

## **The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention**

As we approach the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Southern Baptist are clearly at a crossroads. We find ourselves in the midst of seismic changes all across our Convention of churches. This particular moment in history is unprecedented. Consider the following events that have unfolded in just a five month period of time:

- 1) The Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Louisville, KY in June 2009 by a 95% vote empowered the president of the SBC, Dr. Johnny Hunt, to appoint a Great Commission Resurgence Task Force to study our Convention and bring back a report with recommendations as to how we can more efficiently fulfill the Great Commission. This occurred in spite of serious opposition in a number of places, especially from those who work for the denomination.
- 2) In August Dr. Geof Hammond under pressure resigned as president of the North American Mission Board.
- 3) In September Dr. Jerry Rankin announced his retirement as president of the International Mission Board (effective June 2010).
- 4) In September Dr. Morris Chapman announced his retirement as president of the Executive Committee (effective September 2010).

The import of these four events alone is enough to make one lose their breathe. Add to this the decline in baptisms, churches and membership of the Southern Baptist Convention in recent years, bizarre attempts to justify and paper over these declines, false rumors about and sustained opposition to the whole idea of a Great Commission Resurgence, distrust and a passion for the status quo on the part of some leaders, and it would not be difficult for one to be less than optimistic about the future of the Southern Baptist Convention. The fact is I am not optimistic.

However, I am hopeful. And, I am hopeful not because of my confidence in Southern Baptists, sinners saved by grace be we all, but because of my confidence in our God, His Word and His promises. He has promised in Revelation 7:9-10 that there is coming a day in heaven when there will be “a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” God has promised this will happen and praise His Name it will. Now, the question that stares Southern Baptists in the face is this: will we join hands with our great God in seeing this awesome day come to pass or will we find ourselves sitting on the sidelines watching? Will we, as Pastor Al Jackson has well warned us, make the wrong investment (treasures on earth rather than treasures in heaven), have the wrong perspective (the temporal rather than the eternal), and love the wrong master (money rather than God)? The spiritual stakes are high. Of that no one should be in doubt.

Interestingly, this is the 4th time I have addressed some aspect of the future of the Southern Baptist Convention in the past five years. I have some embarrassment at this point because I am not a prophet nor am I all that smart. There is no false humility here, just an honest self-evaluation and admission. Still, I will do my best to share my perspective on where we are and what we must do to have a “viable future” that will allow us to be a part of God’s great and glorious plan of redemption. I will intentionally draw on these previous addresses, particularly “Axioms for a Great Commission Resurgence.” I do so because 1) I believe they chart a hopeful and positive agenda for the future and 2) nothing has transpired since I delivered these addresses that would cause me to change my perspective. I will also draw on conversations and experiences over there past several months that have only highlighted and made even more clear where the dangers to our future lie. I have eight points of observation for your consideration.

#1) Southern Baptists have a hopeful future if we return to our first love and surrender

ourselves fully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. (Col 1:15-20; Rev 2:1-7). I have experienced significant grief at how little attention has been paid to this first axiom of my spring address at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. It was placed first for a reason. It must be first. It must set and establish the foundation for any future agenda for Southern Baptists. Yet, it has been passed over and quickly dismissed with the wave of a hand and words like, “we all believe that.” However, the question is not do we believe it? The question is do we live it?!

- Is Jesus Christ really our passion and priority? Do we truly aspire to both know Him and love Him fully? Do we long to see Him “come to have first place in everything” (Col. 1:18)? I fear we do not and as a result we too often devolve into petty quarrels, territorialism, turfism, defensiveness and personal agendas that find the Savior nowhere in sight. Jesus said, “He came to seek and save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). Is that our passion? Our priority? Our agenda? His final words are found in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:4-8. Have we heard Him? Have we obeyed Him? Let me quickly add that a right reading of Scripture will not set these statements in opposition to or at odds with one another. Any appeal to Acts 1:8 to justify not getting more personnel and resources to the unreached nations is wrong headed. Actually it is shameful. Most of our Jerusalems have a gospel witness. Large portions of the uttermost parts of the earth do not. Who will tell them about Jesus?
- George Barna is on target: “most Christians don’t act like Jesus because they don’t think like Jesus.” Again Jesus said, “I came to seek and save that which is lost.” (Luke 19:10). Southern Baptists need to think like Jesus. Southern Baptists need to

act like Jesus. His Lordship requires it. It demands it. Any other agenda is to get the first and most important thing wrong. If we fail here, we will fail everywhere.

#2) Southern Baptists have a hopeful future if they continually make clear their commitment to the inerrant and infallible Word of God affirming it's sufficiency in all matters. (Matt 5:17-18; John 10:35; 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21)

- Southern Baptists won the “battle for the Bible” that began in 1979. Men of God like Jimmy Draper, Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, Adrian Rogers, and Jerry Vines put it all on the line because they saw what the poison of liberalism was doing to our Convention and its institutions. These men are heroes of the faith and what they did must be honored and never forgotten. We must keep on reminding a new generation of what happened when they were small or not yet born. It is easy for young Southern Baptists to forget Joseph, to forget the sacrifices of their fathers.
- However, the “war for the Bible” is not over and it will never end until Jesus returns. The war over the truthfulness of God’s word was launched in the Garden of Eden when Satan asked, “has God said?” The Word of God will continue to be under assault, and we must ever be on guard and ready to answer those who question its veracity and accuracy. A younger generation of Southern Baptists will face this challenge, and they must be warned not to squander away precious theological ground that is absolutely essential to a healthy and hopeful future for this convention of churches.
- Dr. Russ Bush who is now with our Lord was absolutely correct. I heard him say in a seminary classroom in the early 1980’s, “the question of biblical inspiration is ultimately a question of Christological identity.” Why? Because Jesus believed the

Holy Scriptures to be the completely true and trustworthy Word of God! Even Rudolf Bultmann said this about our Lord, he just believes Jesus got it wrong! To deny inerrancy is to say that Jesus was wrong or that He willfully deceived. That is both heresy and blasphemy. It is spiritually suicidal!

- Do you doubt or deny the full truthfulness of the Bible? My counsel is go and join another denomination. We will love you and pray for you, but we do not want you infecting our people with a spiritual disease that is always fatal to the Church of the Lord Jesus. Inerrancy and the sufficiency of the Bible in all matters of faith and practice must never be up for debate in the Southern Baptist Convention.

#3) Southern Baptists have a hopeful future if we will pursue a genuinely Word based ministry that is theological in content and on fire in delivery. (2 Tim 4:1-5)

We live in a biblically illiterate culture that increases year by year. Sadly, Southern Baptists have not been immune to this spiritual malady. Even with the gains of the Conservative Resurgence, we have not seen a wide spread revival of biblical exposition in our churches. This is both surprising and disappointing to many of us. Now, I am encouraged by what I see as a real hunger for biblical/theological exposition in the younger generation. It is ravenous. At the same time I am discouraged that so many of their models are non-Southern Baptists. Think Alistair Begg, Mark Driscoll, John MacArthur, James McDonald, and John Piper. Thankfully, I can now add to these wonderful expositors men like Andy Davis, Mark Dever, J.D. Greear, James Merritt, Al Mohler and David Platt. This tribe must increase across our convention of churches if we are to have a healthy and fruitful future. So, what needs to happen?

- We need seminaries that teach an expositional model.

- We need pastor/theologians who model expositon.
- We need ministers of the Word who preach the whole counsel of God's Word (Book, chapter, verse, phrase, word).
- We need preachers who value the calling of being a theologian.
- We need men who are gospel saturated in their ministry of the Word who are faithful to proclaim Christ each and every time they stand to teach the Word of God.
- We need in our pulpits engaging expositors who are on fire as heralds of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Nothing is more exciting than theology. Nothing is more relevant than doctrine. No one is more beautiful than Christ. To proclaim these glorious truths in a dispassionate or boring manner is inexcusable. It is, I believe, sinful. If Southern Baptists have a future it will be rooted in the Word. If Southern Baptists experience a Great Commission Resurgence it will find its life blood in the Word.

#4) Southern Baptists have a hopeful future if we can unite around and affirm the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* as a healthy and sufficient guide for building theological consensus that avoids the equally deadly extremes of liberalism on the left and sectarianism on the right. (1 Tim 6:3-4).

- What do we as Southern Baptists agree on doctrinally and theologically? I believe the answer is quite a lot and I would like to pinpoint a number of these:
  - We affirm the inerrancy, infallibility, authority and sufficiency of the Bible.
  - We affirm the Triune God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.
  - We affirm God as Creator and reject naturalistic evolution as untrue.
  - We affirm both the dignity and depravity of humanity.

- We affirm the full deity, perfect humanity and sinlessness of Jesus the Son of God.
- We affirm the penal substitutionary nature of the atonement as foundational for understanding the cross work of our Savior.
- We affirm the good news of the gospel as the exclusive and only means whereby any person is reconciled to God.
- We affirm the biblical nature of a regenerate church witnessed in believer's baptism by immersion.
- We affirm salvation by grace alone thru faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone.
- We affirm the reception of the Holy Spirit at the moment of regeneration/conversion and the blessing of spiritual gifts for the building up of the body of Christ.
- We affirm the literal, visible and historical return of Jesus Christ to this earth when He will manifest fully His kingdom.
- We affirm the reality of an eternal heaven and an eternal hell with Jesus as the only difference.
- We affirm a "sanctity of life" ethic from conception to natural death.
- We affirm the sanctity of heterosexual marriage, the goodness of sex in marriage and the gift of children, lots of them.
- We affirm the complementary nature of male/female relationships rejoicing in the divine ordering of them for the home and the church; and this list is not exhaustive.

- Now, there are also some things we do not agree on doctrinally and theologically.

For example:

- The exact nature of human depravity and transmission of the sin nature.
  - The precise constitution of the human person.
  - The issue of whether or not Christ could have sinned. (We all agree He didn't!)
  - The *ordo salutis* (“order of salvation”).
  - The number of elders and the precise nature of congregational governance.
  - The continuance of certain spiritual gifts and their nature.
  - Does baptism require only right member (born again), right meaning (believer's) and right mode (immersion) or does it also require the right administrator (ever how that is defined).
  - The time of the rapture (pre, mid, post, partial rapture or pre-wrath rapture).
  - The nature of the millennium (pre, amill or post)
  - And, of course, we are not in full agreement about Calvinism and how many points one should affirm or redefine and then affirm!
- Now, what are we to make of all this? Can we, and if so, how can we move forward, work together and pursue the Great Commission as one united army of believers under the command of King Jesus?
  - No one has been more helpful in helping us think rightly and wisely in this area than Dr. Al Mohler of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In spite of some interesting and, in my judgment, inadequate criticisms of his model, I believe his paradigm of “theological triage” gets to the heart of how we can think well

theologically. Furthermore, Paul, himself, affirms in 1 Cor 15:3 that there are theological matters of first importance, and in 1 Tim 6:4-5 that there are other issues that ought not drive us to engage in “word wars” that lead to “envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions and useless wrangling...”

First-order doctrines are those that are basic and essential to the Christian faith. These include doctrines such as the full deity and humanity of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the atonement, and essentials such as justification by faith alone. Where such doctrines are compromised, the Christian faith falls.

Second-order doctrines are those that are essential to church life and necessary for the ordering of the local church but that, in themselves, do not define the gospel. Here theological differences make it difficult to function together in the local congregation.

Third-order doctrines are those that may be the ground for fruitful theological discussion and debate but that do not threaten the fellowship of the local congregation or the denomination.

Now, let me make my position and convictions crystal clear at this point. Some things are worth fighting over and dying over. Some things are not. Some things are worth dividing over. Some things are not. At the Building Bridges Conference in November 2007, I put it like this, and I have not changed my mind: “Our agreement on *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* is an asset, not a weakness. It is a plus and not a minus. If I were to pen my own confession it would not look exactly like the *BF&M 2000*. But then I do not want nor do I

need people exactly like me in order to work together for the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the building of His church. Our confession is a solid foundation for a sound theology that avoids the pitfalls and quicksand of a straightjacket theology. Do we want or need a theology that rules out of bounds open theism, universalism and inclusivism, faulty perspectives on the atonement, gender-role confusion, works salvation, apostasy of true believers, infant baptism and non-congregational ecclesiology's just to name a few? Yes, we do. These theological errors have never characterized who we are as Southern Baptists and they have no place in our denomination today. Inerrancy is not up for debate. The deity of Jesus and His sinless life are not up for debate. The triune nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not up for debate. The perfect atoning work of Christ as a penal substitute for sinners is not up for debate. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is not up for debate. A regenerate church is not up for debate." I am convinced we have an adequate and healthy theological consensus for coming together for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission.

#5) Southern Baptist have a hopeful future if our denomination at all levels begins to

reflect the demographic and racial makeup of our nation and the nations.

- Southern Baptists were born, in part, out of a racist context and have a racist heritage. That will forever be to our shame. To deny or ignore this is foolish. Actually it is dishonest. By God's grace and the Spirit's conviction, we publically repented of this sin in 1995 on our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but there is still much work to be done. To my utter dismay, some still refuse to own up to our past

transgression, perhaps because the seeds of this sin are still scattered across too much of our denomination, especially in the South where most of our people still live. We must confront the sobering reality that the Southern Baptist Convention remains a mostly middle-class, mostly white network of mostly declining churches in the South. If you doubt what I am saying look around today, visit most State Conventions, attend an annual Southern Baptist Convention meeting, or drop in on 99% of our churches on any given Sunday. We can integrate the military, athletics and the workplace, but we can't integrate the body of Christ! The lack of urgency and concern in this area is mind-boggling. It is spiritually inexcusable.

- Until we get right about race I am convinced God will not visit us with revival. The plea for a Great Commission Resurgence will not move heaven, and it will be scoffed at by the world as a sham.
- Starting at home we must pursue a vision for our churches that looks like heaven. Yes, we must go around the world to reach Asians and Europeans, Africans and South Americans. But we must also go across the street, down the road, and into every corner of our local mission field where God in grace has brought the nations to us.
- Now please hear carefully what I am about to say. I plead with you to consider its merit. This call to reach the *ethne* here in America and across the globe will demand a greater commitment and a greater devotion, especially on the part of men. Reaching, for example, Muslim men, will require Christian men! More men must have a Christ-centered passion and gospel-centered priorities. More men

must leave our nation and go to the nations like our sisters in Christ have been doing for generations! This will demand a radical reorienting of lifestyles, choices, commitments, and perspectives. Business as usual as a denomination and as individuals will not be an option if a real Great Commission Resurgence is to take place. Fathers and grandfathers must live lives that will inspire their children, especially their sons and grandsons, to do something great for God.

#6) Southern Baptists have a hopeful future if we have the courage to rethink our Convention structure at every level, clarify our mission so that we maximize our energy and resources for the fulfilling of the Great Commission, and provide a compelling vision that inspires our people to do something great for God.

- Are Southern Baptist a Great Commission people? If you listen to our rhetoric then the answer is yes. And yet, though Southern Baptist gave \$12 billion last year through the local church, only 2.75% ever left the borders of the United States. Further, North America church planting in the unreached and underserved areas of our nation is little more than a trickle! Why we plant more churches in Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee than we do in New York, Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Washington and California is absolutely incomprehensible to me.
- Recent days have convinced me of an undeniable truth. The future of the Southern Baptists will depend upon the type of leaders we choose to follow. The need of the hour is for aggressive visionary leaders who are daring and courageous, men who understand the times and are willing to attempt great things for God and believe great things from God. Why do I say this? Because many

Southern Baptists are trapped in a time warp. They are aiming at a culture that went out of existence years ago. They use mid-20<sup>th</sup> century methods and pine for a nostalgic golden age. They are convinced if we would just go back “to the way things were” we would experience a spiritual renaissance that would restore the good ole days. Such a perspective is a prime example of denial and a refusal to live in the real world in which we find ourselves. We cannot go back. We are not going back. We will move forward into the future whether we like it or not. How we move ahead is the question yet to be answered. The leaders who lead us will play a significant role in that answer. Of that I am certain.

- In addition, we have built bureaucracies and little kingdoms that are the primary objects of our affections, concerns and reasons for existence. We are slowly dying but refuse to admit the patient is even sick. The amount of time, energy, personnel and resources we keep at home, especially in the deep South, is hard to explain or accept for a rapidly growing number, and I fear how we will justify ourselves when we stand before our Lord. Some may say this is “dramatic rhetoric” merely designed to “fan the emotions.” Call it what you will, my concern is what will the God of heaven say about so much staying in church saturated regions in America? Jesus said, “To whom much is given much is required.” God will, no doubt, require much of Southern Baptist when He asks what we did with what He gave us to reach the nations and penetrate the lostness of this world.
- Thom Rainer has challenged us to do simple church. This is good counsel. Once more I want to challenge us to do simple Convention. We must streamline our

structure, clarify our identity and maximize our resources. A younger generation wants a leaner, quicker and more missional Convention that pursues the unreached and under-served in our nation and around the world. That is where they are going and our leadership at every level will either get on board or be left behind. In other words we will change the way we operate whether we like it or not. The Southern Baptist Convention of 2010 will not look like the SBC of 2020, and certainly not like 2030. Again, I would raise some hard questions we must consider in the immediate future.

- 1) Is the name “Southern Baptist Convention” best for identifying who we are and want to be in the future? I believe the answer is no.
- 2) Do we have unnecessary overlap and duplication in our denomination that can be corrected for greater efficiency and better stewardship? Yes.
- 3) Do we have a healthy and strategic structure and mechanism for planting churches in unreached and under-served areas that will thrive and survive past a few years? I am doubtful but hopeful that will change and change quickly in the near future.
- 4) Should we dismantle the Cooperative Program because it is dead, no longer effective and does not work? No, because such a perspective is simply untrue. Actually, in spite of a recent Baptist Press article, I cannot find anyone who thinks like this. Now, this does not mean that we should not be open to studying the Cooperative Program and making improvements if possible. Such a mindset is essential if we are to be responsible stewards of the gifts of God’s people.

- 5) Are we technologically savvy and up to date, living on the cutting edge of the advances being made at a rapidly increasing pace? Doubtful.
- 6) Are we distracted by doing many good things but not giving our full attention to the best things? No doubt. Church planting in the unreached and underserved population centers in North America, pioneer missions around the world, and theological education that permeates every sphere of our Convention is a 3-legged stool that will excite and inspires our people. It will inspire them to serve more and to give more. Of that I have no doubt.

Our mission in the future will require aggressive and intentional church planting. Rick Warren is right, “Starting new congregations is the fastest way to fulfill the Great Commission.” The churches we plant must be sound in their doctrine, contextual in their forms, and aggressive in their evangelistic and mission orientation. In order to make this work, we need a new and compelling vision for our churches, local association, state conventions, and national entities.

- Timothy George is correct, “the exchanging of one bureaucracy for another bureaucracy does not a revolution make.” For a revolution, for a revival, to occur we need to kill and bury all sacred cows; we need to be willing to put on the altar for sacrifice our dreams, goals, ministries and entities if doing so will further the Great Commission. For me personally, that would include the dismantling and closing of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary if that would further the goals of world evangelization. For me to think any other way would be hypocritical.

#7) Southern Baptist have a hopeful future if we raise up a generation of pastors who lead their churches to see themselves as a gospel missions agencies equipping and training all their people to see themselves as missionaries for Jesus regardless of location or vocation.

(Eph. 4:11-16)

- The headquarters of the Southern Baptist Convention is the local church. All associations, conventions and national entities exist to serve them not the reverse. Further, these agencies and entities exist to assist the churches in fulfilling the Great Commission.
- Missions is not a ministry of the church, it is at the heart of the church's identity and essence. No Great Commission passion, no genuine New Testament church.
- The strategic and biblical importance of the local church in this regard must be recaptured. The local church is to be ground zero for the *missio dei*. Here is the "spiritual outpost" for the invasion of enemy territory as we reclaim lost ground for its rightful owner King Jesus. A new vision that I pray will grip the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention is, "every church a church planting church and every church a Great Commission church." This must be more than a slogan. It must be a reality.
- Pastors must be seized by a vision for the strategic importance of their calling as the head of a gospel missions agency called the local church. This will involve:
  - 1) Rightly defining the Great Commission and missions. The shibboleth that "everything we do is missions" is without biblical warrant and is theologically flawed.

- 2) Being used by God to call out the called who have an overseas calling given by our commander-in-chief, the Lord Jesus.
- 3) Partnering in strategic and vibrant church planting that assaults the major population centers of North America following closely the pattern of the apostle Paul revealed in the book of Acts. Again, this will inspire and energize a younger generation because of the excitement entailed in new works. For too long we have neglected the great urban centers such as New York, Washington, DC, Boston, Los Angeles, and Seattle, cities that are almost completely bereft of evangelical influence. This cannot continue or we will face a future of irrelevance and insignificance.
- 4) Working to help revitalize existing local congregations so that we do not lose a meaningful past and squander massive assets built by our parents and grandparents.
- 5) Training all of our people to see themselves as a God-called missionary no matter what their vocation or location happens to be. God has gifted them and we must equip them for their service of ministry and missionary service in their community, school, workplace and places of recreation. Religious practices and traditions are not the same as missionary and gospel living. We must recognize the difference. We must help our people recognize the difference.
- 6) Motivating our people to give the necessary funds to match the missions strategy plan that is in place to reach the nations. That will require funding 8,000 missionaries, not the 5,700 we have this year, and the 5,000 that it

seems will be on the field in 2010. Money follows vision. Jim Henry is correct, “Many of our faithful people are more than ready to move into reproducing their church; but let’s face it, they can only go as far as the pastor’s passion and support for the project will allow.”

#8) Southern Baptist have a hopeful future if we can devote ourselves to a cooperation that is gospel centered and built around a biblical and theological core and not methodological consensus or agreement. (Phil 2:1-5; 4:2-9)

- When I delivered the axioms message at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in the Spring this axiom, for some reason, caused hesitation and concern for some. Therefore, let me take another run at it.
- There are essential and non-negotiable components of biblical worship and work. The Word proclaimed, the ordinances administered, singing, praying and mutual service are necessary components of authentic church life. However, and we must be clear on this: there is no one specific biblical style or method ordained by our God. Within biblically defined parameters there is room for variety and difference. Is this not self-evident?
- What will unite Southern Baptist in the future will not be style, methodology and liturgy. Any past hegemony of methods and programs is gone, and it is not coming back. How we do things will be expansive and diverse and that is ok. The key, and please hear this, will be that what we do is filtered through the purifying waters of Scripture so that we honor Jesus and glorify the Father in all that we do. Nothing should distract or detract from the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior. Nothing!

- Different contexts will demand different strategies and methods. Cultivating the mind of a missionary we will ask, “What is the best way to reach with the gospel the people I live amongst?” Waycross, Georgia will look different than Las Vegas, Nevada. Montgomery, Alabama will look different than Portland, Oregon. Boston will be different than Dallas. Memphis will have a different strategy than Miami. Reaching Liberty, Missouri is not the same as reaching Seattle, Washington. Various ethnic believers and social/cultural tribes will worship the same God, adore the same Jesus, believe the same Bible, preach the same gospel, and seek to glorify the one true and living God. However, they may meet in different kinds of structure, wear different kinds of clothes, sing different kinds of songs, and engage in different kinds of gospel-centered ministries. The point I want to make is this: we must treat the United States missiologically and do so with the same seriousness that our international missionaries treat their people groups missiologically. As long as it is done for the glory of God, has biblical warrant, and theological integrity, I say, Praise the Lord! It is foolish to grip about organs, choirs and choir robes, guitars, drums, coats and ties. It is also a waste of time. It is time to move on with the real issue of the Great Commission!
- If we seek to build a consensus around style or methods we will continue to balkanize, fracture and lose important ground. If we will build a consensus around Jesus and the gospel, we can, we will, cooperate for the advancement of God’s Kingdom and He will bless us.

- Theology should drive our cooperation not tradition. The message of the gospel will unite us not methods!

### **Conclusion:**

Recently I was studying the life of the wonderful C.I.M. missionary James Fraser. A brilliant engineer and gifted pianist, he left the comforts of England to spend his adult life in Western China among the Lisu people. What moved him to make such a radical, life changing decision? It was a small tract placed in his hands in 1906 when he was only 20 years old. Hear the words that has resulted in hundreds of thousands of believers among a rural mountain people group that had no hope until James Fraser came to help them.

“A command has been given: ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’ It has not been obeyed. More than half the people in the world have never yet heard the Gospel. What are we to say to this? Surely it concerns us Christians very seriously. For we are the people who are responsible ...”

“If our Master returned today to find millions of people un-evangelised, and looked as of course He would look, to us for an explanation, I cannot imagine what explanation we should have to give ... Of one thing I am certain – that most of the excuses we are accustomed to make with such good conscience now, we should be wholly ashamed of then.” (*Do Not Say*)

These words haunt me. I hope they haunt you. They moved James Fraser to live out the Great Commission. I pray they move me. I pray they move you. I pray they move Southern Baptist. If they do, our future is bright. If they don't, we do not deserve a future.