

**A Word From Paul For A Southern Baptist Convention Great Commission Resurgence
Advance For The 21st Century**

Romans 15:14-23

Introduction: 1) “It shocked the system. We needed a shock. We’re not breathing healthy.”

Those are the words of Dr. Johnny Hunt in a May 14, 2009 interview with the *Florida Baptist Witness*” as he commented on the release of the declaration “Toward a Great Commission Resurgence.”

2) Words that shock the system are not always welcomed, but they are often needed. Southern Baptists have such a need in 2009. Business as usual is not working, no matter how people try to explain and justify our stagnation and plateaued status. No, business as usual is not working and it cannot continue! Furthermore, shocking the system with strong words, in the context of obeying the marching orders of our commander-in-chief King Jesus, has biblical warrant as our text makes clear. Notice v. 15, “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you, on some points, as reminding you ...” The *NIV* says, “I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again ...”

3) Of what things did Paul need to remind the Romans? What things do we as Southern Baptists need to be reminded of at the end of the first decade of the 21st century? I want to make 4 observations from the inspired text of Scripture that can remind and guide the churches of the SBC in the “advance of a GCR.” Each principle will emphasize the necessity of mutual encouragement, even admonishment (v. 14) of one another. We must come alongside one another and move forward together, shoulder to shoulder, as a mighty army following the orders of the “captain of our salvation” (Heb. 2:10).

I. We must encourage one another to stay focused on the nations. 15:14-16

- Paul begins with a note of confidence in God’s people. He says they are full of goodness as those who, as Rom 12:1-2 teaches, are living sacrifices being transformed by the making new of their minds.
- He says they are filled with all knowledge, the knowledge of the gospel and all that it entails from the beginning to the end of the Christian faith. Once again we are reminded: theology matters! What we know and believe really matters. We must teach our people to think and live theologically.
- He says he knows they are able to mutually challenge and admonish one another.
- Nevertheless, because of God’s grace in him, he can be bold to challenge them to pursue the salvation of the nations so that, now don’t miss them, “they [the nations] might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (*NIV*).
- Paul was so consumed with “the nations,” the “*ethne*,” translated “Gentiles” in the *NKJV*, that he uses the word 10 times in 15:9-27. Bringing them to Jesus is an offering acceptable to God!
- Ringing in his ears, as it must continue to ring in our ears, were the words of Jesus in Matt. 28:19 to go and make disciples of all the nations, all the *ethne*.
- Today there are at least 16,309 *ethne* that comprise the 6.8 billion people on the planet. Today there are at least 5,850, and possibly as many as 6,652 *ethne* who are unreached. There are 1.6 billion who have never heard the name of Jesus, and 3.4 billion who have not heard or have very limited access to the gospel. Add to that the reality that there are 255 million lost people in North America, 3 out of every 4

persons (*On Mission*, Special Issue, 2009, p.8). My brothers and sisters, this is simply unacceptable! We and we alone have the only message of hope! What will we do with it? Oswald Sanders said, “No one has the right to hear the gospel twice, while there remains someone who has not heard it once!”

- To bring the nations to King Jesus is to bring an offering to Him that pleases Him, delights Him, that honors Him as the Sovereign Lord and Savior of all the universe and all the earth. We must stay focused on what He asks us to stay focused on. We must not get sidetracked by some good things that are not the best things! We must stay focused on the nations, the *ethne* coming to America and the *ethne* scattered around the globe. The Baptist theologian Carl F. H. Henry was right, “The gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.”

II. We must encourage one another to be a Christ-centered people. 15:17-18

- Paul never lost the wonder of His relationship with Jesus. Doubly amazed that Jesus both saved him and then called him to serve Him, his consuming passion was to know Christ, “the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil 3:10). His was a life of willing sacrifice for the One who had saved Him.
- In Romans 15 Paul refers to the Savior no less than 5 times. He says we are His minister (v. 16). He desires only to glory or boast in Christ Jesus (v. 17), not daring to say anything except what Christ has accomplished through him to bring the nations to obedience to faith. This is what Christ desires and this is how Christ is working thru him (v. 18).

- A GCR will of necessity be a radical “Jesus Movement.” It will take place only as we return with fresh passion and devotion to our first love which is Jesus! Get this right and everything else will naturally, no supernaturally follow!
- My prayer is that when the world thinks of Southern Baptists they will think “that is the Jesus people.” They sound like Him and act like Him! They are consumed with Him. They are “intoxicated” with Him. Now that is a form of intoxication I am in favor of!
- On YouTube there is a video making the rounds that features the atheist magician Penn of “The Penn and Teller Show.” As of June 15, 329,542 people have viewed the video. Penn is responding to the fact that a Christian man had kindly and graciously given him a Gideon Bible after a show. It was clear to him that the man was concerned for his soul. Listen to Penn’s piercing comment as he reflected on the man’s witness to the gospel: “I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe that there’s a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward,... how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? If I believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you and you didn’t believe it and that truck was bearing down on you there is a certain point where I tackle you and this is more important than that. And I’ve always thought that.”
- Being a Christ-centered people will inspire us and embolden us. It also will humble us, something we very much need. It will strip of us pride, destroy selfish ambitions,

convict us of petty agendas, bring to an end myopic territorialism and turfism, and extinguish sinful self interest that has lost sight of what really matters. It will remind us that apart from Christ we can do nothing. It will remind us that Jesus does not need Southern Baptists to do His work. No, Southern Baptists need Jesus to do His (not our!) work.

III. We must encourage one another to be gospel saturated in all we do. 15:19-20

- In verses 16-29 Paul mentions the gospel 4 times. He calls it the “gospel of God” in v. 16 and the “gospel of Christ” in vs. 19 and 29.
- What is the gospel? You say everyone knows what the gospel is. I must respond and say I fear most don’t know what the gospel is. That is why our churches are filled with many 1) who are unregenerate and 2) many who lack the joy of their salvation.
- Recently in a *Christianity Today* interview (4-22-09) Rob Bell, a popular pastor in Grand Rapids, Michigan was challenged to present the gospel on Twitter, which restricts you to 140 characters. He violated his character count but even worse, he violated the gospel! Here is his attempt at a short, concise definition.

I would say that history is headed somewhere. The thousands of little ways in which you are tempted to believe that hope might actually be a legitimate response to the insanity of the world actually can be trusted. And the Christian story is that a tomb is empty, and a movement has actually begun that has been present in a sense all along in creation. And all those times when your cynicism was at odds with an impulse within you that said that this little thing might be about something bigger - those tiny little slivers may in fact be connected to something really, really big.

- My response is huh? What? That’s good news? This is the message that saves from sin, death and hell and takes us into eternity in the presence of Christ? Are you

kidding me? Add to this the false gospel of “prosperity theology” that dominates so much Christian media and you have a church awash in gospel confusion.

- So I took up the challenge to “tweet” the gospel. Here is my feeble attempt:

“The gospel is the good news that King Jesus died and paid the full penalty of sin, rose from the dead and saves all who repent of sin and trust Him!”

- That, I would argue, is biblically faithful. That, I would argue, is good news.

It is good news at the beginning of my Christian experience. It is good news throughout my Christian experience. It is good news at the end of my Christian experience. The gospel affirms that Jesus is both the author and finisher of faith (Heb. 12:2). It is a gospel saturated life from beginning to end!

- The gospel teaches us that the person who has Jesus plus nothing has everything! On the other hand, the person who has everything minus Jesus has nothing. Being Jesus intoxicated and gospel saturated: the two go hand in hand and can never be truly separated.

IV. We must encourage one another to have a passion for the unreached peoples. 15:20-23

- Here is where a word from Paul hits us between the eyes and challenges us to rethink our priorities, our structures, our agendas.

— Paul says in v. 19 “I have fully preached the gospel” from Jerusalem to Illyricum, (modern Albania and Yugoslavia).

— Paul says in v. 20 it is his aim to preach the gospel where Christ was not named.

— Paul says in v. 21 this has biblical and theological justification based upon the great Suffering Servant song of Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

— Paul says in v. 23 because of this theological conviction he “no longer has a place in these parts.” The *HCSB* says, “I no longer have any work to do in these provinces.”

- You mean everyone has heard the gospel in these provinces? You mean you have planted all the churches needed in these provinces? No, he is not saying that at all. What he is saying is there is now a gospel witness there but there is not a gospel witness elsewhere, and I am concerned and driven to get the gospel to the “elsewheres,” to those where the Name of Christ is not.
- At IMB headquarters and in the Great Commission Center at SEBTS you will see on a wall in plain view to all what is called “the world evangelism clock.” This is what it said just a few days ago:

| | Increase Today | Increase This Year | Totals to Date |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| World population increase | 177,842 | 38,460,350 | 6,817,841,778 |
| People hearing and believing the gospel | 19,646 | 4,248,689 | 750,377,139 |
| People hearing and not believing the gospel | 68,697 | 14,856,525 | 2,633,935,652 |
| People not having an adequate opportunity to hear the gospel | 89,499 | 19,355,137 | 3,433,781,350 |

- Let’s trace this out a bit further.

This week 626,493 more will not have an adequate opportunity to hear the gospel.

This month 2,774,469 more will not have an adequate opportunity to hear the gospel.

This year 32,667,135 more will not have an adequate opportunity to hear the gospel.

And the number is growing larger with each passing moment.

- Brothers and sisters, masses of lost people are dying and going to hell with no possibility of being saved. By our lack of urgency it would seem that we do not believe this to be the case or worse, we do not care!
- And, who are the worst offenders of this “spiritual crime?” Men! Men who are suppose to lead the way in both home and church. One example. Today our International Mission Board has 331 journeygirls serving King Jesus but only 126 men. That means there are more than 2.5 times the number of women to men serving our Savior around the world as journeymen. In West Africa we have 50 journeymen. 48 females and 2 males. Our sisters are faithful to go while our brothers sit home and play video games in their boxers and T-shirts! Where are the men inspiring our sons and grandson to do something great for Jesus, something that really matters for eternity? When she was on the mission field Lottie Moon had this same burden and wrote to Southern Baptists back home, “I am trying honestly to do the work that could fill the hands of 3 or 4 women, and in addition must do much work that ought to be done by young men ... I must add that the work is suffering and will continue to suffer ... for want of a man living on the spot.” (*Five Who Changed the World*, 67).
- Lottie Moon fell nearly \$30 million dollars short of our goal this year requiring major cuts. It is the largest dollar decrease in the history of the offering. That means 667 missionary positions will go unfunded. A IMB story (6-4-09) sadly reported, “Though the number of Southern Baptists who want to go – and are qualified – keeps growing, there are not enough funds to support them.”

According to the 2008 IMB Annual Statistical Report, 565,967 people were baptized, and 26,970 churches were started overseas through IMB missionaries and our Baptist partners.

The Gospel also was shared among more than 1,190 people groups – 100 of these groups heard about Jesus for the first time.

Dr. Jerry Rankin said in response to the current situation, “We need to realize that God has blessed Southern Baptists with numbers and resources to be His instrument to fulfill His mission to the ends of the earth. One day we will stand accountable to Him for how we have used our resources. It breaks my heart that God-called people want to go – and millions need to hear the Gospel message from them – yet we don’t have the funds to send them. I pray this situation will convict our hearts and challenge His people to do whatever it takes to get the Gospel to the whole world.”

- My heart has been convicted and so let me share what I am going to do.
 - Christmas in August is coming to my church, Wake Cross Roads Baptist, on August 23. We will take a special Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.
 - Christmas in August is coming to SEBTS on August 25 at our opening Convocation. We will take a special Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.
 - SEBTS can track over 450 graduates on the field right now with nearly 100 more students in partnership with the IMB on the field now.
 - We have 32 new 2 + 2 missions units ready to go in the fall.
We have 24 new 2 + 2 missions units and growing, ready to go in the fall of 2011.
I suspect all of our seminaries have similar numbers.
- Will I tell them to plan on staying home because of a shortage of funds? No!

Will I tell them to consider changing degree programs because of a shortage of funds?

No!

Will I tell them to consider looking for a home assignment because of a shortage of funds? No!

- I will tell them that by God's grace and for His glory we will trust God to get hold of His people, call them to Jesus, break their hearts for the lost, and move us to give as never before that the nations might be brought to worship His Son.
- God forbid that Southern Baptist would be content to be a plateaued predominantly white middle class denomination restricted to the South and Southwest concerned mostly about our neck of the woods. If that was the heart of Jesus, He would have never left heaven. If that was the heart of Paul the odds are you and I would not be sitting here today.

Conclusion: I have been dreaming and day dreaming about what “the Press” might say following the conclusion of our Convention on Wednesday. After I read it a number of you may say, “You must be dreaming!” Then again, maybe God might be gracious and surprise us!

“Southern Baptists Rally to President’s Call For A Great Commission Resurgence”

In what many say is nothing less than a visitation of God, Southern Baptists came together in virtual unanimity at their annual meeting affirming Dr. Johnny Hunt’s call for a Great Commission Resurgence. Often known for their fussing and fighting, Southern Baptists came together as one leader said, “in a way I have never seen in my almost 50 years of ministry. It was truly remarkable.” Across the convention hall messengers wept, prayed and rejoiced in what many believe will be a new day in missionary and evangelistic advance. Prior to the Convention much conversation had centered around Article IX of the 10 point GCR Declaration issued by

Hunt and its focus on studying and streamlining Convention structures on all levels of SBC life for maximizing resources in fulfilling the Great Commission. However, as messengers gathered in Louisville the conversation and emphasis was on the Lordship of Christ, the gospel, the Great Commandments and everyone taking upon themselves their responsibility in a Great Commission Resurgence. Pastor Bob Wilson from Montgomery, Alabama said, “I think I speak for most pastors when I say a GCR must start with the local church, with its pastor and with its people. Every pastor must see himself as the head of a Great Commission outpost. We must lead every local church to be a Great Commission church, a church planting organism filled with passionate missionaries for Jesus. Every believer a missionary must be our motto and our goal. Location and occupation makes no difference. I once read where Oswald Smith said, “Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist.” I am going back home and lead my church to a greater passion than ever for the Great Commission.”

In a stirring display of support for Dr. Hunt’s challenge, national and state leaders came together and pledged to do everything within their power to serve the churches in a new day of Great Commission energy. They committed, said one, to pray, listen to the people, and carefully examine every facet of their ministry assignments to ensure that priorities and structures line up well for advancing the Great Commission. One State Executive was quoted as saying, “we want our nation and all nations to hear the good news of salvation found only in Jesus. This is going to require us to say no to some good things that we might say yes to the best things. We ask all Southern Baptists to pray that God would grant us His wisdom as we move forward in the days ahead.”

Perhaps the highlight of the 2 day meeting and what brought the messengers together was the report of the International Mission Board. Hit hard by the economic downturn, the International Mission Board's Lottie Moon offering experienced a \$30 million shortfall requiring severe cuts to missionary personnel on the field and a cutback on new personnel being deployed. Following Dr. Jerry Rankin's report, President Hunt came back to the podium and said he believed Southern Baptists could not be satisfied with this. Saying he felt impressed of the Lord, he challenged Southern Baptists to set aside August for a special Lottie Moon offering to help make up the shortage. "Let's have Christmas in August and let's trust the Lord to provide through His people what is needed to get the gospel to nations. I believe, as William Carey said, "we should expect great things from God and attempt great things for God." Southern Baptists, let's go for it and see what God does." Hunt's proposal received a long and sustained applause. A layman from Arkansas said, "It is a moment like this that causes me to give thanks to God for our Convention. This is Southern Baptists at her best."

Almost eclipsed in the excitement surrounding the Great Commission Resurgence was President Hunt's appointment of a task force to assist him in a study of the Convention in the context of the Great Commission Resurgence. However the sentiment of the 2 day meeting was captured by Texas DOM James Morris, "I do not think Southern Baptists have any problem trusting a committee led by a man with the heart and passion of Johnny Hunt. He loves Jesus. He loves the lost. He loves the local church. He loves our Convention. God raises up men like this for us to follow. You can count me in."

Brothers and sisters, you can count me in. A Great Commission Resurgence advance: that is what being a Southern Baptist is all about. The great missionary Hudson Taylor said,

“The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.”

Southern Baptists, let's get obedient. Let's get on board and do something great for King Jesus!