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The Simple and Clear Truth

J.R. Graves and Thomas Patent correctly stated that the precise ORDER of commands in Matthew 28:19-20 are positive “LAWS” or “BINDING”. It is from this interpretation of Matthew 28:18-20 that the phrase “gospel order” or “church order” originated in history. Both listed the precise order of commands to be three in number - (1) going with the gospel - evangelization; (2) baptizing the evangelized; (3) Teaching them to observe whatsoever things Christ commanded. Nothing difficult here - very simple and clear.

Second, both Direct Authority (DA) advocates and Church Authority (CA) advocates agree it is the church being authorized to do these three precise things, not Christians in general, not unbaptized believers, not two or three baptized unchurched believers but the church. This is church authority in the administration of all three commands. Nothing difficult here - very simple and clear and a matter of binding law.

Third, the third law found in Matthew 28:20 which states “*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*” is authority to bring the previous unchurched baptized believers in verse 19 into church relationship (membership). Indeed, it is impossible for the church to obey this command without bringing unchurched baptized believers into church relationship (membership). Why is it impossible to obey this without bringing unchurched baptized believers into church relationship (membership)? Because the very nature of the command requires both the “ye” and “them” to be assembled together in order to obey this command. Moreover, church relationship is part of the “all things” Christ commanded. Matthew 18:15-20 cannot be observed outside of assembling together in church membership. Matthew 26:12-30 cannot be observed outside of assembling together in church membership. Acts 1:21-22 proves Christ observed this command by constituting the first church by bringing them together around himself in a perpetual assembling. Hence, the third law that is binding upon the church is the command to bring baptized believers into church relationship. Obedience to this command is shown by Christ himself in Acts 1:21-22 which constituted the first church in Jerusalem. Obedience to this command by the church in the book of Acts is seen by adding them directly to the membership of an existing church as in Acts 2:41-42 OR this act of obedience is as Christ did by constituting them into a new church as in Acts 14:1-23. Matthew 28:20 is church authority to constitute baptized believers into church membership. Nothing difficult here - very simple very clear and a matter of “binding” “law.”

Fourth, both DA and CA advocates believe in organic church link by link perpetuity. DA demands it by saying no new church can come into existence unless the material for that church has received their baptism from a preexisting church and they believe this church

to church link through baptism has existed from the days of John the Baptist until the present. CA advocates believe the same thing with one exception. That exception is that the authority to constitute new churches is not found in baptism as the DA demands, but the same authorized agent to administer baptism (Mt. 28:19) is the same authorized agent to bring baptized believers into church relationship - the church (Mt. 28:20). Both baptism and church constitution are under the authority of the church as the THIRD order in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:20) is administered by the same authority as the SECOND order in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19) - the church. Hence, church constitution falls under church authority equally as baptism. Nothing difficult here - very simple and very clear.

Fifth, 99.9% of recorded Baptist history confirms church administration of the third binding law of the Great Commission as unchurch baptized believers were added to the membership of an existing church, or new churches were either authorized through letters of dismissal for constitution and/or constituted by an authorized representative of previously existing church. Any other way was regarded contrary to this gospel order, and treated as an anomaly, strange and unorthodox. Yet, those who are advocates of direct authority want to take the rare and unorthodox and contrary to positive law and binding order and make it the orthodox and norm and positive law. They attempt to do this on the basis of a sliver of history and a few Baptists who misinterpreted Matthew 18:20 between 1850-1900. Nothing difficult here - very simply and very clear.

The Irrefutable Biblical Proof

1. The Grammatical Structure

*Go (Aorist Participle) ye therefore, and **teach** (primary Aorist verb) all nations, **baptizing** (Present tense participle) them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **Teaching** (Present tense participle) them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

Admittedly, Greek grammar is not the easiest thing to convey to the average reader. It is a challenge for any writer to take something difficult and make it easy to understand. That is the challenge of this chapter.

Proper exposition based upon solid exegesis of the Hebrew or Greek text provides a defense that is hard, next to impossible to honestly overthrow. However, when a writer provides such an exegetical based exposition it requires a lot more space to present because it requires explanation of the grammatical facts that under gird that exposition. A

few years ago, I provided such an exegetical based exposition of Matthew 28:19-20 and the only thing a detractor could do in his response was to ridicule my education and the amount of work that I provided:

It takes Bro. Fenison, a school trained preacher almost forty pages in GCC just to lay it out is that perspicuity? Is that clarity Is that plain? His *explanation* amounts to *assumption* and then assertion – nothing more! – J. C. Settlemoir, *Landmarkism Under Fire*, Revised edition, published by New Testament Baptist Church, Lizton, OH, 2017, p. 188

This writer could not deal with the substance provided in the exegetical based exposition and so his only tool left as a debater was ridicule and ignore the provided evidence. Rather than deal with the evidence provided he simply makes the totally unsupported assertion that what I said was “*assumption and then assertion – nothing more*”. No, what I provided was based upon sound exegesis of the text as will be seen shortly.

20 years ago, another professional debater was asked about the grammatical implications of the primary noun in Matthew 28:19 (“teach”) and its relationship with the three participles (“go...baptizing...teaching”) in verses 19-20. That public debater was Dr. Walter Martin, the host of the famous radio program “The Bible Answer Man.” He too, attempted to escape the grammatical implications by making a similar totally unsupported assertion that there was no grammatical or logical relationship between the primary verb and these participles but that the participles were simply dangling participles. Of course, a dangling participle is a participle that has no logical or grammatical connection with the primary verb. However, is Dr. Martin correct? Is there no logical or grammatical connection between the verb “make disciples” and the three participles translated “go...baptizing...teaching?”

What is Dr. Martin plainly saying? He is saying that gospel preaching, baptism and teaching people to observe what Christ commanded has nothing to do, has no relationship with discipling process of a person. Surely, even any unschooled person who has attended Sunday School should be able to see this assertion is simply foolish.

The primary verb translated “teach” in Matthew 28:19 represents the Greek 2nd person plural Aorist tense verb μαθητευσατε (mathateusate) and means “make disciples.” The term “disciple” means “a follower” or one who embraces the doctrine and practice of a master teacher.

This main verb defines what the primary mission is about or the action that is to be taken – they are to make disciples of all nations. However, this verb does not instruct them how to do that or what that may include.

The three participles explain how that is to be accomplished and what is included in accomplishing that mission.

For example, the first participle is found in the Aorist tense just as the primary verb is found in the Aorist tense. What does that mean

grammatically? It means that going to the nations is considered as a completed action primary to the action of making disciples. In the parallel gospel account of Mark "going" is further explained as going with and preaching the gospel (Mk. 16:15). The grammatical implication demands that evangelization has already occurred previous to the action of making disciples. Thus, a paraphrase of the intent of Christ command would be "having already evangelized the nations, disciple the evangelized by baptizing...teaching them...." That is his intent when Mark 16:15-16 and Matthew 28:19-20 are considered together. A more literal translation of Matthew 28:19 would be "Having already gone, make disciples of all nations..."

The next two participles translated "baptizing" and "teaching" are found in the present tense. What does that mean in relationship to the Aorist tense primary verb – "make disciples"? It means the action of baptizing and teaching are identical in action with the action of being made a disciple. In other words, baptism and teaching inform them how disciples are to be made.

The theological implications of the grammar here are tremendously significant. It demands evangelization must already be a completed action before a person is qualified to be baptized and instructed in Christ's teachings. In other words, only saved persons are proper candidates to follow Christ in the actions of baptism and systematic instruction in how to observe all things commanded.

Secondarily, the theological *implications* of the two following participles are equally significant. The action of being baptized and being taught is inherent in the meaning of a "disciple." A disciple is a baptized believer that is habitually assembling under an instructor in order to properly observe the faith and order of Christ.

For example, when this commission is first applied in Acts 2:40-41 this precise order is followed. The gospel is *first* preached and "as many as received the word" are *secondarily* baptized and *thirdly* "added unto" a congregational teaching and observing body ("them") wherein they "continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine".

Not only so, but Luke uses the periphrastic construct in Acts 2:41 to indicate this pattern was not mere once upon a time happenstance, but was the regular pattern that the church at Jerusalem continued to observe. Luke coupled an imperfect tense verb with a present tense verb that is translated "continued stedfastly." The imperfect tense verb says an action began at some unstated time in the past and continues to some unstated time in the past. However, when coupled with the present tense verb, that action begun in the past presently continues up to the time of Luke wrote these words. What does that mean theologically? It means, that Luke is claiming this is a pattern begun at some point in the past (Acts 1:21-22 "from the beginning of the baptism of John...") that the church at Jerusalem continued to follow at least up to the time Luke penned these words. If Luke penned these words after Paul finished two years under guard in Rome (Acts 26) then Luke is saying that this was the apostolic practice "from the beginning of the baptism of John"(Acts 1:21-22 - the unstated beginning point) until at least A.D. 62 when Paul finished his two-year confinement.

Moreover, instead of repeating this who Great Commission threefold process every time someone was evangelized, baptized and churchd, Luke took the word "added" in Acts 2:41 and used it consistently to summarize the whole process (Acts 2:47; 5:14; 11:24). When the numbers were too great to add up, he switched to the term "multiplied" to summarize the same Great Commission process (Acts 6:1,7, 7:17; 9:31; 12:34). Why would anyone imagine that followers of Christ would disobey the Great Commission and make disciples in any other fashion???? However, that is precisely what many imagine when they come to interpreting the book of Acts in order to defend their theological errors (universal invisible church theory, direct authority in church constitution, etc.).

Significantly, the command to "teach them to observe all things whatsoever commanded" necessarily includes bringing that baptized believer into a church relationship.

There was no electronic communication equipment in the first century. There was no TV's, no laptop computers, no telephones, and no I-pads. The only possible way for a baptized believer to be instructed in how to observe all things Christ commanded was to assemble with those instructing him in a habitual manner and this is precisely how the Apostles understood this command as noted in Acts 2:41 by the words "and added unto them" which precedes "stedfastly continuing in the apostle's doctrine."

This is precisely how Christ disciplined others. He preached the gospel, upon their profession they were baptized (Jn. 4:1-2) and then such habitually assembled with him under his instruction:

*.... **companied with us all the time** that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us... - Acts 1:21-22*

Not only is it impossible to teach them to observe all things without actually assembling with them in a habitual manner, but it is impossible to observe Christ's commands without entering into a church membership relationship (Mt. 16:18; 18:15-20; 26:12-30).

Hence, bringing baptized believers into church relationship is the ultimate intent of this commission as any observance of this commission that falls short of bringing baptized believers into church relationship falls short of being made a disciple of Christ.

So, the participles are not dangling participles but they are adverbial participles that further modify and explain what it means to make disciples. Followers of Christ are those who have already been evangelized under the preaching of the gospel, secondarily they are baptized and finally they are brought into church relationship wherein they are taught to observe all things commanded.

So, the primary verb instructs them WHAT must be done, while the participles instruct them HOW it must be done and WHAT it includes. Thus, the participles function as adverbial modifiers of the primary verb.

Significantly, this text provides the only Biblical definition of what is a "disciple" according to Christ.

Therefore, whenever the term "disciple(s)" occur(s) throughout the rest of the New Testament (especially in the book of Acts) it refers to a person who has already been evangelized, baptized and added to a teaching observing body of like-minded persons.

Acts 11:18-26

18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

19 ¶ Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

There are some that feel that this passage and a few more previous to this passage within Acts 8-11 repudiates church authority in the administration of the ordinance of baptism and organization of new churches.

However, context is everything. Acts 8-11 is encapsulated by the revelation that these events were triggered by the persecution by Saul (Acts 8:1; 11:19). Interestingly, Paul was not only the

instigator of these actions by the church at Jerusalem but proved to be the solution to these actions as well.

First, one must recognize and understand the underlying chief cause for this section and that was the church at Jerusalem was disobedient to its commission to go to “all nations.” Peter had to be shown three times, not once, not twice but three times a vision in order for him to go to a gentile home. The first words he made when entering the home was to tell them it was “unlawful” for him to be there “but” God had showed him. He took six Jews with him as witnesses because he knew he would have to give account to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-17). Notice that Acts 11:17 is the first admission by the all Jewish church at Jerusalem that God would grant repentance unto life for Gentiles. Notice, in Acts 11:19 that those who went preaching abroad preached only to “Jews.” God sent Saul to persecute the church at Jerusalem because of their disobedience, their refusal to preach the gospel to “all nations.” Even after Paul was saved and had been approved by the leadership in Jerusalem they said he was sent to the Gentiles but they would go to the Jews (Gal. 2:9). They didn’t leave the borders of Judah and had not even preached in Samaria (Acts 9:31).

Upon this persecution, the leadership at Jerusalem got the message and began sending out ordained preachers. We know this, first, because the term “scattered” is not the Greek term used in the scattering like when chickens scatter when chased by a dog but is the word used in agriculture for a purposeful directed scattering of seed. Second, the leadership did not leave Jerusalem. Third, all the pronouns used to describe those who left preaching are masculine, and the special Greek term used to distinguish males from females is used to describe these preachers (Acts 11:19 “anar”). Fourth, Philip, who is called “the evangelist” and an ordained man (Acts 6:4-5) is set forth as an example of the kind of preachers being sent out by the church (Acts 11). Peter is the kind of example of those being sent out to preach (Acts 10). Fifth, the church at Jerusalem obviously believes it has authority to examine and follow up these preachers and set in order anything needed (Acts 8:14; 11:1-17, 22). So, we have a pattern; (1) Ordained Male members sent forth to preach; (2) Church supervision over the missionary work and this pattern is in keeping with the Great Commission pattern (Acts 2:41-42).

Sixth, it is expressly said by Luke that those who preached at Antioch were merely passing through and did not stay in order to complete the last part of the Great Commission which takes assembling with the baptized believers and teaching them how to observe all things. It appears that some of these had been of those saved in Acts 2 who had come from various parts of the world and were returning home but preaching along the way. The church was notified of this deficiency which apparently characterized their work all the way from Jerusalem to Antioch as they were going back home. **One must ask, why was the church notified of this deficiency if “direct authority” was sufficient for these believers?** Is it possible for a church to be organized that is not “the pillar and ground of the truth” because it has not been taught the truth and does not observe the truth??? This is what direct authority advocates would have you believe in this case.

Seventh, the church “sent” Barnabas for the very purpose to complete the Great Commission command with regard to these new converts. First, he assembled them around himself as the teacher into an organized assembly whereunto the Lord could “add” unto them:

*23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and **exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.** 24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people **was added** unto the Lord.*

It was not until he came, and assembled them around himself in order to be taught how to observe all things that they were called a “church” and the members were called “disciples.”

*And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with **the church**, and taught much people. And **the disciples**....*

Barnabas saw the work was too great for himself alone to do, so he sought out another church authorized and church sent missionary in Tarsus to help him. The church at Jerusalem had “sent” (Acts 9:30) Paul to Tarsus to do missionary work. However, it would seem as in many cases a man is without honor among his own kin and so he left off and came with Barnabas.

Eighth, Luke has already established the pattern in Acts 2:41-42 and then summarized this pattern by the words “added unto” or “multiplied” which characterized the obedience to the Great Commission in the book of Acts. The words “disciple” and “disciples” in the book of Acts is defined by Matthew 28:19-20 in keeping with the pattern and summaries of this pattern. If silence, is going to be interpreted, why should it be interpreted as disobedience to this pattern? Why not interpret the silence in keeping with the pattern just as interpreting the summary words “added unto” and “multiplied” in keeping with that pattern? If silence is the objection, then pray tell from whence did the Eunuch learn about the need to be baptized as there is nothing recorded in Philip’s words about baptism? Why not interpret the silence in keeping with this pattern, that Philip not only informed him in the need of baptism but in being added to a teaching observing assembly? Why not interpret the repeated follow up pattern by the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:14; 11:22) to be true with the Eunuch as well, as they did follow up Philip’s ministry in Samaria? Why choose to interpret silence contrary to the patterns provided? Why not choose to interpret silence in keeping with the established patterns and obedience to the Great Commission? For example, there is no mention of baptism in Acts 11:19-25 so should we assume they never were baptized, or this is the first church of unbaptized members???? Silence, should be interpreted in keeping with established patterns already laid down.

CONCLUSION: They were unorganized, untaught believers prior to the arrival of Barnabas, and Barnabas was a church authorized and church sent representative out of the church at Jerusalem to specifically follow up on the report they received wherein no doubt it was reported to them that these were believers who were not brought into an organized teaching observing assembly.

Acts 13:1-5

1 ¶ Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

4 ¶ So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

There is no question this is the record of the official setting apart and sending of Saul and Barnabas on the mission field to preach the gospel, administer baptism and organize churches of which the record that follows in Acts 13:5-19:7 demonstrates they did exactly that.

QUESTION: *Did they administer baptism under church authority or under direct authority in Acts 13:5-19:7??? Advocates of "direct authority" demand they did not receive church authority to carry out the Great Commission including the administration of baptism.*

New Testament churches always had a plurality of elders – always! Why? Because there were no New Testament Scriptures available to direct them concerning proper church policy and practice. Instead, revelatory gifts were given to the ordained leadership which required at least two or more such gifted leaders in order that every revelation could be tested by “two or three” others with such gifts so that they knew what was said was from God.

Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. – 1 Cor. 14:29

Paul reminds Timothy that when he was ordained that Paul laid hands upon him and he received the necessary gifts for his calling. It was through the apostolic laying on of hands that such gifts were imparted (2 Cor. 12:12; Acts 6:4; 14:22-23; etc.). They were temporary because they had their source with apostolic laying on of hands which ended with the death of the apostles by which time New Testament Scripture had replaced the need for such gifted leadership.

Secondly, notice that Saul and Barnabas are listed among this group of specially gifted men and we know Saul and Barnabas were elders that first gathered these baptized believers into a teaching/observing assembly (Acts 11:27 - more on this in a later article). The Lord speaks to his church through its ordained leadership (Rev. 2-3 - unless you believe John could deliver a letter to a heavenly angel. The

word “angel” means “messenger” and that is what the Pastor is, a messenger boy. He gets a message from the Lord and delivers it to the assembly).

The eldership did not act independent of the church but laid hands on them and sent them as the ordained representatives of the church. How do we know that? First, because the pattern of final church authority in selection and ordaining of church members is laid down in Acts 6. The ordained members did not arbitrarily lay hands on the seven in Acts 6. The church made the final decision while the ordained simply revealed the Lord’s will to them. Likewise, in Acts 13:1-4. The Lord revealed His will through the ordained leadership to the church. We know that because Paul and Barnabas repeatedly reported back to the church (Acts 14:26-27; 18:22) and while with the church they submitted to its authority as their church (Acts 15:2-3).

QUESTION: *If Direct Authority were taught in this passage, then the Holy Spirit should have by-passed the elders and the church and directly revealed it to Saul and Barnabas. However, the Lord works through his church when it comes to administration of the Great Commission as it was given solely to the church alone (Mt.28:19-20).*

The Holy Spirit working through the Church “sent” them to the mission field. Notice, that both the Holy Spirit and the ordained eldership of the church “sent” them (v. 3 “sent” and v. 4 “sent”). The word used in verse 3 translated “sent” is the same form for which we get the word “apostle” and means one sent under authority to accomplish some kind of mission. This is how Barnabas became an “Apostles” as the word “apostles” in Acts 14 includes Barnabas and it means one sent under authority. Both Paul and Barnabas became “apostles” in a secondary sense of the term, church sent and authorized missionaries. The church at Antioch did not make Paul an apostle in the technical sense, but they did make him their “apostle” or a church sent and authorized missionary.

CONCLUSION: Acts 13:1-4 cannot be jerked out of context but must be interpreted in the overall context of scripture and the patterns previously laid down in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit reveals His will to the ordained leadership, who in turn make it known to the church (Acts 6) and then men who have been approved and authorized by the church are ordained and sent out for which they have been called. The Holy Spirit works through appointed and authorized instrumentality (the church) in sending out missionaries. If not, then not only are the baptisms performed by Paul and Barnabas not church authorized, and thus not church administered, but they are in complete rebellion to the Great Commission which was given to the church alone, a previous existing church (Acts 1:21-22).

The Positive Law in the Great Commission by J.R. Graves

“III. BAPTISM IS PREREQUISITE TO THE LORD’S SUPPER BECAUSE THE DIVINE LAWGIVER PLACED IT IN THIS ORDER, AND HIS APOSTLES INVARIABLY OBSERVED IT IN THIS ORDER, WHICH IS EQUAL TO FUNDAMENTAL LAW.

1. Baptism preceded the institution of the Supper over three years and six months nearly.
2. The Savior invited only those who had been baptized to partake of it.
3. In his commission he placed baptism first, and commanded it to be observed in this order - can it be denied that the order of the commission is *Law*? ***Has Christ given a law for the constitution of His church and the administration of its services, or left it to float upon every shifting tide of opinion?*** If a preacher should first organize a church, then baptize its members, and then proceed to disciple them, is his course as lawful, or no more *unlawful*, than one directly in reverse? If unlawful, I ask WHY? How can it be unlawful and not contrary to the law? If Christ has given a law, what is the law? ***Is it not contained in the commission? If not WHERE?*** If in the commission, does it not establish the necessary priority of baptism to church membership? If not, I ask does it establish the priority of faith to baptism? and, if it does, How? In any other manner than the order in which these duties are prescribed? If not, the order of the commission is a part of its law, and this law establishes the priority of baptism to church membership. Membership, not less than of faith to baptism. It must be granted, because true, that the order in which positive laws are given is as important and as inviolable as the law itself. It may not be violated with impunity.” - J. R. Graves, **Great Carroliton Debate**, pp. 115-116

I have quoted the greatest portion of Graves with regard to the quotation I took from it and which Bro. Settlemoir demands I took out of context and contrary to the context. My quotation is taken from the bold highlighted portions. If you study this whole quotation carefully, Graves ultimate point is to prove that baptism precedes observance to the Lord’s Supper based upon three arguments. The first argument is the institution of baptism occurred prior to the institution of the supper in the gospel accounts. The second is that only baptized believers were invited to observe the Supper. The third argument is based upon the precise order of actions provided in the Great Commission. Graves argues that gospel faith, or the command to gospelize precedes baptism and baptism precedes church membership. Now, if you look at the Great Commission as given in Matthew 28:19-20 the first in order is to go preach the gospel to all nations. The second order is to baptize those evangelized and the third in order is to bring the baptized believers into a teaching observing assembly or what Graves calls “priority of baptism to church membership.” Hence, bringing baptized believers into church membership is third in order within the Great Commission. Graves uses the term “constitution” in the bold quote above for all the steps found in the Great Commission including bringing baptized believers into church membership. This precise order of steps is how a church is first constituted and that order proves that the Lord’s Supper follows evangelization and baptism and is located in the third aspect after a church is organized in keeping with this order. The precise order found in the commission Graves calls positive Law. It is from this precise order that Baptists all the way back to the early 1600’s called “regular church order.” Early English Baptists would not recognize a group of people as a church

if that church was not constituted according to this Great Commission order. Neither do we. We believe a person must first be evangelized, then baptized and then brought into church membership and that bringing baptized believers into a covenant teaching observing assembly is not only part of the Law of the Great Commission, not only authorized by the Great Commission, but inherent in observing the Great Commission. Since, our “Direct Authority” brethren admit that the Great Commission was given solely to the church, and that the Great Commission is positive law that demands the precise order be observed, while condemning those who do not observe this precise order in organizing a church, then this is admission that the Great Commission is church authority to bring baptized believers into a teaching observing assembly - or church authorized constitution. So, when Graves uses the term "constitution" in this context he is arguing for the precise order of actions found in this commission that must be observed in first organizing a church but must be consistent with all of church practice. So, his use includes BOTH.

Direct Authority Theory and Papalism

Papalism is the doctrine that takes away authority given to the church alone and places it in someone or something else, in the case of Rome it is the Pope!

Direct authority is the doctrine that takes away authority given to the church (Mt. 28:19-20) and places it in someone or something else, in the case of Direct Authority a non-church entity. Papalism and Direct Authority share this common error. I make no further application of Papalism outside of this common error.

When I entered into this debate with Direct Authority advocates several years ago, they denied that the pronouns “you” in Matthew 18:18 and Matthew 28:19-20 referred to the church but referred to the apostolic office. So, in my first book I replied to this error by charging them in believing and supporting eldership rule rather than congregational rule because they interpreted “church” in Matthew 18:17 to refer to the elders of the church and not the church. Eldership rule is the pattern that establishes Papalism and the College of Cardinals in Catholicism.

This year I have been notified by e-mail they have changed their interpretation and they now admit “you” in Matthew 18:18 and Matthew 28:19-20 refers to the church not to the apostles or elders. Furthermore, what makes this change of view richer is that they now charge me with Catholicism or elder rule or a “priestly class” because I claim the ordained leadership administers these things in behalf and under the authority of the church! I simply asked them does their church have ordained men and do these men administer baptism, the Lord’s Supper and missionary work in behalf of the church? No response! Why? Because admission that their church does administer such things through ordained members debunks their whole argument.

However, their dogma is akin to papalism in the narrow comparison I have made as both their doctrine and papalism USURP Christ’s authority which delegated authority to the church alone. In this case, the particular area of authority is not only authority to administer baptism (which they accept) but to bring unchurched baptized believers into church relationship (which they reject).

J.R. Graves and Thomas Patent on the Great Commission

J.R. Graves and Thomas Patent correctly stated that the precise ORDER of commands in Matthew 28:19-20 are positive “LAWS” or “BINDING”. It is from this interpretation of Matthew 28:18-20 that the phrase “gospel order” or “church order” originated in history. Both listed the precise order of commands to be three in number - (1) going with the gospel - evangelization; (2) baptizing the evangelized; (3) Teaching them to observe whatsoever things Christ commanded. Nothing difficult here - very simple and clear.

Second, both Direct Authority (DA) advocates and Church Authority (CA) advocates agree it is the church being authorized to do these three precise things, not Christians in general, not unbaptized believers, not two or three baptized unchurched believers but the church. This is church authority in the administration of all three commands. Nothing difficult here - very simple and clear and a matter of binding law.

Third, the third law found in Matthew 28:20 which states “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” is authority to bring the previous unchurched baptized believers in verse 19 into church relationship (membership). Indeed, it is impossible for the church to obey this command without bringing unchurched baptized believers into church relationship (membership). Why is it impossible to obey this without bringing unchurched baptized believers into church relationship (membership)? Because the very nature of the command requires both the “ye” and “them” to be assembled together in order to obey this command. Moreover, church relationship is part of the “all things” Christ commanded. Matthew 18:15-20 cannot be observed outside of assembling together in church membership. Matthew 26:12-30 cannot be observed outside of assembling together in church membership. Acts 1:21-22 proves Christ observed this command by constituting the first church by bringing them together around himself in a perpetual assembling. Hence, the third law that is binding upon the church is the command to bring baptized believers into church relationship. Obedience to this command is shown by Christ himself in Acts 1:21-22 which constituted the first church in Jerusalem. Obedience to this command by the church in the book of Acts is seen by adding them directly to the membership of an existing church as in Acts 2:41-42 OR this act of obedience is as Christ did by constituting them into a new church as in Acts 14:1-23. Matthew 28:20 is church authority to constitute baptized believers into church membership. Nothing difficult here - very simple very clear and a matter of “binding” “law.”

Fourth, both DA and CA advocates believe in organic church link by link perpetuity. DA demands it by saying no new church can come into existence unless the material for that church has received their baptism from a preexisting church and they believe this church to church link through baptism has existed from the days of John the Baptist until the present. CA advocates believe the same thing with one exception. That exception is that the authority to constitute new churches is not found in baptism as the DA demands, but the same authorized agent to administer baptism (Mt. 28:19) is the same authorized agent to bring baptized believers into church relationship - the church (Mt. 28:20). Both baptism and church constitution are under the authority of the church as the THIRD order in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:20) is administered

by the same authority as the SECOND order in the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19) - the church. Hence, church constitution falls under church authority equally as baptism. Nothing difficult here - very simple and very clear.

Fifth, 99.9% of recorded Baptist history confirms this church administration of the third binding law of the Great Commission as unchurch baptized believers were added to the membership of an existing church, or new churches were either authorized through letters of dismissal for constitution and/or constituted by an authorized representative of previously existing church. Any other way was regarded contrary to this gospel order, and treated as an anomaly, strange and unorthodox. Yet, those who are advocates of direct authority want to take the rare and unorthodox and contrary to positive law and binding order and make it the orthodox and norm and positive law. Nothing difficult here - very simply and very clear.

Precise Definition of Church Authorized Constitution

Church Authorized Constitution is authority granted by a preexisting church in a called business meeting for unchurched scripturally baptized believers to self-organize. That authority may be administered (1) Directly or (2) Indirectly.

When it is administered directly by the authorizing church(es) it may be administered through the issuance of letters of dismissal with the presence of church representatives in the organization. If prospective members of organizing church come from more than one previous existing congregation there may be representatives from all churches issuing letters for dismissal for that purpose. The number of churches is irrelevant as church authority is being expressed.

When it is administered indirectly by the authorizing church(es) it may be administered through a church authorized representative (usually a missionary, pastor, deacon) present in the organization service. Also, the church can simply issue letters of dismissal for the purpose of organization to those self-organizing without the presence of such authorized representatives, although this is quite rare in history, but nonetheless, church authority is being expressed through such letters of dismissal issued in a called church business meeting for that purpose and conveyed to those self-organizing.

The Great Commission is impossible to observe without bringing baptized believers into church relationship. Either baptized believers are brought into church relationship through direct addition into an existent church as in Acts 2:41-42 OR they brought into church relationship by the assembling with the missionary as in Acts 13-18 where Paul organized newly baptized believers into congregations and appointed ordained leadership (Acts 14:21-22).

The bottom line is that authority is being granted by an existing church and is being conveyed either directly or indirectly.

