

Marks Of A Great Commission People
(Praying for a Great Commission Resurgence for the 21st Century Church)

Romans 15:14-24

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Romans 15:14-24

Introduction: 1) June 1979 marks the launching of the “Conservative Resurgence,” a back to the Bible movement, when Southern Baptists declared their commitment to an inerrant and infallible Bible. Thirty years later June 2009 marks the launching of the “GCR” when Southern Baptists rededicated themselves to taking the gospel across our nation and to the nations as an absolutely essential priority. The Commission Resurgence was never just about biblical authority. It also was about taking the gospel grounded in an authoritative Bible to the nations.

2) Southern Baptists desperately needed to do this. Business as usual is not working. As a denomination of almost 45,000 churches, we have become stagnate and plateaued. Actually, we have been losing ground here in America and across the globe for decades. This past year we lost members for the 2nd year in a row and baptized the fewest number of people since 1987. It was the 4th consecutive year of decline in baptisms. It takes 47 Southern Baptists to baptize one person for Christ! (BP 4-23-09). No, business as usual is not working and it cannot continue! We need to shock the system with strong words, calling us to obey the marching orders of our commander-in-chief King Jesus. Such a call 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 ...” Getting the gospel to the nations was something we should never hesitate in being bold about!

3) Of what things did Paul need to remind the Romans? What things do we need to be reminded of? I want to make 5 observations from the inspired text of Scripture that remind us what a Great Commission people look like. 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 will be focused on the nations. 15:14-16

- Paul begins with a note of confidence in God’s people. He is emphatic (“I myself”). He says they are full of goodness, characterized by moral excellence in their lifestyles as a result of the work of the gospel in their lives (v. 14).
- He says they are filled with all knowledge (v. 14), the knowledge of the gospel, no doubt, being at the heart of this knowledge, and all that gospel 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 as they think and live missiologically! Great missionaries and great theologians should always go together! (Ex. Jesus; Paul). David Livingston, “God had only one Son and He made Him a missionary.”
- He says he knows they are able to mutually challenge and admonish one another (v. 14), to challenge one another to rethink and reconsider certain important issues, even if it might be painful. Proverbs 27:6 reminds us, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”
- Nevertheless, because of “the grace given to me by God” (v. 15), he can be bold to challenge them to join him in pursuing the salvation of the nations so that, now don’t miss this, v. 16, that “they [the nations] might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (*NIV*). Do not miss the Trinitarian impulse of v. 16!

- Paul says to God, “here is my priestly offering: the nations!” 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. Presenting them to Jesus is an offering acceptable to God and set apart by the Holy Spirit. This is why he was a minister of Jesus Christ and was ministering the gospel (v. 15). Bringing them to Jesus is an offering acceptable to God! Indeed our God delights in such an offering!
- 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*. “Untold millions still untold” was a burden in his soul he could not unload.
- Today there are at least 16,348 *ethne* that comprise the 6.7 billion people on the planet (Joshua Project: 11-28-09). Today there are at least 6,647 *ethne* who are unreached. Some missiologists would say there is, at present, 1.6 billion with no access to the gospel at all. That means there are 3.4 billion who have not heard the name of Jesus 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? J. Oswald Smith said, “The supreme task of the church is the evangelization of the world. No one has the right to hear the gospel twice, until everyone has had an opportunity to hear it at least 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* who are coming to America and the *ethne* scattered around the globe. After all the Baptist theologian Carl F. H. Henry was right, “The gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.”

II. We will be a Christ-centered people. 15:16-18

- 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). Paul fully embraced the words of Jesus in John 15:5, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.”
- In Romans 15 Paul refers to Jesus as the Savior no less than 5 times. He says we are His minister (v. 16). He says 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 (v. 18). Paul was consumed with Christ and that people would know Christ. The reality of heaven and hell was something he could not escape. The fact Jesus made all the difference he could not deny.
- A Great Commission people will be a Christ-centered people. He will take hold, control, Lordship, of all that we are, our total being, so that we think differently, act differently and live differently. Henry Martyn, missionary to India and Persia who died at 31 well said, “The spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions. The nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become.”
- My prayer is that when the world thinks of Southern Baptists they will think “that is the Jesus people.” I am not sure that is our reputation at present. That must change.

Would that the world said, “They sound like Jesus and they act like Jesus! They are consumed with Jesus. They are “intoxicated” with Jesus. They have to tell others about Jesus.”

- On **YouTube** there is a video that has been making the rounds for some time now that features the atheist magician Penn Jillette of “The Penn and Teller Show.” As of December 2, 394,351 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, radically alter us! 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 us to do His

work. No, we need Jesus to do His (not our!) work. C. T. Studd said, “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

III. We will 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. In Rom 1:16 he says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” Paul acknowledged this gospel was accompanied by mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God. The power was not in Paul. The power was in the gospel made real in the lives of sinners by the Spirit of God.
- 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 gospels of "prosperity theology," the social gospel, and what some are calling "the new gospel." 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 is the only cure for the false gospel of religion, a disease that is widespread in churches across our denomination. You ask, what is the difference? No one has helped us more at this point than Tim Keller.

Religion: I obey-therefore I'm accepted by Christ.

The Gospel: I'm accepted in Christ-therefore I obey.

Religion: I obey so that God will love me.

The Gospel: God loves me and so I obey.

Religion: Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

The Gospel: Motivation is based on grateful joy.

Religion: I obey God in order to get things from God.

The Gospel: I obey God to get God-to delight and resemble Him.

Religion: My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure and inadequate. I'm not confident. I feel like a failure.

The Gospel: My self-view is not based on a view of myself as a moral achiever. In Christ I am simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad He had to die for me and I am so loved He was glad to die for me. So I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace I am what I am.

★ 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 will be passionate for the unreached peoples of the world. 15:20-23

- Here is where a word from Paul hits us between the eyes and challenges us to rethink our priorities, our agendas, our lifestyles. Unlike too many of us, Paul was not guilty of dreaming too small. He knew he served a great God who could do great things if he would simply be available.

— 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. As God’s Son, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, served to get the gospel to those who had not heard, so would he.
- 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.
- Tom Schreiner provides a very helpful insight into Paul’s missiological strategy, one we would do well to carefully consider, “Paul’s strategy was apparently to plant churches in key cities and from there co-workers would fan out and evangelize smaller towns (cf. Epaphras in Colossians). He believed that his foundation work was completed in this region, and thus he planned to further the work in areas where Gentile churches were not planted” (p. 770).
- Brothers and sisters, masses of lost people are dying and going to hell with no possibility of being saved. (Repeat!) By our lack of urgency it would seem that we do not believe this to be the case or worse, we do not care! An incipient universalism and a blatant apathy is condemning millions to hell.

- 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. I called IMB headquarters in June 2009 and discovered the following tragic reality: The 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 had 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 grandsons 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).
- Brothers and sisters, we must be haunted by the voices crying out for hope who have no hope apart from Jesus. John Falconer said, “I have but one candle of life to burn, and I would rather burn it out in a land filled with darkness than in a land flooded with light.” Count Nicolaus Ludwig van Zinzendorf, the wonderful Moravian wrote, “I have but one passion: It is Christ, it is Christ alone. The world is the field and the field is the world; and henceforth that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls for Christ.”

V. We will help those whom God sends to the hard places. 15:24

- Paul knew Great Commission churches would be praying, giving and sending churches. Not everyone goes to the nations in far away locations, to the unreached, but everyone prays and everyone gives to get evangelists, missionaries and church planters there.
- Thus Paul could appeal to the church at Rome to help him on his way to Spain. This church could provide personnel if they could. They could provide financial resources if they would. Church tradition seems to indicate he received the help he needed to reach another unreached people group.
- What will it take, in terms of giving, for us to reach the undeserved in America and the unreached of the nations? Answer: repentance over our sin and a radical new lifestyle orientation! Oswald Smith once more nails it: “If God wills the evangelization of the world, and you refuse to support missions, then you are opposed to the will of God.”
- In an article entitled, “Book says nation watching this year’s Lottie Moon offering,” (11-12-09) Bob Allen wrote: “A Christian organization that tracks giving to religious groups says other denominations will be watching this year’s Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, which funds overseas missionaries of the Southern Baptist Convention ... Empty Tomb, inc., a research-and-service organization based in Champaign, Ill., says the nation’s second largest religious body is approaching “a critical choice point” in December 2009 ... The book cites the SBC as a case study, describing a denomination with a “clearly stated goal” for achieving the 2,000-year-old mission of preaching the Christian gospel to all people groups, but lacking an adequate funding plan for meeting that goal. The research calculates that by increasing their donations

to the SBC International Mission Board’s upcoming Lottie Moon Christmas Offering by an average of \$7 per member, the denomination would raise enough money to field an additional 2,800 missionaries the IMB says it needs to engage every global people group in evangelism ... Researchers say the difference between the SBC and many other denominations and multi-denominational groups is that Southern Baptists have a large, at-scale, clearly stated goal around which congregations can rally. The question, they say, is, “Will Southern Baptists put their donations where their stated goal is?” “Will they seize the present opportunity to put feet on the gospel, and set a standard for other denominations to follow?” The article concludes, “The eyes of the nation are on the Southern Baptists.”

- What are the cold, hard facts we must face?
 - More than one in four American Protestants give nothing to the work of the church.
 - The median annual giving for a Christian is 2.6% of their annual income.
 - Only 27 percent of evangelicals give away 10% or more of their income.
 - About 5 percent of Christians provide 60% of the money to churches and religious groups.
 - 20% of all Christians account for 86% of all giving.
 - 10% of evangelicals and 33% of fundamentalists give nothing.
- Christian Smith, sociologist and researcher on American Christianity, says in his book on Christian giving called *Passing the Plate* that he estimates that if committed Christians in the United States gave 10 percent of their after-tax income—fully but no

more than 10 percent—that would provide an *extra* \$46 billion per year of resources with which to fund needs and priorities.

- ★ Some of the things this money could fund, according to Smith, include:
 - 150,000 new indigenous missionaries and pastors in nations most closed to foreign religious workers.
 - Triple the resources being spent by all Christians on Bible translating, printing, and distribution to provide Bibles in the native languages of the 2,737 remaining people groups currently without Bible translations.
 - Quadruple the total resources being spent by all Christians globally on missions to evangelize the unevangelized world.
 - Eradicate polio worldwide.
 - 1,000,000 new clear water, well-drilling projects per year in the poorest nations (25 percent of the world’s population drinks unsafe water).
 - Prevent and treat malaria worldwide.
 - Provide food, clothing, and shelter to all 6,500,000 current refugees in all of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.
 - Sponsor 20 million needy children worldwide, providing them food, education, and healthcare.
 - Quadruple global Christian medial missions work.
- ★ The facts are plain. The facts indict us. The personal are there. The resources are there. Will we go? Will we give? What will we do?

Conclusion: I continue to be hounded by the tract that move James Fraser to leave the comforts of England and go to a mountain region in Western China to see that the Lisu of China might hear the gospel of King Jesus:

- ★ “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-evangelized, 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*).
- ★ Lost people matter to God. They must also matter to us.
- ★ “We talk of the Second Coming when half the world has never heard of the first.”
Oswald J. Smith
- ★ Keith Green was right: “This generation of Christians is responsible for this generation of souls on the earth!”
- ★ There are souls to be saved. There is work to be done. It is time for the church of the Lord Jesus to get busy with what matters most!