



GRACE COMMUNION
SEMINARY

GCS NEWS

A Newsletter for Students and Alumni of Grace Communion Seminary

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President's Letter



A Commission to Teach

This is an edited version of the 2023 Commencement Address, given in Concord, NC, on June 30.

Introduction

Matthew ends his Gospel with “the Great Commission” (Matt. 28:18-20). Its literary placement at the end of the book gives it some prominence. These are the words Matthew wants us to remember. Matthew is telling us how Jesus wants us to respond to what he has done and what he has taught.

When we hear the words “Great Commission,” we usually think of evangelism. That’s what the commission is about: going into all the world, preaching the gospel, making disciples, and baptizing them.

But wait – there’s more!

The Great Commission has four important verbs in it. I label these verbs the four parts of the Great Commission.

- 1) First, Go.
- 2) Second, make disciples.
- 3) Third, baptize them, and
- 4) Fourth, teach them.

I believe that we need to be more attentive to the fourth verb: we need to teach believers to obey all the commands of Jesus, and today I want to remind you, as graduates of a seminary, that this part of the Great Commission is particularly appropriate for you.

Jesus gave commands, and his disciples repeated those commands – we see them not only in the four Gospels, but also in the letters of Paul and other New Testament writings. The

church accepts these writings as inspired and authoritative for what we should believe and how we should live.

Learn before we teach

One important step in teaching the commands of Jesus is to be sure that we understand them, that we are teaching accurately.

Many of us are familiar with a denomination that was founded by a man with more enthusiasm than knowledge – a zeal for God, we might say, but not according to knowledge. This man had opportunities to get formal training, but he did not use them. He was self-taught, and proud of it. He often quoted the verse “Lean not on your own understanding,” but that is precisely what he did. Some people who are self-taught turn out pretty good. This one made some major mistakes. He was skilled in writing and speaking, and he convinced thousands of people to follow him in his errors, and he left behind thousands of people hurt by his errors.

Now, we can point to various doctrinal errors he made, but one of the most basic errors he made was his refusal to get formal academic training. It meant that often, he was speaking vigorously about things he didn’t really understand.

We all need to learn before we can teach, and I congratulate you graduates on your willingness to complete a program of study. Your degree says “Master of...” but that is just an academic category. You are not really the Master – only Jesus is the Master – and we all still have much to learn. One thing that I hope you learned at GCS is that there is still a lot that we don’t know, and I urge you to be a lifelong learner as well as a lifelong teacher.

Continued on page 5



2023 GRADUATION

In Pictures





GCS President Dr. Morrison, administration and faculty, board, honored guests and my fellow students.

It is a privilege and honor to speak before all of you this afternoon. (It's also a bit terrifying actually).

Year 2017 was when GCI Philippines National Director Dr. Eugene Guzon encouraged me to study at GCS; later confirmed by an invitation of our then incoming GCI President Dr. Greg Williams.

I have a confession to make. I remember just giving Dr. Eugene and Dr. Greg a big smile but I did not respond with a yes. Alone with my wife I told her, "No, I'm not going back to school – and they can't make me!" I even had the thought: "They don't have the leverage to make me go back to school, I'm a volunteer in ministry – I can walk away if going back to school was a requirement to serve in ministry."

I credit my wife not glaring at me and saying, "Audie, what an unconverted way of thinking!" She just probed and asked why not? I said I've been attending lots of very helpful weekend church seminars and conferences. I've got in my head so much information and things to do for ministry but I'm limited and unable to put them all into practice – why add more to what is already a clogged long line of info and things to do in my brain. What I need to do first is fast track putting into practice first-in-first-out, before I give

The Master's Touch: From Reluctance to Eager Participation

This is a transcript of the 2023 Graduation Student Address, given by Audie Santibanez.

GCS a go. I was a little more pleased with this answer... with a smirk that Jesus would have returned before I get everything into practice and I wouldn't have to go to GCS.

My wife was unconvinced but empathetic and so was God, because a year later, after God doing some re-arranging in my life that was clear to me only he could do – with the "hound of heaven" I took my first GCS class.

My first ever GCS class was with you Dr. Mike (BI520 NT Survey). I was still a reluctant student till about halfway into that class. But it was a beginning of something magnificent. I am here to say what I did not want at first has turned out to be one of my greatest blessings these past five years. God has used my classes with GCS to bring spiritual renewal to my life. Something I did not expect but I'm immensely grateful for.

How about you, my fellow students, fellow graduates? You have your own beautiful story to tell how you got here, don't you? I believe we honor God and we honor his church that has established GCS with our graduation.

Not surprisingly, any personal renewal from God positively affects family, career work, church, and ministry. It may have something to do with theology (our knowledge of God) affecting practice or lifestyle; our theology affects how we see ourselves and treat ourselves, how we see others and treat others.

It is life-changing when the theology

and ministry classes are like a "burning bush" and you marvel and are stunned and in awe learning about our Trinitarian God - how it is most coherent and in agreement with the scriptures. Understanding the Father, Son and Spirit also adds depth of meaning to creation, salvation, church, prophecy, and all the other doctrines.

I experienced firsthand the importance of teachers. Both the teacher of the class and authors of books of the class. Like the evangelist Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, we need the help of those who have given and dedicated their lives to concentrate on their particular field for the benefit of others. Thank you very much GCS professors.

GCS classes are setup serving students well whether fulltime or part-time. GCS does not uproot you from where you currently serve in ministry but rather serves you while you are serving others.

The online lectures, directed readings, written assignments, practical application experiences, interaction with fellow students and professors, and exams made inroads to my heart regarding God and ministry.

Sure, the study load is always challenging and one gets stretched out and even stressed out, but many times – I found myself singing the Disney song "A Whole New World" from the movie Aladdin. When you come to a point of finally seeing something clearly or apprehending a particular truth about God for the first time, even though it had always been

there, it's "A whole new world... a new fantastic point of view... a dazzling place I never knew... but when I'm way up here it's crystal clear... a hundred thousand things to see.... I've come so far I can't go back to where I used to be... a whole new world."

It has been said that study is one form of worship when we love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength; when we like to learn more about who he is, what he's done for us and what he is currently doing for us and the wonderful future he promised for us. Our studies help us praise God.

I believe I can say and proclaim on behalf of students and graduates that GCS is accomplishing its mission of "Equipping Men and Women for Ministry" through classes grounded in biblical, Christ-centered, historically orthodox faith. The instruction and learning opportunities foster intellectual curiosity, the student is helped to be sensitive to the lead of the Spirit, and you find yourself willing to respond and participate in God's mission. Thank you faculty, staff and administration of Grace Communion Seminary and Grace Communion International.

By the mercy and grace of God I have been transformed from being a reluctant GCS student to someone who in thanksgiving supports GCS students. I am sure you my fellow students have also something to share that has changed you.

As we graduate, let us bring with us a continued enthusiasm for the things that we learned. It is a newly formed track or pathway that needs to be more constantly used in order to create a more permanent highway. We will all learn more as we apply what we have learned, and as we share what we have learned with others. As we do so, let us continue to experience and be amazed how Trinitarian theology

affects everyday thinking and living - affects our peace, hope, love, courage, endurance, and faith.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all as we live, work, and serve the church.

— Audie Santibanez



Fun and laughs while preparing to enter the graduation ceremony



Online students enjoying some rare face-to-face time, reuniting with old friends while others meet for the first time.



The graduation processional

President's Address Continued

Make disciples

In the Great Commission, Jesus gives his disciples a command: Make disciples of all nations. Can an individual Christian keep this command? No, not directly. No one lives long enough to go to all the nations of the earth, and we don't have time to learn all the languages and make disciples in all the nations. This command is really given for the church as a whole. It's a collective mission. It is something that Jesus wants his disciples as a group to be doing. The fact that no one individual can do what Jesus says here does not mean that we should ignore what he says. Rather, it means that we need to work together. The church needs to have a global vision, and individual members need to support the church in that mission.

Some of the graduates today are here only because the church set aside some money to subsidize our international leaders, and although this is not primarily a fundraising speech, I do ask people to consider participating in this global vision, and to use the resources God has given you to help support the mission God has given us. I ask that you donate to help provide scholarships for our international leaders.

The Great Commission is a self-perpetuating command: Jesus says to teach all the disciples to obey everything he commanded, and one of the things he commanded, and one of the things that we teach people, is that disciples are to go to all the world and teach. Each believer should be involved – even if indirectly. Each person should be doing something to support the Great Commission.

Jesus is at the beginning (v. 18) and the end (v. 20) of the commission. This is a reminder to us that it is his work,

his ministry, and making disciples is not just a bright idea that the church came up with later. We are being invited – commanded even – to join Jesus in his ministry, and he will be with us as we do it.

We learn by teaching

Jesus is capable of doing all the work himself, but he wants to involve us in what he's doing. Why? If he doesn't need our help, why does he want it? Many people have compared it to a parent, asking a young child to help make something. The parent can do it easier working alone, but the important thing here is not the job, but it's about a relationship with the child, and teaching the child about work, and about working with people.

Similarly, Jesus involves us in his work not just because he can boss us around, like some slave labor, but he involves us because he loves us, and it is good for us to be involved. He is doing work in our lives as we are involved in the work he assigns us to do.

Many books about the Great Commission miss this important point. Sometimes they present it just as a job that we have to do, as if Jesus cannot do it without us. The focus is on the work, with little attention to the relationship, and with little attention to the work that Jesus is doing in us as we work with him. It's actually good for us to be doing this.

There's something bigger going on here. We are not just worker bees trying to bring more honey to the hive, and eventually we run out of steam and end up worn out crawling on the sidewalk. No, it's more like the parent who wants to involve the children in working together.

When we are involved in doing what Jesus commands here, we need to see not just that we are doing something

“out there,” but also see that through our participation in Jesus' work, he is doing something “in here,” in our hearts and minds. It's part of his plan to make us more like he is, to bring us into conformity with what Jesus is like.

He can do the work without us, but he doesn't want to. He wants to involve us – even though we slow him down and we don't do it very well. There's something bigger going on here. God doesn't need us, but he wants us. As Karl Barth said, he does not want to be God without us – and the Great Commission is part of his plan to bring us more and more completely into his life. Our work is part of our preparation. If we want to be like Jesus, we need to want the things that he wants.

What do we teach?

As we go into all the world, we are to make disciples. A disciple is someone who learns; that's what the Greek word means – a “learner,” an apprentice. What are these disciples learning? We see it in the Gospel of Luke, “Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (Luke 24:47).

Luke presents this as a prediction – this is what's going to happen. But he's talking about the same message, a message that goes into all nations. It includes repentance and forgiveness. In the Gospel of Mark, we also find it as a prophecy: “the gospel must first be preached to all nations” (Mark 13:10). It's three ways of saying the same thing: the message to all nations is called the gospel, the good news. It's a message about repentance and forgiveness, and people who accept this message are “disciples” – learners. They are learning about God's grace and love.

Repentance means to change the way we're thinking, and that will result in a change in the way we are living, as

well. But not just any change will do – it has to be in the right direction. The message needs to tell people what to repent from, and what to think instead. People can't really understand what forgiveness is, or what grace is, unless they have some concept of what they should have done, and where they went wrong, and why forgiveness is needed. Forgiveness implies some sort of relationship that needs to be restored. Discipleship starts when people repent of thoughts, words and deeds that disrupt our relationship with God, and we are assured by the gospel that those things are not barriers to our relationship with God – and that is good news for all of us.

What then?

Matthew 28:20 says, “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” We don't just teach what Jesus commanded – we are also to teach people to obey what he commanded.

Not legalistic

We have sometimes not done this as well as we should have. We are sometimes so afraid of legalism that we are afraid of teaching people to obey Jesus.

Legalism is when we think that we can earn our salvation by keeping the law. We come before the judgment seat of Christ and he asks us, Why should I let you into my kingdom? We respond by saying that we've done this, or we've done that. We think that our behavior, our performance, is the ticket to eternal life. God is obligated to accept us because of how much we have done.

However, the proper answer, and the right mindset, is that we fall short. We need mercy, we need forgiveness, we need the death of Jesus on our behalf. If we are ever asked what makes us think that we can get in, all we can say is that it is only by grace – knowing in advance that our judge is full of

mercy and he has already experienced the penalty of sin on our behalf. It has already been done. We can point to what Jesus did for us, but we cannot point to what we have done.

Jesus brings us grace. He also gives us commands, and tells us that we should obey. It is not legalistic to say that we should do what Jesus commands; we just don't want to think that this obedience earns us a spot in eternity. When we realize that God is smarter than we are, and that he loves us, then we are going to want to do what he says. The Creator knows a lot more than we do about how to live in love, joy and peace, and he has given us these instructions for our own good. Obedience is part of a good relationship with God – it shows that we trust him. He's got authority, he's got wisdom, he loves us and knows what's best for us. When we go against what he tells us, it shows disrespect. It shows a lack of trust.

Now, we are sometimes uncomfortable with the word “obey.” Western culture in general doesn't like the word “obey.” Dallas Willard says that the Christian world in general has been reluctant to teach people to obey what Jesus taught. We make converts, he says, but we are not making disciples. He calls this “the great omission.”

Teaching and learning

Jesus tells the disciples, and through them, he also tells us, that we should teach people to obey what Jesus commanded. The church of Jesus Christ should be a teaching church, and the people of Christ should be a learning people. This is not some add-on, some footnote – this is part of the message that should be preached to all nations, and should be preached in the churches, too. However, this isn't always easy. It isn't always easy to obey, and it isn't always easy to figure out what it is that we should obey. It requires some discernment – some

principles of biblical interpretation. That is one role of the church, and of the seminary. We don't just each of us decide for ourselves which commands we want to follow.

We come to the Bible not just as individuals, but as members of a community, people who seek together what Jesus wants us to be doing. As Jesus reminds us, he will be with us as we gather in his name. People who go it alone, who lean on their own understanding, sometimes come to strange conclusions.

Jesus commands leaders in his church to teach. Teaching is a long-term commitment on the part of church leaders, and it implies a long-term commitment on the part of members, that we all continue to learn, that we are willing to be taught. The teachers also need to continue learning, and growing in our willingness to do what Jesus commands.

The teaching we do is actually part of the learning that we do. The work we do is part of the way that God is working not just through us, but in us, because there's still a lot of work to do in each of us. It goes back to the big picture: God is recruiting us not as slaves who do his work for him – he is recruiting us as family, as children with whom he wants to live and spend time with forever. He does not want to be God without us. That's what the gospel is about, and that's what the church is about, and that's what ministry is about.

Those who serve are also being served; the ministers are being ministered to. We are being prepared for eternal life with God through the work that we do. We are learning together, teaching together, and growing together by working together.

The church is to work together to understand how we are to obey the

commands today. The rest of the New Testament gives us some guidance on how that was done in the first century, and we look to that example, and the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit, to help us obey Jesus today.

The church has a ministry of teaching, and we have a ministry of learning, and we also have an ongoing ministry of obedience. As we do what Jesus has commanded, including teaching, we are continuing his ministry in the world and in the church. As we do good in our neighborhood, we are continuing the ministry of Jesus. As we care about the people around us, we are continuing the ministry of Jesus. Jesus wants us to be doing something good. One of his commands is, Let your good deeds be seen, so that people will praise God for it (Matt. 5:16). They will not only see the good works, but also know that God had something to do with it, that we are doing these works because Jesus has motivated us to do something good.

Our life needs to match the words that we speak, and both need to match what we see in Jesus. We don't do this as well as we'd like, but that's what we need to aim for, and try to get better at it as we go forward. Words and deeds go together; the Great Commission and the Great Commandment go together. It's all part of the package God is using to prepare us for eternal life with him.

It's good news, and good works. The last command in the book of Matthew is "Behold" (v. 20). It means: Take note of this: "I am with you always, until the end of the age." He is with us, and we join Jesus in his ministry of making disciples, teaching them to obey what Jesus commands. Keep learning, and keep teaching! Thanks for what you have done, and for what you will yet do.

— Michael Morrison, PhD
President

Thank you to all our board members, faculty, and staff for their participation in the GCS Graduation and for all their faithful service to the seminary.



Participants in the graduation ceremony get a sound check and make final preparations before the ceremony



Board members, faculty, and staff enjoying various moments of the celebration.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR GRADUATES WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE CEREMONY

Master of Divinity (MDiv)

Michael Rasumussen

Master of Theological Studies (MTS)

Dan Krupp
Alaric Kurzawa
Georgia McKinnon
Takalani Musekwa

Cynthia Quarles
Audie Santibanez
Heber Ticas

Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS)

Anthony Gachanja
Cara Garrity
Tony Gregory
Fraser Henderson
Gavin Henderson
Howard Klein

Ceeja Malmkar
Mark McCulley
Dishon Mills
Anthony Mullins
John Newsom
Mike Urmie



Schedule of Courses

All schedules are tentative

Spring 2024: Registration begins Jan. 3. The first lecture will be posted on Tuesday, Jan. 16. Other lectures will be posted on Mondays, January 22 through March 17. All work is to be completed by April 14.

BI510	Old Testament Survey	Jeannine Graham
BI523	Acts of the Apostles	Dan Rogers
CM501	Foundations of Christian Ministry	Lance McKinnon
CM506	Trinitarian Youth Ministry	Jeff Broadnax
CM510	Polity of Grace Communion International	Greg Williams
TH502	Jesus Christ, the Nature of Humans and Salvation	Gary Deddo

Summer 2024: Registration begins April 29. The first lecture will be posted on Monday, May 13. Other lectures will be posted on Mondays, May 20 through July 22. All work is to be completed by August 11.

BI501	Biblical Interpretation	Mike Morrison
CH502	Church History: The Second Millennium	Steve Dolson-Andrew
CM504	Practice of Ministry	Ted Johnston
CM508	Church Planting and Development	TBD
CM513	Trinitarian Worship	Lance McKinnon
TH515	Theological Ethics	Gary Deddo

Fall 2024: Registration begins August 26. The first lecture will be posted on Monday, September 9. Other lectures will be posted on Mondays, September 16 through November 11. All work is to be completed by December 8.

BI540	Using Biblical Greek Study Tools	Mike Morrison
CH501	Church History: The First Millennium	Steve Dolson-Andrew
CM507	Experiencing the Trinity	Larry Hinkle
CM511	Homiletics	Dan Rogers
FE501-3	Field Education	Randy Bloom
TH507	Theology of C.S. Lewis	Gary Deddo

All schedules are tentative. If fewer than five students register for a course, it may be cancelled, at the discretion of the instructor. **Thesis and Capstone courses for the master's degrees are offered in all semesters.**



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Financial support from alumni and friends like you has a profound impact on the seminary's mission of *"Equipping Men and Women for Church-based Ministry."*

If you have a passion for the provision of seminary training informed by an Incarnational Trinitarian faith, GCS is grateful for your partnership through prayer and financial support.



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