

The Necessity and Benefit of the Great Commission

“And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Romans 10:15)

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In Romans 10:13-15, Paul addresses the issue of the necessity of preaching the gospel. There is a logical progression when one follows the text – there is a need to call upon the Lord; yet one cannot call upon the name of the Lord unless they believe; but, they cannot believe if they have not heard; and, they cannot hear if there is no preacher! Therefore, we need to be preachers of the word.

This lesson will concern itself with what we have commonly called the Great Commission. It is called this in contrast to the commission that Jesus gave in Luke 10 and Matthew 10. In both of these passages, Jesus sent people out to teach his message to only those of the children of Israel. The Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:46-48, and Acts 1:8, is broader in its scope. It commands us to take the message of Christ to every person in every nation in all the world.

We tend to make excuses as to why we do not teach others. We say we do not have enough time, or money. We excuse ourselves because “no one will listen anyway”. Some will even profess that they just cannot do it. We talk about it; we analyze it; and we commend those who do it. Yet, we do not fulfill the Great Commission ourselves.

If we are of sound mind, and can communicate in some way with others, we can fulfill the Great Commission. God has never asked us to do something that we cannot do! We make a lot of excuses, because there are no reasons for not fulfilling the Great Commission.

Sometimes, we need to know a little more about something before we will commit ourselves to that something. The same is true in our spiritual lives. That is why it is so important for us to study God’s word. The more we understand what God wants us to do, the easier it is for us to do it. It may be that we have not fulfilled the Great Commission because we do not understand the necessity and benefit of the Commission. In this lesson, we will study this topic in more detail with the intention of helping all of us become more involved in taking the word into all the world.

When I think about the Great Commission, there are several things that come to mind as to why the Commission is necessary. I am not talking about why we should fulfill it, but why we need it in the first place. Consider the points that follow.

The Commission is necessary because we need to understand our mission to know how to fulfill our goal. Without a proper understanding of our work, we cannot be sure we are fulfilling what God desires of us. We need direction in life.

The Commission is important to us because we must have a way to teach the message of Christ. Left to himself, man would be sure to fail to come up with a good plan to perpetuate the message of Christ. The evidence we have before us each and every day is that man is getting farther and

farther from God's word. Therefore, there is no urgency in spreading God's word. Without the spread of the word, its effect will dissipate and die. We need to know what God's plan is for keeping his word alive.

Another reason we need the Commission is because we need direction in our tasks. Jesus instructs us in what to teach (the gospel); to whom we are to teach (the whole world); and the why we are to teach (to be saved). This should serve to keep us focused on our task. We will never waver from teaching the gospel in its pureness and its simplicity.

The Commission is important to us also because it sets the limits that we need. If told to go teach, I may ask what I am to teach. I may also interject my own ideas, if there are no restrictions given. However, Jesus said that we are to teach THE GOSPEL. This limits us in what we are to teach, and therefore we cannot teach man's ideas. We can only proclaim the words of Jesus.

Why should we fulfill the Commission? This question examines our responsibility to the Commission. It is one thing to know that a command exists; it is quite another thing to fulfill that command. As we mentioned, many know that Jesus said go into all the world, but few actually fulfill this command.

We must fulfill the Commission because we want to fulfill God's commands. To put it another way, we must fulfill the Commission because we do not want to go to Hell. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said that we must teach people to fulfill all that he has commanded us. Part of what Jesus commanded was to go into the whole world and preach the gospel. The Bible also teaches us that if we love God, we will keep his commandments (1 John 5:3). For some reason, we think we can neglect to fulfill the Commission and still be pleasing to God. One question: "How many of God's commands can we fail to fulfill and still go to Heaven?"

The Commission must be fulfilled because we want others to go to Heaven. We say that we love our brethren and our fellow man. We profess a love for our families. To show this love, we provide their needs and care for them. But, do we really love them? We are taught to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39; James 2:8). If we do this, we will want to give them the opportunity to go to Heaven because we want to go to Heaven.

Paul expressed a desire to teach the people at Rome (Romans 1:15). He had not yet been there but he wanted to preach the word to them. He had this desire because he knew the word of God was God's power to salvation (Romans 1:16). The Romans, like us, needed to hear the word so they could obey God's word and become the servants of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18).

People in the world are caught up in sin and live in the world of darkness. They are lost being alienated from God (Ephesians 2:12). We can help them come out of darkness and into the light of Jesus Christ by teaching them the word of God (Colossians 1:13). We must therefore fulfill the Commission of Jesus Christ.

It has been said that we are the only book that some people will read. That is, they will learn whether we are the servants of God and whether they want to be the servants of God by what they see in our lives. If we profess Christianity, but do not live Christianity, we will not influence people

to become Christians. We must fulfill the Commission so people will know that we are the servants of God. We are to let our lights shine before men (Matthew 5:16), and we are to keep ourselves upright among those of the world (1 Peter 4:12). We are to be examples in all aspects of life, including faith (1 Timothy 4:12). If people do not see us teaching God's word, will they believe that we are people of faith? O.J. Smith, an atheist, made the following statement:

Did I firmly believe, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, religion would mean to me everything. I would cast away earthly enjoyment as dross, earthly cares as follies, and earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity. Religion would be my first waking thought, and my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. I would labour in its cause alone. I would take thought for the morrow of Eternity only. I would esteem one soul gained for Heaven worth a life of suffering. Earthly consequences should never stay my hand, nor seal my lips. Earth, its joys and griefs, would occupy no moment in my thoughts. I would strive to look upon Eternity alone, and on the immortal Souls around me, soon to be everlastingly happy or everlastingly miserable. I would go forth to the world and preach to it in season and out of season, and my text would be, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (From *Cry of the World*, O.J. Smith, p. 89, as quoted in *The Brown Trail Waymarks*, published by the Brown Trail church of Christ, Bedford, Texas, 1-25-81)

We need to contemplate this statement made by an atheist. He has no faith in God and yet he has captured brilliantly what should be the attitude of the Christian. How committed are we to the saving of the souls of those around us?

Many benefits come from the fulfilling of the Commission. With everything God has commanded comes great blessings when the command is fulfilled. Sometimes these blessings will be evident, and other times we may not notice them for what they are. But, after careful contemplation, we can understand that we have been blessed because we have kept his commandments.

One benefit that comes from teaching God's word is the training of future generations as well as the present generation. 2 Timothy 2:2 teaches us to preach the word to others who will then be able to teach the word to others. This pattern will be continued and each generation will be able to boldly proclaim God's word. A failure to teach this generation will cause the next generation to be lost. We do not ever want to get to the position where there will arise a generation that does not know God (Judges 2:10).

Teaching helps us to grow individually. God expects us to grow (Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Peter 3:18). He does not want us to remain babes in Christ. Those who have taught classes have often commented on how much good the class did them because it caused them to study and they had learned so much. The more knowledge we have of God's word, the stronger we will be in our faith, and the bolder we will be in our proclamation of the word.

When we think about obeying Jesus' command to go into the world and preach the word, we have to remember that if we fail to do so, we will bring dishonor to the name of God. Can we disobey our Father in Heaven and think that people will glorify him? The rest of Matthew 5:16, after he tells us to let our light shine before men, teaches us that people will be able to glorify God by the works

they see in us. 1 Corinthians 10:31 does still teach us that everything we do must be done to the glory of God. It should be our aim to walk in the light as he is in the light (1 John 1:7).

One great benefit that comes from fulfilling the Commission is that we will remove the responsibility for the souls of men from our hands. Like it or not, we bear a certain responsibility for others. We can say that they must ultimately choose to serve God, and we would be correct. However, that does not mean that God has not told us to go teach and give people the opportunity to be saved. If I do not teach, then I bear some responsibility for a soul being lost. One of the songs we sing that should cause us to seriously consider our duty is entitled "You Never Mentioned Him To Me".

Ezekiel was warned by God that he was a watchman of the people. As a watchman, he was to be on guard and warn the people when the enemy approached. They might choose to perish, but he had done his job, and therefore the blood of the people would not be on his hands. However, if he failed to warn the people, the people's blood would be on his hands (Ezekiel 3:17ff).

Paul said he was free from the blood of all men (Acts 20:26). Why? Because he had taught them publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20), and he had given them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). He would not be held responsible for them because he had done his job. He had preached the word. Now, the choice was theirs.

One thing that the teaching of the word does accomplish is that some will be saved and thus not lost eternally (Isaiah 55:11). In Romans 10:13-15, it was the preaching of the word that eventually brought people to the point of salvation (calling on the name of the Lord). They were able to believe because faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). They could respond to this belief by obedience to that word. It all began because someone went out and taught the gospel.

We need to go out and teach the word to keep ourselves strong spiritually. If we do not work, we will die. Paul warned the Galatians to not be weary in well doing for they would reap if they did not faint (Galatians 6:9). They were also cautioned to not let others lead them astray. They had ran well, who had hindered them that they should not obey the truth (Galatians 5:7). All of this helps us to understand that when we stray from Christ or get weary, we are only setting ourselves up for a fall. That is, if we do not grow, we will die.

One of the great lessons of life is that everyone is going to die (Hebrews 9:27). This should help us to understand that a congregation that does not teach others and in doing so, convert others, will eventually die out. If a congregation is going to remain, it must replenish itself.

Someone might argue that we will remain a congregation because our children will be attending there long after we are gone. However, the reality of life is that our children grow up and often move away. No, the only way to remain strong numerically is to go into the world and teach the word.

We see the truth of this when we study the early chapters of the book of Acts. For instance, in Acts 2:41, there were about 3000 who responded to the teaching. Later, in the same chapter, we find

daily additions to the church (verse 47). Acts 5:14 shows that more believers were added to the Lord, and Acts 6:7 says the number of the disciples multiplied. What we note in God's word is that when people faithfully lived God's word and faithfully proclaimed God's word, others became Christians. If we want the congregation where we attend to grow numerically, then every member must be a soul winner who goes into the world and preaches the word.

We live in a very troubled world. Wars, strife, and troubles seem to be everywhere around us. We want the world to change, but seem powerless to do anything about it. However, one of the benefits to fulfilling the Commission of Jesus is that we can change the world. It may be little by little but it is change nonetheless. The early church turned the world upside down (Acts 17:11) and filled Jerusalem with their doctrine (Acts 5:28).

When we study the conversions in the New Testament, we note some marvelous changes in people. Saul went from a persecutor to a preacher (Acts 9). Cornelius was a Roman Centurion who became a Christian (Acts 10). Simon, a sorcerer, became a saint (Acts 8). There was a jailor in Philippi who became a just man (Acts 16), and a Eunuch from Ethiopia who went from being a confused man to a child of God (Acts 8). Lydia, a seller of purple, became a servant of God (Acts 16). What changed all of these people from various walks of life and various stations in life? The word of God changed them. However, the word did not just jump out there and grab them. Someone came into the area and taught them the word.

Further, the word moved people to be willing to give up their old lives so they could serve Christ. Paul gave up much in his standing with the Jews and counted it all but refuse only to be cast away. He was willing to give it up so he could be a Christian (Philippians 3). Simon gave up his power over the people so he could be saved (Acts 8). And those who "used curious arts" burned their valuable books because they were now obedient to the word of God (Acts 19).

The Great Commission is tremendous in its scope and its plan. It is the means by which God has chosen to take his word into the world. It is through this word that the world will be saved (1 Peter 1:23-25). The world cannot obey the word unless they hear the word. They cannot hear the word unless there is someone proclaiming that word.

All Christians are obligated to go into all the world and preach the word. We are so eager for someone to go to Africa, India, Russia, Japan, or some other foreign country. And those who do so are to be commended. But we fail to understand that the United States or wherever we live is also part of the world. Foreign countries are mission fields. This is true, but so is the country in which we live. There is as great a need for the gospel in the northern portions of the United States as there is in any foreign country. We must understand that while we may not be able to travel to some other place to teach, that does not remove our obligation or the need to teach in the place in which we live. The whole world is a mission field. Go and preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.