

Great Commission Christians/Congregations: An Alliance Distinctive

Great Commission—There are two kinds of Christians. They are either doers of the Great Commission, or disobedient ones.

What is the Great Commission? It is the command given by Christ to all His followers in every generation and country without exception: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded You” (Matthew 28:19,20). This mandate to all believers is not some legal obligation. It wells up and overflows as an expression of the very heart of God to His people, for He “so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that who ever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

But “how, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:14,15) “You are my witnesses,” says Christ (Luke 24:48). It is a joyous privilege and serious responsibility He has given to all who follow Him. The Great Commission will only be completed when “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

Congregations—Local churches consist of Christians who share essential beliefs concerning Christ, His message and their mission. The first definition found in the Bible referred to the original fellowship of believers formed after Pentecost: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

The Holy Spirit added another dimension to what the Bible considers a congregation: “While they [the church in Antioch, Syria] were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2,3). Thus began in one of the first congregations in church history the missionary movement that continues to this day and will go forward until “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

Great Commission Churches—As the individual believer, so the congregation. Churches are either obeying the Great Commission as an essential function of their fellowship, or they are disobedient to Christ’s top priority in relation to the world. This may sound radical, but the whole dynamic thrust of the Early Church as recorded in the New Testament following the Gospels was to live and witness in a manner that would make the message of Christ known in the whole world and open the way for His return. In human terms, a church with multiple programs and crowded services in lavish facilities is a success. In God’s sight, however, it may be a small or large congregation with a great heart for lost people at home and abroad, meeting in spartan surroundings, that enjoys His full pleasure and blessing. It is perhaps a case of “the first shall be last, and the last first.”

The issue is not just appearances. Through reaching the lost worldwide the local church, however small or large, has a unique opportunity to make its ministry felt to the

corners of planet earth. And by being part of a denomination that has missions at the forefront, the congregation's impact on the world is multiplied in strength many times over. By making God's heartfelt concern its own, the local church makes it so much easier for God to enrich its fellowship, prosper its community-based ministries, and provide for its pastoral staff. In a word, a church with a vision for a lost world is close to the heart of God, with all the privileges and blessings that implies.