

# **The Commission That Determines Our Mandate**

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**Matthew 28:18-20**

# The Commission that Determines Our Mandate

*"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."*

*Matthew 28:18-20, KJV*

## The ASSURANCE Behind the Commission (v. 18, 20a)

The "authority" stated here is a:

- A. *Divine Authority*      *Exousia* ("authority"), literally means "*out of being*." All of the necessary authority *out of the very being of God* is given to us to fulfill this Commission.
- B. *Delegated Authority*      ". . . is *given*," on the basis of His accomplishment in His Death and Resurrection.
- C. *Deserved Authority*      ". . . unto *Me*." He alone deserves it. *We* don't deserve it, but we *get* it by our faith-association with Him.
- D. *Defined Authority*      ". . . in *heaven* and on *earth*." The two worlds in which *He* operates and *we* operate.

## The ASSIGNMENT Within the Commission (v.19, 20)

### The Church's (Christian's) Only Marching Orders

The Great Commission constitutes the only "marching orders" Jesus Christ ever gave to His Church. The Great Commission is a mandate to soul-winning and missions, but it is far more than that. There is a five-fold account of the Great Commission of our Lord in the New Testament. It is stated in different ways in Matthew 28:18-20 (the most definitive statement), Mark 16:15 (the most concise form), Luke 24:47, John 20:21, and Acts 1:8 (the most expansive interpretation).

In Matthew's account, the Church of Jesus Christ finds the basis of its task. There is absolutely no question in Matthew's statement about what Jesus intended His followers to do. It is not a matter of emotion or feeling. It is not a work to be carried on at our convenience. Jesus left specific instructions. His Commission contains His command. The verbs of this Commission are words of action: Go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. Simply stated, the Church is under orders, but the exact nature of the orders may surprise most believers.

### Division of the Commission into Parts

I want to divide the Commission into seven parts. Here is the outline. First, we are responsible to EMPLOY ALL AVAILABLE PERSONNEL (the word "ye" of verse 19 is plural). Then, we are to ENTER THE FIELD of service ("go"). Third, we are to constantly ENLARGE OUR VISION ("all nations"). Fourth, we are to EVANGELIZE THE PROSPECTS (make disciples"). Fifth, we are to ENLIST THE EVANGELIZED (baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"). Sixth, we are to EDUCATE AND EDIFY THE ENLISTED ("teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"). And finally, we are to EXPECT HIM TO WORK ("and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world"). So you see, there may be a great deal more to our Lord's Commission than we have honored!

As we seriously and carefully investigate the Commission, we make a startling discovery. We find that for approximately two centuries, the Commission worked to perfection and rapidly impacted the known world. But then a peculiar thing happened. Something went terribly wrong. In order to see this, I want to look at each of the seven points I have outlined. Under each point, I want you to think of two sub-headings. One is entitled "The Savior's Strategy," and the other is called "Satan's Substitute." We will do this with each of the seven outline points in the Commission.

## 1. Employ the Personnel

The first point of the Commission is to EMPLOY ALL THE PERSONNEL. In verse 19, the word "ye" is plural, and literally means "all of you."

### The Savior's Strategy

Someone described Jesus' intention for the fulfillment of this Commission in these words, "All believers are to be at it, and they are to be ALWAYS at it." The one thing, apart from the divine power, that made the Great Commission such a sweeping success at the beginning was that it martialled its total work force to the point of service. The goal was that every disciple be a soul-winning, disciple-making reproducer of the same kind of reproducers. They were all propagandists and evangelists! In fact, participation was so universal among them that rules had to be made to avoid confusion (see I Cor. 14:31). There were no mere spectators or observers among them. Adolph Harnack, a great church historian, said, "When the church won its greatest victories in the early days of the Roman Empire, it did so not by teachers or preachers or apostles, but by amateur, informal missionaries." This Commission calls for a personal mini-story FROM EVERY BELIEVER. All the members of Christ's Body cannot do this unless each member does it. A church in modern Manhattan had this message on its church sign: Pastor, -----." "Ministers: Every member of the congregation." This is the savior's strategy for employing the personnel.

### Satan's Substitute

Now look at Satan's substitute. The fact is that the Commission worked. It worked too well to suit Satan. It worked so well that it took him 200 years to recover and regroup his forces. Finally, he fought the Commission with a substitute program of his own. It is not difficult to see that the original Commission has been tampered with. It has been amended, and for

long centuries, the churches have fallen for Satan's program. Satan's most important blow against the Commission was directed at this first point, to employ all the personnel.

Early in church history, Satan orchestrated a division of the Church into two groups, and he over-emphasized the distinctions. The large majority he called "the laity," and the small minority he began to call "the clergy". And his selling point was that laymen are not capable and gifted, and that they have no special interest in the real vocation of the church, anyway. So Satan presided over the creation of a hierarchy of professional religious men. These professional men were to (1) fight all the spiritual battles, and (2) do all the spiritual work. The business of the "layman"? To support the professional leader and to pay for his program to be fulfilled (in the New Testament, the people are the program).

So a "ladder of dedication" was formed within the Church. From the top of the ladder, there was the "missionary," then the pastor, then the other professional religious workers, and at the very bottom was the lowly layman. Someone has described our age as "the age of the spectator." Football has 22 players at one time, but it may have several million spectators! Baseball has 18 players at one time, basketball ten, boxing two, and some Olympic events only one. But all of these sports have millions of fans. Comic Fred Allen said, "If society continues the way it is going, we soon may have a world full of people with eyes the size of saucers, and brains the size of an English pea."

## The Church's Unemployment and Underemployment Problems

The church has developed two (2) "unemployment" problems, and the two problems constantly support each other, thus making the situation steadily worse. There is the problem of the UNEMPLOYMENT of the MEMBERS of the local church body. because the average church member in the average church does not fulfill his Divinely-assigned job description, his "paycheck" is reduced to a welfare, subsistence ration. His responsibility is unfulfilled, his reward is forfeited, the world is left in darkness, and Satan is quite satisfied.

Then, there is the closely related problem of the UNDEREMPLOYMENT of the MINISTER. The typical pastor in today's church is overworked, but underemployed! When Henry M. Stanley returned from Africa and his renowned search for David Livingstone, a newsman asked him the facetious question, "What bothered you the most while you were in Africa—the lions or the snakes?" To which Stanley wryly replied "Neither! It was the gnats and the mosquitoes!" Our pastors hardly even see the lions and the tigers because they are constantly struggling with gnats and mosquitoes. While atomic wars are being fought in the spiritual realm, they are struggling to survive a barrage of popcorn! The red herring of multiplied exhausting religious activities and spurious false images of his job has ben drawn across his path and he cannot fulfill the only job description God has given for his work.

Just this week I received the report from a State Convention office that 300 Southern Baptist pastors per month are being forcibly ejected, dismissed, for pulpits of Southern Baptist churches. I cannot vouch for that number, but I do know that the problem is EXTREMELY serious. I also heard the report several years ago that over 1,000 Southern Baptist pastors a year are abandoning the pulpits of Southern Baptist churches. Neither can I prove that number, but I do know that THE PROBLEM IS EXTREMELY SERIOUS!

Perhaps the greatest reason for this attrition of called leadership is that the leader is tragically unfulfilled by his "underemployment" situation.

## Spectator Christianity in the Church

Inside the church, we have developed a spectator Christianity in which few speak and many listen. The church is filled with a "fraternity of fans," fans of the faith. Imagine a wholesale house which had sales manager whose business was to sell the goods and to lecture on the quality of the goods and the mechanics of selling. Suppose it also had a large "selling staff" whose only real business was to enlist and encourage auditors to listen to the lectures of the sales manager. What a monstrosity it would be! How long would it stay in business? James S. Stewart of Edinburgh, Scotland, said, "The real problem of Christianity is not atheism or skepticism, but the non-witnessing, non-productive Christian trying to smuggle his own soul into heaven all alone." This is Satan's strategy, and furthermore, he has worked so on that word "ye" until now not even all "clergy" are witnesses!

Look at the Christian community. ON WHICH SIDE DOES THE TYPICAL CHURCH FALL, ON THE SIDE OF THE SAVIOR'S STRATEGY, OR ON THE SIDE OF SATAN'S SUBSTITUTE? The answer is tragically apparent. We must re-examine our Marching Orders!

## 2. Enter The Field

The second point in our outline of the Commission is to ENTER ALL THE FIELD. The word "go" is an active, aggressive word, a word which entails movement.

### The Savior's Strategy

The Savior's strategy is obvious. In Matthew 13:38, He said, "The field is the world." This is not the field for "the" church, IT IS THE FIELD FOR YOUR LOCAL CHURCH! JESUS CHRIST FULLY EXPECTS YOU TO TAKE ON THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD! The symbols Jesus used for Christians and the Gospel are bound together by a common denominator. They are all characterized by the idea of penetration. Jesus used such symbols as light, salt, keys, bread, and water. Light is worthless unless it penetrates and disperses the darkness. Salt is no good if it remains in the box or the salt-shaker; it must penetrate the salad or the potatoes. One little boy said, "Salt is the stuff that spoils the potatoes—if you leave it out." Keys are useless unless they penetrate the lock. Bread has little value outside the eater, and water doesn't meet the thirsty man's need unless it penetrates into him. Even so, Christians are to constantly (a present participle) penetrate the world.

Someone said, "You can't spell the word 'God' without the word 'go' in it." and neither can you obey the Gospel and be a good servant of God unless you Go—ON HIS TERMS. Every Christian is to live vocationally (as a Christian) on a frontier of penetration, whether the frontier is a scientific laboratory, a library, a factory, a fruit orchard, a delivery route, an executive desk, a space-age jetliner, a psychiatrist's clinic, or a pastor's study. Our "world" is wherever we are with people. In Luke 10:1-3, the Bible tells us that "the Lord appointed seventy, and SENT THEM TWO BY TWO BEFORE HIS FACE INTO EVERY CITY AND PLACE WHITHER HE HIMSELF WOULD COME. Therefore He said unto them,

The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few. PRAY THEREFORE THE LORD OF THE HARVEST that HE WOULD SEND (THRUST) FORTH LABORERS INTO HIS HARVEST. Go your ways: behold, I SEND YOU FORTH AS LAMBS AMONG WOLVES." Note carefully the units of words which I have emphasized. What a world is in these verses! Every Christian is to be a trailblazer, a forerunner, for the coming of Christ "into every place whither He Himself would come." Lambs-among wolves can only hope to survive by a miracle!

Incidentally, the word "go" in the Commission is NOT a COMMAND. To regard it as a command is to advance "the ladder of Christian dedication" concept. If it were a command, anyone who went to some distant place to preach the Gospel or to witness for Christ would be regarded as special. But the verb means, "As you are going," or even, "Since you are going." Jesus would never be so senseless as to command us to do something that we are already doing! Where is your church on Tuesday afternoon at three? Is it in the church building? No, it is "GOING." The issue is not: *Why doesn't the church get out into the world?* It is rather: *Is the church performing its assignment as it penetrates?*

A few years ago, I was in a large, beautiful city in a foreign country. I preached at the English-speaking church there on Sunday morning. I arrived considerably early so I could visit with the people as they arrived. I received quite a shock from the people. Most of the Americans were employees of an international oil company and had high-salaried jobs. When I asked how they were enjoying their time there, to a person they all complained of monotony and boredom. Many of them were there for two-year assignments. In my message, I asked why they didn't learn the language and/or arm themselves with Gospel tracts printed in the language of the people and practice missions, evangelism, and soul-winning while they were there. They disregarded this possibility apparently without a second thought! You see, someone has sold us a "bill of goods" that leads to a radical betrayal of Jesus and His Commission. They had "gone" (even financed by an oil company), but they had no awareness of their responsibility "as they were going."

## Satan's Substitute

Satan has intruded a subtle substitute into the mentality of the Church. Two of the greatest of Gospel words are "come" and "go." Once we have come to Christ (Matt. 11:28-30, for example), we are to "go and tell" all men what we have found in Christ. Satan is a master manipulator and twister of words. He induced a slow perversion in the Church from "go and tell" to "come and hear." One Socialist observer caricatured the Church in these words: "The motto of Christians seems to be, 'Come here, and get God's message, and go to heaven, or stay away, and go to hell!'" Paul Little said, "The problem is not that the GOSPEL has lost its POWER; the problem is that the CHURCH has lost its AUDIENCE." Another said, "The Holy Spirit cannot save saints and seats -- yet the Church is full of both!"

Consider a medical analogy. Suppose the Department of Health feared an epidemic of scarlet fever. What would it do to stop the spread of the disease? It would isolate the

germ-carriers. It would quarantine the infected, and thus the fever would be contained. Suppose the Department of HELL wanted to stop an epidemic of New Testament Christianity. It would surely do everything possible to isolate the "carriers," and thus stop the spread. And that is precisely what has happened in the Church at large. We have developed a kind of "holy huddle" inside the Church. The team never seems to get "into the trenches" at the line of scrimmage, where the game must be played if victory is to be the result. And some like the coziness and safety of this arrangement. After all, did you ever hear of a football player getting hurt in the huddle? So we plan our strategy, analyze the enemy, recite "chalk-talks," and even criticize our own team members. We worry about membership, programs, buildings and finances. We have weekly "dress parades," and our key command seems to be "as you were." Forgive the mixture of metaphors, but you surely get the message. We are constantly multiplying our religious activities, perfecting our organizational programs, expanding and developing our denominational institutions, and strengthening our ecclesiastical structures, and all in the world we are doing in many, many church situations is MAINTAINING AND ENTERTAINING OURSELVES! THE DEVIL MUST BE AWFULLY HAPPY! The typical church operates almost exclusively by his substitute instead of the Savior's strategy.

### 3. Enlarge the Vision

The third point in our Lord's Commission is to constantly ENLARGE THE VISION. "All nations" is the field of activity in the Commission.

#### The Savior's Strategy

Let us remind ourselves again—Jesus Christ is not playing games with us. He fully expects us to "take on" the whole wide world! And He has given us a Plan by which we can do it! Christian, is it your intention to impact ALL NATIONS by "TURNING MEN INTO DISCIPLES?" Nothing less than this gigantic assignment is our Master's command. World impact is our mission. OUR GOAL MUST BE TO INFORM AND IMPACT THE ENTIRE WORLD TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH UNTIL THE END OF TIME.

This third point in the Commission may well be the most important of all. It is from this point that the disciple-making motivation arises. I want to spend some extra space at this point in order to assure that we recognize the magnitude of the Commission in impacting the entire world. Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said in his book, The Miracle of Grace, "I would not hesitate to say that finally there is no more thorough test of our individual profession of faith than our attitude toward the missionary enterprise of the Church." I might add to the words of this spiritual giant that "the missionary enterprise of the Church" is not merely the dispatching of specially burdened believers to distant foreign countries. It begins in EACH believer's heart and is carried out by each believer becoming a world-conscious, world-consumed, world-visionary disciple of Jesus Christ and building other world-visionary, world-impacting reproducing disciples.

Is your personal vision a "God-big" vision? How far does your intent to impact reach? The measure of your effectiveness as a disciple of Christ may be seen in answer to this question: *How far does your influence reach? How large is your sphere of magnitude?* Isaiah 54:2 says, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes." This verse provides a

perfect motto verse for disciple-makers (all true disciples of Christ), and it calls for an unceasing enlargement of each believer's vision to impact the entire world.

Again I ask you to face the question: *How large is your sphere of magnitude?* Do you work under a HAT-sized vision, with the Christian life largely beginning and ending for the sake of YOUR OWN survival and reward? Or is your vision UMBRELLA-big, taking in perhaps two people? Or PHONE BOOTH-sized, covering at most three or four? Or ROOM-sized, including a few friends? Or HOUSE-sized, accommodating maybe 25 or 50? Or DEPARTMENT STORE-sized, incorporating several hundred? Or MALL-sized, able to contain several thousand? Or GYMNASIUM-sized, enlarged to tens of thousands? OR do you aspire to a SKY-sized vision which would include EVERY HUMAN BEING ON EARTH AND ALL FUTURE GENERATIONS TO COME? Remember that the Commission entails a Jesus-sized, God-big vision, and we are to increasingly become like Christ, thus developing the very Character of God. We became "partakers of His Divine Nature" (2 Peter 1:4) at our conversion, and the remainder of our lives is to be spent cooperating with the expansion of His Nature in us. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). A part of this enlargement necessarily means a growing identification with the Divine Obsession-informing and impacting every person on earth with the Message of the Glorious Gospel of Christ.

It is apparent even from a surface reading of the Gospels that Jesus was out to invade, inform, and impact the whole wide world. He might have said, "I am the light of Galilee," but He didn't. He said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). He did not say, "I am the light of Baptists or Presbyterians or Methodists." He did not say, "I am the light of the well-bred or the well-read or the well-fed." He might have said, "God so loved the Jews," but He didn't. He said, "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). Jesus emphatically stressed again and again that no smaller an area, no smaller a populace, than that of the world was ever in His mind. He is the only spiritual light for every land and for every person in every land on earth.

It is said that the soldiers of Napoleon's army carried in their knapsacks a map of the world in the tri-colors of France. They were "convicts," "prisoners," "captives," "slaves" of the idea of taking the world for France. Christian brothers and sisters, our Sovereign Lord has placed the burning vision of the whole world before the eyes of His people and has asked each of them to let it burn its way into his heart. And this vision is to constantly occupy our thoughts, our plans, our dreams, our activities, as long as we live. Once the vision begins to possess us, we will realize that Jesus patterned a plan for us—you and I as individuals—to implement and fulfill the vision. This is what visionary disciple-making is all about! Is that big, or is that big?

Ponder this question with your heart. Did the Bible and Christianity originate in any of the fifty states of the United States? No, Christianity is an "import" to these United States. Jesus was not born in my block or my neighborhood. The Bible was not originally written in English. WE CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA ARE THE RESULT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES. Are we committed to doing in other parts of the world what those missionaries did for us? If you were one of the lost ones in Asia, Africa, or Latin America, would you want someone to bring you the message of Light and Life? Surely we self-centered Christians and our introverted, institutional "survival churches" must earnestly repent and ask the compassion and forgiveness of our Lord, because we have tried to make

Him our possession (like the Jews did) instead of allowing ourselves to be possessed by Him. And our repentance must be of such depth that it leads to the CORRECTION of this tragic "humanistic Christianity" (my term, itself a contradiction of terms).

John Oxenham, in his volume, Bees in Amber, wrote:

I hear a clear voice calling, calling,  
Calling out in the night,  
O, you who live in the Light of Life,  
Bring Us the Light!  
We are bound in the chains of darkness,  
Our eyes receive no sight,  
O, you who have never been bond or blind,  
Bring us the Light!  
You cannot—you shall not forget us,  
Out here in the darkest night,  
We are drowning men, we are dying men,  
Bring, O bring us the Light!

Now, Christian, don't pull theology or proof-texts on me and tell me that men without God are dead and cannot talk like that! I know that. Believe me, I know that! This is not the way Godless men live, think, or speak—but it is the way every believer must think! We can't describe death to dead people, nor can we expect living impulses, activities, and speech from them. NOR CAN WE EXPECT THEM TO ARISE FROM THE DEAD WITHOUT HEARING THE VOICE THAT RAISES THE DEAD! Romans 10 makes it quite clear: no PROCLAMATION to lost people without SENT-ONES to proclaim the message, no HEARING without such PROCLAMATION, no FAITH without HEARING, and no SALVATION without FAITH (Romans 10:12-17)! Where does it begin in practical reality? With the sending and the saying! Is your church in the sending business? Is it spending to send so the message can be spoken? THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE IS RADICAL DISOBEDIENCE TO THE COMMAND OF THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. What will our feeling and thinking be at the Judgment Seat of Christ if we spent our ministries focusing on the "Killer Bees"— buildings, budgets, bodies, bulletins, boasts, etc.?

Shortly before the middle of the last century, Charles Kingsley visited the New Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific Ocean and was appalled by the savagery and cannibalism existing there. On his return to Britain he wrote a pointed article declaring that the British government would render a service to the human race if it would send a war vessel to blast the natives into the sea like pestilential flies, because they were subhuman and nothing could ever be done to elevate them.

However, there were others who necessarily disagreed with Kingsley's assessment. Among them was a devoted Christian named John Paton of Dumfries, Scotland. Paton believed that the Gospel of Jesus is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and that the Gospel has a quickening power to raise those dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). After long journeying Paton reached the island of Tana in the New Hebrides, and in constant peril of his life preached Christ to these benighted people. I would invite any doubting reader to research the result for himself. When Paton died, the natives themselves erected a tombstone over

his grave on which was inscribed this epitaph: "When he came, there was no light. When he died, there was no darkness." Today, dear friends, we can easily penetrate most of the earth at moderate cost and with little travel difficulty; we are "sitting" on vast resources which could be used to evangelize and disciple vast hordes of people over the world; thousands of Christians, churches, and lost people would welcome and respond to our love in lands near and far; and we often sit in self-occupied disillusionment in dead and dying churches here in America. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

On the very day that Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese bombers, a returned missionary from the Orient was met by a cynical acquaintance who, with a leer in his eye and a jeer in his voice, said, "Well, what do you think of your Japanese now?" To which the missionary quietly but confidently replied, as with the thrust of a sword, "MY Japanese are very well, thank you, resting in the grace of God. If you are talking about the ones that just bombed the American fleet, those are YOUR Japanese—the ones YOU were responsible for, but did nothing about. THEY are the ones causing the trouble. But MY Japanese are doing quite well, thank you, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ." Friends, what about "our" Brazilians, our Chileans, our Hondurans, our Guatemalans? What about our Philippines, our Indonesians, our Mongolians, our Chinese, our New Guineans, our Yugoslavians, our Iraqis? Frank Laubach said, "If Americans had spent as much money on missions in Japan prior to World War II as we spent in building ONE BATTLESHIP that was sunk at Pearl Harbor, we would likely never have had to fight that war to begin with." Are YOU involved in any real way in WORLD impact? Are you GOING as a SENT-ONE to make Christ known? If not, why not?

William James, the Harvard psychologist, wrote of a house in Chocorua, New Hampshire, as a young boy, "Oh, it's the most delightful house you ever saw. It has fourteen doors, all opening outwards." The very safety code that civic regulations impose upon our church buildings, that the church doors open outward for safety's sake, bespeak volumes of wisdom to us. A Christian, a church, a consuming vision, that operates with all doors opening outwards is a "delightful" thing, but frankly, the introverted Christian, the introverted church, should be eaten alive with his (its) own despair, disillusionment, frustration, and defeat!

Our world has been shrinking in size like a balloon as the air is let out. The airplane makes it possible for a person to fly in the rising sun from London to New York. I never travel overseas without meeting numbers of world-circling travelers. A voice captured by radio is heard on the opposite side of the earth sooner than it is heard in the rear of the auditorium where the words are spoken. A scene filmed for television is viewed in distant places exactly at the time of its occurrence. We live in the front yard (the living room?) of the world. The whole world has become one small neighborhood. What are we doing about our neighbors?

I look back over my last pastorate of ten years and try to remember the ways we sought to create world vision and world impact among the members of the Body:

- (1) *We used a "save your change" plan.* Each member was encouraged to empty his pockets at the end of each day and put aside for missions all loose change except one coin of each denomination—a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, and half

dollar. In December, we had a "missions march" in which we placed all these offerings before the Lord for His multiplication to the ends of the earth.

(2) *We used a "Dollar-a-Week-For-Missions" plan.* We asked each member to give an extra dollar a week (what American would miss that?) to world missions.

(3) *We used the "functional Missions Committee" plan.* We appointed the members with the most dominant world missionary spirit and vision, and asked them to "hold the world in front of us" constantly. We devoted quarterly services to a missions focus—with missionary speakers (including missionary wives and children), the reading of missionary letters, special prayer for "our" missionaries, etc.

(4) *We used the "missionary home" plan.* We owned two homes in which we regularly housed furloughing missionaries, and asked them to "traffic" our church with their information and influence.

(5) *We used the "research our world" plan.* We asked for geographical, political, economic, etc., informational reports about the many nations of the world. We especially tried to study the "ripe" areas, that is, the areas most responsive to the Gospel (such as Kenya at this moment).

As an example, we employed such rationale as this. Suppose you owned a fruit orchard. In Field A, a worker would harvest five bushels an hour. In Field B it would take five hours to harvest just one bushel. In Field C nothing could be harvested because the fruit is still green. If you had thirty workers today, where would you send them? I think I would send twenty-nine of them to Field A so as not to lose the fruit there. I would send the other one to do what could be done in Field B and also to keep an eye on Field C. The job description for that one would be to let me know when those fields were ripe so I could reassign the personnel. Jesus called Himself "the Lord of the harvest" (Matthew 9:38). Has He mismanaged His business? Certainly not, but typically, His workers have not been listening to Him. Have YOU been praying the Lord of the harvest that He would "thrust forth laborers into His harvest"? Remember, "the field is the world" (Matthew 13:38).

(6) *We used the "send a missionary" plan.* How could I as a pastor ever be satisfied if God were not calling young people from the church I serve or my sphere of influence to mission stations over the world? I would certainly hold my ministry in suspicion. Just last week, we had a guest in our home who is between stops in the Orient (in a "closed" country), back in the United States only long enough to enlist more support and to bolster his teaching skills so he can be an "informal, amateur missionary" (that's a laugh; the vision dominates him!) in that dark land. Over a year ago now, he was instrumental in winning a young man to Christ, and discipline him, and already, that young man has won ten others to Christ! In a "closed" country! This "missionary" graduated from college with an electrical engineering degree, then returned to college after four years in the military to learn computer science so that he could get a teaching position in a university in the Oriental country. As I write these words, he is back in the states, sharpening his computer data and skills in order to be better equipped as a college teacher. Why?

Because he has captured a vision for disciple-making that impacts the world. He told me again of his pilgrimage through (and appreciation for) the disciple-making process and the world-vision contagion of the church I was privileged to serve as pastor.

(7) *We used the "dispatch temporary missionaries" plan.* The world is open now to brief missions penetrations by small teams of people from churches in the states. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board is one mission agency among many which offer short trips overseas to anyone for the sake of evangelism and world impact. The door to the world stands ajar. A steady stream of growing, happy, motivated, impacting Christians should be filing through it to the very ends of the earth. Some "mega-churches" should be sending at least 1,000 people per year to world-girdling mission projects. I have personally been on ten major missions trips while continuing a very busy schedule at home. I have two trips on schedule for the last half of 1991—one to Romania, and one to South Africa (for the fourth time) where the work escalates. Last year, 1990, I was outside the country three times on major trips—to Portugal, Brazil, and South Africa. Just this week, a layman visiting in our city said to me, "I would be afraid to go to any country outside the United States." AFRAID? That really should not occupy the mind of any Christian (read 2 Cor. 11:23-33, and see how much fear dominated the docket of the Apostle Paul). Sadly, my friend was only confessing to me the failure of his church to infect him with Christ's Commission.

(8) *We used the "study world religions" plan.* This is self-explanatory, and included, when possible, testimonies from converts out of other world religions.

(9) *We used the "profile missions" plan.* When the Great Commission explodes upon the mind of a pastor as the dynamic of the Gospel, he will inevitably communicate his obsession in every situation. He will study the relationship of every major doctrine to this plan. He will "bleed" this passion through every sermon and presentation of the Gospel. He will expose his people to the missionary commitment of visionary believers. He himself will go to as many mission fields as possible, and take as many of his fellow Christians as possible with him.

Christian, are you "dreaming dreams" and "seeing visions" about world impact? "Ta ethna"—all ethnic groups, all nations -- across the street and across the world. Has God hit you with an "Atlas Attack"—so that you "carry" the world for His sake? Are you pursuing the Savior's strategy, or have you succumbed to Satan's subtle substitute?

"Summit III", a conference on the Person of Christ and His redemptive work, was held in Chicago in December of 1986. Dr. Ralph Winter, General Director of the U.S. Center For World Mission, was in attendance. He was one of two people asked to respond at the end of the conference to the theme and its presentation. In his response, Dr. Winter called attention to the fact that the presentation had made no reference to the work of Christians and the Church in bearing witness of Christ and His work to the world. In short, the responsibility of believers for world-witness was not even mentioned.

When Dr. Winter completed his response, the chairman of the session, himself an outstanding and renowned Christian scholar, looked at Dr. Winter with a wry smile and

said, "Well, we should have known that you would refer to your hobby sooner or later." Is world impact to be the HOBBY of a few fanatical enthusiasts, or is it to be the HEARTBEAT of every—EVERY—Christian? CAN WE TRULY AFFIRM THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST AND AT THE SAME TIME IGNORE THE ONLY MANDATE HE EVER GAVE TO US AS OUR MARCHING ORDERS? Furthermore, could any group of Christians accurately or adequately discuss the Person and Work of Christ without specifying His focus on the world? It is incumbent upon us to ponder these questions all the way through to a satisfactory conclusion. The truth is that EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD BE A WORLD CHRISTIAN. He should be committed to infecting others, interceding for missionaries, mission fields, and other Christians, invading the world, ingesting information, and thus inviting God to maximize his life for world impact.

Friends, our world is on fire—ablaze with change, turmoil, distress, revolution, violence, war—all the perfect raw materials for the Gospel. "Revolutions per minute" are occurring. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

One of the stories in Washington Irving's Sketch Book is the familiar story of a whimsical character named "Rip Van Winkle." Rip, you will remember, went into a 20 years sleep—to escape his own uselessness, boredom, and a vicious, bad-dispositioned wife. When he went to sleep, his home state of New York was one of the American colonies under English control and fighting the tyranny that oppressed the people there. But it wasn't the "larger tyranny" that bothered Rip; it was the smaller, local, selfcentered, "practical" tyranny of an immediate bad home situation. By one long sleep, Rip was delivered from both tyrannies. Christian, are you listening? Rip's story is subtly symbolic. Pastors suffer from small, local tyrannies, and often duck into a chloroformed sleep (no vision, no dynamic, no world impact)—and they aren't even aware of the cosmic tyranny, Satan's strong grip on the whole world (I John 5:19b). So what happened in the story? Rip went soundly to sleep, and didn't awaken for twenty years. Meanwhile, a Revolutionary War was fought (!). When Rip went to sleep, he was ruled by George the Third of England—a king. When awakened, he lived in a democratic republic, and another George—General George Washington—was soon to assume leadership. Rip Van Winkle had CLOSED HIS EYES and SLEPT RIGHT THROUGH A REVOLUTION! Christian, are you listening? One cannot possibly know what he is missing when he is asleep. No wonder Satan wants you introverted—to your own guilt, your own prayers, your own Bible reading, your own faith, your own witness, your own faithfulness, your own ministry, your own church, your own sins, your own fears—a humanistic, survival brand of Christianity. Wake up, Christian, and look at your Savior, look at your Bible, LOOK AT YOUR WORLD, LOOK AT YOUR OPPORTUNITY through new eyes!

### Satan's Substitute

Meanwhile, back at Matthew 28:18-20, point three of the Commission! We have been looking extensively at the Savior's strategy under the heading, "Enlarge Your Vision." Now, let's momentarily look at Satan's substitute at this point. Satan is constantly turning our attention back to our own struggles, our own survival, the local institution in which we serve (and its success), etc. He is constantly seeking to shrink our vision to something traditional, institutional, or personal, and thus the overwhelming masses of the world's population never even hear of Christ and the Gospel. Jesus gave us a plan to impact the

entire world, but we settle for a frustrating, disillusioning, non-productive substitute. Which plan are you following, the Savior's strategy by which you—yes, YOU—can actually impact the world, or Satan's substitute which secures the constant reduction of the Christian community and guarantees that billions will perish uninformed?

#### 4. Evangelize the Prospects

The fourth point of the Great Commission is to Evangelize the Prospects. There are seven verb forms in the Great Commission, but the only command (the only imperative mood verb) is to "turn men into disciples." This is a particular kind of evangelism, not to get "decisions for Christ," but rather to get "disciples" who will revolutionize the world.

##### The Savior's Strategy

Think carefully about this: since this is a command of Jesus—His ONLY Marching Orders to His Church—it is impossible to truly BE a disciple unless you are MAKING disciples. The "make disciples" clause is not an ADDITION to Jesus' plan, but the very command itself. The issue is not "converts," but "disciples." So the Savior's strategy at this point is not merely soul-winning, but disciple-making. We will examine the word "disciple" more extensively in a later study.

##### Satan's Substitute

What is Satan's substitute for making disciples? One part of his plan is to keep lost people lost, or to keep them from being saved. A second part is to keep believers from being world-visionary, world-impacting disciples. Or, if believers become disciples, Satan's purpose is to make them disciples of a pet idea, or a pet procedure; anything to keep them from being true, Christlike, New Testament disciples.

#### 5. Enlist the Evangelized

The fifth point of the Commission is to Enlist the Evangelized. "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

##### The Savior's Strategy

The Savior's strategy for each believer is an identification with Jesus Christ that reveals death to everything the believer previously lived for, and a resurrection that means that he now lives only unto Christ. By baptism, a believer in Christ acknowledges death to his past—his past sins, his past selfishness, his past motivation, his past lifestyle, his past thought patterns—his entire past, and acknowledges that he now has only one real focus for living—the glorious Person and all-consuming Purpose of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a descent into a watery grave, a picture of entering into Christ's death, and a rising again from that grave, a picture of participation with Christ in His resurrection. So baptism reveals the believer's full enlistment and total involvement in Christian discipleship. The fact that it is "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" means that the believer is implicated in total involvement in the total Person and total Plan of God. Nothing in

one's life is to be retained for his own purposes. Death has erased that possibility. Resurrection has secured another direction altogether for his life. Now, every resource of personality is devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Satan's Substitute

What is Satan's substitute at this point of the Commission? Satan seeks to push the minds of men to two extremes. On the one hand, he says that baptism is a material, mechanical, ritualistic exercise, and thus it has no importance at all. So Quakers don't baptize at all—for that reason. On the other hand, Satan says that baptism is ALL-important and that sinners cannot have eternal life without it. So Campbellites make baptism the great capstone of eternal salvation. In the middle, holding the extremely weak view that baptism is a "mere symbol," are Southern Baptists and other church bodies.

A man came to work one day with two black eyes and a bruised and swollen face. "What happened to you?" a fellow workman asked. "My wife beat me up," was the meek reply. "Do you mean you let a mere woman do that to you?" His answer was, "Listen! There is nothing 'mere' about my wife!" Friends, when we say that any commission of Jesus involves a "MERE picture," are we not on the side of Satan's substitute? Nothing Jesus ever SAID is "mere"! Have you seen how big your enlistment by Jesus Christ and your involvement with Jesus Christ really are?

## 6. Educate and Edify the Enlisted

The sixth point of the Great Commission is to Educate and Edify all the enlisted. "Teaching them to observe (obey) all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Again, the lead verb is a present participle. It indicates an ongoing, unceasing, uninterrupted, continual activity.

### The Savior's Strategy

There is never to be a moment of my life as a Christian when I am not teaching! Whether by intentional example, overt statement, specific planned curriculum, silent influence, structured or unstructured settings, I am to be an indefatigable communicator of the One Who is my Life. Every believer is to be a teacher, whether he has the gift of teaching or not. The means of communication which are available today are so many and so convincing that a Christian can hardly offer a valid excuse for not teaching. Cassette tapes on every conceivable Christian subject and produced by Godly, skilled Christian communicators; video tapes of top quality and content; vast libraries of books which may be obtained by loan or purchase; regular publications which contain a variety of teaching articles and studies, etc., etc. Every Christian's residence should be a repository and a circulation station for these teaching means. Every Christian Church should be a disseminating station for Gospel truth, using every available means and every available member to penetrate hearts, homes, community establishments, etc., with the total truth of the Gospel. Each Christian should be a special target for endless discipleship and disciple-making teaching. World vision and world ministries should be dynamically kept before each Christian and each church. The goal? That every Christian and every church

have on his (its) heart what God has on His: *the impacting of the entire world by building and deploying world-visionary, world-impacting Christians.*

## Satan's Substitute

What is Satan's substitute at this point? He first seeks to prevent the anointed teaching of the great truths of the Bible at all. Then he seeks to make "sermon-tasters" out of Christians. In this manner, they will be immunized from true Christianity by a mild inoculation of the real thing. Or he makes believers into analysts or sifters of truth, presuming that they can discern and appreciate truth apart from the Holy Spirit. Thus, they assume superiority over the truth and over the teacher of the truth. The New Testament word for "obedience", *hupokonan*, means "to hear under," and it pictures a person listening to God's truth from a consistent position of humility. James M. Barrie said, "Life is one long lesson in humility," and this is certainly true of the Christian life. But Satan's strategy is to cancel this possibility of humble listening to truth, and thus to turn the believer back into a self-governed, self-centered life-style.

Satan's plan for the believer is evident to a perceptive, sensitive Christian. Let me employ a word that shows the end result of Satan's plan. It is the word "reprobate." To "bate" means to "suspend." The prefix "pro" means "before" or "in front of." To "probate," then, is to suspend in front of. When this action is repeated, this is called "re-probating," or repeated probating. It is Satan's delight when a believer parades to church Sunday after Sunday and allows the truth to pass freely in front of him. The first time he does this without humble reception of that truth into the broken soil of a humble, sensitive, obedient heart, he "probates" that truth. The second time he does it, he "reprobates" that truth. It is quite easy to see that this is the weekly procedure of the average church member, Sunday by Sunday, week after week, month after month, year after year. He has become convinced that attending church and listening to the sermon IS the Christian life. When this procedure has continued until the person can actually no longer adjust to truth in the proper way by brokenness, humility, and prayerful obedience, God steps into the picture and turns the word "reprobate" back upon this regular listener. He becomes a lifeless, powerless, vision-less "pew potato" in a local church. He may or may not cause overt trouble for the church and the pastor, depending on the degree of his guilt over his diversion. You see, it was people who constantly went to church and constantly "handled" truth and constantly analyzed it who were guilty of the reprobate mind and the unpardonable sin. They were the scribes and Pharisees, the best and most religious people of their day (see Matthew 12). So Satan wants us to be "cafeteria line Christians," constantly appraising the truth, and picking and choosing with regard to our favorite truths, our favorite preachers, and our favorite sermons. Thus, point six in the Great Commission is neutralized by Satan's substitute strategy.

Christian, on which side do you fall? Are you pursuing the Savior's strategy with all the humble industry of your spirit, or are you "trampling God's courts" as a regular auditor who is completely non-productive in fulfilling the Great Commission?

## 7. Expect Him to Work

Point seven of the Great Commission is to Expect Jesus Christ To Work. "And lo, I am with you all the days, even to the end of the age." Please note that the "lo" follows the "go". The promise of Christ's special Presence in this verse belongs only to those who are pouring their lives into all the prescribed activities to fulfil the Great Commission. In other words, you cannot validly claim the PROMISE unless you follow the PLAN. We will never have New Testament POWER until we follow New Testament PATTERNS. So most of our prayers for the Holy Spirit and His power are wasted prayers. What do we want that power for? Why do we seek His fullness? To secure God's approval on our plans? To enhance our reputations? To put a brand of success on our endeavors for Him? Remember God's answer to the great preacher's prayer: "My child, WITH PLANS NO BIGGER THAN YOURS, YOU DON'T NEED MY POWER."

### The Savior's Strategy

What is the Savior's strategy? It is to personally attend the efforts of every disciple-maker and anoint his life and activity with the great power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "And lo, I MYSELF (the word is very emphatic) am with you all the days, even to the end of the age." Every Christian is an inadequate, incapable, insufficient, powerless representative of Jesus Christ apart from this promise (actually, it is a FACT, not a mere promise). But every amateur in any field knows what an encouragement, what an enablement it is to have the regular attending presence of THE EXPERT with him. What did Jesus mean when He said, "I Myself am with you?" He meant that the Holy Spirit may best be understood as Christ's "alter ego," or His "other self." The day will never come when the Lord Jesus is not powerfully present in the life of His disciple-making saint.

John Wesley White said, "To be filled with the 'holy go' is to be filled with the 'Holy Ghost'." People often quote this promise out of its proper setting. When they are in adversity, they use this verse to claim that the Lord is always with them. But this verse isn't a balm for adversity. There are plenty of verses in Scripture which may be used for that purpose, but this isn't one of them—unless, of course, the adversity comes as a direct result of fulfilling the Commission. This is a verse for the disciple-maker. In other words, if you wonder where to find Jesus today, you must look where disciples are being made. He by-passes many a church where sermons are preached (and even GOOD sermons), where prayers are prayed (and even SINCERE prayers), and where crowds gather (and they may even be BIG crowds), and goes to approve and anoint any person who is making disciples ACCORDING TO HIS NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN.

Do you want to know where Jesus will be attending church next Sunday? Look for Him in a church where world-visionary, world-impacting reproducers of world-visionary, world-impacting reproducers are being made. Not merely "good Christians", mind you, because that is usually merely a humanistic brand of Christianity. Jesus doesn't attend and anoint and approve many churches and many believer's lives because they don't have on their hearts what God has on His heart, to "turn men into disciples in all nations." On the other hand, when God sees a disciple-making church (building disciples after His pattern and fully depending upon Him in this gigantic undertaking), He gets thoroughly involved there. He gets down-right, in-right, up-right, out-right enthused and excited about it—and He joins that church right away. And He will meet with the people of that church as long as He can enjoy Himself there.

We need no bigger proof of the bigness of the Commission than to see the statements Jesus put before and after it. "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and on earth." He is the deserving, delegated EXPERT: "And lo, I Myself am with you all the days, even unto the very end of the age." "All the days"—in days of peril or days of safety, in days of failure and of success, of freedom or restriction, of peace or war, of sowing or reaping, of study or action. There will never be a day when this fact fails.

When Fretyof Hansen, the great Norwegian explorer, set sail in 1896 to penetrate the polar ice cap and study the flow of polar ice, everyone knew it was a hazardous undertaking. He took with him a cage of carrier pigeons. At each stage of the perilous journey, he released one of the birds with a message attached to its leg. Mrs. Nansen's journal at home contained this entry: "I was overjoyed each time I found one of the pigeons at my window. When I saw the bird, I knew my husband was alive and thinking of me." Two thousand years ago, the glorified Lord Jesus Christ released the Heavenly Dove, the Holy Spirit, His Other Self, into the world on the Day of Pentecost—the full release of Divine Power for the fulfillment of the Divine Plan. When we obey Him and see the working of His mighty Spirit, we know He is alive and well, thinking of us, and present and active with us. It is His desire and pleasure to act this way all the time. This is His strategy.

### Satan's Substitute

What is Satan's subtle substitute? He tries to divert our attention to institution-building and other reduced activities, and thus preclude the involvement of the Holy Spirit with us. Or, he tries to convince us that we are all alone and that no one is listening when we pray. He tries to keep us ignorant of the Holy Spirit or indifferent to His Person, Presence, and power, or occupied with a self-centered counterfeit experience of Him.

On which side, dear Christians do you fall at this point?

### The Great Commission or the Great Omission?

We have examined the Commission that determines our mandate. Remember, it is the only marching orders Jesus ever gave to His church. However, Satan keeps the Divine Plan hindered by keeping his own program in operation. Wherever the church is DIVERTED to institution-building, or self-survival, or merely making "good Christians," Satan's hand is evident. In that case, the Great Commission has become the "Great Omission." Isn't it time that we put the "see" back into the Commission?

Years ago, I taught this study on the Great Commission in a group of young married couples. At the conclusion of the session, a young housewife prayed this prayer which I copied from a cassette tape later:

"Father, I glory in the fact that there is a man, a human being, in heaven for Us right now. And if He IS and REMAINS truly human, then He must still have human

emotions. He can enjoy, appreciate, hurt, and suffer. HOW HIS HEART MUST GRIEVE as He seeks to administrate His cause on earth, but watches His earthly Body following a strategy that is generally the EXACT OPPOSITE at every point to that strategy which He gave to His disciples."

Great Commission or Great Omission? Friends, isn't it time that we put the "see" back into the Great Commission?