

Renewing Great Commission Cooperation
Matthew 28:16-20

I. The Call of Great Commission Cooperation

Read Matthew 28:16-20

The great missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, said, "The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed." This morning we will look at what the Great Commission is and what it demands of us individually and as the church.

Formula for Cooperation. The Great Commission demands great cooperation! ***Great Commission Cooperation is simply churches joining together to make disciples of all nations.*** We first share our faith regularly with those around us. Then we extend our witness by faithfully tithing to and through our church so that others make go and share the gospel at home and to the ends of the earth. We do so collectively, as Baptist churches when we link arms together for the gospel, extending the gospel through our Southern Baptist of Texas Convention, North American Mission Board, and International Mission Board to reach all the nations of the earth. ***God-called missionaries and their families from the Southern Baptist family, serving from closed countries in the Middle East, the Amazon basin in South America, megacities in Brazil, India and China, to unchurched and unreached areas in North America and beyond, all depend on your faithful giving to reach the world for Christ. Currently your giving supports 4,903 missionaries through the International Mission Board to reach a world of nearly 7 billion people-the vast majority of whom are living in spiritual darkness. The North American Mission Board reports that 259 million people in North America and Canada do not have a personal relationship with Christ, and there is one SBC congregation for every 6,828 persons. The needs are vast and the call of Christ is clear: go, give, send!***

The primary reason for a Baptist convention is for Baptist churches, united in biblical doctrine, to cooperate together for the advancement of the gospel among the nations, doing more together than we can do separately. This extension of the gospel to the ends of the earth is only made possible through your giving, going, and sending.

Renewing Great Commission Cooperation involves overcoming the barriers of materialism, fear, racial prejudice, self-centeredness, and unbelief by being reminded that Jesus Christ sends us out together under His authority to make disciples of all nations. Jesus calls us to redirect our lives in the direction of His vision for the nations. He calls us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to Him and to His cause, recognizing that the His mission is bigger than any one individual, church, or denomination. He calls us to view our lives and the gospel as a stewardship from Him. When we realize that we are not our own, but we have been brought with the precious blood of Jesus, then can see clearly and act urgently on the will of Jesus for His church. "If the Great Commission is true, our plans are not too big; they are too small." -- Pat Morley.

Seeing the Harvest and Sending Workers into it. The world we live in today demands that we see the wide open door for Great Commission cooperation that God has given us. We live in an age of mass migration of people. No longer is it the case that the "ends of the earth" means the other side of the planet. The "ends of the earth" are upon us today in the USA. Texas alone is rapidly becoming one of the most multi-cultural and multi-religious states in the USA. Muslim mosques and Hindu/Buddhist temples in the large urban areas of the Bible belt are becoming more a part of the landscape. All the major world religions are represented in Texas alone. Waves of Asian and Latin Immigration has brought the nations to our doorstep. Technology and the ease of long

distance travel has made the planet that we live on much smaller than that of our parents. In the midst of the changing demographics we often respond with fear and unbelief-fear of foreigners (particularly Muslims) and disbelief that people of other religions can be reached with the gospel.

But the only question is: will we have eyes to see, a heart to serve, feet that go, a mouth to share, and the vision to give to the cause of the gospel, which is much greater than any one of us-to make disciples of all nations, starting right here at home? The call of Jesus to His church remains the same. In an age when other religions are aggressively seeking to win the hearts and minds of people around the globe, Jesus calls the church to awaken to the great task before her-to bring the gospel to those lost in sin and make disciples of all nations.

- Jesus said to his disciples, ““Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.” (John 4:35 NAS95)
- “And He was saying to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Luke 10:2 NAS95)

Renewing a Great Commission Cooperation involves seeing the harvest around us, becoming involved in and through your church, praying that God would call out more workers, and giving so that others whom God calls may go.

The message challenges you to consider your stewardship of the gospel in God's great plan of salvation in Jesus Christ that He offers through the church to all the nations of the world. **Are you involved in sharing the gospel with others, and are you giving so that others whom God is calling may go to reach the nations with the gospel of grace?**

II. The Foundation of Great Commission Cooperation

We have a Great Commission that demands a great cooperation because we have a Great Lord and Savior who sends us out under His authority to make disciples of all nations. Great Commission Cooperation is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ and extends to the entire world.

The Authority of Jesus Christ. Jesus said to His disciples: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth, go therefore. . . ." Jesus Christ is the Divine Son of God, Creator, and Savior, who holds the universe together by the word of His power. In 1:23 he is God with us; in the Great Commission He promises that He will be with his church until the end of the age. Passages in Matthew also emphasize Jesus' authority during His earthly ministry. In 7:29 his teaching had authority. In 8:1-13 he exercised authority in healing. In 9:6 he exercised authority in the forgiveness of sins. In 10:1 he has authority over Satan. In chapter 16 He is the One who promises to build His church so that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And Matthew clarifies at the end that Jesus has all authority.

“So Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”” (John 20:21 NAS95)

Responding to Christ's Command. The disciples responded with worship when they saw Jesus. But some “doubted.” Leon Morris points out that the word is best understood as “hesitated.” It could be that the crowd present was the 500 mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, which would have included some of those who were hesitating.

Coming to terms with the authority of Jesus Christ helps us overcome the barrier of fear. Fear of rejection and even failure often prevent us from taking the first step to share our faith with others. “The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.” (Proverbs 29:25 NAS95) **God calls us to respond in faith, not fear!**

"Risk-Taking" for the Gospel. The world is also full of uncertainties and dangers. We must accept the risk and die to self for the glory of Christ. But we can go into all the world knowing that Christ has sent us and nothing can touch us apart from His divine allowance. Harm may come to us at home as easily as overseas, so we must remember that God has called to be risk-takers for the gospel of Jesus Christ, entrusting our lives into His hands.

The Unstoppable Gospel. No government, system of laws, or earthly ruler can stop the gospel of Jesus Christ. 2 Timothy 2:8, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, 2Timothy 2:9 for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; **but the word of God is not imprisoned.** 2Timothy 2:10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory." (2 Timothy 2:8–10 NAS95) Jesus alone is sovereign—King of kings and Lord of lords. Let's us have confidence and boldness to go to all the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ. No weapon formed against the gospel of Christ will stand.

Closing Off our Escape Routes. **Illustration:** The great 16th century explorer, Cortez, burned all his ships in the harbor, except one to carry a portion of his treasure back to the Spanish crown, leaving his crew completely stranded in Mexico, in order to secure the allegiance of his men. Not until all escape routes were eliminated could his men focus on their mission and completely obey the direction of Cortez.

Now our King, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords sends us out on His mission under His authority. He often has to cut off our escape routes in order than we might become single-minded and focused on the mission that he has given to us. What is it that is keeping you from simplifying your life and focusing on His will for you? Are we still being distracted by the allegiance of self and accumulating the temporary things of this world?

When we come to terms with the Lordship of Jesus over us, then we are ready to serve together, as He directs, to reach the nations for the glory of His name. When I recognize that I own nothing and that He has given me everything, then I am free to move in the direction that He would have me go and give of myself completely to His mission to make disciples of all nations.

III. The Agents of Great Commission Cooperation

The local church is HQ for God's mission to reach the nations! The local church is the goal, fruit, and means of God's mission! Even with all its imperfections, it is the most important institution on earth! For this reason it is worthy of our investment. This means **everyone** who is a part of this church has a significant role to play through your giving, going, and sending to reach our world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In speaking to the apostles Jesus speaks today to all His churches. Paul describes the apostles and prophets in Ephesians 2 as the foundation of the church. ***In commanding the apostles, Jesus is commanding churches of all ages in every generation to make disciples of all nations until He returns again.***

Cooperation among Southern Baptist churches. Southern Baptist Churches have always seen the need to cooperate together to send out missionaries, at home through our Southern Baptist of Texas Convention and the North American Mission Board, and abroad through the International

Mission Board. These structures exist by the churches, for the churches, and are accountable to the churches. They do not replace the responsibility of the churches for spreading the gospel but serve as one critical means of extending the gospel witness of the churches by sending out those who are called as full-time missionaries. *A portion of every dollar that you tithe to the Lord through this church goes to our Southern Baptist of Texas Convention, NAMB and IMB in order to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ in North American and to the ends of the earth.*

The formula for a Great Commission Cooperation is simple: We first cooperate with God in His mission as His submissive and joyful servants. It is ultimately His mission that we are furthering. Second, we cooperate with one another as the body of Christ locally and the family of Baptist churches collectively to advance the mission of the gospel to the nations. In doing so we seek to join hands together in the church and with the broader family of like-minded churches to advance the glorious gospel of the rise Lord to all peoples. We do so by going, tithing in our church, and sending out missionaries.

Recognizing that the Great Commission is for the local church helps us overcome the barrier of individualism and isolationism, causing us to see more can be done together to advance the kingdom of God than separate.

Illustration: We can find the principle of cooperation in the New Testament. Paul was a missionary sent out by the church of Antioch and at various times was fully supported by the donations of churches while at other times he made his own support through work. Paul commended the Philippian church for their *partnership* in the gospel. Philippians 1:3-5, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, Philippians 1:4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, Philippians 1:5 in view of your *participation in the gospel* from the first day until now."

The Philippians' partnership in the gospel involved their witness to the world and their support of Paul's missionary ministry. *There is no greater partnership/fellowship/cooperation than for the gospel of Jesus Christ! In order to be faithful to the Great Commission, churches must engage the whole church in upholding a bold witness for Christ to the world and supporting those who give their life to this task.*

IV. The Scope of Great Commission Cooperation

The scope of the Great Commission, to make disciples of all nations, demands a great cooperation. Acts 1:7-8, "He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in *Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*'"

God's Heart, Our Heart. God has the world on His heart and He wants to put the world on our hearts-to pray, labor, and cooperate for the evangelization of the nations. John 3:16 reminds us that "for God so loved the *world*. . . ." The word for *nations* is properly translated as *people group-those who share a common ethnicity, language, and culture*. God's ancient promise to Abraham was to bless *all the nations of the earth* through his seed. Paul states that the seed of Abraham is Jesus Christ. *Our mission is simple: to be witnesses for Christ to all peoples, sharing the good news of his victory over sin, death, and devil through His cross and resurrection.*

Knowing the Map. The great Baptist missionary to India, William Carey, said, "To know the will

of God, we need an open Bible and an open map." As Baptists we are good at opening our Bibles, but are we as equally proficient at opening our maps? Do we know the *people map* in our neighborhood, city, state, country, and world? God calls us to bring the good news of the Bible, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, to *ALL* the people around us. Jesus commanded us to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The line between our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth are not as clear as they used to be. What do we see when go to the grocery store, when we drive around our neighborhood and city? In Texas alone there are over 400 People Groups representing over 100 nations! If we have the spiritual eyes to see, then we observe that God has brought the nations to our doorstep. The only question is: what are we doing to reach them with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Overcoming Racial Prejudice. Recognizing that God's heart is for *all nations* helps us overcome the barrier of racial prejudice and fear of foreigners.

Illustration. Jonah hated the people of Ninevah, but God called him to preach a message of judgment to them so that they would repent and be spared but Jonah ran from the call of God. We know the rest of the story. Jonah eventually went and preached and the people repented in sackcloth and ashes. God likewise calls us to demonstrate the same compassion and love for our enemies, as we do to our friends.

"We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God." — John Stott

V. The Task of Great Commission Cooperation

"God is a God of missions. He wills missions. He commands missions. He demands missions. He made missions possible through His Son. He made missions actual in sending the Holy Spirit." — George W. Peters

Go! Leon Morris says that the participle *go* carries the imperative force because it is followed by the imperative, *make disciples*. The Great Commission involves the church scattering, *as you are going*, for the furtherance of the gospel. Jesus' words convey intentionality. We deliberately go, evangelize, and make disciples. This means we are to plan and strategize how best to reach a lost world for Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:13-15, "for 'WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.' How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!'"

Romans 10:17, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

Methods must change and adapt but the unchanging gospel remains the same. Churches must find a balance between respecting the traditions of the past and yet being open to reach this generation and world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we *go* we are following the footsteps of our missionary God who came from heaven to earth to secure our salvation. When we *send*, we are following the example of Jesus who sends us

out as the Father sent Him out.

“The mark of a great church is not its seating capacity, but its sending capacity.” -- Mike Stachura. Our sending capacity increases when we work together as Baptist churches!

Make Disciples. ***The goal of Great Commission Cooperation and its progress are measured in terms of discipleship.*** Some make a distinction between evangelism and discipleship but no such distinction is made in the NT. ***Disciple*** means that the task is not finished until Christ is formed in the heart of every child of God. ***Discipleship involves the first step of obedience through baptism and the ongoing process of learning the Word of God and applying it to one's life.***

Are you in a discipleship relationship in which you are giving to someone younger in the faith and receiving from someone older in the faith?

- *Baptizing in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.* When we baptize we are not performing a meaningless ritual. It not only pictures the work of salvation in the heart, but it also reflects our view of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Baptism has lost its place of importance even among Baptists. Baptism is not an option for new Christians. Baptism is not a Baptist tradition; it is the command of Jesus Christ in the Great Commission. Jesus commanded that baptism be administered by immersion to all believers. The word is *baptizo* and it means *immerse*. Baptism does not save. It is not sacramental. It pictures what Christ has done in the heart. He has circumcised the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the visible sign of an invisible grace that has been bestowed on the believing heart.

Acts 2:37-38, “Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Have you been baptized as a believer? If you have repented of your sin and placed faith in Christ, it is God's command to you to be baptized. This is a significant first step in your Great Commission Cooperation. Church, do you make much of the baptism of new believers? Every time we baptize, the gospel is proclaimed.

- *Teaching them to observe things that Jesus has commanded.* Discipleship is the church's task, not a parachurch organization's task. God has given the gifts within the body of Christ to lead in this important ministry. It is vital because Christ has commanded it.

Ephesians 4:11-13, “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Jesus said that the substance of the teaching is that they ***observe all things that I have commanded***. This means that Jesus is teaching a way of life. We are not merely making converts, Baptists, or quick decisions. We are making disciples. This goes against the shallow views of evangelism that seeks quick decisions for the gospel with no follow up. Discipleship begins with

a decision for Christ, but it does not end there. Churches must structure themselves in such a way to meet this critical discipleship need for all believers to grow together into the likeness of Christ and be fully equipped to disciple others.

VI. The Promise of Great Commission Cooperation

Promise of Presence. *The promise of a Great Commission cooperation is that Jesus Christ will be with us in presence, power, and provision, literally, "all the days to the end of the age."* The *I* is emphatic. The promise is not “*will be* with you” but that “*I am* with you.” Matthew opens with the declaration that in Jesus God is with us and it closes with this same promise.

Jesus commands us to take His Great Commission yoke upon us and be His co-laborers in the great task before us.

You are never alone in doing the will of God. No matter how lonely we may feel, how afraid we become, or disappointed at the lack of results, Jesus promises to be with His people to the end of the age.

Presence in Power. Acts 1:7-8, “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’”

Presence in Provision. **God never experiences economic downturn!** He owns the cattle on a thousands hills and can meet our every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. For this reason we can be encouraged by the words of the famous missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, who said, "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply." He calls on us to cooperate with Him as his co-laborers in the harvest and with one another to bear the message of God's salvation in Christ to a world living in darkness with no hope and without God.

VII. The Application of Great Commission Cooperation

Romans 1:14, “I am under obligation both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish.” All that we do for God and others should flow out of a deep sense of gratitude to God for what He has done, is doing, and will do for us in Christ Jesus. In this sense we are debtors to grace. Do we operate out of a sense of gratitude and responsibility to the God of the gospel to share what we have received with others? We express our gratitude to God and stewardship of the gospel by giving, going, and sending.

1. Give

2 Corinthians 8:1, "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 Corinthians 8:2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 2 Corinthians 8:3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 2 Corinthians 8:4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 2 Corinthians 8:5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.” (2 Corinthians 8:1–5 NAS95)

Give yourself first to the Lord! The churches of Macedonia also begged for the favor of

participation in the support of the saints. The cause was to give to the impoverished saints in Jerusalem, suffering in the great famine. How much greater need is there to support the saints who are bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Have you given yourself first to the Lord?

Give financially so that others may go. Are you a cheerful giver? Would you characterize your life as eager and willing to participate in God's mission?

2. Go

Go so that others may hear. The force of the command, go, conveys the idea of "as you are going, make disciples." Each believer is called upon bear witness to what Jesus Christ has done in his life and desires to do in the lives of others. We are witnesses to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit at home, our neighborhood, at work, and beyond. As we go throughout our days and weeks on earth, God gives us a stewardship of the gospel, entrusted to us in order that we might share it with others. God also calls specific individual to plant their lives in another culture to share the good news of Jesus with a specific group of people. Perhaps today God is calling you to surrender your life to full-time Christian service as a missionary.

3. Send

Send so that others may serve. The volunteer/short-term missions explosion has many positive benefits. More people are wanting to be directly involved in serving the people groups of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The cost and ease of travel makes short-term missions more affordable today than ever before. As people from churches go to distant lands or areas more close to home, God calls some through these experiences to serve in full-time missionary service. While the positives of the short-term missions explosion are evident, the needs of the vast majority of the 6.9 billion people on planet earth demand that churches continue to send out full-time workers who will plant their lives in a culture among a people to learn their language, show the love of Christ daily, communicate the gospel of Christ in an understandable way, make disciples, plant churches, and train leaders. **We will never outgrow the demand of the Great Commission to cooperate together to send workers into the harvest.** *Not all are called to go full-time, but all are called to give and send.*

Since we have experienced great things from God in our own salvation we can as the great Baptist missionary, William Carey, once preached, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

Let us look to Him today to overcome the barriers of materialism, fear, prejudice, individualism, and unbelief so that we may be about the Father's business of making disciples of all nations for His glory until He comes again.