

What the Great Commission is Not

Today's Church is Busy Doing Everything Else!

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

(Mark 16:15)

The Lord Jesus gave this commission to His disciples after His resurrection and prior to His ascension to the third heaven. The command is to “**PREACH** the gospel.” The verb “preach” means to herald the message. It is the same word found in 2 Timothy 4:2-- “**PREACH** the Word.” In ancient times momentous messages were communicated by a herald. This was the King's personal messenger who would cry out the king's message as the people in the town would assemble together eager to hear the latest news. The herald would not give his own message and he would certainly not give his own views and opinions. He would simply give the King's message word for word. He would not interpret the message. It made no difference whether the herald liked the message or did not like the message, he had to faithfully deliver it. He did not debate with people. He did not argue with people. He just presented the King's message. Paul once said, “necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.” Woe unto me if I fail to faithfully announce the King's message of good news!

Today it seems as if the church is doing everything except the very thing that our Lord told us to do. We substitute our program and programs for God's program. We present our gospel instead of His gospel. Let us briefly consider what God's great commission does not say:

“Go ye into all the world and feed the hungry, clothe the naked, build homes for the poor and care for the sick.”

While we certainly should not be oblivious to the pain and poverty and suffering in the world, yet the social gospel is not what our Lord commanded. The solution is not for each believer to become like Mother Teresa. We may feed their stomachs but what have we done for their souls? We may cure them of a bodily illness, but what has been done about the deadly and incurable disease of sin (Jer. 17:9)? What good does it do if they become rich for a second (in this life) but poor forever (in eternity)? If we clothe their bodies with the finest of garments, how shall it help them if they die without being covered by the robes of Christ's righteousness? What shall it profit them if we build them a wonderful house, but no provision is made for their eternal home in heaven? What ultimate good have we done if we only help them this side of the grave?

The are Christian groups today that are almost exclusively devoted to a social gospel (clothing the poor, feeding the hungry, etc.), with little emphasis upon the salvation of souls. It is very interesting to hear what William Booth, of the Salvation Army, had to say many years ago: *I recall hearing William Booth, the first general of the Salvation Army, say, when explaining his “Darkest England” scheme, that its real objective was, not just the amelioration of social conditions, but first and foremost the bringing of men to repentance that their souls might be saved. I can recall the flash in his eye, and the noble bearing of his commanding figure as he exclaimed, “Take a man from the filth and squalor of the slums, exchange his rags for decent clothing, move him from the stifling stench of the city tenement to a neat little cottage in the pure air of the country, put him on his feet economically where he can make a decent living for himself and his family, and then let him die in his sins, unsaved, and be lost forever at last—really it is not worth while, and I, for one, would not attempt it.”* (Cited by Harry Ironside, Except Ye Repent, pages 181-182).

"If every person in the world had adequate food, housing, income;
If all men were equal;
If every possible social evil and injustice were done away with,
Men would still need one thing—CHRIST! --J.W. Hyde

Go ye into all the world and become politically and socially active in order to eliminate the great social problems of our day and in order to impose Biblical standards upon society.

Is this really our mission? Think of the early Christians. What was their main thrust? What was their main activity? What do we discover as we read the book of Acts? Did they lobby to outlaw temple prostitution? Did they labor to get conservative men elected to the Roman senate? Did they march to Rome to protest the inhumane gladiatorial contests? Did they actively campaign against the social evils of their day such as divorce, the abuses of slavery, abortion, infanticide (Herod was not the only one guilty of this last mentioned crime), etc.? As good and as important as these things were, the early disciples of Christ simply did not have time for this. They were too busy doing what their Lord had told them to do: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). Imagine this conversation, "Would you like to come with us to protest the social injustices and immorality of our day?" "Protests are only protests which show a protest, but have little if any lasting results. I have a message from the King of Kings which I must deliver. No matter how vital these other causes may be, heralding the message of my King must ever be my first priority."

Increasing numbers of Christians are engaging in social and political "activism" for the astonishing purpose of attempting to coerce an ungodly society into adopting Christian standards of conduct. "Operation Rescue" is one example. Its founder, Randall Terry, explains that its purpose is to create social upheaval and thereby pressure government into changing the abortion laws.

No matter how commendable the goal of such tactics, there is not one example in the entire Bible of political or social "activism" ever being advocated or used by God's people. There are numerous cases of civil disobedience in Scripture (the Hebrew midwives, Daniel, Daniel's three friends, etc.), but it was never engaged in for the purpose of forcing an ungodly society to obey Biblical principles.

"Christian Activism" involves the well-meaning but foolish attempt to force "Christian principles" upon a godless society through more effective lobbying, larger demonstrations, and greater "social upheaval" than the homosexuals, abortionists, or pornographers can produce. But rather than pressure the ungodly to live like saints, we must win them to Christ that they might live wholly for God.

We must denounce sin, call for repentance, and preach the gospel in convicting power. Yes, Christians should call for repentance from homosexuality, child abuse, pornography, and abortion, but we should primarily be calling for repentance from rebellion against God and rejection of Christ. Rather than indicting the church for its lack of "social concern," it should be held accountable for its heresies and failure to preach the truth. It is hypocritical for the church to protest the world's sins while tolerating and honoring those who preach a false gospel and are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Instead of PROTESTS, we need PROPHETS who call the world to repentance. We need Enochs who walk with God and warn of judgment (Jude 14-15) and Noahs who preach righteousness and warn of judgment to come (2 Pet. 2:5).

“Christian Activism” is not Christian, and represents a detour from the straight path the church is to walk before the world. It can confuse the real issues, lead to compromise and unholy alliances, and divert time and effort that would be better used in proclaiming the gospel...Be fully engaged in rescuing souls for eternity.

--Dave Hunt

When believers do what the Lord told them to do, it is amazing what an impact it can have even on society at large. Consider the early Christian believers: “In a few generations they entirely changed the face of society by the doctrines of the Bible. They emptied the temples of the heathen gods. They famished idolatry, or left it high and dry like a stranded ship. They brought into the world a higher tone of morality between man and man. They raised the character and position of women. They altered the standard of purity and decency. They put an end to many cruel and bloody customs, such as the gladiatorial fights” (J.C.Ryle).

Go ye into all the world and change the world for Christ.

Years ago Campus Crusade for Christ founder, Bill Bright, wrote a book entitled, “Come Help Change the World.” The foreword says, “This is the story of the inception, the work and the vision of Campus Crusade for Christ to help change the world. They know the world can be changed....There are twentieth century Christian disciples who are committed to changing the world and fulfilling the Great Commission in this generation.” In this same book Bill Bright writes: “I am convinced that 5,000,000 trained disciples, who are experiencing the reality of Christ's control of their lives can literally change this world....Personal contributions, life estates, wills, and other financial investments can help to change the world” (pages 197 and 193). I am much more impressed by the 11 trained disciples who were taught by the Master Himself! What they accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit was remarkable.

More recently there are professing believers known as postmillennial reconstructionists. They believe that they can bring in the kingdom and change the world by putting all societies under an Old Testament legal system (re-instituting the Mosaic laws and their penalties). Individual sinners cannot even keep God's holy law. How then can we expect an entire society to conform to such standards? It would not work in a thousand years!

God has never told us to change the world. The world system is incurably sick and headed for destruction. God has told us to preach the gospel to individuals (“to every creature”) and when a person responds in the right way to the gospel message, his life is truly transformed by the grace of God. It is better to think of the world as a sinking ship like the Titanic. It is hell-bent and hell-bound, doomed to destruction. Many, yea most, will perish. It is our job to “throw out the life line” and seek to “rescue the perishing” as we herald the good news.

The Great Commission does not involve exerting a Christian influence upon society. We are not to “change society,” but to “convert individuals.” There is much talk today about “changing the world for Christ.” There is no Biblical teaching or example to support that popular slogan.

--Dave Hunt

The only One who can change the world is God Himself, and this will be done only when Christ returns to this earth to establish His kingdom. The church will never bring in a new world. This work will be done by Christ and by Christ alone.

Go ye into all the world and bring people to church.

What saith the Scripture? “And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). This says that we should bring the gospel to the unsaved. It

does not say that we should bring the unsaved to the gospel. It does not say, "Go...and invite every creature to come to church." Rather we are told to "go into all the world" because that is where the unsaved are. We are to bring the gospel to the unsaved. The herald does not invite people to travel to the palace ground so that they can hear the king's message. The herald goes right to the villages where the people live and it is there that he delivers the king's message.

There are many churches today that take the other approach. Their ministry is based on the philosophy that we need to bring the unsaved to the gospel. They thus see the local church as an evangelistic center, a place where the unsaved can be brought in, bused in, and even bribed in by way of gimmicks so that they can hear the gospel.

Is the purpose of the local church to be primarily that of a SOUL-WINNING STATION or a SOUL-BUILDING STATION? In the world our emphasis should be that of *evangelism*, but in the church our emphasis should be primarily that of *indoctrination*. In the world we should be *reaching them*; in the church we should be *teaching them*. The saints need to be indoctrinated in the church; the indoctrinated saints need to be evangelizing in the world.

In saying all this, we do not in any way want to discourage God's people from inviting the unsaved to church services or bringing the lost into the assembly of the saints. We need to do more of this. We certainly thank God for every sinner who attends the local assembly of believers, hears the gospel message and receives Christ as his personal Saviour. If the whole counsel of God is preached and if the Bible is faithfully taught according to the New Testament pattern (Acts 20:28,32; Eph. 4:11-12) then the cross of Christ, the grace of God, justification and God's so-great salvation will be themes that will be heard repeatedly. How can the Word be faithfully taught and the gospel not be preached?

The problem comes when churches focus their ministry primarily upon the unsaved. Instead of feeding the flock and properly nourishing the saints, they present a steady diet of salvation

messages or "John 3:16 messages." John 3:16 wonderfully summarizes the gospel message, but the Bible is more than John 3:16. The saints need all of the Bible. Being saved is just the very first lesson in God's school. Interestingly enough, the cults do not establish evangelistic centers. Rather they establish edificational centers and indoctrination centers so that each person will be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks him a reason of the *false* hope that is within him. The devil knows which system works.

When the local church is functioning as an edification/indoctrination center according to God's pattern, then the unsaved person who enters such a place will be deeply convicted: "But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor. 14:24-25). May God help us to be this kind of assembly, manifesting the awesome PERSON and LIFE of God.

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In these difficult and demanding days, may we faithfully herald the message of good news that our King has given to us and entrusted to us. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:12).

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