even attach it to their doctrine of salvation.

The key passage that these churches cite as the biblical requirement for practicing this ritual is Matthew 28:19-20, also known as the Great Commission.

## II. The Great Commission

**Matthew 28:19** - “Go [ orist active participle of πορεύομαι, *poreuomai*: the action of “going” precedes the action of the main verb ] therefore and [ καί, kai: connects the attendant- circumstance participle with the main verb ] make disciples [ orist active imperative of the main verb μαθητεύω, *mathēteuō*: informal, conversational teaching that wins followers to the message of the Gospel ] of all the nations [ not to the Jews only but to all ], baptizing [ present active participle of βαπτίζω, *baptizō*: to immerse in water ] them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

**v. 20** - teaching [ present active participle of διδάσκω, *didaskō*: formal academic instruction ] them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” [NASB]

1. This is the Great Commission. It is proclaimed by Jesus Christ to the eleven disciples who meet him on the day of the resurrection on a mountain near Galilee. These eleven are permanent rank disciples who are now on the promotion list for permanent rank apostles. They are given the authority to teach mystery doctrine before the completion of the canon of Scripture.
2. The Commission begins with our Lord’s mandate to the eleven to take the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations. When anyone, anywhere, responds positively to the message that Jesus is Savior he will become a disciple, which simply means a “follower or believer in Jesus Christ.”
3. In this passage there is one imperative mood and three participles. The imperative is found in the main verb which is the orist active imperative of μαθητεύω, *mathēteuō*, “to make disciples.” However, the mandate also includes the orist active participle of the verb “to go,” πορεύομαι, *poreuomai*.
4. The action of the orist participle precedes the action of the main verb. Therefore, the eleven disciples are ordered to first go into all nations and second, to make disciples.
5. The other two verbs are not associated with the main verb “to make disciples,” because they are not participles of *attendant circumstance*. These two verbs are the present active participles of βαπτίζω, *baptizō*, “to baptize” and of διδάσκω, *didaskō*, “to teach.”
6. To fully understand this passage it is important that we address the issue of *attendant circumstance* participles. Again, the verb “to go” is one of these while the verbs “to baptize” and “to teach” are not. The importance of this can be seen by defining the attendant circumstance participle and then applying this information to our passage. In the reference we are about to note I will insert from Matthew 28:19-20 the verbs that correspond to the definition provided by:

Wallace, Daniel B. “The Participle.” In *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 640-43:

### Attendant Circumstance

#### a. Definition

The attendant circumstance participle [ *poreuomai*: “to go” ] is used to communicate an action that, in some sense, is coordinate with the finite verb [ *mathēteuō*: to make disciples ]. It is dependent semantically because it cannot exist without the main verb. It is translated as a finite verb connected to the main verb by *and* [ *kai* ]. The participle then, in effect, “piggy-backs” on the mood of the main verb [ *imperative* ]. This usage is relatively common, but widely misunderstood.

#### b. Clarification

First, we are treating this participle as a *dependent* verbal participle because it never stands alone. That is, an attendant circumstance [ *poreuomai*: “to go” ] will always be related to a finite verb [ *mathēteuō*: to make disciples ]. (p. 640)

#### d. Structure and Semantics

##### 1) Structure

In the New Testament certain structural patterns emerge regarding the attendant circumstance participle [ *poreuomai*: “to go” ]. These are not absolute. We might, however, say that they follow a “90% rule.” That is to say, *all five of the following features occur in at least 90% of the instances of attendant circumstance*. The conclusion from this is that if these five features are *not* present, to label a participle as attendant circumstance needs strong corroborative evidence. The five features are:

- The tense of the participle is usually *aoist*. [True]
- The tense of the main verb is usually *aoist*. [True]
- The mood of the main verb is usually *imperative* [True] or *indicative*.
- The participle will *precede the main verb*—both in word order and time of event. [True]
- Attendant circumstance participles occur frequently in narrative literature [True], infrequently elsewhere. (pp. 641-42)

Some of the features are more central than others. Specifically, (1) all or almost all attendant circumstance participles are *aoist*; (2) almost all attendant circumstance participles come before the verb; (4) in narrative literature, in almost all of the *aoist* participle + *aoist imperative* constructions, the participle is attendant circumstance.

These first two features do not *necessitate* that a participle be attendant circumstance. But the fourth feature is stated to mean just this.

##### 2) Semantics

Two things should be noted about the semantics of this participle. First, the attendant circumstance participle [ *poreuomai*: “to go” ] has something of an *ingressive* force to it. That is, it is often used to introduce a new action or a shift in the narrative. (p. 642)

Second, ... *a greater emphasis is placed on the action of the main verb [ *mathēteuō*: to make disciples ] than on the participle [ *poreuomai*: “to go” ].* That is, the participle [ *poreuomai*: “to go” ] is something of a prerequisite before the action of the main verb [ *mathēteuō*: to make disciples ] can occur. (pp. 642-43)

7. From this we learn that in the Lord’s statement to the disciples He utilizes an attendant circumstance participle to begin his instructions. They cannot “make disciples” [ *mathēteuō* ] of all nations unless they first “go” [ *poreuomai* ].
8. The main verb is to “make disciples” which would be better translated “through preaching the Gospel make followers.” This verb is in the imperative mood and is therefore a command. The attendant circumstance participle of *poreuomai* “piggy-backs” on the mood of the main verb and is therefore an imperative as well.

9. So far we have two commands: (1) go and (2) recruit followers through the Gospel. But what of the other two participles in the context? If they too were attendant then we would have clear mandates to “baptize” and to “teach” in addition to “going” and “discipling.”
10. In Dr. Wallace’s grammar he addresses our passage as an illustration of the attendant circumstance participle and in so doing resolves the issue:

**Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 645:**

**Illustration**

Matthew 28:19-20, **Go** [**πορεύομαι, *poreuomai***], therefore, **and** make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching ...

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

Second, ... in Matthew, in particular, every other instance of the aorist participle of *poreuomai* followed by an aorist main verb (either indicative or imperative) is clearly attendant circumstance (Matthew 2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 17:27; 21:6; 22:15; 25:16; 26:14; 27:66; 28:7).

Third, we must first read this commission in its historical context, not from the perspective of a late twentieth-century reader. These apostles of the soon-to-be inaugurated church did not move from Jerusalem until after the martyrdom of Stephen. The reason for this reticence was due, in part at least, to their Jewish background. As Jews, they were ethnocentric in their evangelism (bringing prospective proselytes to Jerusalem); now as Christians, they were to be *ektocentric*, bringing the gospel to those who were non-Jews. In many ways, the book of Acts is a detailed account of how these apostles accomplished the command of Matt 28:19-20.

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

11. The editors of the *NET Bible* cite Dr. Wallace’s analysis in their “translator’s notes” to Matthew 28:19 along with an important additional comment:

***NET Bible*. (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 1790:**

As for the two participles that follow the main verb (*baptizō* and *didaskō*), according to Wallace these do not fit the normal pattern for attendant circumstance participles, since they are present participles following the main verb. However, some interpreters do see them as carrying additional imperative force in context. Others regard them as *means*, *manner*, or even *result*.

12. The first point from all this is that in the Great Commission the Lord clearly gives the apostles two commands: (1) go to all people, not just Jews, and (2) make them disciples, or followers, by means of the Gospel.
13. Secondly, it is also clear that the two participles “to baptize” and “to teach” are secondary components to the commandments “to go” and to “make disciples.” Why? Because unless a person responds to the Gospel baptism is unnecessary and teaching is impossible.

14. Therefore, the issue before the apostles was to go out indiscriminately to whoever would give them a hearing with the objective of recruiting followers of Jesus. This could only be accomplished by witnessing to them proclaiming Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and risen Savior. In other words the first step in *making* a follower is to present the Gospel.
15. Once a person believes then he *becomes* a follower either by *means* of certain resources, or in a *manner* that utilizes certain procedures, or as a *result* of the consequences of these things.
16. Those that will be evangelized *initially* by these apostles will be Jews and later Gentiles. The Jews who will be reached are involved in a religion that has demonstrated violent public hatred for Jesus as the Christ and categorical rejection of His message.
17. For Jews to become followers of Jesus they must separate themselves from Judaism and the legalistic mental attitude that drove them to insist that He be crucified. To do this they will be required to profess publicly their conversion through baptism followed by spiritual growth accomplished by submission to the teachings of the apostles.
18. Similarly, the Gentiles were involved in a Greco-Roman culture that stressed false gods and the deity of the Roman emperor. The Roman Pantheon housed twelve major gods that were worshipped throughout the empire to one degree or another. Emperors were usually deified by the Senate following their deaths. After worship of the emperor, citizens were allowed to then worship any of the gods they pleased.
19. Romans worshipped these gods in a variety of festivals but each was typically a reflection of the mother-son cult that was introduced by Lucifer at Babel and later adopted by the Catholic Church with its idolatrous Madonna-Christ Child bric-a-brac.
20. In addition to these there were household gods called Lares \lär' ēz\ and Penates \pa-nā' tēz\ which were the spirits of deceased family members who guarded the home and protected the family. The sanctuary for these "spirits" was usually in the vestibule of the home and called a *lararium* and every Roman household had one. Its absence in a Christian household indicated a major break with Roman religious tradition and culture.
21. The initial manner by which this break was announced was by water baptism followed by instruction in Christian theology by the apostles and others who became associated with the apostles.
22. This instruction began with the baptism ritual which was a visual aid designed to illustrate the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Immersion into the water taught the believer's identification with Christ in his deaths and burial while emersion out from the water illustrated the believer's identification with the Lord in His resurrection, ascension, and session.
23. These concepts are evident in the execution of the Lord's instructions, given in Matthew 28, throughout the book of Acts. However, as we have noted, these passages have been interpreted in a variety of ways that have resulted in a multiplicity of applications and associated controversial doctrines.
24. One of the most controversial is the interpretation of the first application of the baptismal ritual in the Church Age which is documented in Acts 2:38. The context of this verse is extremely important and will assist us in properly analyzing the ritual, its intended purpose, and its present status.