

The Great Commission In Scripture and History

With Applications From

the First Century Churches to Modern Times

Christ's post-resurrection command to win the lost and establish churches until the Rapture, recorded in the concluding sections of each of the gospels and at the beginning of the book of Acts, is commonly referred to today as the Great Commission. The record of the early churches in Acts manifests the practical outworking of this order of the Lord, and uninspired history testifies of the continuation of this practice of the Commission by the Lord's churches through the centuries to the present day. Analysis of the Lord's inscripturated charges constitutes a necessary preliminary exercitation to any further examination of obedience on the part of first century disciples or those of following days.

Matthew chapter twenty-eight provides the fullest record of the Great Commission:

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:16-20)

It is explicitly stated that the apostles were present at the giving of this command, and others were almost surely present as well (cf. Mt 28:7, 10, 1 Cor 15:6) at this appointed appearance in Galilee, and that among their number were those that “doubted” (v. 17)—the eleven, although they had been doubting earlier (cf. Mr 16:13-14), would likely at this point have grown to a degree of assurance (cf. Jn 20:25-29). To this assembled body, which worshiped the Savior and so demonstrated its belief in Christ's deity (Jn 20:28), the Lord declared that He has been given “all power... in heaven and in earth.” His appointment (v. 16) of them itself necessitated a measure of authority,¹ but here He claimed all (cf. Jn 13:3)—He had received from the Father

¹ The word used is ἐτάξατο, from τάσσω, which signifies to “assign a post to, with the suggestion of duties connected with it, [and is] often used of military appointments” (Online Bible for Mac 2.5.3 Greek synonyms); compare Lu 7:8. The Great Commission provides the “marching orders” of the church.

² The accusative case for πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, an accusative of measure, indicates that “Jesus’ promise to his [church] is not just that he would be with [it] *during* the present dispensation [which would have been expressed by the genitive], but for the *extent* of it” (pg. 202, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Daniel Wallace, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

power over everything, and “therefore” (v.19) He issued the command in v.19-20 and provided the comfort that He, the Omnipotent One who is Head of His church, would be (with all that it implies) with her always² while His commandment was in effect (v. 20). In each of the gospels the giving of the Commission is within the context of Christ’s resurrection from the grave, His validation of His claim to be the Son of God (Rom 1:4—note that v. 5 again associates the resurrection with being sent with a commission to bring the nations to the obedience of faith). The time of humble obedience unto death had passed, and Jesus the Christ, soon to ascend to the right hand of the Father (Mr 16:19), exalted above every name in heaven and earth as Lord, God, and Savior, sent forth His people with both full authority and the ability to empower them to fulfill His noble but demanding mandate.

The Lord gave one imperative, the “teach” of v. 19, with which were associated three participles, “Go” (v. 19), “baptizing” (v. 19), and “teaching.” The “teach” of v. 19 is *matheteusate*, an aorist active imperative from μαθητεύω, a verb derived from the common NT word, μαθητής, “a disciple”— the verb signifies “to make disciples.” The going, baptizing, and teaching all things were constituent parts of this over-arching command to make disciples.³ The KJV marginal reading on this word “teach” states: “or, make disciples, or, Christians of all nations.”⁴ Manipulating people to say “sinner’s prayers”⁵ who, since they are not regenerate,

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³ Participles can function as imperatives (see p. 283, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax*, Daniel Wallace), although this is a rare usage. It is not, however, necessary to argue that the “go” of Mt 28:19 is an example of this to defend the accuracy of the KJV rendering; the interpretation given in this paper, which accords with the common usage of Greek participles, does not view the AV at all inaccurate. “Go” is a participle of attendant circumstance; see the discussion on pg. 645, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Wallace.

⁴ From the Online Bible for Mac KJV module; most modern editions of the KJV leave out the translator’s footnotes.

⁵ An example of this, excellent in its effectiveness in illustrating the point in question, and horrible in its contrariety to Christ’s methodology in the salvation of men’s souls, is found in *Let’s Build An Evangelistic Church*,

never act like saints, is not part of the Commission, even if they are also tricked into getting immersed. The church which received the Matthew 28 Commission would have sought to make disciples of the sort described earlier in the gospels, for Christ provides no alternative post-resurrection definition. The church which received the Commission directly had the Lord's previous personal example in disciple making (Jn 4:1-2).⁶ Disciples of Christ were clearly different from the unconverted (Mt 9:10), and did the will of the Father (Mt 12:49-50). Disciples bore their cross, forsook all, and cleaved to Christ as their supreme Lord (Lu 14:25-35). While in Christ's earthly ministry spurious disciples arose (Jn 6:66), just like there were some whom the Lord knew had a spurious faith (Jn 2:23-25), the "disciples indeed" continued in His word and were made free, while those who were servants of sin were cast out and perished (Jn 8:31-36). It was the disciples who believed on Jesus (Jn 2:11) and who were promised the kingdom of God (Lu 6:20). The command of the Commission to baptize those who have become disciples, compared with the fact that all who repent and receive forgiveness are to be baptized (Ac 2:38), demonstrates that disciples are not a higher class of believers; a believer, one who has been justified by faith, is a disciple. The Lord's decree to "make disciples" clashes powerfully with much of modern church-growth philosophy, with its heresies which rend repentance from salvation and compartmentalize the Christ so that He is not received, but only the part of Him which is Saviourship (allegedly in sin, not from sin) divorced from Lordship, and with the body of contemporary evangelistic methodology which both pushes for necessarily spurious salvation decisions from those unwilling to surrender to discipleship and distorts the gospel by removing

Jack Hyles, pgs. 58-61.

⁶ Note that John 4:1-2 records that disciples were "made" before they were "baptized." This accords with the order given in the Great Commission, and refutes both paedobaptism and Campbellite baptismal regeneration teaching which makes immersion itself the act of conversion or discipleship.

all mention of the cost of believing in Christ from its presentation (cf. Lu 14:27-32).

“Going” is the first aspect Christ delineates in the disciple-making process; the word used is πορευθέντες, an aorist deponent participle from πορεύομαι, which is translated by a form of “to go” in the large majority of its appearances in the KJV. It was the word regularly used for the march of an army.⁷ The word is a participle of attendant circumstance, so it “communicate[s] an action that . . . is coordinate with the finite verb . . . the participle is something of a prerequisite before the action of the main verb can occur.”⁸ The command was to go to “all nations,” not simply the Jews, as commanded earlier (Mt 10:5-6). The text provides a Biblical basis for evangelistic endeavor in foreign lands, for it is impossible to make disciples of all nations without bringing the gospel to them. Those who become disciples are to be baptized (βαπτίζοντες, the first participle which follows μαθητεύσατε). The Lord does not insist that the Gentiles become Jews, but disciples, who are to be baptized into His church as such on equal footing with converted natural sons of Abraham (1 Cor 12:13). In addition to the lexical fact that βαπτίζω signifies dipping, not pouring or sprinkling, the examples of baptism in the gospels clearly refer to post-conversion immersion, so the disciples would have taken the command as instruction to continue the practice already in place in the pre-crucifixion church. The Lord first made disciples, then had them baptized (Jn 4:1-2), the order also seen in John the Baptist’s

⁷ see the Online Bible for Mac 2.5.3 Greek synonyms.

⁸ *The Basics of NT Syntax*, Daniel Wallace, pgs. 279-280; cf. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Daniel Wallace, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996, pgs. 640-645. Wallace mentions that in participles of attendant circumstance, at least 90% of the time, the participle is usually aorist, the tense of the main verb is usually aorist, the mood of the main verb is usually imperative or indicative, the participle will precede the main verb, both in word order and time of event, and such attendant circumstance participles occur frequently in narrative literature, but infrequently elsewhere. πορευθέντες, in its association with the imperative aorist verb μαθητεύσατε, meets all five of these conditions. Indeed, as Wallace points out, (pg. 645, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*), every other instance of the aorist participle of πορεύομαι followed by an aorist main verb (either indicative or imperative) in Matthew is clearly attendant circumstance (Mt 2:8, 9:13, 11:4, 17:27, 21:6, 22:15, 25:16, 26:14, 27:66, 28:7).

practice (Mt 3:6-8, Mr 1:4-5, Lu 3:3-14). Immersion was the mode employed (Mt 3:16, Jn 1:26, 3:23). John baptized with authority from heaven (Mt 21:25, Mr 11:30, Lu 7:29-30, 20:4, Jn 1:33), and the church Jesus built, made up of those converted and dipped by John, also immersed with His divine authority.⁹ Those baptized were then to be taught “to observe all things whatsoever” the Lord had commanded. The “teaching” participle of v. 20 is a different word

⁹ Christ’s church is an assembly (consequently local and visible, not universal and invisible) of baptized believers. The Lord began His church during His earthly ministry (since it was “added to” (Ac 2:47) on Pentecost, it was already in existence before that day) out of saved and baptized disciples of the Baptist (Jn 1:35ff.). John’s baptism is Christian baptism, and was accepted as valid; none of the apostles, or any other converted individual, ever was rebaptized (Ac 18:24-28). The church already existed at the time of John 3, for there Christ, the bridegroom, already had the bride, the church (Jn 3:29, Eph 5:22-33). The pre-resurrection church baptized with Christ’s authority, as an examination of Jn 3:22, 4:1-2 demonstrates—the disciples, not Jesus Himself, physically immersed people, but still it was the Lord that baptized, because they received authority from Him. The post-resurrection church also baptized with Christ’s authority, that is, in His “name” (Ac 4:7, 10, 18, 16:18, 19:13; Ac 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5). Apart from John the Baptist, who baptized with authority received directly from heaven (Mt 21:25, Mr 11:30, Lu 20:4, Jn 1:33), and the church, no other body has ever been authorized to baptize. John’s true disciples outside of the church are never said to have received this power—Scripture contains a total absence of any example of their doing so in the gospels, despite their numerous appearances and the frequency with which the fact that John baptized appears. The scribes and Pharisees were condemned for not being baptized “of him” (Lu 7:30), not by him or his disciples. The multitudes were only baptized by him personally (Mt 3:6; Mr 1:5), and the Lord made a journey of several days to receive baptism from the Baptist, when his disciples were surely around closer (Mt 3:13). Controversy also only existed over the authority of John to baptize without any mention of like jurisdiction on the part of his disciples (Mt 21:25). This is why it was the baptism “of John” alone (Mt 21:25; Mr 11:30; Lu 20:4; Ac 1:22; 18:25). Acts 19, is no exception; it records some who were unsaved who received baptism apart from conversion from “disciples” who were ignorant of the fundamental nature and emphases of John’s teachings, including his preaching on the Holy Spirit. Paul indicates in that passage as well that only “John baptized” with his baptism properly (Ac 19:4). These were saved and Scripturally immersed after Paul presented them with John’s true message, which was the gospel (19:4). The Great Commission provided that the church received divine authority to baptize until the end of the age (that it is an institutional command to the *ekklesia* rather than a mandate for the individual as such, or for the apostles alone, is proven further on in this paper— see also pgs. 9-21, “What? I Must be Re-baptized?: What the Bible says about church authority in baptism,” Robert Sargent.). Even considered apart from other Biblical evidence, the fact that no one besides John and the church are commanded to baptize forbids any other individual or body from doing so; “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” (Deut 12:32). The supposed exceptions to this in the book of Acts must be interpreted in light of the plain, normative commands—to use arguments from silence to disavow plain statements demolishes sound hermeneutics. Besides, arguments against church authority in baptism from passages in Acts are very weak; the immediate context of Paul’s baptism, for example, mentions the church at Damascus (Ac 9:18-19). Just as rejection of baptism at the hands of John was rejecting the council of God (Lu 7:30), so rejecting John’s baptism, as administered by the church today, is to reject the council of God. To prove that Christ’s church is always a local, visible assembly and refute the common Protestant invisible catholic church view is a task beyond the scope of this paper: it is done successfully, along with a sound elucidation of other aspects of Biblical ecclesiology, in *Landmarks of Baptist Doctrine*, vol. 4, “The Doctrine of the Church,” pgs. 481-596. A study of the word *ecclesia* in the NT, along with relevant background information in classical Greek and the LXX, which likewise demonstrates the local, visible significance of the word, is available in the pamphlet “Ecclesia,” by B. H. Carroll, at <http://faithsaves.net/ecclesiology/>.

than that in v. 19; here it is διδάσκοντες, a present active participle from διδάσκω, the common verb translated by a form of “to teach” in all its appearances in the KJV. Both βαπτίζοντες and διδάσκοντες are participles of means.¹⁰ They therefore indicate “the means by which the action of a finite verb [here μαθητεύσατε] is accomplished . . . define[] or explain[] the action of the controlling verb . . . the participle of means asks, “How?” . . . If [it] is absent (or removed) . . . the point of the main verb is removed as well. . . . In some sense, the participle of means almost always defines the action of the main verb; i. e., it makes more explicit what the author intended to convey with the main verb.”¹¹ The process of making disciples is to proceed, after going, by baptizing converts and continuing to teach them Biblical doctrine, so that they in turn may grow to assist effectively in the process of making others disciples. They are not to be left with a bare-bones knowledge of alleged fundamentals while so-called “non-essentials” are left to slide, but must be taught to observe “all things whatsoever” (cf. 1 Tim 1:3)—anything less than this is disobedience and sin, and a failure to put in practice the Great Commission. Even if it were possible to somehow get the hodgepodge of organizations and church societies which comprise the ecumenical movement to agree on the nature of the Godhead and the gospel, and, through a miracle comparable to many which the modernistic infidels among them deny, lead them to agreement on the nature of baptism, unified, cross-denominational efforts to fulfill the Great Commission would be bound for failure because of their natural inability, through the very nature of a union which side-steps conflicting doctrine, to teach any hopeful converts “all things” commanded by the Lord. All parachurch organizations

¹⁰ See, for example, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, Cleon L. Rodgers Jr. & Cleon L. Rodgers III, on Mt 28:20, and *The Basics of NT Syntax*, Wallace, pgs. 280-281, the comments on Mt 28:19-20.

¹¹ *The Basics of NT Syntax*, Wallace, pgs. 274-275.

are also unable to fulfill the Great Commission, for none of them has authority to baptize, nor do they teach all things whatsoever— their supra-church status necessitates the watering down of doctrine at some level. Disciples must learn to “observe” (τηρεῖν, “to attend to carefully, take care of”¹²) all the Savior “commanded” (ἐνετειλάμην, “to enjoin[;] is used esp. of those who office or position invests them with claims, and points rather to the contents of the command.”¹³). Both the discipler and the one receiving instruction may take heart in the promise of their Lord that He would be “with [them] always, even unto the end of the world.” “I am” is a prophetic present,¹⁴ a promise that the Lord would be with the body of disciples until the end of the age. “I” (ἐγώ) is stated and emphatic, as is appropriate for One who has all power in heaven and in earth. “He is to be with the disciples when he is gone... with them all the days (all sorts of days, weakness, sorrows, joy, power), till the consummation of the age . . . an incentive to the fullest endeavor to press on to the farthest limits of the world that all the nations may know Christ and the power of His Risen Life . . . He is with us all the days till [H]e comes in glory.”¹⁵

It is of great importance to a sound ecclesiology to determine the exact body to whom the Great Commission was given— many assert it to be for all believers, others confine it to the church as an institution, and it could be argued to have direct reference only to the apostles.¹⁶ The statements in Matthew, along with expressions of the Commission elsewhere, make the exegetical answer to this question clear. The setting of Matthew 28 demonstrates that it was given in a church context. The eleven were assembled as a body (Mt 28:16), and the conclusion

¹² Online Bible for Mac 2.5.3 Greek lexicon.

¹³ Online Bible for Mac 2.5.3 Greek synonyms.

¹⁴ See Robertson’s Word Pictures in the Online Bible 2.5.3 file, on Mt 28:20.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ It was certainly not given to the “universal, invisible church,” for such a concept does not appear in the New Testament (see footnote #8). Furthermore, even if the Scriptures did teach the existence of such an entity, it never has and never will baptize or teach anyone, nor go to anyone and make him a disciple.

that, since the Lord had given them a preappointed meeting place, others who remained unnamed were there and these were the ones that “doubted,” necessitates that an assembly is present for the receipt of the command. In Mt 28:7, the consecutive “you,” “ye,” and “you” (all second person plurals)¹⁷ must refer to the women at the tomb in addition to the eleven disciples— so they, at least, were included in the number that saw the Lord in Galilee a few verses later without explicit mention. The option that the Great Commission was only for the apostles is consequently eliminated, because they were not the only ones who were present to receive it from the risen Lord.¹⁸ The nature of the statements in v. 19-20 also make it a necessity that the Commission is given to the church institutionally, rather than to the apostles, or to individual believers as such. The Lord promised the body receiving the Commission He would be with it “always, even to the end of the world,” which eliminates all possibilities other than an institutional church commission (note that the “ye” of v. 19 and the “you” of 28:20 are plural)— the apostles, as well as all the believers of the first century, have long since departed to be with their Master, but the end of the age is still in the future. The Judean church body which received the Commission directly did not itself endure until “the end of the world,” but her daughter churches, in accord with the promise given here and similar declarations elsewhere in Scripture (Mt 16:18, Eph 3:21, 1 Cor 11:26, etc.), remain to this day, despite the fiercest attempts of the devil and his human lackeys to overturn her perpetuity—God’s promise stands forever, so His churches have and will continue to exist and obey their Savior’s post-resurrection marching orders until the day they are caught up to meet Him in the air. Furthermore, it would be

¹⁷ An excellent feature of the KJV is its employment of “ye” and “you” for the second person plural pronouns in the original languages, while “thee” and “thou” appears for the singular forms. This accuracy is missing in the overwhelming majority of modern English versions.

¹⁸ One with a theological axe to grind which did not allow for a church commission in Matthew 28 could argue that the appearance Christ promised the disciples and the women in 28:7 was not the appearance of 28:16ff. This is overwhelmingly unlikely contextually, and other necessities of Matthew 28, as well as the statements of the Great Commission in the other gospels, make it clear that the church was the recipient.

impossible for an individual believer to teach “all” nations “all things whatsoever” Christ commanded. If he won a man to Jesus and immersed him, he would then have to continue with that newborn soul until he learned everything there was to know in the Christian life—that is, for the rest of his earthly pilgrimage; and he would, indeed, have failed in his obligation if he died before his new convert, because he would then no longer be able to give him further instruction. In addition this necessity, were the Commission indeed given to individuals as such, it would render the disciple-maker unable to go to all nations (even if somehow he could divide himself in pieces to go to various countries and people-groups), since he would need to stay with disciples made in his own country. Plainly, the Great Commission cannot be fulfilled by individuals of themselves. The church, however, can both win men in her domestic “Jerusalem” while she sends forth others to the uttermost parts of the earth to establish daughter assemblies in far-flung locals. Furthermore, God has given the church “pastors and teachers[,] for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13). The church as an institution is able to take those who have newly become disciples and teach them “all things whatsoever”—she received a specific epistolary command to do so. Since she does not cease to exist throughout the church age, she is able to continue to teach those whom she makes disciples beyond the limitations of the mortality of her individual instructors. Indeed, Ephesians 4:14-16 sounds like a reworking of the Great Commission in a Pauline letter; as the church makes disciples and they grow into the image of Christ, the whole assembly or body (v. 16) doing its part, the result is the “increase of the body” (v. 16)—church growth, and, as the congregation follows its Lord, the establishment of new churches elsewhere.

The fact that baptism is a church ordinance¹⁹ (1 Cor 11:2, Col 2:12, Gal 3:27, etc.) also proves that Christ's command in Matthew 28 and elsewhere is for His *ekklesia* viewed institutionally. Baptism adds one to the body of Christ, the church (Ac 2:41, 47, 1 Cor 12:13).²⁰ If believers as such had authority to baptize, the great incongruity of those not part of the church adding individuals to it (which actual assembly the believer added the new Christian to would be another difficult question) would arise. Only a church has the authority to administer a church ordinance; the individual who actually places a proselyte under water, whether a pastor, deacon or saint of God without a special church office, whether the man immersing has an ordination certificate or not, does not affect the validity of the baptism—the church can delegate the actual performance of immersion to whom she pleases, and the ordinance remains valid.²¹ While Christ commands, and thus authorizes, His church to baptize, He tells her to do so in the “name” of the Triune God (Mt 28:19). “The use of name (ὄνομα) here is a common one in the Septuagint and the papyri for power or authority.”²² This is clear also from the reference to preaching “in His

¹⁹ The Lord's supper, the other church ordinance, should be practiced “closed,” not “open” or “close,” because it is also a church ordinance, and hence is for the church alone, as part of the “all things whatsoever” she is to practice in perpetuity until Christ's return (1 Cor 11:26). This ordinance (1 Cor 11:2) was practiced in the individual assembly (v. 18), for it was delivered to it (v. 23, “delivered unto you,” the church, so that she (“ye”) could partake in it, v. 26). Compare 1 Cor 10:16-17; the Lord's supper is for Christ's body, the assembly, alone. Both ordinances are “closed” and administered by the church alone.

²⁰ The body of Christ is the local assembly, entered through water baptism. Paul called the church at Corinth the body of Christ (1 Cor 1:2, 12:27). A body, by its very nature, must be local, visible, and assembled; something universal, invisible, and scattered, while it may be described as a “widespread ethereal diffusion” or compared to something like cosmic background radiation, provides a far better contrast with a body than an analogy to one. The view that the body of Christ is the so-called universal, invisible church, entered through Spirit baptism, has much more to do with historical theology immersed in the heretical notion that baptism and membership in the catholic church were necessary for salvation than Biblical precept (cf. Col 2:8, Rev 2:6, 15, 17:1ff.). The Biblical imperatives for unity in the body of Christ (cf. Eph 4:3-4, 12-13) require that every Baptist church member work towards fulfilling the commands of the Great Commission; otherwise he is not actively helping the body fulfill this order of the Lord and so creating disunity with obedient brethren.

²¹ This also means that baptisms performed on the authority of a true Baptist church of Christ are valid, even if the pastor or the one who commonly does the immersing later demonstrates he is unconverted. Anyone baptized by Judas (cf. John 4:1-2) would still have had a valid immersion, because the authority came from Christ through the church (John 3:22), not through him as an individual.

²² Robertson's Word Pictures on Mt 28:19, from the Online Bible for the Mac version 2.5.3 software program. See also footnote #8.

name” in Lu 24:47, where “name” necessarily signifies authority. The authority to immerse derives ultimately from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but the Lord has placed this power in the hands of His churches—both vertical and horizontal authority is involved. The jurisdiction of church discipline is likewise the *ekklesia* of God, not any individual, board, or denomination (Mt 18:15-17), but heaven itself ratifies the church’s actions (Mt 18:18-20). Arguments which allege the legitimacy of alien baptisms “on the authority of God and His Word,” although apart from the churches of the Lord, in reality have neither the sanction of the King of heaven nor support in His inspired revelation, and His assemblies should obey the strictures of the Scriptures and view such administrations as invalid, as does their Head.

The gospel of Mark provides further detail about the nature of the Great Commission, and so supplements the record in Matthew’s gospel.²³

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. 15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mark 16:14-16)²⁴

The account in Mark again necessitates that the Commission is a church duty, not one for individuals or the apostles alone. It is given here to the “eleven” assembled together—as in the other Biblical records, Christ gives His order to His assembly of baptized believers, not to single individuals. The command of 16:15 is “Go ye,” a second person plural, which necessarily designates the church corporately. No Scriptural record exists where a Great Commission

²³ The modernistic theology which runs through evangelicalism in ever growing quantities has led some prominent neo-evangelicals, such as Grant R. Osborne and Robert H. Gundry, to declare that the Trinitarian formula in Matthew’s account of the Great Commission is a product of the man Matthew, not the words of Jesus Christ (See pgs. 220, 321, and 361 in *The Jesus Crisis*, Robert L. Thomas & F. David Farnell, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998). This is abominable, soul-damning heresy. All the gospel accounts give the very words of Christ—they are supplementary, not alternative redactions of some one underlying “tradition” which was actually historical. Christ emphasized the importance of the Great Commission to His church by giving it to her repeatedly in different forms at different times.

²⁴ Mark 16:9-20 is unquestionably the preserved Word of God. It has been received as canonical by God’s churches and people through the centuries and is supported by overwhelming manuscript evidence.

command is given to a solitary person at a post-resurrection appearance; neither Mary Magdalene (Mr 16:9), Peter (1 Cor 15:5), James (1 Cor 15:7), Paul (1 Cor 15:8), or any other individual to whom Christ appeared was commanded to go to all nations to win men to Christ, baptize them, and teach them all things until the Lord returned—indeed, despite the popularity of the “all believers” view of the Great Commission, a simple statement of the requirements of Christ for Commission obedience makes this view facedly impossible, since no single man (nor the body of the apostles) could go to all nations, baptize, and teach all things until the Rapture. The reference of 16:16 to baptism, a church ordinance, also makes it evident that the imperatives of 16:15 are ecclesiological. Furthermore, the precedence of faith to baptism, which evidences that immersion is rightly administered to believers only, divests all paedobaptist bodies, as well as those who allow for “freedom” to chose between Scriptural believer’s baptism and the dunking or sprinkling of infants, from any claim to a stake in the Great Commission.²⁵ The church to which Christ gave His command only baptized those already saints—she has maintained this practice through the centuries until today, and will continue to employ it until the

²⁵ There is absolutely no evidence in the NT for the baptism of infants, even apart from the fact that, since they cannot believe (cf. Jonah 4:11), they are not fit candidates for it. The supposed evidence from household baptisms does not hold up; when the Philippian jailer’s household was baptized (Ac 16:33), they all previously heard the word (v. 32), and the whole household believed (v. 34), so there were no infants. When Lydia and her household were baptized, it is extremely unlikely that any infants were there, for she was from Thyatira, a very long distance from Philippi where she was converted (Ac 16:14-15, cf. v. 40); her household would almost surely have consisted of servants old enough to believe. One who would use this passage to prove infant baptism is obviously reading into Scripture his predetermined views. When the household of Stephanas was baptized (1 Cor 1:16), its members “addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints” (1 Cor 16:15); infants in paedobaptist bodies, as in Baptist churches, do not addict themselves to the ministry of the saints. When households were baptized, they followed the pattern of “Crispus... [who] believed on the Lord with all his house,” and, like the rest of the Corinthian converts, first “believed, and [then] were baptized” (Ac 18:8). In Acts 8:5-12, it is specifically recorded that “men and women” (ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες, v. 12) were baptized, not infants. 1 Cor 7:14, another supposed proof text for infant baptism, only would mean that children were made “holy” through infant baptism if the unbelieving husband or wife was also baptized apart from his decision, but it is obvious that this was not the case. The text actually teaches that one believer in a household sets the house apart for the special care of God from the moment of the individual’s conversion (cf. Gen 39:5; also note the perfect tense of ἀγιαζῶ in 1 Cor 7:14)—the “unbelieving husband” is “sanctified by the wife,” not by baptism, and likewise the unbelieving wife by her husband, and so, by implication, the nonbelieving infants. This sanctification happens immediately upon the conversion of one member, not subsequently upon the baptism of infants or any other members of the household. “[E]lse were your children unclean” also militates against infant baptism.

end of the age when her Head no longer abides with her on earth, but takes her to blissful union with Himself in heaven.

The church is to go and preach. “Go” here, Πορευθέντες, is a participle of attendant circumstance, as in Matthew 28:19;²⁶ here it is syntactically dependent upon the aorist imperative “preach” (κηρύξατε). The church is specifically to preach τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, “the gospel.” This going and preaching results in men being converted and made disciples (Mt 28:19) at the moment of justification, when they believe (Mr 16:16). Subsequent to their believing or becoming disciples, Mark 16 repeats the command of Matthew 28 about baptism. Mark 16:15-16 consequently delineates the means through which the disciple-making process commanded in Matthew 28 begins; the church goes “into all the world, and preach[es] the gospel to every creature,” then baptizes those who respond. The command to go into “all the world,”²⁷ in addition to again proving that the Commission is for the *ekklesia* as an institution, demands sustained and fervent efforts in the cause of worldwide church planting,²⁸ with the goal of preaching the gospel to every human being, “every creature,”²⁹ on earth. Mark 16:15

²⁶ see footnote #7.

²⁷ τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα. The word ἅπαντα, “all,” comes from ἅπας, an intensive form of πᾶς (pg. 98, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd. ed (BDAG), rev. by Frederick William Danker, Chicago, IN: University of Chicago Press, 2000.). The church is not simply to go to portions of the world, or to make feeble attempts to reach the entirety, but to exert herself intensively to preach and plant churches in its farthest reaches; she must seek to cover it all, from the accessible and pleasant locations to the most hostile, dangerous, and difficult regions, if she would obey the command of her Lord.

²⁸ While it is the duty of all saints to do good to all men as they have opportunity (Gal 6:10), Christ did not commission His church to go to nations and seek to relieve social ills or political injustice, but to evangelize the world and fill it with other assemblies that would obey “all things” commanded in Scripture.

²⁹ Some argue that “every creature,” πάση τῇ κτίσει, should be rendered “the whole creation” or “all the creation,” rather than the way it appears in the KJV. There are a number of reasons why the rendering of the Authorized Version should be maintained. 1.) While forms of *pas* followed by an articular noun (including even ktisis) are rightly rendered differently at times (cf. Rom 8:22 πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις, “the whole creation”), the KJV rendering is also possible: see Mt 21:10, πᾶσα ἡ πόλις, KJV “all the city,” Lu 2:1, πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην, “all the world,” Lu 2:10, παντὶ τῷ λαῷ, “all people,” Ac 3:9 & 11, πᾶς ὁ λαός, “all the people,” Ac 5:21, πᾶσαν τὴν γερουσίαν, “all the senate.” 2.) The only other place where the exact Greek phrase found in Mr 16:15 (πάση τῇ κτίσει) appears, it is translated “every creature” (Col 1:23). 3.) The context supports the rendering “creature” for ktisis; inanimate objects, such as rocks or trees, while part of creation, certainly do not need the gospel preached to them. It is possible to argue that a rendering of “the whole creation” in Mark 16:15 would be

necessitates aggressive evangelism of the type that could theoretically reach every individual in the community where the assembly comes together³⁰ and the sending forth of laborers to establish assemblies in the rest of the world which will practice in the same way.³¹ The book of Acts records attempts to reach everyone with the gospel (Ac 19:10, cf. Ac 5:28, 17:6) as quickly as possible. It should be noted that this was accomplished by attempts to establish churches in every city, which then individually had the responsibility to reach their communities and establish new churches elsewhere; all the saints, not the apostles alone (cf. Ac 8:1, 4), were involved in fulfilling the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18, cf. Eph 6:15) committed to them by aggressively preaching to “every creature,” although apostolic (Rom 15:19) and pastoral (2 Tim 4:5) modeling and leadership played a role. The epistles record the prosecution of the Great Commission locally and in more distant regions by the churches (Rom 1:8, Php 2:16, 1 Thess 1:8), with great success (cf. Col 1:5-6, 23).

Mark 16 expands the Scriptural understanding of the importance of baptism; the simple command to baptize disciples in Matthew 28:19 gains in detail with the statement that “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark

synchdoche for the human portion of it—but does not “every creature” then represent this idea with at least equal clarity? 4.) The KJV is the Bible providentially given to God’s English speaking churches; many of them declare that it is a translation without error, and an even greater portion declare that it was providentially created and that its underlying texts are the exact equivalent of the autographs. New Testament churches have affirmed this sort of canonicity for no other text-type or version. Can it be that Christ has allowed His church, the pillar and ground of the truth, to be in error in these matters? Can one conclude as well that God has allowed the great body of His English speaking people, who do not know Greek or Hebrew, to be misled by an erroneous translation of this important verse for hundreds of years? Certainly extreme care must be exercised before one alters the Authorized Version, if it must be done at all.

³⁰ This further demonstrates a Biblical imperative for house to house evangelism of the type modeled in the book of Acts. Passing out literature, preaching on streetcorners, in nursing homes, and wherever else it is allowed, placing ads in newspapers, proclaiming the gospel on the radio or television, and holding special meetings designed to attract visitors are all well and good, and such means rightly supplement house to house preaching, for the church should employ all possible means not contrary to Scripture to reach the lost—but none of these can replace the systematic canvassing of every dwelling in the region, because none of them are designed to, in theory, reach every single soul with the gospel, which is the command of Mark 16:15.

³¹ Note the summary Markan record of obedience to the command of 16:15 in 16:20.

16:16). While reprobate men have employed this verse to support baptismal regeneration, Mark 16:16 teaches no such thing, and the larger context of the Bible unequivocally supports salvation by faith alone (Jn 3:16-18, 36, 5:24, 6:47, 20:28, etc.) The statement “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” no more teaches that baptism is a requirement for justification than “he that eateth three meals a day, and brusheth his teeth, shall not be hungry” asserts that sound dental hygiene prevents starvation. Furthermore, Christ affirms that “he that believeth not shall be damned,” rather than “he that is not baptized shall be damned”— the key to escape from the condemnation of God is faith in His Son, not baptism (cf. Jn 3:18). “He that believeth” in 16:16a represents the Greek ὁ πιστεύσας, a substantive use of the aorist active participle. This aorist participle affirms that the one who places his faith in Christ at one particular moment, and who subsequently is baptized at a particular time (βαπτισθεὶς is another aorist participle), will receive heavenly future salvation (σωθήσεται, a future passive indicative verb). In contrast, the one who does not place his faith in Christ will be condemned and spend his eternity in the lake of fire. The use of the aorist to describe the believing mentioned in Mark 16:16a argues for eternal security; one who truly believes in Christ, and consequently demonstrates the reality of his faith by baptism, “shall” be saved; there is no doubt about it. Advocates of baptismal regeneration almost universally teach the necessity of works after baptism to continue in a saved state— essentially none accept a “once baptized, always saved” view. Mark 16:16 certainly does not support their theology.

Mark 16:16 does not support baptismal regeneration, but its association of faith with immersion conveys an important truth. The New Testament assumes that those who savingly believe in Christ will follow Him in baptism. In Matthew 21:32, Christ condemns the Pharisees

for not believing the message of John, although “the publicans and the harlots believed him,” while Luke 7:29-30 declares that “all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.” Those that believed the gospel of Christ, which John preached (cf. Jn 1:29), submitted to baptism and so took a stand for God, while those who did not believe John’s message “rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.” The gospels affirm that the sheep of Christ follow their Shepherd (Jn 10:27); this certainly includes a willingness to identify with Him in baptism. The book of Acts records apostolic preaching of the necessity of obedience in baptism after repentance unto life (Ac 2:38), and describes, without exception, a desire in new converts to obey the Lord and submit to baptism (Ac 2:41, 8:12, 8:36-38, 9:18, 10:47, 16:14-15, 16:30-34, 18:8, 19:5, 22:16)—the question was not how to convince those who have made salvation decisions to submit to baptism, but “can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?” (Ac 10:47).³² Acts counts as converts those baptized into the church, who in this manner publicly identify with Christ (cf. Mt 10:32-39)—and those who do so then tend to live lives of obedience (Ac 2:41-47; 4:4, 32-37, 5:11-14). Conversely, the book of Acts leaves no record of saints who did not submit to baptism. The epistles also assume that the believer will be baptized (cf. Gal 3:26-27). This explains the emphasis of Mark 16:16a; the saints should not reckon those who refuse to submit to baptism as believers. If contemporary evangelistic procedure is to follow the pattern of the Great Commission and the example of the whole of Scripture, it should not count men as converts, nor assume they are really regenerate, unless they submit to baptism. Furthermore, while the heresies of baptismal regeneration and salvation by church membership or other works should be

³² Note that 10:46 states that Peter “answered” the question of 10:47. This implies that these newly converted Gentiles were asking him to baptize them.

zealously opposed, and Christ and His all-sufficient work exalted as the sole and perfect means for the eternal salvation of sinners, soulwinners should explain to those to whom they preach the necessity of persevering obedience to Christ after conversion, including baptism and unity with the church of God (Ac 2:38, 41-47, cf. Mt 19:16-22, 29; Lu 14:25-35, Eph 2:8-10, 1 Thess 2:13-14, Tit 2:11-15, 3:5-8, Heb 3:14, etc.). Certainly for personal workers or preachers to tell unsaved or even professedly saved individuals who attend apostate, neo-evangelical, or non-independent Baptist churches “we are not trying to take you from your church” or “we are not in the business of changing people’s churches” involves either ignorance of what the Great Commission demands, forthright disobedience to its terms, or a dishonesty similar to that of cults when they try to entice men into their systems by hiding their demanding or unpleasant teachings from those not already committed; while such declarations may, to the eye of carnal reason, provide for less hostility from the unconverted, it does not follow the example of the apostles, who did not employ “flattering words,” but spoke “the gospel of God . . . not [with] deceit, nor in guile . . . not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts” (1 Thess 2:1-5). Unbiblical methodology quenches the Spirit of God and therefore hinders successful evangelism and obedience to the Great Commission to the glory of God. The soulwinner who can say, as Paul and his fellow laborers did, to those he ministers to that “even as a nurse cherisheth her children[,] so being affectionately desire of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us” (1 Thess 2:7-8), and so, living “holily and justly and unblameably . . . exhort[s] and comfort[s] and charge[s] . . . as a father doth his children” (1 Thess 2:10-11; cf. 1:5, 2:19-3:1), and both fervently seeks the Lord for the increase, and gives Him thanks to God for it (1 Thess 1:2, 2:13), will not need to employ anti-Biblical methodologies to see visible results and fulfill the Great Commission. While, (alas!) God-honoring evangelism is more easily spoken of than done, as it is something

clearly in God's will, the saint can pray to His Father, the Lord of the harvest, for conformity to Christ in this matter, and the God of love will hear and answer such a prayer (1 John 5:14-15).

The gospel of Luke records another restatement of the Great Commission by the risen Lord Jesus:

44 And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me. 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And ye are witnesses of these things. 49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. (Luke 24:44-49)

As in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, Christ gives the Great Commission as recorded in Luke's gospel to the church. Luke 24:33 records that the two who met Christ on the road to Emmaus returned to Jerusalem to where "the eleven gathered together,"³³ and them that were with them." The delivery of the Commission command to an assembly of numbers in addition to the eleven apostles again excludes an exclusively apostolic interpretation of the extent of the Great Commission. The individual believers present in that day would not get to "all nations,"³⁴ (v. 47) to give the glad tidings, but the church, guaranteed perpetuity by Christ, could not only reach them but continue to preach repentance³⁵ to them until the end of the age. The "ye" who

³³ The word for "gathered together" is *συνηθροισμένους*, from *συναθροίζω*. The word means "to cause to gather together as a group, gather, bring together," and, in the passive (as is the form here, a perfect passive participle), to "be gathered together, meet," or to "hold meetings" (BDAG). It appears only three times in the New Testament; the other two are Acts 12:12 and 19:25. In Acts 12:12 it appears again as a perfect passive participle and seems to refer to a special church prayer meeting. The Acts 19:25 reference is in the active and outside of an ecclesiastical context. This word, both from its lexical meaning and the cross reference to Acts 12:12, supports the fact that Luke 24:33ff., including the Commission of 24:47, was given to Christ's *ekklesia*.

³⁴ "among all nations" in Lu 24:47 is *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. The identical Greek phrase is found in Mt 28:19 as the basis for the words "all nations" there.

³⁵ Note that Lu 24:47 refutes the absurd and spiritually poisonous notion which circulates at Dallas Theological Seminary, among other places, that repentance is not part of the gospel preached in the church age. In addition, the phraseology here of "repentance and remission of sins" militates against the view that John the Baptist did not preach the Christian gospel; the only previous references to the word here used for repentance, *μετάνοια*, and the word for "remission" here, *ἄφεσις*, in the same verse in the gospels are Mark 1:4, "repentance for the remission of sins," *μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*, and Luke 3:3, "repentance for the remission of sins," *μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν*. Both verses refer to the preaching of John the Baptist—he preached

will be “endued with power from on high” in v. 49 when the Father sends His “promise” represents the church of Acts one and two, which Christ, in fulfillment of His promises to send the Comforter (Jn 14-16), baptized with the Spirit (Ac 1:5),³⁶ and so set forth as His new institution, replacing the Jerusalem temple, which (as with the tabernacle, and with the future Millennial temple) had received similar miraculous recognition as His place of public worship and service (Ex 40:34-35, 1 Ki 8:11, Mt 21:43; cf. Eze 10:18, 43:4-5, 44:4, 48:35, Rev 21:11, 22-23). When Christ sent the Spirit, the ones who “were all with one accord in one place” (Ac 2:1) were “filled with the Holy Ghost” (Ac 2:4) and, having received power (Ac 1:8),³⁷ proceeded to preach repentance and remission of sins (Ac 2:38) as Christ had ordained (Lu 24:47, 49), “beginning at Jerusalem,” and were used by the Lord to produce tremendous conviction and many conversions. The church, clearly already alive and functioning before Pentecost in Acts chapter one, where it held a business meeting to appoint the successor of Judas (Ac 1:15, 23, 26), having now been baptized in the Spirit, had three thousand souls added to her previous membership of at least one hundred and twenty (Ac 2:1, 41).³⁸ The longevity required to reach “all nations,” the explicit assembly context of Luke 24:47, and the demands of 24:49 all

“repentance and remission of sins” (Lu 24:49), the church’s gospel. The only subsequent reference which combines the two words in the same verse occurs in Ac 5:31, where Peter preaches the gospel given to the Baptist and then to Christ’s immersionist assembly in Luke 24. Peter employs the related word μετανοέω with ἄφεσις in Acts 2:38.

³⁶ For a sound study of Holy Spirit baptism, see *Landmarks of Baptist Doctrine*, vol. 2, pgs. 293-299.

³⁷ Note that the power mentioned in Acts 1:8, along with that mentioned in Luke 24:49, is not something which the saints today must seek as some sort of post-conversion second blessing. When the church was baptized with the Spirit in Acts two, she received the endowment of power of Lu 24:49 and Ac 1:8; after Acts 19, the baptism with the Spirit was a completed historical phenomenon. At the moment of regeneration all believers now receive the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9)—as they have the Spirit of God, who is Omnipotent, within them, they all possess power from on high to the utmost extent. Their great need is to be filled with the Spirit, be surrendered to His control, and to not quench Him. Certainly fervent prayer for Him to convict and convert the lost, to reveal sin in the lives of His people, to strengthen the inner man, and do all the other things He has promised to do are exceedingly wholesome—but to pray for a baptism of the Spirit, or for a larger amount of power, when Spirit baptism is over (Eph 4:5) and the saints already have omnipotent power at their disposal, is contrary to Scripture. The saints possess “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3); no “second blessing” is possible, because they received everything already at the great “first blessing” when they became children of God.

³⁸ The notion that the church did not begin until the day of Pentecost, a combination of over rigid dispensationalism and the unscriptural Protestant universal church theory, is contrary to New Testament teaching. See, e. g., *Landmarks of Baptist Doctrine*, vol. 4, pgs. 509-516.

demonstrate that Christ delivered the Great Commission in Luke’s gospel to the church.

Christ appeared to and commissioned His church in Luke 24 on Sunday (Lu 24:6, 21, 29, 33ff.), the day of His resurrection— she continued to meet on Sundays (John 20:19, 26) from that point on, was baptized with the Spirit on Pentecost Sunday (Lev 23:15-16, Ac 2:1), and continued to commemorate Christ’s resurrection by meeting on Sunday throughout the New Testament era (1 Cor 16:1-2, Ac 20:7), worshiping Him upon that day, as the disciples did the Sunday of His resurrection (Mt 28:9). The pattern of Sunday meetings was thus set immediately after Christ’s resurrection early Sunday morning.³⁹

Christ tells His church in Luke 24:48 that her members “are witnesses of these things.” The KJV word “witness,” μάρτυς (*martus*), meant in Classical Greek “a witness,” and was related to the verb μαρτυρέω (*martureo*), “to be a witness . . . to bear witness to a thing, testify to.”⁴⁰ In the Koiné Greek of the NT period a witness or *martus* was “one who testifies in legal matters, witness,” or “one who affirms or attests, testifier, witness,” or “one who witnesses at cost of life, martyr.”⁴¹ The members of the first century churches were to testify of their knowledge of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection according to the Scriptures, of the gospel (1 Cor 15:1ff.)—modern Baptists must do the same, for they have received the same Scriptural testimony, and they have known the resurrected Christ as well through what they have learned of Him in, among other things, regeneration, progressive sanctification, personal communion, His voice in His Word (Jn 10:27), and answered prayer.

Christ calls every church member to be a witness for Him. In Luke 24:48, every saint

³⁹ This does not make Sunday a “new Sabbath.” The Sabbath is Saturday, and was a type of rest in Christ (Hebrew 4). The New Testament declares that men in the church age do not need to keep the Sabbath (Col 2:16, Rom 14:5-6), for it is part of the Law, which as a whole has been fulfilled and abolished (2 Cor 3).

⁴⁰ pg. 426, Liddell & Scott, *Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (abridged), New York, NY: Clarendon Press, 1935.

⁴¹ Definition from BDAG on μάρτυς.

present was a *martus*—the Lord said “ye [2nd person plural] are witnesses.” Christ promised the same individuals named “witnesses” in v. 48 the coming baptism with the Holy Spirit in v. 49—the “ye” of v. 48 is told “I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye . . . until ye be endued with power...” Since all the church members received “the promise of the Father” and were baptized with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1ff., each saved and Scripturally immersed individual is called to be a witness. Further support for this comes from Acts 1:8; the church, again the “ye” of the verse, is told “ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses (*martures*, nom. pl. of *martus*) unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”⁴² While the Commission here, as elsewhere, is given to the church, the command “ye shall be witnesses” demonstrates individual responsibility in reaching the local area, “Jerusalem,” nearby regions, “all Judaea, and in Samaria,” and the farthest regions, “unto the last part of the earth” (ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς). All church members should be involved in these several aspects of outreach; they should be winning men to Christ in their local community, seeking to plant churches nearby, and making the utmost efforts in prayer, financial support, and all other Scriptural means⁴³ to support those God calls to personally go to the part of the “every creature”

⁴² ἀλλὰ λήψεσθε δύναμιν, ἐπελθόντος τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς· καὶ ἔσεσθέ μοι μάρτυρες ἐν τε Ἱερουσαλὴμ, καὶ ἐν πάσῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ καὶ Σαμαρείᾳ, καὶ ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.

⁴³ The Scriptures give no support whatsoever to a mission board model of reaching foreign lands; the Biblical pattern is church sent and church supported missions (Ac 13:1-4ff.). Mission boards, unless they are under the authority of a church (and if they are, and the mission board is, say, the church’s deacon board, then why not give up the name which associates the church deacons with unscriptural parachurch boards?), have no right to exist, but are unscriptural parachurch organizations. While churches have been and are started through Baptists who use mission boards, there are practical, as well as theoretical and personal eternal (2 Tim 2:5) benefits to foregoing them. Arguments for church-sent and supported missions, as well as practical assistance in following the Biblical model, are available in *Biblical Missions: History, Principles, Practice*, Roy F. Dearmore, Garland, TX: Rodgers Baptist Church, 1997, and *The Bible, the Baptists, and the Board System*, M. L. Moser & J. A. Scarboro, Emmaus, PA: Challenge Press, 1975. These books, and other resources, are available through Lehigh Valley Baptist Church, 4702 Colebrook Ave, Emmaus, PA 18049, <http://lvbaptist.org>.

the Lord wills to reach with the gospel at the ends of the earth. Naturally, each saint must be willing to go himself if the Lord calls; but he should also seek, in the process of winning others to Christ and discipling them, and as he raises children the Lord has given him, to equip them to go as well if the Master graciously calls them.

Both the references in Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8 demonstrate that the *martus* of the Great Commission was one who bore testimony to the gospel of Christ before others. Peter's gospel preaching in Acts 2:17-40 is the first example in Acts of the fulfillment of the Great Commission command to be a witness.⁴⁴ The soulwinning of Acts 3:12-26 (see 3:15, "witnesses"), 5:29-32 ("witnesses," 5:32), 10:34-43 ("witnesses," 10:39, 41), and 13:16-41 ("witnesses," 13:31) demonstrates what the witnessing demanded in the Great Commission involves; it is the proclamation of the gospel of Christ to others by God's people, those who have received Christ and experimentally know Him (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3, note the μαρτυρέω verb in v. 2). Both the proclamation of the gospel one has received and personal testimony to one's own conversion (Ac 22:1-21, note the μάρτυς of v. 15) are properly termed "witnessing." Paul states that Christ's purpose in appearing to him was to make him a "minister and a witness" (26:16) and to go to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (26:18). Paul's witnessed of Christ that men might be converted to Him,⁴⁵ and he so practiced to "all men" (22:15), to "small and great" (26:22). He

⁴⁴ The word μαρτυς appears in Acts 2:32.

⁴⁵ The verb "have appeared" (ὤφθην) of Ac 26:16 controls the infinitive of purpose "to make" (προχειρίσασθαί, v. 16) and the infinitives of purpose "to open" (ἀνοίξει), "to turn" (ἐπιστρέψαι), and "they may receive" (λαβεῖν) of v. 18 through the "I send" (ἀποστέλλω) of v. 17, for this is subordinate to the participle "delivering" (ἐξαιρουμένος) of v. 17, which in turn is subordinate to the "have appeared" of v. 16. The witnessing of v. 16 and the conversion and forgiveness in v. 18 are consequently related as sections of the singular "purpose" of Christ in v. 16. Note Paul's description of his witnessing (note the μαρτυρέω participle v. 22) in 26:19-23; he was

eventually sealed his witness with his blood, as did Stephen, Christ's *martus* (Acts 7, 22:20), Antipas, another witness or martyr for Christ (Rev 2:13), and innumerable multitudes at the hand of the persecutions of pagan and especially Papal Rome (Rev 17:6), which will continue its butchery of God's people in the Tribulation period under the one world religion headed by the False Prophet. Christ commands, in the Great Commission as recorded in Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8, that each church member diligently and fervently witness for Christ, that is, preach the gospel to one's community, regionally, and to the uttermost parts of the earth, as seen in the pattern of the book of Acts. The Lord's people should be willing to do this even if it means they seal their witness by death; excuses such as lack of time, lack of ability, coldness to the gospel in the population, derogatory remarks, or even threats to one's person or possessions in the process of witnessing to the "every creature" who is at hand provide no justification for failure to witness, nor to simple performance of the motions of preaching; they must proclaim the saving truth in a Christ-like manner to even the most bitterly antagonistic (cf. Acts 7:51-60), in the strength of the Holy Ghost who indwelt the saint at regeneration and empowered him to do so (Ac 1:8). The saint who obeys the command to win souls can rejoice in the knowledge that the Triune God witnesses alongside of and through him (1 John 5:6-10, cf. Ac 5:32), and he gives Him glory as he fulfills one of the primary purposes for which he has life on earth. However, the church member who fails to witness as commanded in Scripture commits despicable iniquity, violates the trust of the Great Commission, and is guilty of the blood of those who go to Hell because of his rebellion and wickedness (Ac 20:26, Eze 3:18-21, 33:1-9).

The record of the Great Commission in the gospel of John also emphasizes the

not "disobedient," but preached that men should "repent and turn to God," and testified to all that "Christ should suffer, and . . . rise from the dead."

tremendous responsibility and privilege of the church in preaching the gospel:

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. 20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them *his* hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. 21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: 23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained. (John 20:19-23)

The record in John describes the same gathering as that of Luke 24:36ff. John records Christ statement “Peace be unto you” (Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν; also in Jn 20:21, 26), as did the beloved physician in Luke 24:36. John 20:20 and Luke 24:40 also demonstrate the unity of the two gospel accounts; Christ spoke the words recorded in the two gospels, and then He showed the disciples His hands, side, and feet, with the result that they were “glad” (Jn 20:20, from verb χαίρω), or, as Luke records it, they had “joy” (Lu 24:41, from noun χαρά). John’s gospel provides additional confirmation to the account in Luke that the Great Commission was given to the church. Christ gave His orders, filled with second person plural forms, when “the disciples were assembled”⁴⁶ (Jn 20:19). Christ was “in the midst” (εἰς τὸ μέσον, 20:19) of them, as He was the next Sunday evening (Jn 20:26)—He had promised that He would be in the midst of His church (Mt 18:20; the church is “gathered together” (συνάγω), and Christ is “in the midst” (ἐν μέσῳ) of them; see also Heb 2:12, “in the midst of the church,” (ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας). Luke also records Christ’s dwelling “in the midst” (ἐν μέσῳ, Lu 24:36) of the disciples at the resurrection appearance of John 20:19. He was seen later to walk “in the midst” (ἐν μέσῳ) of the seven churches of Revelation (Rev 1:13, 2:1). Thus, that Christ was “in the midst” of His

⁴⁶ The verb here is συνηγμένοι, a perfect passive participle from συνάγω. The word means the disciples were brought or gathered together (see BDAG). It seems as if the Holy Spirit employed a great variety of words to denote the church assembly to especially emphasize the fact of the church’s receipt of the Great Commission; the Scripture employs συναθροίζω in Lu 24:33 (note that the form is a perfect passive participle, as it also is in Ac 12:12, where the word again refers to the church; the only other appearance of the word in the NT is as an aorist in Ac 19:25), here in Jn 20:19 συνάγω in Ac 1:4, συναλίζω, and in Ac 1:6, συνέρχομαι.

assembly, as seen twice in John 20, indicates a church context for the resurrection appearance of 20:19ff.

While John records the Great Commission on the same appearance of Christ as in Luke, he left a record of a different set of words the Lord employed to convey His great church charge. The Lord said to His congregation “as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” (Jn 20:21).⁴⁷ Christ indicates that His Father “sent” him with the perfect active indicative form of ἀποστέλλω, while He tells His church “even so send I you” (κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς) with the present active indicative form of πέμπω. Christ utilizes *apostello* to refer to the Father sending Him in Jn 5:36, 6:57, 8:42, 10:36, 17:21, 25, and here in 20:21. He employs *pempo* to denote His Father’s action in sending Him in John 5:23, 30, 37, 6:39, 44, 8:16, 18, 29, 12:39, and 14:24. The references to the sending with *apostello* are divided into perfect tense forms (5:36, 20:21)⁴⁸ and aorist tense forms (6:57, 8:42, 10:36, 17:21, 25),⁴⁹ while the *pempo* verbs are universally in the aorist.⁵⁰ While ἀποστέλλω and πέμπω certainly have distinct ranges of possible meaning,⁵¹ care is required in pressing the distinctions in relation to the sending of Christ; the terms may be employed in different tenses in rapid succession, as they are in John 5:36-38, where a perfect tense of *apostello*, an aorist *pempo*, and an aorist *apostello* follow in the succession of verses. Furthermore, while ἀποστέλλω has more lexical specificity in relation to

⁴⁷ καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέ με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς.

⁴⁸ Note also the perfect passive participle in Jn 9:7, “Sent.”

⁴⁹ Further references to God sending Christ where the word “Father” is not found in the verse, but it is clear that the first Person of the Trinity is in view, occur in Jn 3:17, 5:38, 7:29, 11:42, 17:3, 8, and 17:23. In all of these verses an aorist form of *apostello* occurs.

⁵⁰ References to *pempo* without the explicit naming of the Father appear in Jn 4:34, 5:24, 6:38, 7:16, 28, 33, 8:26, 9:4, 12:44, 45, 49, 13:20, 15:21, 16:5. All of these verb or participle forms are likewise aorist.

⁵¹ BDAG lists the two primary meanings (with subdivisions) of *apostello* as “to dispatch someone for the achievement of some objective, send away/out” and “to dispatch a message, send, have something done,” while *pempo* more generally signifies “to dispatch someone, whether [a] human or transcendent being, usually for purposes of communication, send” or “to dispatch something through an intermediary, send.”

the idea of sending with a message or commission, such a meaning falls within the semantic range of πέμπω (cf. Lu 16:24, 27), and to assert that the verses which employ *pempo* in relation to the sending of Christ do not retain this meaning is unjustified. In any case, it is true that Christ was sent by God to man, and this was not a continual process but a one-time incarnation, a view of sending consistent with the aorist tense; it is also true that this one-time sending brought about abiding results, a view consistent with the use of a sending verb in the perfect tense; and Christ certainly was sent with a specific mission in mind, consistent with the meaning of *apostello*. The important and Scripturally unique⁵² use of πέμπω in the present tense in John 20:21, in contrast with the universal employment of the aorist to describe the Father's sending of Christ, portrays an important caveat in the comparable natures of God's sending of Christ and His sending of the church; Christ was sent only once to perfectly provide salvation for all men through His death on the cross, while the church in all her members is continually commissioned to go and give the gospel through the entirety of the dispensation of grace.

The Biblically stated reasons for Christ's coming illuminate the nature of the "so send I you" Christ commands His church. 1 John 4:14 states: "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent (ἀπέσταλκε, perfect active indicative of ἀποστέλλω) the Son *to be* the Savior of the world." Romans 8:3 declares "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending (πέμψας, aorist active participle from πέμπω) his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Christ declared that He had come to seek and to save that which was lost (Lu 19:10); His work was to glorify God in providing redemption and saving sinners (Jn 17:4, 6ff., 19:30, 10:11, 15-18), for which His people will

⁵² The word appears in this form here alone despite eighty other NT appearances.

give Him glory forever (Rev 5:8-10). If Christ sends the church even as (Jn 20:21, καθώς + καί [κἀγὼ]) the Father sent Him, then she is to similarly seek and save that which was lost.⁵³ She is to provide the human instrumentality of this work of saving sinners to to glory of God by pointing men to the Son who was crucified for them. The church has the Spirit as the divine agent for the successful prosecution of this work, for Christ sent Him to her. The Father sends the Spirit in Christ’s name (Jn 14:26, aorist active participle of πέμπω); The Son sends (πέμπω form) Him from His Father (Jn 15:26) to testify to Christ. Furthermore, the word “testify” in Jn 15:26 is a form of *martureo*, the verb related to the noun *martus* examined above in connection with Luke 24:48—the Holy Spirit “bears witness” to Christ alongside the saints. Christ, who in John 20:21 stated He sent forth the members of His church just as the Father sent Him to seek and save the lost, promised in John 15:26 to send the Spirit to “testify” or witness to Him. As the saints preach the gospel, He works with them, as One called alongside them,⁵⁴ Christ, who showed forth through the cross His heart of love of which all must justly exclaim that truly “greater love hath no man than this” (Jn 15:13), sent the Spirit to indwell the saints (Jn 16:7) that the Holy Ghost might, through them, convict the world of sin, righteousness, and of judgment (16:8-11), and draw (cf. Jn 6:44, 12:32) all made willing by grace to receive redemption from sin and the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ by faith. The sequence of the statements of the Faithful and True Witness (Rev 3:14, cf. Rev 22:16, 20) in John 20:20-23 contain a glorious logic: the church, having received peace through the blood of

⁵³ Note that *apostello* (Mt 10:5, Mr 3:14, 6:7) is employed of the evangelistic activity of the (pre-Pentecost) church just as *pempo* is employed of her gospel preaching in John 20:21. Consider also Jn 17:18, where *apostello* is again employed (both times as an aorist).

⁵⁴ For the Spirit is the παράκλητος (Jn 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7), One who is “called alongside” as the advocate and help of the saint, and He assists them in their proclamation of the gospel so that it is not they that speak, but He through them (Mt 10:20, Mr 13:11). The Spirit witnesses/testifies, and the saints also bear witness (Jn 15:26-27, both “testify” and “bear witness” are *martureo* forms).

the cross which brought the Lord His wounded hands and side (v. 20),⁵⁵ is sent to seek and to save for the glory of God, even as Christ was sent by the Father (v. 21); to accomplish this service, Christ, who has all power in heaven and in earth (Mt 28:18), gives her the Holy Ghost to bear witness to Himself as she preaches to others (v. 22);⁵⁶ the result of this is the remission of sins through the divine instrumentality of the Spirit of grace and the human instrumentality of the church (v. 23). May the congregation of the Lord, Christ's spouse, consider the awesome responsibility and glorious power wrapped up in the words "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come" (Rev 22:17).⁵⁷

The nature of the declaration in John 20:23, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained,"⁵⁸ has been one of significant dogmatic controversy;⁵⁹ however, the context makes its significance apparent. As the Father sent Christ for the salvation of men, so Christ sent the church to see the same work accomplished (20:21). To this end, He gave her the Spirit (20:22), and then told her about her power to forgive or retain sin (20:23). Christ gave His church the solemn responsibility of preaching the gospel, and those who receive the message she brings have their sins remitted.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ John's gospel alone records the piercing of Christ's side, Jn 19:34 (cf. 1 Jn 5:8).

⁵⁶ Christ was literally in the midst of His church during His earthly ministry. In John 20:22 He bestowed the Holy Spirit upon her so that, between His ascension and the permanent indwelling of the Spirit which would take place on Pentecost, she would not be without the Divine presence in her midst.

⁵⁷ "Come" (Ἐλθέ) is a singular imperative; it is "Come thou," not "Come you all." The Spirit draws men as individuals, and the bride should go to them individually to bring the message of grace from her Head, Husband, Lord and Savior.

⁵⁸ ἄν τινῶν ἀφήτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας, ἀφίενται αὐτοῖς ἄν τινῶν κρατήτε, κεκράτηνται.

⁵⁹ It is obvious that the contention of Poperly that this refers to priestly forgiveness of sins is invalid. The "ye" who can remit or retain sins includes the entire body of the assembly then present; all the disciples (Jn 20:19), including some who are not apostles (Lu 24:33), fall within its limits, while Catholicism limits the power to remit sins to its priesthood. In a related passage, the whole church, not Peter alone, possesses the keys of the kingdom and the power to bind and loose (Mt 16:19, 18:15-20).

⁶⁰ While the second person plural forms found in 20:22-23 deal with the members of the church, it is understood that the sins are remitted only by the converting power of the Holy Ghost, who testifies with the church, convicts of sin, draws to Christ, and gives the gifts of repentance (Ac 11:18, 2 Tim 2:25) and faith (Php 1:29; cf. Jn 3:27, 6:65, Jam 1:17, Jn 1:12-13).

If she is lax in proclaiming the truth, then men's sins are retained, because the gospel recorded in the Word of God, which Christ has commanded the church to set forth before every creature, is the only means through which men are saved (1 Cor 4:15, Rom 10:17, Jam 1:18, 1 Pe 1:23, Ac 4:12). Whomever believably receives the gospel preached by the church has instant pardon of all sins,⁶¹ and this pardon, once given through the instrumentality of the preached gospel, is eternal,⁶² since the saint is kept by his Savior. In contrast, if the church does not faithfully evangelize, men's sins are retained,⁶³ for they do not receive the gospel, and so abide in their natural and horrible state as cursed in life and damned in death.⁶⁴ This verse demonstrates the tremendous responsibility Christ gives the church to seek to make disciples of every creature—she alone has this mission.⁶⁵ No parachurch organization, union evangelistic crusade, or Protestant denomination bears this accountability and privilege—it is the sole property of true Baptist churches.⁶⁶ The church holds the keys of the kingdom (Mt 16:19, 18:18);⁶⁷ through her

⁶¹ “remit,” ἀφήτε, is a second aorist active subjunctive. This tense, voice, and mood of ἀφίημι appears elsewhere in Mt 6:14, 15, 18:35, Mr 11:25, 12:19, Jn 11:48, 16:32, and 1 Jn 1:9.

⁶² The present passive indicative “are remitted” indicates a continuing state in this verse. Note that the other NT references to *aphiemi* in this tense, voice, and mood (Mt 23:38, 24:40, 41, Lu 7:47, 13:35) do so as well.

⁶³ “Ye retain” (κρατήτε) is a present active subjunctive. The other NT instances of *krateo* in the present usually indicate continuing action (Mr 7:3, 4, 8, Ac 2:24, 3:11, 1 Cor 16:13, Col 2:19, 2 Thess 2:15, Heb 4:14, Rev 2:1, 13, 14, 15, 3:11, 7:1), but this cannot be universally asserted, for Mr 14:51 is not clear. The presumption is, however, in favor of continuing action in the κρατήτε of Jn 20:23.

⁶⁴ The Greek word for “are retained” (κεκράτηνται), is a perfect passive indicative verb. Acts 27:13 is the only other use of the perfect with *krateo*, and there it is a perfect active infinitive.

⁶⁵ This verse also demonstrates that a Calvinistic fatalism, which reasons that the elect will be saved regardless of the diligence of God's people in evangelism, and so concludes that a lax attitude to the commands of the Great Commission and the pattern for obedience to it found in the book of Acts will bear no eternal consequences, is in error.

⁶⁶ This truth of the Scriptures does not mean, of course, that nobody has ever been saved outside of the instrumentality of Baptist witness (if we leave aside the fact that Baptists wrote the New Testament). Certainly many have been converted through the preaching of paedobaptists or others outside of the church of God. Nevertheless, they do not bear the responsibility to evangelize the world (nor do they have any right to continue to exist outside of God's immersionist assemblies), and groups within Christendom outside of the authority of New Testament Baptist churches tend to fall away from the gospel into countless errors, from the rejection of the gospel because of manmade and antichristian traditions (as in Eastern and Western Catholicism), to theological modernism (as in mainline Protestantism), to baptismal regeneration (most paedobaptists), to the substitution of intellectual apprehension of facts for conversion (many Calvinists and Reformed groups) to wild emotionalism which devalues or replaces the content of the gospel (as in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements and in groups theologically Arminian), to the denusion of repentance from the gospel (as in many falsely-so-called “grace” oriented evangelical groups opposed to Lordship salvation and influenced by the soteriology of Lewis Sperry Chafer and his Seminary),

witness do men come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt 16:16), and so receive eternal life (Jn 20:31). God holds her accountable to get the truth to men that they may be saved from the unbearable misery of everlasting torment. How many are currently in the burning lake, weeping, wailing, and gnashing their teeth, because of her disobedience to God's command in the Great Commission? How awful will be the loss before Christ's judgment seat for the non-evangelistic church and the church member who is not a soulwinner!

The reference in Ephesians 4:5 to "one baptism" demonstrates that by the time of the inspiration of the epistle to the Ephesians Spirit baptism was a completed historical phenomenon,⁶⁸ and only immersion in water continued for the course of the age of grace. The fact that there is only one true baptism requires that neither sprinkling, nor any pre-conversion ceremony, nor any baptism given with a view towards remitting sins, nor any administered by any individual or organization not authorized by Christ—indeed, that all baptism not in accord with the "one faith" (Eph 4:5) delivered to the saints, must be rejected. Christ, in the Great Commission, gave authority to immerse believers to His church alone. The Roman and Greek Catholic denominations, with their gospel of the baptismal regeneration of infants, is immersed in the spirit of Antichrist, and such baptisms are obviously null and void, as are the sprinklings of

to evangelistic methodology that leaves out conviction of sin and brings down repentance and faith to a mere sinner's prayer (essentially all neo-evangelicalism), etc.

⁶⁷ Keys refer to authority (cf. Is 22:22, 1 Ch 9:27 ("opening"), Lu 11:52, Rev 1:18, 3:7). The power of the keys and the authority to bind and loose are related in Mt 16:19, and the later is explicitly given to the church in Matthew 18:15-20. She has authority in church discipline (Mt 18:15-17) and bears Christ's authority even if she has only two or three members (Mt 18:19-20). 18:18 fits necessarily within this context. The fact that the church can bind people into its membership, and loose them from it, pre-Pentecost, indicates that the church existed and was able to enact discipline before Acts 2, which is consistent with the membership roll of 120 names mentioned in Acts 1:15.

⁶⁸ Spirit baptism was a historical phenomenon which fulfilled Christ's promise to send the Comforter (Jn 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7). Christ baptizing Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles within and outside of the Promised Land with the Spirit (Ac 1:5, 8; 2, 8, 10, 19). Spirit baptism ceased after Acts 19; all those converted today immediately receive the Holy Ghost (Rom 8:9), but Christ does not baptize them with Him. By the time Paul wrote to the Ephesians, there was only one baptism (Eph 4:5), namely, water baptism, which the Lord promised would continue throughout the church age (Mt 28:18-20). See *Landmarks of Baptist Doctrine*, Robert Sargent, book II, lecture 4, pgs. 293-299.

the traditional Protestant denominations, and the immersions of cults from Campbellism to the Watchtower society which give some measure of saving efficacy to its waters. Groups congregational in polity that deny that Christ is a sufficient Savior and reject the perfection of His atonement by opposition to the doctrine of eternal security (Jn 6:47, 10:28-30, Rom 8:28-39, etc.) must also have invalid baptisms, for they teach a mutilated gospel (Gal 1:8-9) and so are no churches of Christ. It is also a necessary consequence of the Great Commission that societies which have separated from Protestantism, Catholicism, or sprung up in some other way, yet preach the true gospel, are congregational in polity, and immerse only believers, (as do the majority of assemblies within the Bible church denomination, for example) but have no organic connection with the church Christ organized and commissioned or her daughters, do not have valid baptism, since they are devoid of divine authorization. Once baptismal authority is lost, the Great Commission gives no means for its recovery apart from one of the legitimate assemblies the Lord has guaranteed would continue to exist until the end of the age. A man without Bible baptism and church authority, who has, perhaps, separated himself from a Protestant group which itself came from the Papist Harlot, who immerses others and starts his own denomination, does not have a true church of Christ, however zealous or sincere he may be, however God may graciously use him to the salvation of sinners despite his errors, or however similar to Baptist polity he is in areas other than authority in baptism; nor does any body which develops from his assembly become a legitimate church, a true temple and bride of Christ, unless it first receives baptism from an assembly which has heavenly authority.⁶⁹ This fact, clearly taught from the

⁶⁹ While the phrase “mother church” is not found in Scripture, the establishment of new churches through the agency and with the authority of a parent congregation is the Biblical pattern; although the words are absent, the concept is Scriptural. Acts 11 provides a case study in the matter; the entire Great Commission appears in the passage. Men from the Jerusalem church go forth (“Go ye”), souls, Jewish and non-Jewish, are preached to and repent and believe (“preaching . . . a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” Ac 11:19-21, “teach all nations”), The report of the conversions is returned to the Jerusalem church (“tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem,” 11:22), the mother church baptizes them, after, through Barnabas, she verifies the work is legitimate (“had seen the grace of God,” 11:22-24; “baptizing them”), the new “disciples”

language of the Great Commission, demonstrates that all baptism other than that administered by Scriptural Baptist churches, which alone have maintained, in accordance with the promise of their Lord (Mt 28:20),⁷⁰ a continuous existence with actual succession to the church Christ

(11:26; μαθητεύσατε . . .) of the daughter church are organized into a new church and then “taught” (“teaching them to observe all things whatsoever”), and they turn their region upside down to the extent that they are first called Christians (11:26). The new church then begins to establish its own daughter assemblies by sending forth others to repeat the process elsewhere (Ac 13:1ff.). This is all done in the power of the Spirit (Lu 24:47, Ac 1:8, Jn 20:21-23, Ac 11:24, 13:2, 4).

Barnabas was sent (ἐξαποστέλλω) from the Jerusalem church with authority to organize the Antioch church (Ac 11:22), and, since he was sent to go “as far as” Antioch, very possibly he organized new churches in the closer regions of Phenice and Cyprus as well (11:19). Men were saved before his arrival, but none were baptized (Ac 11:19-21). After Barnabas arrives with authority from Jerusalem, many are baptized; in Ac 11:24, “added unto the Lord,” προστίθημι + τῷ Κυρίῳ, is a reference to baptism. The combination appears elsewhere in Acts only in 5:14, a reference to baptism, not conversion. There the church (5:11) is together with one accord (5:12), and while of the general population none dared “join himself” to them by baptism into the membership (5:13, κολλάω, cf. Ac 9:26), those who did believe were “added to the Lord” in multitudes. The general context indicates church membership is in view: v. 13 and 14 are contrasted by μᾶλλον δὲ (cf. Rom. 8:34; 1 Cor. 14:1, 5; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 4:28; 5:11), and *the rest/believers* and *join himself to them/added to the Lord* are contrasted. Those who became believers were then added to the Lord by baptism into the body. In Ac 2:41, 47, προστίθημι also refers to immersion (cf. also in 2:47, ὁ δὲ Κύριος προσετίθει . . . and 1 Cor 12:18, ἅμα δὲ ὁ Θεὸς ἔθετο). When associated with a dative in Acts, προστίθημι uniformly refers to baptism (2:47, 5:14, 11:24), and in Ac 2:41, a dative similar to that in the other passages is implied. The only times the word does not refer to baptism in the book, it is followed by an infinitive (12:3) or a preposition in an idiomatic phrase (13:36). Only after the baptisms with the Jerusalem church’s authority, is the group of believers called a “church” (Ac 11:26ff.). This Antioch church subsequently sent forth Barnabas and Paul with authority to baptize and organize churches elsewhere (Ac 13:1ff., 14:26). The book of Acts exemplifies a “mother church” methodology.

Furthermore, the “elect lady” of 2 John is likely a church (cf. Eph 5:23, 2 Cor 11:2, 1 Peter 5:13, ἡ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι, “the church that is at Babylon”), a natural association since in the NT era the church is the bride of Christ. 2 John could be the letter referred to in 3 Jn 9a, “I wrote unto the church.” If this is the case, it proves the “elect lady” is a congregation. This view was popular among the Patristics, and is also held by many in modern times. Upon this theory, that this “elect lady” had an “elect sister” with “children” (2 Jn 13) settles the issue of the propriety of “mother church” terminology. Furthermore, the false church-system centered in Rome (Rev 17:9) is said to be the “mother of harlots” (Rev 17:5; cf. Is 45:1, 5, 7, which refer to Babylon as a “lady”), which refers to the spiritual abominations and false churches which developed from the Roman Catholic system—the Protestant denominations, having issued from Rome, are the daughters of the Harlot. If false churches can be mothers, it is reasonable to call new assemblies that spring from older ones daughter churches, and the sending church the “mother church.” “Mother church” terminology has a Biblical basis. See also “Can You Identify This Woman and Her Daughters?” and “The Need for a Mother Church,” Appendices III and IV of *Three Witnesses for the Baptists*, Curtis Pugh, Bloomfield, NM: The Historic Baptist, 1994, pgs. 192-202.

However, while a “mother church” practical methodology does appear in Scripture, churches are self-constituted—whenever two or three Biblically baptized saints gather together in Christ’s name and covenant together to constitute a new church (Matthew 18:20), one is constituted, even without a “mother” assembly. The fact that a “mother church” is not absolutely necessary has been recognized historically by practically every segment of Baptists. Even those who freely assume the “Landmark” label historically have affirmed the fact of self-constitution, not the absolute necessity of a “mother church”; see, e. g., *Landmarkism Under Fire: A Study of Landmark Baptist Polity on Church Constitution*, J.C. Settlemoir.

⁷⁰ Large amounts of historical testimony verify the existence of the Baptists from the days of Christ to the present. There appear to have been at least two lines of historical succession to American Baptists, one through the Continental Anabaptists, the Waldenses, and other groups upon the continent of Europe, and the other through

organized during His earthly ministry, is invalid. This does not mean that individual members of faithful Baptist churches of today must wonder if, because of some remote historical aberrancy in the sixth century, say, or the 1100's, they have legitimate baptism—since Christ guarantees church perpetuity in the Great Commission, and it is a plain Biblical command to join a true church of Christ (Heb 10:25, etc.), God will always make it possible for His people to know where His *ekklesiai* are. A church which a saint can see historically has separated from Protestantism or formed apart from the lineage of Christ's assemblies, whether it carry the Baptist name or no, has no authority from the Lord to immerse, but is a schismatic, unbiblical organization, while a member of a Baptist church that is faithful in doctrine and practice to the

Welsh Baptists, who appear to have maintained an existence from the time Britain received the gospel, apparently c. A. D. 58-63 (see "Britain's First Christian," pgs. 247-250, *After the Flood*, Bill Cooper, Chichester, England: New Wine Press, 1995 and the book *The History of the Welsh Baptists, from the Year Sixty-Three to the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred and Seventy*, J. Davis, Pittsburgh: D.M. Hogan, 1835), until the Reformation. Some of the many history texts which document Baptist succession from the first century to the present, as well as the persecution of the true churches by Roman Catholicism, include: Cloud, David, *Rome and the Bible: Tracing the History of the Roman Catholic Church and its Persecution of the Bible and of Bible Believers*, 2nd. ed., Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1997, Hammett, Douglas, *The History of Baptists*, Emmaus, PA: Lehigh Valley Baptist Church, n. d., Hunt, Dave, *A Woman Rides the Beast: The Roman Catholic Church and the Last Days*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994, Orchard, G. H., *A Concise History of Baptists*, Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1996 (reprint), Overbey, Edward H., *A Brief History of the Baptists*, Emmaus, PA: Challenge Press, 1974, Pugh, Curtis A., *Three Witnesses for the Baptists*, Bloomfield, NM: The Historic Baptist, 1994, Sargent, Robert J., *Landmarks of Church History*, books 1 + 2, Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist Church Publications, n. d., and Williamson, Thomas, *The Waldenses were Independent Baptists: An Examination of the Doctrines of this Medieval Sect*, Bloomfield, NM: The Historic Baptist, 1996. A demonstration that the Baptist churches were involved in preserving the Word of God through the centuries and used the *Textus Receptus* Greek Testament, (as well as the Hebrew Masoretic Text), the kind which underlies the King James Bible, rather than the critical Greek text which underlies the modern Bible versions, appears on pgs. 174-318 of *Which Bible?* (3rd ed.), David Otis Fuller (editor), Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1972. Note as well that early writings, such as the 1644 Baptist Confession of Faith, quote verses such as Mark 16:16 and Acts 8:36-38 (Article 39), which demonstrate that the churches believed these *TR* verses legitimate; furthermore, note the attacks on Biblical ecclesiology in the CT in Ac 9:31 (territorial church), 1 Pet 5:1-2 (bishops are no longer the same office as pastor and elder, favoring hierarchicalism), Eph 1:1 (the letter is no longer sent to the congregation at Ephesus, so the church truth of the epistle is altered), Ac 2:47 (baptism no longer adds men to the church), Eph 3:21 (addition of *kai*, changing "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus..." to "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus"), etc. Much valuable information in this area is also found in Cloud's *Rome and the Bible*, mentioned earlier. Actual succession has been the traditional position of American Baptists; this is demonstrated in *Old Landmarkism: What is it?* J. R. Graves, Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1880 (reprint ed.). The existence of successionist opinion among English Baptists in the 1600's appears from the reprint of *A Vindication of the Continued Succession of the Primitive Church of Jesus Christ (now scandalously termed Anabaptists) from the Apostles unto this Present Time*, authored by John Spittlehouse & John More and printed in 1652, found in Appendix II, pgs. 157-188, of *Three Witnesses for the Baptists*, Curtis Pugh. Note that these Landmarkers of the 1600's also refer to Mark 16:16 and Acts 8:37 as Scripture in their defense of immersion.

Scriptures, and which, as far as he can tell, lies within the temporal continuity of His Savior's churches, need not fear about the legitimacy of his baptism out of worry over events which have slipped off the pages of history; his Omnipotent God had promised to preserve the church, and He will not make it impossible for His people to obey His commands— such a saint should trust His Lord's promises, be humbled by the privilege of his position in the Bride Christ loved and gave Himself for (Eph 5:25), and joyfully serve His faithful God through His NT Temple (1 Cor 3:9-17, Eph 2:20-22, 1 Tim 3:15).⁷¹

⁷¹ The ecclesiological position expounded here is often known as "Landmarkism" in contemporary American Baptist circles. Unfortunately, many who oppose this position on church truth have created all sorts of ridiculous misrepresentations of the Landmark Baptist position, so that many non-Landmark Baptists, including pastors and others in positions of leadership, ignorantly think that Landmarkism teaches that only Baptists will be saved, or only Baptists are Raptured, or various other types of utterly heretical nonsense. It has also been misrepresented as an assertion that a church must be able to trace a chain-link succession back to the first century or it does not have a valid baptism. It is unfortunate that those who hold to and propagate this sort of hot air do not take the time to find out what the Landmarkers they vociferously oppose actually believe. Let J. R. Graves, one of the first, along with J. M. Pendleton, to employ the term *Landmarkism* in the 1800's to describe the ecclesiological position which he and many other Baptists of his day contended for, define the term himself: "Nor do we admit the claims of the 'Liberals' upon us, to prove the continuous existence of the church, of which we are a member, or which baptized us, in order to prove our doctrine of church succession, and that we have been scripturally baptized or ordained. As well might the Infidel call upon me to prove every link of my descent from Adam, before I am allowed to claim an interest in the redemptive work of Christ, which was confined to the family of Adam! We point to the Word of God, and, until the Infidel can destroy *its* authenticity, our hope is unshaken. In like manner, we point the 'Liberal' Baptist to the words of Christ, and will he say *they are not sufficient?*" (pg. 85, *Old Landmarkism: What is it?* Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1880 (reprint)). Landmarkism is the Scriptural teaching that there has been an actual succession of churches, just like there has been an actual succession of men from Adam, but it does not assert the necessity of tracing that succession back church by church to Christ, because the Bible asserts its existence, and God's naked promise is sufficient. It is a position based upon faith (Hab 2:4) in the promises of God about church succession, as found in the Great Commission and elsewhere (Mt 16:18, 18:17, 1 Cor 11:26, 12:13, Eph 2:19-22, 3:21, 5:27; see these passages explained in relation to succession on pg. 7, *Landmarks of Church History*, Robert Sargent, Oak Harbor, WA: Bible Baptist Church Publications, n. d.. 2 Tim 2:2 also suggests a succession of church leadership.). The definition of Landmarkism set forth by J. R. Graves is still that believed by those who gladly call themselves Landmark Baptists today. For example, I. K. Cross, "one of the most outstanding proponents of Landmarkism during the last quarter of the twentieth century," a prominent historian and seminary professor for a school associated with the American Baptist Association, the largest group to universally assume the title of "Landmarkers," defends the same position in relation to perpetuity delineated by J. R. Graves in his pamphlet *Landmarkism: An Update* (Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1984- the quote above is from the back cover). He includes numerous quotes from Graves and rejects the misrepresentations of Landmarkism mentioned above. This modern day Landmark Baptist leader writes: "I do not know of a reputable Landmark Baptist student of church history who claims that every congregation must trace its individual history link by link back to Christ and the apostles. If this were true there would be few, if any, churches that could validate themselves. This is **not** [bold in original] the claim of true Baptist church perpetuity. This does not, however, weaken the need for church succession in New Testament church history." (pg. 13, *Landmarkism, an Update.*) Neither those who coined the term "Landmarkism," nor those who take the term to themselves today, believe the various strange, heretical, and unbiblical positions their opponents put to them out of either ignorance or spite.

The restatement of the Great Commission to the church in Acts 1:8 provides the outline for the book: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Acts neatly splits into sections which divide the practice of the Commission in Jerusalem (Ac 1-7), in Judea and Samaria (8-12), and to the uttermost part of the earth (13-28). The expansion of the gospel in accordance with the command to go to “all nations” (Mt 28:19), the theme of Acts, constituted the major focus of early Christian churches, as it should be for their modern successors. Acts 1:6 demonstrates that the Great Commission as stated in 1:8 was given to the disciples when they were “were come together,”⁷² and so was, as noted earlier, a church commission. Through the instrumentality of the preached gospel converts were won, who, as souls genuinely born of God, “were baptized . . . added . . . and . . . continued steadfastly” (Ac 2:41-42) in their new faith; the fulness of the charge of Mt 28:19-20 was practiced, rather than an abbreviation of it which, through the neglect of its two latter participles, abandons the meat of the verbal imperative to make disciples. The apostolic proclamation of the free grace of God was no easy-prayeristic antinomianism. It is assumed throughout the book that those who are saved will join the church (Ac 2:47). While believers certainly sin, even grievously (cf. Ac 5:1ff.), to be a Christian was to be a disciple in Acts (6:1, 2, 7, 11:26, 14:20, 22, 15:10). This is in full accord with the mandate of Matthew 28 and the teaching of the gospels. The necessity of divine authority in baptism appears in Acts from the use of the “name” terminology, as found in the Commission (Mt 28:19, Ac 2:38, 8:16, 19:5, cf. Ac 3:6, 4:10, 18, 5:40, 8:12, 9:27, 16:18, 26:9).

The book of Acts clearly teaches and models by example aggressive evangelism for

⁷² The Greek word is *συνελθόντες*, from *συνέρχομαι*, to “come together” or to “assemble.” It is used of church assembly in 1 Cor 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34, 14:23, and 14:26 as well.

every church member; all should go “every where preaching the word” (Ac 8:4).⁷³ House to house evangelism is the explicit pattern of the book of Acts. For example, in Acts 5:42 the apostles “daily in the temple, and in every house . . . ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”⁷⁴ One notes the persistency of this teaching and preaching (cf. Ac 5:42, 21:28); it was not done only a few weeks a year to advertise Vacation Bible School or a special evangelistic meeting, but consistently and continually. This preaching “in every house” must have referred to house to house evangelism,⁷⁵ not simply holding church meetings in the houses of believers. The context of Acts chapter five involves the apostles preaching the gospel to “the people” (from the Hebrew **אֲנָשִׁים**), that is, lost Israelites, and v. 42 is a continuation of this action. Every

⁷³ Acts 8:1-4 demonstrates that women, not men alone, were participating in public evangelism (such as house to house). In 8:1, the entire church membership, the apostles excepted, were “scattered abroad.” In 8:4, “they that were scattered abroad,” (in both passages the verb **διασπείρω**), the entire church membership, both “men and women” (in the verse, **ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας**; note no infants were members) went “every where preaching the word.” The “preaching” of v. 4, from *euangelidzo*, is explaining the saving gospel, or evangelizing. The fact that women can “preach” in the sense of evangelizing does not in any way mean that they preached to congregations or engaged in any kind of authoritative proclamation (as befits the more general word for preaching in the NT, **κηρύσσω**—and women never are said to engage in this sort of preaching in Scripture) over men (1 Tim 2:11-15; 1 Cor 14:34-37), although women did teach other women, Acts 21:9 (yet note that it was the male prophet who addressed the entire congregation including men, 21:10ff.). Furthermore, while women are, as demonstrated in Acts 8:1ff., to engage in public evangelism such as house to house or methods such as tract distribution, they should not be aggressive in explaining the gospel to men, as is appropriate when they evangelize other women, or when men evangelize anyone (Acts 7:51-52; 13:9-10, etc.).

⁷⁴ Of course, house to house is not the only means of giving out the gospel mentioned in Acts; in addition to evangelistic preaching outside of church meetings (Ac 2:14-40, 3:12-26, etc., a great variety of methods of giving out the gospel appear: see Ac 5:42, 8:26-40, 13:7-12, 16:13-14, 31-32, 20:20-21, etc.). Note as well that to “teach and preach Jesus Christ... in every house” implies more than simply seeking to win a man to Christ at his doorstep and then leaving him there, whether he responds or not. A series of home Bible studies which preach the gospel, while not explicitly mandated in addition to attempts to see conversion “cold” at the door, are at least implied; it is likely that both sorts of preaching took place in the book of Acts. Churches today that offer evangelistic Bible studies today (such as the fine four week “Salvation Bible Basics” course by Pastor Doug Hammett of the Lehigh Valley Baptist Church in Emmaus, PA, <http://lvbaptist.org>, or the evangelistic Bible study series at <http://faithsaves.net>) tend to have much higher percentages of salvation decisions that lead to baptism and church membership (and so are not spurious) than churches that solely seek to lead men to Christ at their doorstep without such a foundation for more in-depth instruction. Furthermore, discipleship Bible studies subsequent to conversion are both a natural implication of Ac 5:42, a clear mandate of the Great Commission, and also unquestionably simply the part of wisdom.

⁷⁵ This is not to say that every reference to preaching in houses involved soulwinners getting the gospel out “door to door” in the pattern of Acts 5:42 and 20:20-21.

residence in Jerusalem obviously did not have believers in it, so preaching in “every house” indicates bringing the gospel to the residences of the unconverted. Furthermore, the same sort of preaching and teaching took place in the temple and in the houses; since the temple preaching was almost surely evangelistic to reach the lost, the house to house proclamation would have been the same. Finally, “preach” in v. 42 is not κηρύσσω, but εὐαγγελίζω, which indicates that specific evangelizing or preaching of the gospel, rather than the simple proclamation of Biblical truths, is in view in this text; they were evangelizing in the temple and in every house. Acts 20:20-21 also refers to house to house evangelistic preaching of repentance toward God and faith toward Christ, that is, preaching the kingdom of God (v.25) to unconverted Jew and Gentile. Verse twenty-one refers to “testifying” (διαμαρτυρόμενος, from διαμαρτύρομαι, a verb primarily used for evangelistic preaching to the lost in Luke-Acts) to Jews and Greeks, and this verb is used again in v. 24 of Paul’s “ministry, which [he] received of the Lord Jesus, to testify (again, a form of διαμαρτύρομαι) the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:20-21 indicate that Paul taught the elders at Ephesus to practice house to house soulwinning. To attempt to interpret the text otherwise would require it to refer simply to the teaching of Jew and Gentile elder within the Ephesian church the necessity of daily repentance and every-increasing faith in Christ. It would also make this sort of testifying about repentance and faith in Christian life the essence of Paul’s ministry (v. 24). Someone who would declare that this verse does not refer to house to house evangelism either does not know how to employ literal hermeneutics, has never bothered to study the passage, or comes at it with an unwillingness to obey God in this

matter. The specific illustrations of the book of Acts, given for the saints' examples and admonition, in addition to the general exhortations found throughout the Bible, including the Old Testament (Prov 11:30, Dan 12:3, etc.), to give the gospel to every creature, and the logical necessity, for those with a Christ-like love for the unconverted, for aggressive evangelism because of the fact that all without Christ are headed to eternal torment, renders inexcusable the churches and all Christians not bedridden and crippled that do not go house to house in nations such as the United States, where the chances of imprisonment or martyrdom for such a labor of love are essentially non-existent—first century Rome heavily persecuted believers, yet house to house evangelism was still practiced. Saints who do not aggressively evangelize grievously sin against God, and apparently do not esteem the blood of Christ highly enough to simply inform others, in line with the Savior's command, of the great salvation their professed Lord had to leave heaven and suffer infinitely to make possible.

The modern practice of gimmicking to manipulate people into church buildings is absent both in the Commission and in Acts; apart from the committed, “durst no man join himself to them” (Ac 5:13— this and similar passages also demonstrate the existence in Acts of church memberships made up very of a very high percentage of true converts, rather than assemblies filled with those professing and orthodox but not truly born from above). Nor were faithful churches popular in their communities,⁷⁶ as they might have been had they weakened or toned down parts of their message; rather, Acts 28:22 indicates that “concerning this sect [of Christians], we know that every where it is spoken against.” This absence did not result in the

⁷⁶ Note likewise in Revelation 2-3 the faithful churches endured persecution, while only those that were very far advanced in apostasy were spared from it.

Holy Spirit bestowing lesser success than might have been achieved through the power of popcorn and plastic toys, for “believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Ac 5:14). Gamesmanship for salvation decisions is also absent. While there is no record of an “invitation” of the exact kind employed in the majority of Biblical Baptist churches today (in Acts there were no church buildings, and the only altars known to them were at the Jerusalem temple and pagan cult centers—the modern practice of terming the front of the church auditorium the “altar” and labeling the invitation the “altar call” appears to be a Baptist adoption of terminology from Papistical or Galatianizing Protestants), the counseling of inquirers after preaching (2:37-39, 13:43, 17:4, 34, etc.), urgent and searching public proclamation (Ac 2, 3, 7, etc.), and personal soul-winning work of a wondrously varied kind (Ac 5:42, 8:26-40, 13:7-12, 16:13-14, 31-32, 20:20-21, etc.) is found throughout the book. Salesmanship techniques may produce larger numbers of “decisions,” but the command of the Lord is to multiply disciples—and men will only persevere in following the Lord, even when faced with violent persecution of the kind recorded in the book of the Acts, if they are genuinely born of God, and the Spirit-empowered employment of the means detailed in Luke’s second volume are best designed to accomplish. Those in Acts who counted the cost and became disciples were then faithfully taught the whole counsel of God (13:1, 15:35, 18:11, 20:20), in fulfillment of the last section of the Great Commission.⁷⁷ When there are prayer meetings where the house is shaken (Ac 4:31) and preaching through which men are pierced to the heart (Ac 2:37, 5:32, 7:54), a spiritual

⁷⁷ While the gospel is certainly part of the “whole counsel of God” and so should be preached within the assembly, the pattern in the book of Acts was to go outside of the church to preach the gospel and lead sinners to repentance and faith in Christ and build up the saints within the meetings of the congregation. There is no Scriptural command to invite the lost to church meetings to hear the gospel, although to do so is certainly not unbiblical. However, to focus upon reaching the lost through a model of inviting them to services, rather than seeking to reach them in the world and focusing upon the edifying and equipping the saints in church assemblies, is to adopt an unScriptural philosophy of ministry not found in Acts— Paul’s preaching to the disciples until midnight (Ac 20:7) certainly would not be allowed in a modern “seeker sensitive” service. Additionally, arguments against expository preaching through books of the Bible in church meetings based upon sermons in Acts fail to recognize that the great majority of the sermons recorded in the book are not preached in church meetings.

methodology, like that seen throughout the book of Acts, will be sufficient and, by God's grace, superabundant; the arm of the flesh will not be required to manufacture carnal pseudo-revival. The multiplication of churches⁷⁸ in precise accord with the mandate of the Great Commission is seen throughout the inspired record of the early churches preserved for our emulation today.

In the edict of Matthew 28:18-20 and its parallel passages, commonly termed the Great Commission, the Lord Jesus Christ, the risen Savior, Omnipotent Lord, and soon-returning King, commands His church to make disciples of all nations, and promises His presence with her as long as the decree remains in force, namely, until the end of the age. This process of disciple-making involves going, preaching the gospel of repentance and faith, baptizing those converted, teaching the baptized the whole counsel of God in the church, and establishing other assemblies to do the same in the rest of the world, to the glory of the Triune Jehovah. This practice, obediently pursued in the book of Acts, is enjoined today upon the Baptist churches which are the twenty-first century products of the faithfulness of previous generations. These churches, in light of the tremendous privileges and responsibility committed to them, should heartily continue in divinely-empowered church-planting efforts until at last caught up to be with their Lord.

⁷⁸ The Biblical pattern of individuals multiplying through saints winning others, who are discipled and themselves go on to win others, and churches establishing new churches which then multiply themselves, is seen clearly in Acts. Disciples “multiplied . . . greatly” (Ac 6:1, 7; note the imperfect form ἐπληθύνετο in Ac 6:7; 6:1 has a present participle in a genitive absolute construction, πληθυνόντων), the Word of God “multiplied” (Ac 12:24, also ἐπληθύνετο, “were multiplying”), and the churches “were multiplied” (also ἐπληθύνετο). Each individual saint and church is to reproduce and lead the new disciple or church to do likewise.

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