



GRACE COMMUNION
SEMINARY

FALL 2024

GCS NEWS

A Newsletter for Students and Alumni of Grace Communion Seminary

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President's Letter



"Just the Red Letters"

A pastor asked me, The Great Commission says that we should teach people to obey everything that Jesus commanded. What is it talking about – the Sermon on the Mount? Should we go through the four Gospels and focus on what Jesus said? In some Bibles, these words are printed in red. Is that where we should look when we want to define our mission?

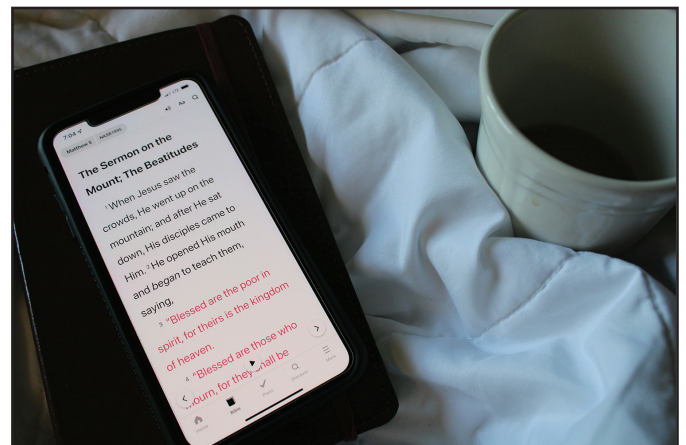
Matthew puts the Sermon on the Mount in a prominent place in his Gospel – it's the first of five major sections of Jesus' teachings. But much of it is not a command. When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness" (Matthew 5:10), he wasn't commanding us to be persecuted. When he said, "You are the salt of the earth" (verse 13), he was making a statement of fact, not a command.

Jesus said, "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (verse 28). That's not a command, either. In grammar, it is an indicative verb, not an imperative.

It is making a statement of fact, although the implications are not hard to see. Jesus was building on the framework of an Old Testament command. He implied the validity of the old command but the letter of the law didn't go far enough. We cannot limit ourselves to the exact words used in the Old Testament – we need to look at the principle, of what God wants in the heart.

However, we cannot limit ourselves to the exact words that Jesus used, either. He was giving an illustration, not a complete list of forbidden behaviors. For one thing, he said nothing about those who look at men lustfully. He says nothing about what might be called emotional adultery, where we become dissatisfied with our spouse for not living up to some relational ideal. We want our spouse to have a better body, a better way with words, a better spirituality, a better use of time. Even if these longings do not lead us to sexual adultery, they are hurting the relationship that God wants marriage to be.

When we look for the commands of Jesus, we cannot limit ourselves to the exact words that he used. We cannot look for the minimum.



That in itself suggests a reluctance on our part. That's not surprising – it is the way we all start, and none of us has become perfect in the heart.

If the commands of Jesus are the only thing we teach, it's not going to come across like good news to most people. "I have good news

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for you – you should stop doing this, start doing that.” Something is missing in this message.

The good news is not just that God’s in charge and we have the privilege of obeying him. Both of those are true, but there’s more to the message of Jesus than that. The good news is that God accepts us as his friends even though we aren’t very good about doing what he wants. He wants us in his family even when we aren’t very sure we want to be there.

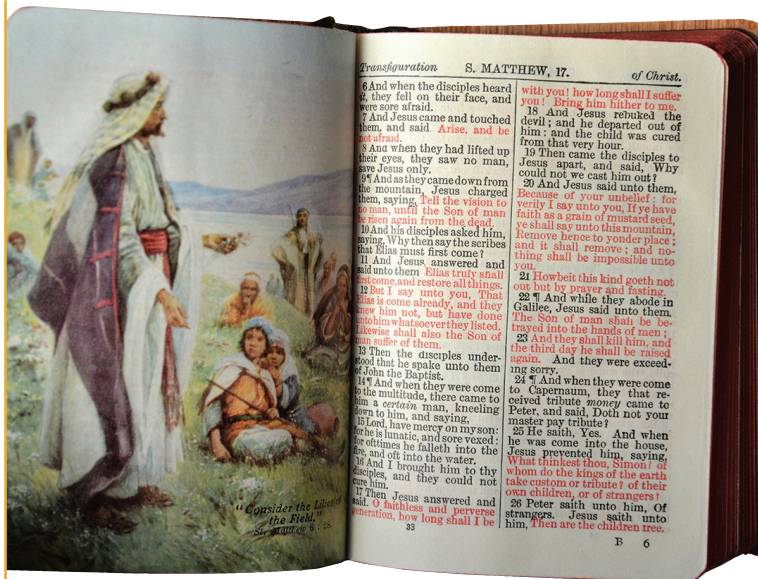
In the Great Commission, Jesus mentions making disciples before he mentions teaching people to obey. The two ideas are related, but we can’t equate them. We make disciples by preaching forgiveness first, and response next. Both are part of the Great Commission. We have to address the question, “What’s in it for me?” The disciples asked it, Jesus answered it, and the answer is given for all of us (Matthew 19:27-29).

We should read the red letters, but we need to think a little deeper than what they say on the surface. We need to see principles, ideas, a vision of what life could be. We look for whole-hearted response, not a minimum.

We need more than the red letters. Jesus did not teach merely by the words he used. He took, by most estimates, more than three years to teach his disciples. He didn’t just give them a list of things to do. He gave them a life to watch; he wanted them to “do as I have done” (John 13:15). Although that command is set in a

specific context, it was Jesus’ approach to making and shaping his disciples. They were to do not just what Jesus directly commanded, but they were to approach life the way he did.

In his teachings, Jesus set high standards. Our righteousness should be more thorough than what the Pharisees taught (Matthew 5:20). Why would thousands of people want to listen to a sermon like that? It is because of the example that Jesus set. Richard Burridge put it like this: Jesus set the bar high, and he accepted everyone who fell short of it. The goal is to be more like God, and no one has reached that goal. The good news is that God loves us and wants us anyway.



He doesn’t take away the goal, as if he doesn’t care about what we do. The message has two parts: “Neither do I condemn you.... Go now and leave your life of sin.” We are to forgive seven times seventy times, and then some, while we also teach that people should not sin. We are to do the one, and not leave the other undone.

Jesus commissioned his disciples to continue his ministry. But we cannot look at the Great Commission and say,

What’s the minimum we need to do here? What are we required to do?

We are required to be generous in forgiveness. We don’t do very well at that, but Jesus forgives us anyway and he continues to tell us that we are required to be forgiving. Forgiveness and obedience are a never-ending loop. If obedience isn’t needed, there’s nothing to forgive.

We need more than red letters. That’s why the New Testament has more than the Gospels. Luke tells a story in the book of Acts, and the disciples were not restricted to the words in red. Nor did they repeat them as if that’s the sum total of what we are to preach.

When Paul wrote letters to his churches, he didn’t just stick to the words in red. He was explaining the implications of the gospel, how it is to be fleshed out in a Greco-Roman culture. He writes about forgiveness, and he gives commands; he expects his readers to accept those commands as authoritative. He believes that if Jesus were in that situation, then this is what he’d say. This is how the church took it; this is what it means when the church accepted his writings as part of the canon, part of the Scriptures, the things that are

written for our instruction. They are words of Jesus, too – they may be in black, but they should be read.

There is no simple list of things we are to preach and teach. What Jesus gave was an example, not a formula. We need the guidance of the Spirit, a bit of humility, a bit of work, and a bit of forgiveness as we participate in the Great Commission.

Michael Morrison, PhD
President

FEATURED DEVOTIONAL

“Oh, God, you know what I mean!”



Some of the most awkward moments we can experience occur when we are at a loss of words. We're expected to say something, but we simply don't have

anything to say. We can't find the right words. We're speechless—or, under pressure, we force something out and end up saying something stupid, silly or completely irrelevant to the conversation or occasion.

But perhaps one of the most trying situations in which this speechlessness can occur is not in a conversation or in a discussion or before an audience or congregation. It is when we are before the Lord in prayer. It might happen when we're full of thanksgiving and praise, and our words just don't do justice to what we want to express. But perhaps more often it's when we're deeply distressed, heart-broken, confused, or profoundly concerned for others in a dire situation – when we're hopeless and feel helpless, perhaps suffered a great loss. At that point we can find ourselves speechless. Maybe you can recall moments like that before the Lord in prayer.

I can recall an incident from many years ago when I was serving as a university campus minister with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The student groups I served had weekly prayer meetings. It was not very structured. But each one attending could pray about something—a word of thanksgiving, a word of praise, a request of a personal concern, or for others, or for a national or world event or situation. And then two or three

would follow up on that prayer and add to it, saying what came to mind along the same lines as the first prayer offered. This is sometimes called conversational prayer. The group stays on topic for a while before it moves on to another.

A relatively new follower of Jesus was attending one of these prayer meetings that I was leading. He began to pray in earnest about something he was obviously concerned about. All of us were intently listening. But he was having a lot of trouble praying what he wanted to pray...he'd say a few words, “Dear God I just want to pray that, that...” and then stumble, mumble, and try to start over: “Jesus, I pray that...that...that, well, I don't know...” and then stop, almost giving up, trying again to find the right words. He was having such a struggle that all of us in that prayer group felt agonized with him. And I was wishing I could somehow help him get his words out.

I would not be surprised if we all have times like these: we simply don't know what to pray or how to pray.

In fact, for me, this too, happens in prayer. And I have to say that the situation has not gotten better over time—rather it seems to happen more often now than in years before. I was hoping for the opposite! Prayer should get easier, shouldn't it?

But over those years I have come to appreciate more and more two passages of Scripture that I thought in these troubling times or for any times, might be encouraging to us all. They tell us something very important about prayer. Not about how to pray, but about who we're praying to. Let me quote them to you:

Speaking of the incarnate, resurrected and ascended Jesus, the author of Hebrews reminds us:

“The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it



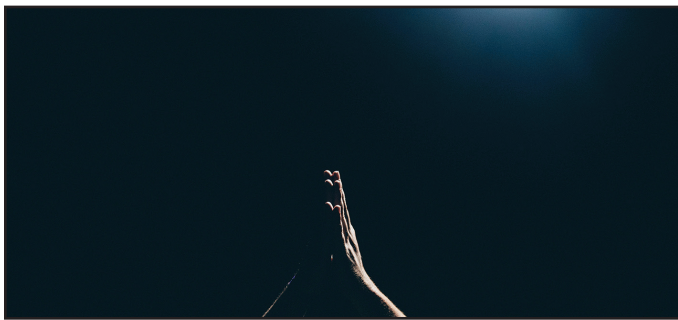
was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Hebrews 7:23-26).

The Son “lives to make intercessions” for us!

Then the apostle Paul in Romans 8, verse 26 speaks to us about the Holy Spirit. He tells us:

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26).

Our not having words to pray does not stop the Holy Spirit from interceding for us, perhaps as we simply join in the speechless groanings of the Holy Spirit, like many of the Psalms seem to exhibit.



These verses remind us that when we pray we never pray alone. We’re not trying to launch our prayers from an earthly platform up to a distant God, hard to reach, hard of hearing, even if it seems our prayers go up, hit the ceiling and bounce back to us. That’s because we not only pray to God in the name of the Son, we are actually praying along with the Son who is interceding for us.

Our Lord Jesus who bodily ascended into heaven is not on vacation. He is not unemployed waiting for a signal

from the Father to return to bring to completion his ministry after waiting around for who knows how long. He is our eternal mediator, our resurrected and ascended intercessor who lives to make intercessions for us, as one of us, as our worship leader, and our great High Priest who ushers us into the very presence of the Living God, often in times of prayer. That’s the grace of prayer to our gracious Triune God.

The ascended Son, although absent in body, is present to us by the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit, who is also involved in the ministry of intercession. The Son and the Holy Spirit are both doing something as we pray—interceding for us. In fact, then, the whole Triune God is living and acting in relationship to us.

C.S. Lewis memorably speaks of the practicality of our belief in the Trinity in just this way. Whenever we take

time to pray to the God revealed in Jesus Christ, the whole Trinity is involved in a united but three-fold way. First, we are praying with Jesus Christ, who is already interceding for us long before we say

a word. As one of us, still sharing our human nature, he hears us and takes our prayers, our human prayers, and joins them to his and delivers them to the Father, cleaned up, sanctified, made perfect. He listens to us and knows what we ought to pray.

Second, through the Son we are praying to the Father, who is over us, who along with the Son oversees all things, who allows nothing to take place that cannot be redeemed through the Son. The Son joins our prayers with his intercessions and shares them with God the Father

And third, it is the Holy Spirit who moves us to pray to the Father through the Son. In our simple prayers the Holy Spirit is ministering in us.

The Holy Spirit can guide us in our prayers, free us and strengthen us to pray, sometimes giving us the words, sometimes praying for us in ways that are beyond words. The Spirit, then, also intercedes for us, especially as we recognize our weakness and run out of words, when we don’t know what to pray. The Spirit always knows what to pray and how to pray for us and in us—through the Son and to the Father.

So we pray to the Father who is over us, through the Son who is with us and by the Holy Spirit who is in us. Prayer is a blessed communion with the whole gracious Triune God—we never pray alone.

Let me finish the story about that new believer struggling to pray at that campus fellowship prayer meeting. After wrestling to put into words his heartfelt prayer, and all of us agonizing with him, he finally, in a way, gave up and simply blurted out in exasperation: “Oh, God, you know what I mean!” And we all, with great relief and joy, spontaneously joined him in a quiet reverent chuckle of recognition: “Yes, Lord Jesus, you do know what he means.” Thank God, you know what we mean!

So we can be encouraged even today or any day, when we seem at a loss for words, when we don’t know what to pray—we never pray alone. We’re always joining our Lord Jesus Christ in his continuing prayers, in his ongoing intercessions for us. Thanks be to our gracious Triune God who continues to lead and intercede for us in our prayers and all our worship.

*Gary Deddo, PhD
Professor of Theology*

Schedule of Courses

All schedules are tentative

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 | Michael Morrison |
| CH501 | Church History: The First Millennium | Steve Dolson-Andrew |
| CM507 | Experiencing the Trinity | Larry Hinkle |
| CM508 | Church Planting and Development | Randy Bloom |
| CM511 | Homiletics | Dan Rogers |
| FE501-3 | Field Education | Randy Bloom |
| TH515 | Theological Ethics | Gary Deddo |

Spring 2025: Registration begins January 3. The first lecture will be posted on Monday, January 13. Other lectures will be posted on Mondays, January 20 through March 17. All work is to be completed by April 6.

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| BI512 | Prophets | Timothy Finlay |
| BI520 | New Testament Survey | Michael Morrison |
| CM503 | Christian Counseling | Ted Johnston |
| CM506 | Trinitarian Youth Ministry | Jeff Broadnax |
| TH507 | Theology of C.S. Lewis | Gary Deddo |

Summer 2025: Registration begins April 21. The first lecture will be posted on Monday, May 5. Other lectures will be posted on Mondays, May 12 through June 23. All work is to be completed by August 3.

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| BI510 | Old Testament Survey | Jeannine Graham |
| BI523 | Acts of the Apostles | Dan Rogers |
| BI524 | Epistles of Paul | Michael Morrison |
| CM501 | Foundations of Christian Ministry | Lance McKinnon |
| TH502 | Jesus Christ, the Nature of Humans and Salvation | 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.





Fall Semester Online Convocation September 17, 2024

A Time to Gather for Devotion and Prayer



Join us for our next convocation where we meet by Zoom to share in a short devotion, and prayers for the work we are doing together. The meeting is open to current students, alumni, faculty members and board members from around the globe. We hope to see you there.

The convocation for the Fall semester will be held on September 17, 2024 at 8:00pm Eastern Daylight Time. Invitations with Zoom links will be sent to all students who register for summer semester courses. If you aren't taking a class this semester but still want to attend the assembly, send an email to Georgia McKinnon at registrar@gcs.edu.

In a world with more than 24 time zones, we know that everyone may not be able to attend our gathering. If you have a schedule conflict at this time slot, let us know for our future planning considerations.



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