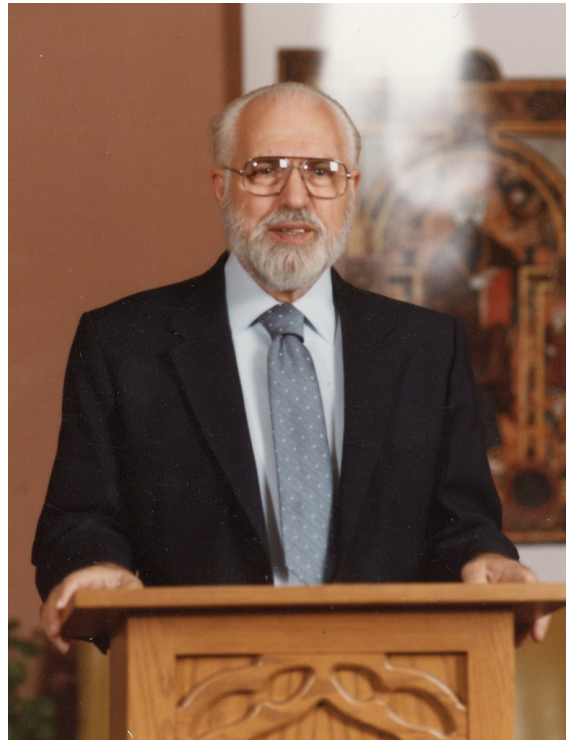


Transcripts of
**THE GREAT COMMISSION
and the SPIRIT**

A Lecture Series by R.J. Rushdoony



R.J. RUSHDOONY

(1916–2001)

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony (1916–2001), was a leading theologian, church/state expert, and author of numerous works on the application of Biblical law to society. He started the Chalcedon Foundation in 1965. His Institutes of Biblical Law (1973) began the contemporary theonomy movement which posits the validity of Biblical law as God's standard of obedience for all. He therefore saw God's law as the basis of the modern Christian response to the cultural decline, one he attributed to the church's false view of God's law being opposed to His grace. This broad Christian response he described as "Christian Reconstruction." He is credited with igniting the modern Christian school and homeschooling movements in the mid to late 20th century. He also traveled extensively lecturing and serving as an expert witness in numerous court cases regarding religious liberty. Many ministry and educational efforts that continue today, took their philosophical and Biblical roots from his lectures and books.

Learn more about R.J. Rushdoony by visiting: <https://chalcedon.edu/founder>

“Go Ye Therefore”

R.J. Rushdoony

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore...

One of the most neglected statements in the gospels is Matthew 28:17. The statement that “some doubted.” These were the eleven disciples. By this time they had seen the risen Christ repeatedly so it was not the resurrection that was now their doubt. Clearly, Jesus had risen from the dead. But was He the Christ? Was He the Messiah?

Luke tells us in Acts 1:6 that they had asked: “Lord wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” For them the Messiah had to be the one who restored freedom and royal power to Israel. The question in their minds, their source of doubt was this; ‘how could a resurrected man about to ascend into heaven restore an earthly kingdom to Israel? How would He overthrow Roman rule and how would He supplant a corrupt Sanhedrin?’

Our Lord does not answer this question. Instead, He issues marching orders. Universal and total power is His on earth and in heaven. As Paul later tells us, Jesus Christ is “...the blessed and only potentate, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” He is the world-Savior and Messiah. He is the cosmic Christ. His realm therefore cannot be limited to Israel, nor can it be circumscribed by Israel’s hope. The doubters had too limited a faith, too limited a hope. It was not their dream that the Messiah had come to accomplish, but God’s plan for His universal, or catholic kingdom. And this, Judea was not ready to accept.

In recent years, one Jewish writer has contrasted interest in what he calls the fossilized past as against interest in what he calls the living people in these words, and this is his statement, “Israel before the Bible!” John 11:50 tells us that Caiaphas, the high priest held to the same view saying it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perish not. Then and now, the issue is in our lives, our nations, whose will will it be; our will, or God’s will? Our nation, or Christ?

Since all power and authority over all things is given to Messiah Jesus, the disciples then, and we now, are commissioned to bring all things into Christ’s dominion. The answer to the disciples’ doubt; “how can this be done?” is a clear one. The disciples must do it! We must do it! “Go ye therefore!” This is a very central fact.

Instead of a wonder-working messiah, slaying all our enemies, the disciples, the believers are commissioned to disciple, to convert, to teach all nations. All too many churchmen are still today in the camp of the Pharisees. They expect the Christ to return and to set up a miraculous kingdom and before all the troubles and battles ensue to rapture them up into heaven. This is the church’s version of Phariseeism, and it is as wrong as the Jewish Phariseeism.

It is not enough therefore, to equate “go ye therefore,” with missionary zeal. Our Lord condemns false zeal strongly, declaring;

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.” 1

Strong language, spoken to the most devout people in all Israel. It is not enough to go forth. We must teach, or disciple all nations; “...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Some would limit this all things to the New Testament or to the recorded words of Jesus. To hold so is to go against our Lord’s very words;

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” 2

Again, this is strong language. I don’t know where people ever got the idea, certainly not from the New Testament, about “Jesus, meek and mild.” Amazingly, we do have people who deny that our Lord plainly upholds all of the Law. But of course, we also have some who deny that the Bible condemns homosexuality, such men are either blind or evil guides.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you;”

“All things.” The whole Word of God is to be taught to all nations. The answer to the question; “Lord wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” is that a restoration of all men and nations to Christ the King is commanded, and the burden is placed upon you. “Go ye therefore.”

This means bringing all men and nations to Christ as Savior, and making them working citizens of His kingdom by faithful obedience to His Law; the law of righteousness or justice, instead of waiting for the any-moment return of Jesus, the disciples were given as are we, a task of reconstruction and restoration, the duty of restoring God’s creation to God the Son. The atonement, whereby our sins are remitted or forgiven as the work of God the Son; He is therefore the Adam of the new humanity and also king of the New Creation. The task of restoration which began with His atoning work, continues with our restoration and then with our going, our going forth, with our reconstruction of all things by His Law-Word.

This is why the Church from the very early years described itself as ‘catholic’ or ‘universal.’ The term was used in writing, first of all about 110 AD, by Ignatius of Antioch. The way he uses the word ‘catholic’ makes clear that it was a familiar description of the Church. Therefore, it required no explanation by Ignatius. Vincent of Lérins said of the meaning of ‘Catholic,’ that it means that Christ’s body and realm include everything universally; Christ’s body and realm include everything universally.

“Go ye therefore.” Disciple all nations because I am the catholic King, the universal King of creation. This means that it is our duty to bring all things into Christ’s kingdom and dominion in subjection to His grace and Word. Paul tells us that this includes every imagination and thought so that our task requires;

“ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” 3

Evangelism is thus simply the necessary beginning of our Great Commission, not the sum total of it.

But this is definitely not all. A further task is set forth; "...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." "Go ye therefore." Baptize. This was the great sign of covenant membership. It replaced the circumcision of the covenant with Abraham, although very early Christians stressed their continuity with Abraham by circumcising their males as the seed of Abraham in Christ, and by baptizing them into Christ. They did both.

Baptism as a covenant sign means membership in the covenant. But how can a male child eight days old understand the gospel, understand the faith, that he was first in Israel circumcised and then in the Church baptized? And in either case, it's obvious that he cannot understand. In either case it is the grace and mercy of God that affects salvation. Man in his misguided and false zeal attributes too much power to himself. And this is wrong. He assumes the Lord's work depends on human effort. But our Lord, while commanding us; "go ye therefore," tells us that our total dependence must be on Him.

The disciples were all men of Israel. Infant male circumcision was a familiar fact to them. It was a witness to the sovereign and electing power of God. This is why the baptizing of all members of a family was a practice of the apostles. It was a witness to predestination, to God's sovereign grace. "Go ye therefore," in His power, knowing that it is not you, but God working in and through you and apart from you that will accomplish His purpose. And it is to be done "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," that is, in the power of the Trinity. But to invoke the name means little to modern man. To the apostles, it was the name of power, supernatural power. "Go ye therefore..." in the name, in the power.

The Sanhedrin therefore in Acts 5:28, 40 and so on, forbade the use of the name. To be baptized into the name of the Trinity is to be baptized into power. Go ye therefore in the power of the name, the name of Christ, the second person of the Trinity. The Church today argues about the mode of baptism, as though power rested in the form; whereas our Lord tells us the power is in the name.

There are many references to baptism stressing a variety of things, all true. It is clearly associated with salvation in I Peter 3:21. In Romans 6:1-11 it is compared to death and resurrection. It means incorporation into the new humanity of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:13. In adults, forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38, and other verses. It is also tied to a confession of faith, Acts 18:8 and a number of other verses. It means a total dependence on His grace and mercy. It requires of us the response of obedience, of faithfulness.

The Great Commission does not end here. It goes on to say, "...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." Our Lord ascends into Heaven and the disciples stand there looking upward. How were they to command the world with the king gone? How would a world which had crucified the king trust them to be a people of power? Or treat them as they sought to extend His dominion? This was a frightening question, a frightening mandate. "Go ye therefore," without me? Yes, He said, without me. "Go ye therefore," in the name. But what could they expect from men who killed Jesus the Messiah? Perhaps no king ever left a more bewildered army behind.

God's power would soon come to that army at Pentecost. Meanwhile, and always, there was the abiding promise of His presence. Later, Paul and his missionary fellowship declared to the believers;

"Let your conversation (or behavior) be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' So that we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.'" 4

If our life is governed by God's covenant and covenant faithfulness, we will then move in the power of His name, in the assurance of His presence, and in the confidence of His victory. "Go ye therefore," in the name.

J.S. Wright, in his analysis of the Great Commission, stresses among other things, two facts which are relevant here.

"The supreme authority of the one who commissions; baptism seals the contract and is to be, literally, into the name of the Trinity. It submerges into a new relationship with Father, Son and Spirit."

Wright's use of the word 'contract' instead of covenant is worth commenting on. While 'covenant' is the broader and clearer meaning, contract reminds us of an aspect of covenant we now often forget. A contract, and a covenant, a legal document; covenant is emphatically a legal fact and we neglect this to our peril. Baptism is a legal transaction whereby we acknowledge God's total ownership of us and of our children. Hannah's words in taking the young Samuel to Eli are relevant to baptism.

"Therefore also I have lent (or returned, or given) him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent (or given) to the LORD." 5

We were all given to God. We were baptized in the name. The presupposition of the Great Commission is that we are God's property, commanded by Him to be sent where He ordains. He promises to be with us always. He says our power does not depend on His physical presence, but we go in the power and in the name of Jesus Christ. "Go ye therefore."

And the Great Commission is an echo of an earlier commission. It is called great in contrast to the earlier one, to Joshua. And Joshua is told, go and wheresoever the soles of your feet shall tread, that ground shall be given unto you if ye go in my name and in my power. "Go ye therefore." And God shall bless you.

ENDNOTES:

1. Matthew 23:15
2. Matthew 5:17-20
3. 2 Corinthians 10:5
4. Hebrews 13:5-6
5. 1 Samuel 1:28

The Great Commission and the Spirit (2)

By My Spirit

R.J. Rushdoony

Before his ascension, our Lord commanded His disciples thus: tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be imbued with power from on high. John tells us that before Pentecost, when they received the gifts of the Spirit, our Lord gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit, Himself declaring;

“Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” 1

The missionary task of the Church cannot be truly understood apart from these words.

Our world is a fallen realm, its basic fact is sin. This sin is described in Genesis 3:1-5, the desire by the creature to be his own god and law, determining good and evil for himself. Man is thus a sinner, a revolutionist at war against almighty God. His life is one of rebellion against God and His Law, and man is incapable of making peace with God, because his very nature is now morally governed by his enmity to God. We are plainly told;

“For to be carnally minded (or the minding of the flesh or human nature) is death; but to be spiritually minded (or the minding of the spirit or the governing of the spirit) is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” 2

The contrast here is between our fallen human nature and our redeemed spirit-governed nature; between fallen man and the Holy Spirit in us. Our fallen nature is minded to death, but the minding of the Holy Spirit in us is to life, and to peace. Fallen humanity is at war with God. It rejects God’s law and cannot live under it. Therefore, fallen man cannot please God.

Our mission to this fallen humanity is to proclaim salvation through the remission of sins. Forgiveness in the Bible is not a personal, nor an emotional fact; it is a juridical act, a law-act. It has reference to a court of law; God’s court of law, whereby we are removed from the area of a death sentence into life. In that court, all men born of Adam are sentenced to death. There is no remission of sins without the death penalty, without the shedding of blood. In Hebrews 9:22 it is plainly stated;

“...without shedding of blood is no remission.”

Now the gift of the Holy Spirit is essentially related to this fact, the remission of sins. In John 20:23, when the gift of the Holy Spirit is given, our Lord says;

“...Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

This is not an executive privilege on the part of the Church, but a ministerial privilege, that is, to be in total faithfulness to the whole Word of God.

If the missionary work of the Church is separated from this fact, the remission of sins, it is both futile and evil. The power here conferred by the Lord and the Spirit is a ministerial power. The minister, evan-

gelist, teacher or missionary cannot alter the terms of remission; he can only administer them as the Lord's representative.

The first great proclamation of this fact came at the end of the first sermon and missionary proclamation, on the Day of Pentecost, when Peter declared;

"...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." 3

The place of baptism in this, we discussed in the morning. Here we see stressed repentance, an about-face, a change of direction in all our ways. The very meaning of the Greek word repentance indicates not a verbal profession, but a turning about, a change of direction. It is a radical reversal in our lives, a change from one way of life to another, from our autonomy, or self-law, to theonomy, or God's Law. The Gospel is gutted if repentance is dropped.

We cannot in faithfulness to God approach the sinner with the claim "God loves you." The sinner stands condemned in God's court of Law. He is an object of wrath, of judgment, not of love. To state otherwise is to pervert the Gospel. The sermon preached by Peter was an indictment of sinners and of sinning Israel. It was not an assurance that; "God loves you."

A missionary in Papua, according to Tim Vaughn, who is here, preaching for the first time to a tribe newly reached, cited their problem in Paul's words, first describing the Bible as God's message to them;

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." 4

At this point, says Tim, the tribal chief jumped up angrily, and confronting his men, demanded, "Which of you told this stranger about me?" And the missionary promptly of course, told him that these were God's words and God had the remedy.

The remission of sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Gospel. The power to proclaim this in truth and with the assurance of God's ratification is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Those who receive God's pardon through Christ, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift to the apostles is the gift also to all believers; the instructing, guiding power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Peter stressed the universality of this gift, it is to us and to our children. It is to as many as the Lord our God shall call. This is the qualification, the calling of our God.

God's election or predestination is clearly stated, and also the catholicity of His kingdom. In a time of discouragement, when Zerubbabel and others were overwhelmed with a sense of their helplessness against the immensity of their problems, God through Zechariah gave Zerubbabel a commission. This is the Word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying;

"Not by might (or by army) , nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of

small things?" 5

Zerubbabel had a task, together with others; the rebuilding of God's house. It was going slowly, and had suffered greatly by comparison to Solomon's Temple and to various pagan sanctuaries. It was a discouraging task. God however contradicts the common attitude through Zechariah. The future is not determined by the power of structures of this world. It comes not by might or literally by military army, nor by political power. The future is only governed by the Holy Spirit, by the Spirit of God; "...by my Spirit." Before an inconspicuous and seemingly insignificant man like Zerubbabel, the great mountain of adversity will be made a plain by God's grace. God will supply the strength through His Spirit, and all the obstacles will be conquered. The work shall be completed and the cornerstone set by God's grace. As TV Moore commented:

"Now, if the strength to do God's work comes from God, the weakness of man is no obstacle. For when he is weak, then is he strong. Zerubbabel may have had but a few visible resources, but the work was one that after all was to be completed by God, and not by man. And however feeble the Church might seem to be, there were more for her than against her." 6

In any and every sphere, whether it be in the Church or in the mission field, in politics or in economics, education and elsewhere, we must not put our trust in might or armies or money or in any of the humanistic varieties of power. Our trust must be in the Lord and His Spirit. Advance comes, He declares; "...by my Spirit."

We have a catholic (or universal) mission to all men and nations, to every sphere of life and thought, to all institutions and vocations. So great a task requires the greatness of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 22:16,17 we read;

"I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Our Lord here identifies Himself as both the root and the offspring of David, His creator and descendent. He is both God and man. He also declares Himself to be the; "...bright and morning star." This was an image, an ancient image, of world dominion. Our Lord, as He reminds us of our calling and all its battles, tells us also that the conclusion is His world dominion. Though we face the world without an army, and power, we do so in His Spirit, His Spirit who is King of Kings, and Lord over all lords.

Therefore, as we as individuals and churches face our todays and tomorrows; "...the Spirit and the bride say come." The future beckons us to victory. The bride is described in Revelation 21:2 as the holy city or kingdom, the New Jerusalem, the new creation of which we are all citizens in Jesus Christ. Therefore; "...let him that heareth say, Come." Our Lord summons us to victory. The proclamation of the Gospel is the proclamation of victory. Christ, having broken the power of sin and death on the cross, nothing is too great for Him.

Our Lord then refers to the 'water of life.' In John 7:39, our Lord who is the Tree of Life declares the River of Living Water to be the Spirit of God; "...this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." In Psalm 46:4, we are told;

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High."

Therefore; "...let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

With Adam's fall, mankind was barred from the Tree of Life. He was ousted from Eden, from paradise. Now in Revelation, our Lord declares that the water of life is given to us freely. According to Revelation 21:27 and 22:15, the ungodly are barred forever from the tree and the river.

Our gospel proclaims the remission of sins, it gives us salvation and the water of life, the Spirit of God. We have a mission to all men and nations and to every sphere of life. The Gospel of Mark begins in these magnificent words;

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."

The continuity of the Old Testament era and the New is very clear here. The dramatic difference is the new relationship to the Holy Spirit. Joel 2:28-32 refers to a difference however. The Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh, on all peoples everywhere by God's grace. The powers of this world shall be shaken and brought down. However; "...whosoever shalt call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered."

All people, tribes and tongues are summoned into the Kingdom. The word of salvation is proclaimed everywhere. "By my Spirit, says the Lord..." working through the weakness of men, I will bring all the world into my kingdom. This phrase; "...by my Spirit," has the same meaning as Paul's declaration to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 1:18-25;

"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

"Go ye therefore, by my Spirit."

ENDNOTES:

1. John 20:22,23
2. Romans 8:7,8
3. Acts 2:38-41
4. 1 Corinthians 6:9,10
5. Zechariah 4:6-10
6. Thomas Verner Moore. The Prophets of the Restoration, Or, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi : A New Translation With Notes. New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1856, 154.

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