

## TO WHOM WAS THE GREAT COMMISSION GIVEN?

Elder Ralph Harris

I am persuaded that if what is commonly called "The Great Commission" was not fulfilled in the days of the apostles, unto whom it was given by Christ (Matt 28:16-20 & Mark 16:14-16) then it will never be fulfilled, for since their day, and since the withdrawal of the gift of tongues, the conditions have never again been in place that would be necessary for any group of ministers or any religious organization to go into *all* the world and preach the gospel as the Commission required.

Not even the modern so-called Missionaries have been able to go into all the world, even with all their organizational machinery and fund-raising apparatus. After two centuries of their supposedly trying to "take the world for Christ" over half of the earth's population has never heard *any form* of gospel, much less the *true* gospel. And are we now to imagine that God has laid it upon the shoulders of a few Old Baptists to over-spread the whole world with the gospel?

At the time the apostle Paul wrote the epistle to the Colossians, the gospel had already come unto "*all the world*" and had been preached "*to every creature which is (was) under heaven*" (Colossians 1:5-6 & 1:23), and there is no other period in the history of the church in which this can be said. This clearly shows that the commission Christ gave to His apostles has already been fulfilled by them.

If the "Great Commission" was given to the Church as a body, can we suppose that during the Dark Ages when they had to hide in the dens and caves of the earth they were complying with the requirements it laid upon the apostles? I don't see how anyone can think so. They had to remain as inconspicuous as possible and could not have even attempted such an undertaking.

It appears to us that if Christ gave the "Great Commission" to the Church, or even to its ministry, then He laid a requirement upon them that it was, and is, impossible for them to fulfill, and I am sure the Lord has never operated that way.

In all my study of Old Line Primitive Baptist history I have never found where they have ever undertaken to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to "every creature," whatever that may or may not entail. Why, then, if as some are contending, our Primitive Baptist forefathers believed the Commission was given to the Church, did they not at least *try* to "go into all the world"... "And teach all nations," etc., and why did they withdraw fellowship from those among them who started advocating such a venture?

Are we to conclude that the Old Baptists have been rebelling against the "Great Commission" all these many centuries and that in these last days the Lord is just now impressing a few Old Baptist preachers to start trying to fulfill it? I hardly think so.

And if these men are being impressed of God to fulfill a commission that they say applies as much to the Church as it did to the apostles, are they actually going to try to comply with what that commission required of the apostles? Are they now going to "*go into all the world and teach all nations*," etc.? And are they going to do it like the apostles did it, and not first make up money for the journeys. Unless they do I cannot see how their conduct is going to be consistent with their professed beliefs.

If the commission of Mark 16:14-16 was given to the Church as a body, and if it was given to them for all the ages of its existence, how many times does the Church need to "*go into all the world*," etc.? A new generation arises about every twenty years, no doubt numbering in the billions. Does God require His Church to go into all the world and preach to every new generation and baptize every believer into their body? Or is just one time around enough? How are we to imagine a few thousand relatively poor Old Baptists coming up with enough money to over-spread the whole earth with the gospel, even *one time*, much less *many times*?

There are presently over two hundred nations in the world, and a world population of well over five billion people. Many nations will not even allow modern missionaries to enter their borders. How, then, are a few Old Baptists going to penetrate those barriers and overcome innumerable other such impossible hindrances and obstacles.

If the Commission was given to the Church as a body, isn't *the Church* commanded to "go"? And if the Church is supposed to "go," can they fulfill the commission by *sending* someone else? And if the whole Church "goes," will they have to vacate their meeting houses and let them stand idle until they get back home? And if so, will there be no church left here in America until they get back? The absurdities multiply more and more the further a person looks into the heresy of the Commission being given to the Church as a body.

If the ministers of the Church are under the command to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, why was the gift of tongues withdrawn before the close of the apostolic age? I do not know how many different languages there are in the world, but I only know *one*, and I don't know *that* one very well. The *World Almanac* lists over 220 languages that are presently being spoken in the various countries around the world. How many Old Baptist preachers do we know who can fluently speak more than one language?

If we are now under a command to go into *all* the world and teach *all* nations, how are we to overcome this barrier? And if we are under such a command does this not

require some kind of Divine direction? Does it not require the opening of a great many doors by the Holy Spirit and corresponding impressions on the part of the ministry to "go"? How many preachers would it take; how many leadings, openings and impressions would be necessary for such a commission to be fulfilled now? Where is the evidence that God is opening the prodigious number of doors it would require? Where are the host of preachers it would take, and how many of them are impressed to undertake such an overwhelming task?

I personally have never had the slightest desire to go into other nations, not even to go on a vacation to such places, much less to preach to people that don't want to hear me in the first place. But if I have been *commanded* to "go" as a result of being under a divine commission, does it not follow that I ought to "go" whether I have any *impressions* to "go" or not?

I understand that a number of churches have now been established in the Philippines. When those churches were given a charge, were they told that they are now under the obligation to go into all the world and preach the gospel, etc.? I have been told by reliable sources that those people live in great poverty and that their ministers cannot even come to America unless someone pays their way. In such a case how are they going to comply with the requirements of "the Great Commission"?

These are just a few of the problems I find with the contention that the Church is under the obligation to fulfill the "Great Commission." I believe that if Christ had placed His Church under the enormous burden of evangelizing "all nations" He would also have given the Church inspired answers to these and all other questions regarding the matter. The epistles would give clear and detailed instructions as to how such a prodigious work was to be performed and achieved.

I realize that I cannot express my concerns along this line without being further accused of being opposed to Scriptural evangelism, but that is of no great importance to me. The Lord knows my views on the matter very well, and He also knows how hard I have labored over the last forty-five years in the interest of His cause and the spread of His truth. And, if He ever says to me, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel,*" etc., I will start looking for Him to provide the way. However, until He does I am sure it would be very wrong for me to go presumptuously. ---Elder Ralph E. Harris