

Title The Great Commission
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God is a God of multiplication and addition, not division and subtraction, though I would ask him to subtract my heart rate. This topic was given to me with an outline, and I'll tell you what the outline is, then we'll decide if we can spend a lot of time on each, or if I simply have to give an overview of the topic.

1. What is the Great Commission?
2. Why the need for the Great Commission?
3. How is the Great Commission being filled? (changed from personal/congregational evangelism, but he changed to how it is being fulfilled)
4. Anabaptist history and the correlation between ministry and spiritual vitality.
5. Ministering to the religious in the communities as well as the heathen.

I can give an overview of the first three in the allotted time, the what, why, and how.

What is the Great Commission? The last recorded instruction given by Jesus to his disciples. Another thing is the Creator God would use man to fulfill something so great. It's a special calling from Jesus Christ to all his followers to take specific action while on this earth. When we think about being commissioned it is not only a task but has the authority to fulfill the task. It is given to one as an agent for another.

Let's turn to three Scriptures. Matthew 28 is the most familiar one. Notice the authority given first to Jesus and how he gives us this authority to go. [*Read passage. Then read Mark 16:14.*] I thought it was only those who went, but the signs shall *follow them*. In verse 20, it says, "signs following." The Lord went with them. Luke 24:47, it tells us what to preach, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem. "I send to you the promise of my father upon you..." This was previous to Pentecost. The point is, we dare not go by our own power, our own authority. We'd better stay home. There is a pattern; it always starts at home. Family, even business, that is a principle we should always keep in mind. To neglect the things at home is to be against the very basic teachings of the Word. Ministry as we heard "happens as we live our lives" someone said. We go, and we sent people, just as they did back then. We heard last night about the 'other' gospel. When we think about the great commission and the four very clear teachings here, the Great Commission is not just baptism and church membership as was the thrust during the Protestant reformation, as it still is today. Our own churches have had this, where we depend a lot on baptism and church

membership and we fail the four parts. Neither is it just to preach the gospel to get people saved so they don't go to hell. It's fire insurance for many people in churches today. We've been greatly influenced by these teachings. You will find that the Great Commission was the heart of the Anabaptist movement. They took seriously the four parts of the Commission: the Commission to preach the gospel, to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach, to observe the commandments of Christ.

We tend to take the easy route; we tend to baptize and make members or just preach the gospel and get people saved. The discipleship part of it is much more difficult. We tend to shy away from this part of it. In Chapter 7 in Stephe Russell's books where he talks about the duties given to the state—I've been greatly influenced by Stephe, he's a member of my church—he says, "In this short command to the church..." [*Summary: She is to proclaim the Gospel around the world. She is to initiate by baptism those that respond positively by invitation, responsible to instruct and guide all believers into complete obedience.*]

Why the need for the Great Commission? If we look at the first and last two chapters of the Bible, we learn about the Creation, man being the pinnacle, God calling the creation very good. In chapter 3 we read about the fall of man. We learn about the need for redemption. In Revelation, we learn about Satan's final defeat and how God is restoring the Creation to a greater glory than what He first created. Between these chapters, we can see in Scripture, we learn about God's plan for restoration, the overarching theme of the Bible: the glory of God revealed to his creation. God will accomplish that which he has set out to do; his plan will not be thwarted. Every knee shall bow. [*Two verses from Isaiah*]

Even now the earth is the Lord's and the heavens declare the glory of God. The early Anabaptists used this verse much, Psalm 21:1 "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof..." In Habakkuk 2:14, it says, the Earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Why the need for the Great Commission? Because of the curse on God's creation. God is restoring and renewing all Satan has ruined and is in bondage. Revelation 20:21-22, we read about separation, restoration, and redemption.

How is the Great Commission being filled? Through God's people. God's plan for the Great Commission began to take shape when he took Abraham away from his country and gave him a promise. It was exemplified through Jesus and his people. In Genesis 12:2-3, this promise was given to Abram. I believe Jesus Christ the true Israel did fulfill this responsibility. Exodus 19:4-6. God told Moses to tell the people, ye have seen what I have done unto the Egyptians... God desired a relationship with his people. He said in verse five, if you will be a peculiar people above all people, for all the earth is mine. Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. 1 Peter 2:9 [*excerpt:*]"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood..." Why? "That ye should show forth the praises of him that have called you out of darkness into marvelous light."

What does this look like? Jesus in Luke 4:18 said what His ministry is. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." I believe we are given this ministry. We do not do the healing, but we are the ones called to bind up the wounds and to preach the gospel to the poor, to preach deliverance. In Acts 26, Paul is giving his story to the authorities. One verse, before his conversion, authority was given to him by the chief priests to do what he was doing. After the conversion experience, the

Lord gave him a charge. Acts 26, let's read the charge that he gave to Paul. Let's see if we can make see some parallels between that and what I just read in Luke. in verse 18, the charge given to Paul, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and sanctified by faith that is within me. It is our charge to open the eyes of people, to show them the difference between darkness and light.

One example of congregational evangelism that has impressed me a lot is the Thessalonians church. 1 Thess. 1:5-10. We can see the pattern that we are called to follow, in verse 5 of Thess. 1. They were preached to, they became disciples of the Lord and those who had taught them. In verse 7, they were examples, set a pattern to all that believe. It starts at home, then it goes outward, such as at the church in Antioch.

I'd like to talk about the things that I believe can hinder churches in truly fulfilling the great Commission. The early Anabaptists did well even during persecution in spreading the gospel. That is what flamed the fires. It does seem that eventually persecution was so great that they opted to be the quiet in the land. I'm not sure—we shouldn't look down on them for that. Once it is almost impossible to live, we look at things differently maybe. Early, let's look at history from the Hutterites. Early, they were very active, sending missionaries to share the Gospel. They have clear records of the ratio of people that went out that didn't come back. It was about 80%. They were sent out, captured, and executed and never returned. As long as they were vigorous in their mission work and being persecuted, they did well. Their Bruderhofs were centers of real Christian life. When they moved to the US and Canada, very little persecution. That prosperity overwhelmed them. I'll come to that later. Right now, we're just looking at what seems to be the problem. The Dutch Mennonites did well in sending relief back to their people. They were tolerated, they became prosperous; they lost their testimony for Christ. Dutch Mennonite merchants began to put canons of their ships to *seem* to be dangerous to those who would hijack the ships. Then they put the real things on. Then they started being governors of part of the colonies. So on and so forth. I believe for all of us whether Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites, whoever, there has been a temptation, especially for the plain people, to try to wall ourselves off to others. I believe in separation, but if we just isolate ourselves, first of all, the divide is external. We could take this whole group of people and go to jungle somewhere and start a community, but the devil is going to be there. The world is going to be there, the world is in our hearts. It seems like isolation is not the answer. We take the world with us.

In looking at current conditions, what are some hindrances? I named a few, but I'm not sure this is the problem. No persecution, prosperity, isolation, self-sufficiency, becoming politically involved, I don't believe that is the problem. In Acts 9:31, I love this Scripture. I believe you get the answer here. I'll ask the question, should the circumstances we're living in control us or control the vibrancy in our hearts? In Acts 9:31, [*excerpt:*] "Then did all the churches rest... and were edified." Here is the key, and walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost, we are multiplying. Severe persecution or no persecution can be detrimental. Prosperity can be detrimental, but I don't believe this to be the underlying problem. Once we move away from the fear of the Lord and the Holy Ghost, we begin to diminish. Here it says, God is a God of multiplication.

I'd like to qualify what I said about separation, to fulfill the great Commission we need to be

rubbing shoulders with the world by showing them how we live in Christ separated. Did anybody say it is going to be easy? “I send you forth as among lambs among wolves.” I believe in separation, but not isolation.

Ministering to the religious in our communities as well as the heathen: Matthew 5:14-16, let’s turn there. As we think about God’s call, first to the nation of Israel, then to the church today. “Ye are the salt of the earth...” Salt doesn’t do much good in a salt shaker. It needs to be in the soup. In verse 14, [*excerpt:*] “ye are the light of the world... and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” As we think about the Great Commission, rather than thinking about the end results of the Great Commission, but I believe if we give a picture of God’s kingdom being restored, of separation of the evil, it should excite people to see the glory of God.

I’m going to close with several paragraphs from a writing our son Josh wrote for an assignment at Faith Builders. “God Is Love.” [*Read excerpt.*] We have in our hands the Word of God. May God bless.