

The Great Commission and God's Law

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INTRODUCTION

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Mt 28:18-20.

If you spent any significant amount of time attending a church that identifies itself as *evangelical*, then you would likely be familiar with these last three verses of the book of Matthew, commonly called the Great Commission. These are ostensibly the last words spoken by Jesus just prior to the remarks He made at His ascension in Acts 1:6-8.

If these verses are not familiar to you, they are viewed by many, and possibly most Christians as the marching orders of the incorporeal Church, *i.e.*, the worldwide body of Christ through the years, not tied to any specific group, congregation or denomination. In other words, these verses sum up what it is that Christians are supposed to do in the world *as Christians* until Jesus returns.

I typically list the Great Commission among the four great commands given by God to all of humanity in its principal institutional capacities, that is, the Dominion Mandate (Gen. 1:28) given to *families*, the Greatest Commandments (Mat. 22:36-40) given to *individuals*, the purpose of civil power (1 Pet. 2:13-14) given to *nations*, and the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) given to the *Church*.

If you have a mastery of these four great commands, understanding what each includes and excludes, and how to interpret them without bringing them into conflict with each other, then you are well on your way to understanding God's overall plan for mankind and His will for human society. Their importance cannot be overestimated.

There is no command or law higher than these. They are supreme over all other laws and commands found in the laws of nature and nature's God, equal in authority and importance with the divine covenants. Indeed, two of them *are* divine covenants (the Dominion Mandate - Adamic covenant; and the Great Commission - Church covenant). The Greatest Commandments and the principles of civil power, in contrast, summarize eternal principles of the law of nature which coincidentally are reflected in the Mosaic covenant but are not derived from it.

By this I hope to establish a proper context for looking at the Great Commission. Yes, it is pretty darn important and well worthy of our attention, as would any statement beginning with the phrase, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Yet, at the same time, this statement is *not over or above* the other great commands of God. In other words, the Great Commission does not supersede or control the Dominion Mandate, the Greatest Commandments, or the nature of civil power. It is equal, not dominant.

One thing we must completely avoid is the common historical mistake of looking at the great

commands of God all through the *lens* of the Great Commission. That is not its function. We are not to understand the other great commands as a subset of the Great Commission any more than individuals, families and nations are subsets of the Church. They are separate, but equal - and functionally *autonomous*.

For one thing, as between individuals, families, nations and the Church, *the Church came last*. Some people think what came last supersedes and/or incorporates what came earlier. Not so - *what came last was least essential* to existence. Don't get your hackles up - I am not trying to minimize or downplay the Church, or its importance historically and spiritually.

I am, however, looking at the Church in the context of the full history of mankind. We cannot ignore the *fact* that mankind existed for 4,000 years without the Church and only 2,000 years with it, and the timing of the inauguration of the Church was determined by God, not man. If the Church was absolutely crucial to existence as is, for example, the bearing of children (as per the Dominion Mandate), then God would have introduced it into history much earlier. Can you imagine if the situation was reversed: if the Church was introduced at creation and the Dominion Mandate only came along 4,000 years later? Which one is more crucial? My point is made.

But I don't wish to press the point too far - let's leave it there and see what we can learn about the Great Commission (which is still plenty important) and what, if anything, it has to do with God's laws.

TEACH THEM JESUS' COMMANDS

What Things Were Not Said

The Great Commission is one of those statements everybody refers to, but no one actually pays attention to the words that were and were not used. The statement seems straightforward - until you see how people have mangled it over the years.

Let us first acknowledge that the Great Commission never says, in so many words, *evangelize the lost*, or even to *preach the Gospel*. Those words simply are not there, and we should ask whether it is necessary or desirable that they be implied when they are not expressed. If Jesus had wanted us to evangelize the lost or preach the Gospel to the whole world, He certainly could have said so - and it can be argued that He never did.

Here we must pause to look at some other statements Jesus made that will illustrate what I mean.

In Mat. 24:14, for example, Jesus said: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." But the statement is not made in the form of a command, but rather as a prediction about the end of the age. Jesus did not say, in Matthew 24, *go and do this*. Just because Jesus said it, does not make it a command.

What about Mk 16:15-18? Let's take a look at it.

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Can we be frank and admit there are some problems with this text? If you have Bible translation done in the last 100 years, you may have a marginal note to the effect that "Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20." *Don't push this on me*, as though it's just a matter of my personal opinion. I didn't translate your Bible, and I didn't come up with this notation. But I grant you, many Bible scholars do not agree with the notation. And if you have a King James Version Bible, it probably does not have this notation.

Yet, there are a number of good reasons for questioning the Mark passage, in any event. First, the text in Mark makes salvation contingent on both *belief* and *baptism*, which is difficult, and some would say impossible, to reconcile with the rest of the New Testament. Second, the text links salvation with visible signs - and not just any signs, but miraculous signs - which almost anyone in Christian ministry will tell you either *rarely or never* occur in connection with a person's salvation experience.

So, the Mark text may contain a strong statement to *proclaim the gospel to the whole creation*, but the context is a package deal, and you either take all of it or none of it. The reality is, many Christians are very uncomfortable with the Mark text, even if they believe it belongs in their Bible, so they ignore it. If you are comfortable with it, fine - it matters not. (I'll come back to this point in a minute.)

Let's move on. In Luk. 24:46-47, Jesus said, "it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations... ." Except, again, Jesus was not giving a command. He was really saying that the Old Testament (*it is written*) *foretold* that the gospel would be proclaimed. It is hardly a set of marching orders to the Church - the statement doesn't even impart any new information.

Then there is Jn. 20:21, 23: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. ... If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." Talk about an interpretational hornet's nest! Protestants like verse 21, Catholics like verse 23, but the statement is another package deal, and you either take all of it or none of it.

Finally, there is Acts 1:8: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Again, not exactly a rousing call to arms to *go do this*. Then there is the fact Jesus' statement was made in response to the question, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6. So it is a fair question to ask what it is, exactly, Jesus wanted the

disciples bear witness to? From the context, it would seem Jesus expected them to bear witness to the *gospel of the kingdom*, which actually creates more ambiguity than it resolves.

If there is one thing you should glean from this discussion, it is that there may not be as clear and prominent a command of Jesus for all Christians to evangelize the world, as you may have thought there was. What we clearly do have, on the other hand, is a plain and unambiguous directive to teach all nations to observe all that Jesus commanded.

Ultimately, however, I *concede* the validity of evangelism as being part of the overall mission of the Church. I don't care what set of scriptures you base it on. I do not deny the *validity* of evangelism, I only deny its *preeminence* in describing the mission of the Church. Evangelism is a legitimate function of the Church, but *it has never been the only thing the Church is to do, or the main thing, or even the most important thing.*

Law vs. Grace

I can imagine some of you tapping your foot impatiently. "OK then, if that isn't what the Great Commission primarily means, then what does it mean?" When Jesus said to *go and make disciples*, let's start with the obvious. Perhaps what He meant was exactly what He said, namely, to *teach people to observe His commands*. In other words, *making disciples* means *teaching His commands*. That's just reading the text the way it really is, without reading anything into it.

Go back and look at the actual words of the Great Commission, and reflect on the fact that the phrases *make disciples* and *teach His commands* are all part of the same sentence, and the same thought. Grammatically, *teaching His commands* is a modifying phrase of *go and make disciples*. In other words, the goal of the Great Commission is to make disciples, and teaching Christ's commands is the means whereby that purpose is carried out.

But I take it yet one step further, namely, that to teach the commands of Jesus means to *teach God's laws*, because Jesus is God in both the Old and New Testaments, and in this context, *commands* mean *laws*. I'll have to take up this idea and expand on it later, because I anticipate there is a hurdle we must jump over first.

Some of you, no doubt, are already thinking, "But we are under grace, not law!!" In effect, this is an argument that the Great Commission cannot mean we are to teach God's laws, because we are under grace, not law, and we cannot give a construction to the words which puts us back under law.

To be sure, grace has come, thanks to Jesus. And I do not deny that the sacrificial and/or ceremonial parts of the Mosaic law have been obsoleted and done away with. That isn't the problem, nor is it the source of our disagreement. Rather, the problem is with the words, *we* and *us*. Because if by *we* you mean Gentiles (non-Jews), *we* were never subject to (or under) the sacrificial and/or ceremonial parts of the Mosaic law in the first place, and that law never applied to *us*. Thus, whether that law was formerly applicable to Jews or not is *irrelevant* to Gentiles, at least as far as the Great Commission is concerned.

The nuances of which parts of the Mosaic law are dead and which parts are still viable is something I will explore later in this essay. However, for purposes of the Great Commission and the subject of law and grace generally, we need to take a step back and consider the whole picture. For that, we need to take into account *all* of the laws of nature and nature's God, not just the Mosaic laws given to ancient Israel.

To start, let's review what the scripture actually says about law and grace:

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Rom. 6:14-15.

Now let's look at the *rule* by which we are to understand Paul's statements.

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Jn. 1:17.

By this we know that in Romans Paul was not speaking of all law in general, the law of nature, or what we would call civil or municipal laws (*i.e.*, the laws by which nations govern themselves). Rather, he was speaking exclusively about that law which was given to ancient Israel *through Moses*. Also remember that Paul was born a Jew before the crucifixion, thus he was himself born *under the law* of which he speaks. So from his vantage point, he himself was once under the law, but at the time he wrote the book of Romans, grace had entered and the law *given to Israel through Moses* had been obsoleted.

When Paul says, *we are not under law but under grace*, he is referring to himself, and to those among his audience who were Jewish followers of Christ. But when *we* modern Gentiles read Romans 6, we have to realize that we were never part of the "we" which included Paul. None of us modern Gentiles were: a) born as a Jew; b) born prior to the entrance of grace; or c) born under the law given to Israel through Moses.

What does that mean? Simply this: no Christians alive today were *ever* under the law given to Israel through Moses to begin with. We cannot therefore, consider ourselves as having come out from under that law, because it was never over us. And unless you are a biological Jew, your ancestors were never under the law given to Israel through Moses either.

However, whether a Jew or a Gentile, your ancestors were under the laws of nature, *and so are you*. Your ancestors were also under the divine covenants mediated through Adam and Noah, *and so are you*. In fact, insofar as the laws of God are concerned, you and your ancestors (even going back more than 3,000 years) *were and are under the exact same laws of God*.

In the wider scope of Ionang, the whole law vs. grace thing has only a very narrow and limited purpose, *i.e.*, to illustrate the change in program, as it were, between the Mosaic covenant and the Church covenant as far as matters of redemption, priesthood and ceremonial laws *for the Jews* are

concerned. Yes, of course, as Gentiles we can use the discussion of law vs. grace to help us better understand the nature of grace and appreciate how much better it is than *if* we had been under the Jewish law.

So I have a challenge for you, if you care to consider it. Name one law of God that applied to the Gentiles nations *before* the First Advent of Christ that no longer applied to them *after* grace had come. Go ahead. I'm waiting. There's, uh, and there's this other, uh Nothing. *There are no such laws*. Admit it. As to Gentiles, there are no laws of God that grace has obsoleted or displaced.

All of which renders the law vs. grace distinction moot and pointless unless you are a Jew.

Consequently, the words of the Great Commission in Matthew *are what they are*. Either they are God-breathed and authoritative, or they are not. Unlike the passage in Mark, we have no reason to question the Matthew text. We don't take a text which is beyond question and substitute new words for the words actually used because we either don't like or don't understand them. We need to accept the fact Jesus knew what He was saying, and His words carry divine authority.

"We Follow Paul"

Up to this point, we have considered the argument that the words of the Great Commission as recorded in Matthew should not be read as an imperative to teach God's laws because "we aren't under those laws." But there are those in the Christian community, primarily dispensationalists, who object to the Matthew statement precisely because it *does* command us to teach God's laws - and that's what is wrong with it (in their opinion).

According to this argument, the last three verses of Matthew hearken back to (and rely upon) the Mosaic law which Jesus operated under during his earthly ministry (*i.e.*, prior to the coming of *grace*). For that reason, the expression of the Great Commission in Matthew should be ignored in favor of a Pauline expression of the Great Commission (such as Eph. 2:8-9). Some commentators even argue the Great Commission in Matthew is actually limited by its terms to the persons present at the time and not specifically directed to future generations.

Let me respond to this last point first. Any statement beginning with *all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*, and ending with *behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*, is not how anyone (much less God, who always knows exactly what He is saying) would frame a temporary instruction to a handful of people. The whole verbal framing of the statement screams that it is something huge, for lots of people, forever.

Imagine Jesus saying something like, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go wash your hands before dinner." All that would do is trivialize His authority. The plain fact is no one needs *all authority in heaven and on earth* to give a temporary instruction to a handful of people. But if the intention was to give instructions to an indefinitely large group of people (most of whom are not yet born) for ages to come, then yes, you would need *all authority*. It's not that hard to match the level of authority with the nature of the command. And Jesus claimed,

in essence, an infinite authority. Thus, the command itself must be worthy of that authority.

Now back to the main point. Representative of the dispensational argument is the following:

As we have seen, Dr. Ironside declared that our commission is to be found in Matthew 28:18-20, but [other commentators] ... realized immediately that this would bind believers hand and foot with the law of Moses, for our Lord distinctly commanded the apostles that in going to "all nations" they should "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," and this would inescapably include obedience to the law of Moses for, not only was our Lord Himself under the law (Gal. 4:4), but He commanded His disciples to "observe and do" whatever the scribes and Pharisees directed them to do because these leaders in Israel occupied "Moses' seat." Pastor Cornelius R. Stam, *Our Great Commission*, 10/3/2006, as published by the Berean Bible Society, www.bereanbiblesociety.org/.

Note what Pastor Stam is saying. First, he recognizes that the core of the Great Commission in Matthew is to teach God's laws. Second, he equates God's laws with the law of Moses given solely to the nation of Israel. Here is the essence of his mistake: there is more to God's laws, and more to the Old Testament, than just the Mosaic law.

Did God know who the Mosaic laws did and did not apply to? Of course. Did Jesus know this, too? Of course, for He is God. OK then, as a starting matter, don't assume Jesus is going to tell a primarily Gentile Church to teach laws Jesus knew darn well were given exclusively to ancient Israel. Give Him a little credit. If Jesus/God is telling us to teach His laws to the world, then by definition He is telling us to teach only those laws that apply to *everyone*.

God would never tell the Church to teach the nations about laws He never gave them for their governance. That would make God the author of confusion, which we know He is not. 1 Cor. 14:33.

Now, let's address one final concern raised by those who argue in favor of a Pauline expression of the Great Commission. It may surprise you to learn that some Christians believe the Church age didn't really begin until Paul's conversion, and the New Covenant in Christ didn't become effectuated at the crucifixion but was delayed for seven or so years thereafter. Yes, there are actually Christians who hold to this position, but it is an extreme position that calls into question so many basic assumptions about the nature and origin of the Church that it would take a separate essay just to refute them all. Here, I will only summarize the problem with that view.

In the working out of the plan of God, the effects are not always immediate. By tearing the temple veil at the crucifixion, God showed that access to the throne of God has been thrown open to all nations, and impliedly, that Israel had been thrown down from its position of privilege among the nations. Just because Jerusalem wasn't destroyed until 40 years later in 70 A.D., doesn't mean the die had not been cast, and Israel demoted in the heavenly places as of 30 A.D.

When Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth," it did not mean all that would happen immediately. In fact, the disciples worked for several years solely in Israel before Paul came along and took the gospel elsewhere. The whole book of Acts is in reality a transition period when everyone was trying to work out how Jesus' words would be accomplished. But that doesn't mean Jesus' instructions were anything other than immediately in full force and effect.

Paul was undoubtedly an instrument of God for the sake of the gospel, but the Church is not *the body of Paul*, the New Testament does not record the *new covenant in Paul*, and it wasn't the death, resurrection or ascension of Paul that gave rise to the gospel message. The Church started with Jesus - not Paul. Paul gave us some of the Church's core doctrines, but guess what? They were true even before Paul said them.

Yes, I know God revealed doctrinal secrets to Paul that up to that point had been *hidden*. 1 Cor. 2:7, Eph. 3:9, Col. 1:26. But that does not mean, brothers and sisters, those secret things only came to be *operational* after Paul said them. The body of Christ concept was *revealed* to Paul, but it did not only come into *existence* with Paul. It was there, fully functioning before Paul laid it out, even though people were unaware of it.

In fact, when something is secret it infers that the secret thing already *does* exist - people just don't know about it. If the body of Christ did not exist until Paul came along, you would never refer to that idea as *hidden* - there wouldn't be anything to hide. You can only hide something which already exists. To speak of hiding something that does not yet exist is nonsensical.

When a treasure lies hidden somewhere and is only discovered hundreds of years after it was lost, you don't speak of the treasure as something that originated with the one who found it. And when someone invents something that no one ever has before, you don't speak of the invention as having been hidden.

Consequently, just because certain doctrines were first revealed to Paul does not mean those things originated with Paul, or that they only came into being when he was told about them. The exaltation of Paul as the starting point of the Church is misplaced at best. At the very least, it falls into the error of the Corinthian church which Paul spoke very forcibly against.

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 1 Cor. 1:10-13.

The questions Paul asks are rhetorical. The obvious answer to each is the same. Is Christ divided? Of course not. Was Paul crucified for you? Of course not. Or were you baptized in the name of

Paul? Of course not. To you who hold to this unbiblical view, I am calling you out. Stop it in the name of Jesus. You are not helping the cause of Christ, you are hurting it.

How is it hurting the cause of Christ? By minimizing, if not completely ignoring, the most important set of instructions Christ ever imparted to the Church, that is, the Great Commission recorded in Matthew. Jesus, the risen Son of God, did not assert *all authority in heaven and on earth* to make a world changing statement just so people could ignore it in favor of the teaching of a later disciple.

WHAT ARE THE COMMANDS OF JESUS?

Now, let's assume the words of Jesus in the Great Commission mean what they say. What does it mean to teach all nations *to observe all that I have commanded you*? In other words, what are the commands of Jesus that we should teach?

God's Laws Are Jesus' Commands

Let's start with the obvious. Jesus is God, thus, Jesus' commands are God's commands, and *vice versa*. Remember who Jesus is:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Col 1:15-17.

This is the same Jesus who said,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Mt 5:17-19.

Scripturally, there is a strong connection between Jesus, the creation, and the laws of God which existed before His birth in Bethlehem. Thus, His commands are not limited to things said in His First Advent, but include all of the laws of nature and nature's God. Who are we, to limit the scope of His commands to things said while He was in the flesh, when His authority extends to all things past, present and future?

Look at the words in Mt 5:17-19 and re-read them *carefully*.

1. When Jesus said He would *fulfill* the law rather than abolish it, many people read that as though Jesus would *bring the law to completion*, and usher in something new (*i.e.*, grace)

to replace it. Functionally, that would mean the law has been terminated, which is the same thing as abolished. But since Jesus said He did *not* come to abolish the law, that cannot possibly be a correct interpretation of these verses.

2. The better way to understand these verses is to use another definition of *fulfill*, namely, to *keep the law or carry it out*. Not only is this more consistent with not abolishing the law, it makes verse 17 more consistent with verse 18. Thus, Jesus' whole ministry was undertaken with the goal of honoring the prior law and adhering to it. That makes what Jesus said in the Great Commission a lot easier to understand, doesn't it?

3. Verse 18 says not one part of the Law will pass away: a) until heaven and earth pass away; and b) until all is accomplished. Arguably, both of those phrases refer to the same thing, *i.e.*, the end of time. In other words, the laws Jesus is referring to both pre-date His First Advent and they are eternal, meaning they are still applicable today because heaven and earth have not yet passed away. The laws Jesus came to keep are still around, folks!

4. When Jesus said He would fulfill the Law and the Prophets, do not assume He was mainly or exclusively referring to the Mosaic laws. We know the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law have been obsoleted (Heb. 7:12), so if Jesus was talking about aspects of the Old Testament laws He knew would be around forever, He must have been talking about laws *other than* the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law. In other words, Jesus must have referred to laws applicable to everyone, and not just the Jews. Namely, the laws applicable to all men under the laws of nature and nature's God.

5. Notice the penalty and reward statements in verse 19, and coordinate them with the Great Commission. If you obey the Great Commission and teach all nations to observe God's laws, you will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. If you fail to do this, you will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. In the latter case, you will still be saved, but you will have failed to do what God wanted you to do. Wait - don't tell me you thought your heavenly reward will be based on how many people you evangelize!? Oops!

Some of you are no doubt thinking that what I have just said cannot possibly be true. You have had it drummed into your head all of your church-going life that God's laws were relevant in the Old Testament, but not the New Testament. But you have been sold a bill of goods. Teaching and following God's commands is not a concept negated by the N.T., but rather embraced by it. Let's allow the scripture to speak for itself.

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. 1 Jn 3:23-24.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. 1 Jn 5:2-3.

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady — not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning — that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. 2 Jn 4-6.

First, just because we live in the age of grace does not mean that obedience to God's commandments has somehow become irrelevant. God has commandments that still apply to Christians and He expects us to still obey them.

Second, notice these three texts use the commandments of Jesus, the commandments of God, and the commandments of the Father interchangeably - they are all equivalent terms for each other. Don't fall into the trap of making distinctions that have no real difference. Just because different words are used does not mean there are three different sets of commands (Jesus' commands, God's commands, and the Father's commands) containing different rules for different people or different ages. The scripture uses over a dozen different names or titles for Jesus Christ - not for the purpose of dividing Him, but to give us a greater range of perspectives of the same person. Same here.

Third, notice how well 1 Jn 3:23-24 tracks with Matt. 22:37-40:

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

1 Jn 3 tells us that we should: 1) *believe in the name of Jesus Christ*; and 2) *love one another*. Matt. 22 tells us to: 1) *love the Lord your God*; and 2) *love your neighbor as yourself*. Are these two sets of unrelated commandments; or are they in fact the same commandments expressed with slightly different words? Aren't they the same? And isn't that what we should expect? "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Heb. 13:8.

So in other words, the commandments under the law (referred to in Matt. 22) are the same as the commandments in the age of grace, *i.e.*, love God and your neighbor as yourself. No change. What's more, the commandments of Jesus comprehend all the Law and the Prophets - it does not *exclude* them, but *includes* them (*yet only as they are applicable to all men under the laws of nature and nature's God*).

Fourth, notice the phrase, *from the beginning* in 2 Jn 4-6. Don't get sloppy - it doesn't mean *from the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry*. It means *from the beginning of time*. From the beginning when Jesus was God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Jn 1:1.

Are you beginning to get the picture? All of the laws of nature and nature's God are the laws Jesus

came to fulfill and which His entire earthly ministry were based around. These same laws are the commandments of Jesus, and these are what the Church is supposed to be teaching the nations pursuant to the Great Commission. And whether we teach these laws to the nations is the criterion by which God will determine who is least and greatest in heaven.

But, Lord help us, the Church is NOT teaching the laws of nature and nature's God to anyone, much less the whole world. In fact, just the opposite. Asserting the pseudo-argument of law vs. grace, we negate the Great Commission and do the very opposite of what Jesus commanded - all while we claim to be doing His will.

The last thing you will ever hear a sermon on in the modern Church is the laws of God, and this is to our everlasting shame. Why our shame? Because this is the essence of apostasy in the end times - that our love has grown cold as is demonstrated by our ignorance and reckless disregard of the laws of God. Because if we truly loved Him, we would teach and follow His laws. But how can we do that, when we don't even know what they are? Shame on us.

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Tim. 2:15 (KJV).

Not everything God or Jesus has said is a commandment, or a law. Not everything the patriarchs, prophets and N.T. saints did are examples to us of rules and practices to follow. Not everything God laid out as a pattern for a particular group of people is a pattern for the rest of us. We need to observe the differences between orders, rules and admonitions, and recognize the role of liberty.

For example, when God told Abram to go from his father's house to the land He would show him (Gen. 12:1), that was not a law, but an *order*. Similarly, when Jesus told the disciples to go to Jerusalem and prepare the Passover meal, that was an order. An order is a command to a particular person to do a particular task.

A law, on the other hand, is a *rule of conduct* that all men must abide by. Sometimes rules can be directed to the people of a particular nation (such as Israel), but of course in fulfilling the Great Commission we want to identify rules applicable to all nations. I'll come back to the question of how we identify these rules in a couple of minutes.

Both orders and rules are distinguished from mere *admonitions*. An admonition is generally a word of caution or advice to avoid something, or an urging or reminder to perform a duty. See dictionary.com. Examples of biblical admonitions: pray without ceasing, do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, put on the whole armor of God, etc. Yes, what I am saying is that none of these examples is a *rule of conduct, i.e., a law*. If church attendance really has a law attached to it, then Heb. 10:25 is merely a reminder of it, but the law itself has to originate elsewhere. But where is such a law to be found? Nowhere.

Mere admonitions, firstly, are unenforceable. No one can truly tell you how often to pray, no one else can actually know how often you pray, and no one can do anything about it if you aren't praying enough. I would even go so far as to say that failing to *pray without ceasing* is not a sin. Just pray often and make it a regular part of your life, but don't ever feel pressured because you aren't meeting someone else's standards for praying. This is not a matter in which one person can judge another. And God, for His part, is not your mother, saying, "You don't talk to me enough."

Ditto for church attendance and spiritual preparedness. That's right - there are no actual rules for prayer, church attendance or spiritual preparedness, or any of a host of other general behaviors. When people make up rules for things that are actually a matter of individual choice and liberty, it is called *legalism*. And legalism is always a bad thing to be avoided.

Second, and I mean this seriously, something is not a law of God or of scripture unless God is speaking in a *legislative* (i.e., a *rule-making*) *capacity*. When is God speaking in a legislative capacity? Either when implementing a divine covenant, or when issuing a statute under or pursuant to that covenant. These instances are pretty easy to identify because there aren't that many of them.

The only other time God has spoken in a legislative capacity is via the laws of nature. Since the laws of nature all have their origin in the creation of the world, any rule of conduct tracing back to creation is a good potential eternal law of God applicable to all people.

Thus, when God condemned the Canaanites for various sexual offenses in Lev. 18, the whole list of offenses can be seen as an enumeration of violations of the laws of nature. Why? Because the Canaanites never received nor were they ever under the Mosaic law. So the question is what law did the Canaanites violate, and how could God condemn them except that they had violated some law applicable to all nations? In other words, the law of nature was in view in Lev. 18, not the Mosaic law. I have treated this topic in great detail in the essay, *Sex, Crimes and Punishment*.

Let's jump to the N.T. Several times Paul invokes the law of nature to make arguments about things most Christians don't like to talk about. Thus, in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 Paul discusses headship in the family, head coverings while praying, and hair length for men and women. But all of these are tied to each other, and all of them are ultimately tied to the manner and order of creation of Adam and Eve. Paul is making a clear case based on creation laws and we only denigrate and do a disservice to the scriptures when we cast the whole debate as a product of the times or the local culture.

When Jesus said "whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven," the denigration of Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 11 is *exactly what Jesus was talking about*.

Similarly, in 1 Cor. 14:33-35 Paul states that "women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak." How many churches do you know, where that practice is observed? Or taught? Or discussed? Or treated without open contempt? Yet, Paul makes this statement in verses 37-38: "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are *a command of the Lord*. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not

recognized.”

So what is Paul really claiming? That his teaching on women in the church is *a command of the Lord*, and as such, a rule of conduct which is part of God's laws. And if it is a command of the Lord, it is one which Jesus came to fulfill, one which God expects all Christians to obey, and one which the Great Commission requires us to teach all nations, or else we will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. So don't be so quick to dismiss what Paul said. You can be sure that if something is a command of the Lord, then God takes it quite seriously.

Looking for Law in All the Wrong Places

Paul's argument is not a claim that he is speaking in a legislative capacity. Paul is not claiming the rule originates with him, he is claiming (under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit) that the rule originated with God. Paul is just calling attention to it for a disobedient congregation. Thus, the rule could either have originated in something Jesus said, or more likely, in the nature of marriage and family (which traces back to creation). I will not expound on it in detail here, but nothing in the rules and procedures for the Church ever trump the family order. If anything, it is the reverse (because the family came first and is more fundamental).

Thus, we need to avoid erroneous teachings, such as the belief prevalent in some churches to the effect that whatever customs and practices were observed by the early disciples in the N.T., and sometimes even the people of God of the O.T., if those customs and practices were “approved by God,” they become not only a model and an example for us, but form the boundaries and limits of what is acceptable behavior on our part.

Such teaching is wrong on all sorts of levels. First, just because so-and-so in the Bible exercised their liberty to worship or serve God in a particular way and this was acceptable to God, does not mean our liberty has been constrained. Jesus said He came to proclaim liberty (Lk. 4:18), not put us in a behavioral straight jacket. Thus, we have our own liberty to exercise as we see fit, and whether our actions are acceptable to God or not will have nothing to do with what someone else may or may not have done.

Second, this teaching inevitably tends to produce a *ceremonial law* for the Church, even while its proponents deny any intention of doing this. Nonetheless, proponents draw principles from many examples based in the Mosaic law itself, or from Israel while it was under the tutelage of that law, and attempt to extrapolate those so-called principles into the Church age. Now I admit it is reasonable and possible to extract principles of universal law applicable today from the experience of ancient Israel (I will expand on this idea below), but *only to the extent* you can trace those principles to the law of nature.

Going back to 1 Cor. 14 for a moment, in verse 40 Paul says, “But all things should be done decently and in order.” Yet, notice he never stipulates what that order should be, or that there is only a limited number of decent orders of worship. Even Paul, in calling for order, leaves the practical working out of that order to our Christian liberty, for Christ has set us free. Gal. 5:1.

Third, this teaching completely corrupts the nature of rule-making. Thus, for example, when the early disciples held all possession in common (Acts 4:32-37), this practice did not establish a rule of conduct, even though it may appear to have been "approved." And the scripture itself shows us what a disastrous result this practice produced - a continuing decline of poverty for an entire church for many years.

As a starting proposition, actions of men do not - and cannot - establish laws of God. God reserves the right, as part of His sovereignty, to establish His own laws. The principle of Isa. 33:22 is as true today as it was so long ago: "For the Lord is our judge; *the Lord is our lawgiver*; the Lord is our king; he will save us." And when God acts this way, He doesn't leave it to implication or innuendo, He comes right out and says, "this shall be a statute."

My point is that not everything stated by Paul in his various epistles or written by other New Testament writers is to be taken as a rule of conduct issued by the Lord as part of God's laws. When that is the case, the writer clearly indicates it in the text and does not leave it to implication. So we should not construe all N.T. admonitions as rules of conduct. But when the writer *does* make the argument that such-and-such is a law of God, we had better treat it as one. God is watching, and He will hold us accountable.

Interpreting the Mosaic Law

Historically, Christians have approached the Mosaic law from two general perspectives, both of which have serious pitfalls. On the one hand, Christians tend to import aspects of the old Jewish law (such as the tithe) into the Church environment when those things have no rightful business in the Church. On the other hand, Christians tend to regard every law of the Old Testament as dead and gone, when there are plenty of O.T. laws having nothing to do with sacrifices and priesthoods that we Gentiles should be paying attention to. It is crucial that we sort these things out properly.

To establish a more balanced framework for understanding the Mosaic law, let me quote a brief excerpt from my essay on *Tithing and the Law of God*:

The Mosaic law is commonly regarded as having three basic components: 1) the eternal moral law (the law of nature); 2) the ceremonial/ redemptive law (the law of the priesthood); and 3) the civil or judicial law (the theocratic or governmental laws).

Of those, the eternal moral law was perfect from the beginning and never needed a correction. To the extent the Mosaic covenant verbalizes the law of nature, of course, it applies to everyone.

But it applies to everyone *not* because it is stated in the Mosaic covenant, rather, it applies to everyone because it is our universal nature. The covenantal expression doesn't make the moral law more binding than it was without the covenant. And the natural law doesn't expand the covenant to make it universally applied to everyone. The covenant simply *agrees* with the law of nature, and to the extent natural law binds everyone, it binds them because of nature, not because of the covenant.

So the bottom line question is: How do we know which parts of the Mosaic law pertain to the theocracy and the priesthood, and which parts reflect the law of nature? I have already stated the general rule for knowing the law of nature when you see it: *To the extent a legal principle or rule is based upon the nature or event of creation it is a part of the law of nature applicable to all people.*

The Eternal Moral Law

Prime examples of the law of nature (*i.e.*, the eternal moral law) in the Mosaic law are the Ten Commandments. This is why public displays of the Decalogue are so contentious - attacks on the Ten Commandments are an attempt to overthrow the laws of God in an effort by the ungodly to escape God's rule. See, Ps 2.

The commandment that gives people the most problems is probably the fourth - to keep the sabbath. Yes, I know what the N.T. says about the sabbath, but remember this: *you can't find a rule of conduct more rooted in the nature of creation than the sabbath.* I don't recall that Jesus in His life, death or resurrection did anything to redefine the week, so you had better assume that is one of the laws He came to keep, wants us to obey, and we will be accountable for. Yet, at the same time, its observance (as taught in the N.T.) is a matter of personal liberty no one can judge us for.

Which illustrates this key principle: in deciphering the applicability of the Mosaic laws, you have to treat separately the rule of conduct itself, man-made regulations adopted to enforce it, and any punishments prescribed to the nation of Israel concerning it. All man-made regulations adopted by the Jews are, by definition, not applicable to the Gentile nations and are to be ignored. All punishments attached to various offenses are by definition part of the theocratic laws of Israel and are not binding on nations today.

That just leaves the rule of conduct itself, which for the most part people have complete liberty to implement as they see fit. Just because I say the Ten Commandments are part of God's eternal moral laws applicable to everyone today, does not mean anyone should enact them as statutes or as a matter of public, municipal or civil law. Nonetheless, the Ten Commandments are rules of conduct the Church should be teaching all nations to obey, with the Church leading the way in modeling obedience.

I never said deciphering the Mosaic law was easy. I only say it is achievable, and it does take some skill and practice. So it can be done. But it will only be done if Christians get back in the habit of analyzing the scriptures, reading them carefully, and making and testing arguments for or against a principle.

We need some more of that *iron sharpens iron* mentality in our churches, and for people (especially ministry leaders) to stop being so thin-skinned that they can't tolerate any criticism or dissent. It is no one's job to *fall in line* with anyone else's teaching. *Each person should be fully convinced in his own mind.* Rom. 14:5. The burden is on the preacher or teacher to prove his point, not on the hearer to submit to it. And if your first inclination is to quote Rom. 13:1-7 back at me ("be subject to the governing authorities"), you need to go back and reexamine that text. Nothing in that text

relates to preachers or teachers in any way whatsoever.

The Theocratic Law

I suggest the following are examples of the theocratic laws of Israel, which are useful for understanding the special place Israel has in history (and in prophecy), but are not rules for the governing of the Gentile nations. No, I am not going to prove any of these here, I merely suggest them and leave the proof to another time.

The command not to intermarry with the people living in the land before the Israelites possessed it reflects an ethnic and spiritual purity which Israel was to maintain as a holy nation. Deut. 7:1-8.

The command not to wear clothing made of two materials is symbolic of the ethnic and spiritual purity which the Israelites were to maintain. Lev. 19:19 and Deut. 22:11.

The infliction of capital punishment for offenses against God is unique to Israel, because only in that nation would an offense against God also be an offense against the civil ruler.

The laws relating to the throne of Israel, including the Davidic covenant, are unique to the polity of that nation. Deut. 17:14-15 and 2 Sam. 7:1-29.

The land laws of the Jews reflect the theocratic nature of the nation. The land, as the unique possession of Israel, reflected the fact that Israel was God's unique possession. Lev. 25:8-17,25; and Num. 36:7-9.

Ceremonial Laws (Laws of the Priesthood)

As for examples of ceremonial laws which have been obsoleted, many of these are easy to identify, such as laws relating to the composition of the priesthood, priestly duties, and behavioral rules for priests. Included among these are any similar rules pertaining to the calling out of the Levites from among the other tribes. Obviously, all laws pertaining to sacrifices and offerings, feasts and holy days, and rules pertaining to the tabernacle or temple, are among the ceremonial laws.

Perhaps less obvious, but no less important to understand and appreciate, is the law of tithing, which has been obsoleted by the priesthood of Christ. No, the tithe is not God's mechanism for funding the Church. Oh, what great wickedness has been perpetrated in the name of Jesus by shackling His body with a burden that was never theirs to bear. For a full account and explanation (and proof) of this point, see my essay on *Tithing and the Law of God*.

WHAT SHOULD WE THEN TEACH?

When you consider all the subject matters the law of God touches, it comprehends most of life. Much of that will be of primary interest to lawyers and law students. In a general church setting,

I don't expect pastors and preachers to become lawyers, and I don't expect that most church attendees will want to drill down into a detailed analysis of the biblical view of torts, contracts, or criminal law - although Christians *should* generally be aware that such things exist. But there are a lot of things - generally very helpful things - that can be easily taught to congregants with a modest effort to clue them into the fundamental principles of God's laws.

So what are the laws of God applicable to everyone that Jesus must have referred to? 1) The eternal moral law, or the laws of nature, which sprang from creation and have applied to the whole human race ever since. 2) The Adamic and Noahic covenants which have never expired or terminated, and which apply to all the descendants of Adam and Noah (which includes everyone alive today). 3) Some aspects of the Mosaic law - not because they were given to Moses or to Israel - but to the extent those laws reflect the laws of nature and would apply to us whether stated in the Mosaic code or not.

These same laws apply to Jews as well as Gentiles. So even if your ancestors were at one point "under" the Mosaic system of laws, the laws described in the prior paragraph are still relevant to you, because they apply to *everyone* without exception.

Now let's flesh these concepts out a little more.

The Four Great Commands

First, churches should be teaching the four great commands given by God to all of humanity in its principal institutional capacities, that is, the Dominion Mandate (Gen. 1:28) given to *families*, the Greatest Commandments (Mat. 22:36-40) given to *individuals*, the purpose of civil power (1 Pet. 2:13-14) given to *nations*, and the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) given to the *Church*.

Each of these institutions created by God has twin purposes worthy of careful study. For individuals, there is the love of God (morality and piety) and the love of our neighbors (which covers a whole range of topics on human interactions and the ways in which we wrong each other). Families have the twin purposes of child-bearing (which includes family interrelationships, sexuality and even education), and dominion (including economic rights and liberties, property, contracts, industry, labor & occupation and stewardship).

Nations have the dual purpose of punishing those who do evil (which gives great opportunities to discuss how government should not punish doing good, nor should government be in the business of doing good things), and praising those who do right (which historically has been understood to mean that government should secure individual rights). And of course, the twin purposes of the Church, *i.e.*, teaching and disciplining the nations (after the manner described in this essay) should be taught.

From there, one can consider that each of God's social institutions are co-equal, and none of them have authority over any of the others. Also, when we follow God's design and plan, none of these basic institutions actually conflict with each other. When conflicts arise, it is inevitably because

someone has assumed (*i.e.*, usurped) authority they do not actually have. I can think of a thousand sermon topics simply dedicated to sorting out what things civil government should not be involved in because those things have been delegated to individuals, families or the Church. And I can think of a hundred different ways churches have intruded on the rightful sphere of individuals and families.

One can even venture into the distinctions between these God created institutions and all man-made social structures, *i.e.*, voluntary institutions, and how man's social structures are never authorized to supersede or superintend God's institutional structures. Plenty of fodder for sermons in all sorts of areas, from considering schools (man-made) vs. families (God-made), to the United Nations (man-made) vs. national sovereignty (God-made).

When teaching or preaching the laws of God, pastors should resist the urge to Christianize the discussion, *e.g.*, What does a Christian family look like? *It's not about Christian families*. It's about what God's plan is for *all families* as a dominion-taking institution that He has created. Focus on the fact that since God created the family, it was never man's place to redefine it or to reshape the principles by which it is governed.

I once spent two years (100 Sundays) teaching a Sunday School class on a biblical view of the family dealing with marriage and divorce issues, child-bearing and parenting issues, sexuality, dominion issues, etc. without ever once delving into religious issues or what it means to be a Christian family. Yet, the discussions were all thoroughly Bible-based. Plus, my audience was a general adult audience - not a bunch of lawyers. The same kind of treatment can be extended to each of the other great commands of God, as well.

Fundamentally, people should realize that God does not have two sets of rules - one for Christians, and another for everyone else. All of the laws of God considered in the context of the present discussion apply to everyone regardless of their salvation status. When you start distinguishing Christians from non-Christians in the examination of God's laws, you are going down the wrong path.

Another tendency pastors should resist is to personalize the discussion, *e.g.*, What do the four great commands *mean to you*? This is not a subjective inquiry. Seek objective truth instead. And for the love of God, please don't frame the discussion of the four great commands in terms of what these teach us about Jesus. I have already pointed out where Jesus fits into the discussion: He has directed that we demonstrate our love for Him by following His commands. Once that is established, we are now simply engaged in the task of fleshing out what those commands are.

I'm really sorry if a discussion of God's will for the nations doesn't lend itself to an altar call, but if your pastor feels the need to turn every sermon topic into an evangelistic moment, *that's the problem*. That's why your church congregation is so ignorant. And ultimately, disobedient.

The Divine Covenants

The second obvious starting point is to consider the divine covenants between God and men, *i.e.*, Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and the new covenant in Christ (*i.e.*, Church covenant). The tendency of many pastors will be to either: 1) tie all the divine covenants together with the thread of redemption; or 2) posture all of the divine covenants as the progressive unfolding of the Church covenant, depending on whether your leaning is dispensational or reformed. Here's a quick tip: avoid both of these.

I have addressed this topic in detail in other essays, so I will not repeat the full analysis here. In short, each of the divine covenants (except the Church covenant) has as much or more to do with non-religious pursuits as it does with religious matters. Thus, the Adamic covenant is mostly about family structure and dominion, so don't just talk about the Fall and original sin. The Noahic covenant is about eating meat, taking dominion, capital punishment, and destruction of the earth - so don't just talk about how the story of the flood illustrates redemption. And so on.

And good grief, if you're going to study the Mosaic covenant, why just talk about the portion of the laws that were abolished and superseded as a foreshadowing of the work of the cross? Why not talk about all the laws that were *not* abolished and reflect the laws of nature because those are the laws which apply to everyone today? Oh, that's right - first you have to figure out which laws those are, how they relate to the laws of nature, and how they apply to everyone today. I didn't say it would be easy - I'm saying it will be worth the effort. So get crackin'.

Jurisdictional Principles

Beyond these two aspects of God's most fundamental laws, I'd next go to the most ignored aspect of God's laws in all of human history - the laws of jurisdiction. Start with the basic question: What things has God delegated to men to handle, and what things has He reserved for Himself? This will get into a discussion of jurisdiction over the heart and the mind, the law of love, freedom of thought and related matters, including the extent to which civil government ought to be involved (if at all) in educational and psychological matters.

Then consider the jurisdictional limits on each of the basic social institutions and voluntary associations. Special attention should be paid to how neither the State nor the Church have any authority over family matters, as that is the manner in which most abuses of authority are to be found today.

But the most important jurisdictional issue of all is this: In any given situation when addressing something that someone has done wrong, we must always ask two questions. First, what law has been violated that makes this something wrong? Second, what authority has God given *me* to do anything about it, and how did I get that authority? Nobody ever asks the second question - people just assume that because something wrong was done, anybody and everybody can jump in at will to address it. Bzzzzz! Wrong!

Use the example of Cain and Abel in Gen. 4 to show that just because Cain murdered Abel (*i.e.*, he did wrong) does *not* mean that anyone had any authority (*i.e.*, *jurisdiction*) to do anything about it. In fact, God didn't give anyone that authority for another 1600 years or so (in the Noahic covenant). Further, while Cain was still alive, if anyone had tried to exercise jurisdiction over Cain, God said "vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." Gen. 4:15. In others words, it can be argued, *who had jurisdiction* was seven times more important a question to God than *whether Cain was a murderer*.

So the fact hardly anyone ever asks the jurisdictional question before acting is a big deal to God - and it should be to us, too. Why aren't we teaching this principle to the nations? Why aren't we teaching it in our churches? Why is it the people who claim to be the "people of the Book" know the least about what's inside it? Don't you dare ask for God's mercy to cover a multitude of sins of omission. You now know the principle - go out and teach it! The Church *will* be held accountable.

And if, by any chance, you are saying to yourself, "I've never heard any of these laws taught in my church (or any church)," THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

Historical Understanding of the Great Commission

Things were not always the way they are at present. Back in the late 1700's we had Christians in America who knew things about God's laws and His governance of the world that have long been forgotten. It wasn't just a precious few, either, but was the course of the day in denomination after denomination.

But today you couldn't find ten Christians in all of America who, having nothing available to them but the Bible and the other resources available in 1776, could come up with anything remotely similar to the form of government our founders gave us. If it hadn't already been done for us, there aren't enough people in America schooled in the laws of God who could come up with a decent plan for government if their life depended on it.

In all of world history, only two Gentile nations ever attempted to form a civil government based on the principles of God's law - England and the U.S.A. The American experiment, while far from being perfect, improved upon and was superior to the prior English experience in several ways:

- 1) America was founded on principles of universal equality, renouncing the concept of nobility;
- 2) America was founded as a representative republic, not as a monarchy;
- 3) America more fully separated the three branches of government, which were far more entangled in England;
- 4) America opted for a written constitution rather than an unwritten one (or a constitution that was cobbled together from various sources at various times); and
- 5) America opted for a separation of church and state, rather than an establishment of religion.

All these major improvements, and many smaller ones, were possible because the American founders were able to take the English experience, learn from it, and refine it. Plus, I am convinced the Americans made a more conscious effort to conform the establishment not only of the government, but the entire nation, on God's laws.

I do not mean to disparage or discredit the English experience in any way. But the people migrating to America from Europe had a more robust understanding of the Great Commission from the time the very first boatload sailed to these shores. It was an understanding most people calling themselves *evangelicals* today would find strangely uncomfortable. Because the settlers coming to America had no intention of proclaiming the Gospel to the native peoples, setting up indigenous congregations and church leaders, and then remaining here only in an advisory capacity.

No sir. The colonists had the twin objectives of propagating the Christian religion and to establish a settled and quiet civil government. The assumption being, they were coming to America to stay and structure a well-ordered society on the basis of God's laws. This intention is well documented, being expressed in the various colonial charters and even the Mayflower Compact of 1620.

This was no passing fancy. The intertwining of the Great Commission and the colonization of America was still going strong when William Penn wrote the *Frame of Government of Pennsylvania* (April 25, 1682):

This settles the divine right of government beyond exception, and that for two ends: first, to terrify evil doers: secondly, to cherish those that do well . . . So that government seems to me a part of religion itself, a thing sacred in its institution and end. For, if it does not directly remove the cause, it crushes the effects of evil, and is as such, (though a lower, yet) an emanation of the same Divine Power, that is both author and object of pure religion . . . [D]aily experience tells us, that the care and regulation of many other affairs . . . make up much of the greatest part of government . . . and will continue among men, on earth, under the highest attainments they may arrive at, by the coming of the blessed Second Adam, the Lord from heaven. [Preface ¶ 3.]

Wow. Can you imagine any Christian missionary enterprise undertaken today to use that approach in pursuing its objectives? Of course not. It would be relentlessly ridiculed by the secularists, on the one hand, as imperialist; and relentlessly decried by religious folk, on the other hand, as departing from the core of the Gospel. The very thought that *civil government is a part of religion itself* is a concept so foreign to the modern evangelical mind that people today no longer have the ability to process that idea, except to say that it must be wrong. Right now you're probably thinking to yourself, "separation of church and state." It is no wonder such things are no longer taught - even in Christian schools.

Yet, that is what makes the founding of America 300 or more years ago the zenith in the practical application of the full master plan of the Great Commission for the body of Christ. Everything since about 1800 has been a downhill slide - can you see how far we have fallen?

Thus, my reading and interpretation of the Great Commission is not far-fetched, not unheard of, and not untried. It was the prevailing view among Christians in America for nearly 200 years. Without it, our nation would not exist and we would never have progressed as far as we have. So I am not pretending to have discovered something that no one else has ever known about the true meaning of the Great Commission. I am just saying lots of people used to know this stuff, but it has been forgotten. We need to reclaim this knowledge, not hide it under the rug. Does this remind you of any scriptures?

No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. Lk. 8:16.

Wait - did you think this verse refers to evangelism? Ha, ha - that's a good one. What do you say - are you ready to let the light of the whole counsel of God shine? Or are you going to cover most of it up?

[N.B. If you are interested in checking out the full context of the historic American understanding of the Great Commission, see *Legal Foundations: The Framework of Law*, ch. 9.]

MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS

The Evangelistic Perspective

The modern *evangelistic* understanding of "making disciples" is that Christians are to gain converts through the process of evangelism (*i.e.*, preaching the good news of the Gospel) to *win souls* or *proselytize*. Then, once people have been converted to Christianity, we are to train them to go out into the world evangelizing others, and this is what the process of *discipleship* consists of.

Thus, the entire thrust of the Great Commission (according to this view) is evangelism, either by evangelizing directly or indirectly by preparing others to do it. The command to baptize is rolled up into the process of evangelism such that by keeping track (*i.e.*, counting) baptisms, we know how many people are being saved and *brought into the Church*. It is commonly asserted that all Christians are *called* to spread the Gospel, *i.e.*, evangelize directly or indirectly.

The directive to *teach all that Christ commanded* is reduced to the evangelistic process, as though the only thing Jesus expects His followers to do is evangelize the lost. The only thing usually added to this expectation is that Christians will also lead holy lives that are pleasing to Jesus and by our example will serve to witness to the lost by our behavior. So even the call to *sanctification* (leading a godly life) is co-opted to serve, ultimately, an evangelistic purpose.

How sad. How myopic. And speaking as someone who was raised in that tradition from infancy, *what a bunch of nonsense*. I knew when I was a young teenager the evangelistic view was shallow and couldn't possibly comprehend all that Christ wanted His followers to do, but I will admit it took a number of years for me to find out what the alternative was - the alternative I now present in this essay.

Ask yourself what kind of Church you would get from many decades of the evangelistic view of the Great Commission. Why, exactly the one we have now among churches identifying themselves as *evangelical*. Where people are welcomed in with easy belief-ism, and by all means we don't want to exclude or judge anyone, so nearly all forms of disobedience are accepted. A Church a mile wide and one inch shallow. A Church where everyone is on board but no one knows what they truly believe beyond what the pastor says. A church which, by its behavior and principles, is indistinguishable from the world around it.

Don't blame those pesky parishioners who don't get involved in church programs. Blame the clergy who aren't teaching the laws of God and rail against all things legal, and the seminaries who teach that the ministry of the Church is just to *love* people and not judge them.

Once upon a time, I was in-house legal counsel for a large international Christian ministry organization, one that you've probably heard of. In the president's office was a large world map, taking up most of one entire wall. In his view, the map symbolized how far reaching the Gospel was (geographically) and what parts of the world were still unreached. To my mind, the map symbolized the shallowness of the ministry's mission, which was to reach every corner of the world with only the tiniest sliver of the whole counsel of God.

The organization was founded as a campus ministry, yet it never occurred to any ministry leaders to make any effort whatsoever to engage either students or colleges at the academic or educational level. In other words, no one gave any thought to how the Bible might apply to education in general, much less how the Bible might apply to any specific area of study. You know, to take every thought captive to obey Christ. While the students were being introduced to the *four spiritual laws* by the ministry, they were being indoctrinated for four years by their professors in how to think like pagans - and the ministry considered this a success.

It was especially galling when the ministry attempted to launch a Christian graduate university which miserably failed for all kinds of reasons - not the least of which was no one in the entire ministry had the foggiest clue what a Christian graduate university would look like (except that it *had* to have a school of theology - duh!). In fact, during my time there I became convinced the leader of the organization was actually anti-academic in his mind set, which trickled down through the organization. The graduate university was doomed from the start because of this. Needless to say, the ministry and I parted ways rather abruptly.

In a way, the modern fascination with evangelism is an impossible dream. Let's revisit Mat. 24, picking up the discussion of "the sign of your coming and of the close of the age" at verse 9, where Jesus is speaking:

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom

will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Mat. 24:9-14.

It is clear from the context that the statement concerning preaching the gospel all over the world in verse 14 is a *prediction*. But many in the evangelical movement today consider it to be a *call to action*, which it clearly is not. By Jesus' own words, when the prediction is fulfilled, the Tribulation will already have begun, and Christians will be persecuted, hated and killed worldwide. In other words, when the prediction is fulfilled, it won't be because there is a healthy and thriving Church that will purposefully be preaching the gospel. Rather, it is the *persecution itself* that will propel the gospel around the world.

So while modern ministries spin their wheels trying to bring about the fulfillment of Mat. 24:14, none of that will really have anything to do with its fulfillment. Fulfillment will come about through persecution, not evangelism, and it will come when God decides it is time, not when church leaders decide it is time. Which is why I say, modern evangelistic efforts are chasing an impossible dream. For those of you waiting to take the gospel to the whole world before the Rapture occurs, snap out of it.

God has *already told us* how the world will be evangelized - since when does attempting to do the same thing through our own efforts ever become a winning strategy? How did things go for Abraham, when He tried to fulfill God's promise through his own efforts?

If you have ever attended an evangelistic church, you've probably heard this logic: The Bible tells us God wants us to bear fruit. Bearing fruit means bringing people to Christ. (Here an analogy is often made to marriage, where bearing fruit means having children, so for Christians bearing fruit must mean something similar, in other words, fruit = people.) That being the case, now get out there and win souls! *Yet, this too is nonsense.*

The general call to bear fruit can be seen in scriptures such as Jn. 15:1-16 and Lk. 6:43-45. But the word *fruit* is not defined in those texts, so we must look elsewhere in scripture for the definition. According to Gal 5:22-23, fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Col. 1:10 indicates fruit is good works and increasing in the knowledge of God. Rom 6:21-22 says fruit is sanctification and eternal life. Perhaps the best summary statements are found in Phlp 1:11 and Heb. 12:11, where fruit is defined as righteousness - not soul-winning - which is entirely compatible with all of the preceding scriptures.

And what is righteousness? According to www.merriam-webster.com, it is “acting in accord with divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin.” So we might say, bearing fruit as a Christian means keeping God's law. Wow. What a concept.

God's Express Plan for Evangelism

The idea that every Christian is called to evangelize the world is not only an impossible dream, it is a lie. The whole manner in which God structured the universal Church (*i.e.*, the body of Christ)

mitigates against it.

According to Eph. 4:11, God gave the Church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The KJV expressly states what other Bible versions imply, that "he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Whether the word *some* appears in the text or not, it is clear from the context that not everyone in the Church is an apostle, or a prophet, or a pastor, or a teacher.

Or an evangelist. No matter how you slice it, the number of people in the Church whom God has appointed to one of these five offices will always be a small minority - the vast majority of Christians will have other tasks. And the mere fact God *appoints* these people - they do not volunteer for the position, they are not elected to these offices, nor do they receive an office because of education, training or experience - means that these are specialized tasks to be carried out by those whom God alone has selected. It is not for men to saddle anyone with the burden of these offices, rather each person must be called by God and convinced of it in their own mind.

Friends, the very fact God gives only *some* in the Church to be evangelists completely negates the argument that *all* believers have a duty to evangelize others.

It is also clear from scripture that God is perfectly capable of bringing people to salvation entirely on His own, apart from any human intervention. Rom. 1:19-20 tells us, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." Col. 1:23 informs us, "the hope of the gospel that you heard ... has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven." And John 1:9 tells us that the true light of Christ "enlightens everyone."

So it isn't just a bare knowledge of the existence of God which is displayed in the creation, nor even a knowledge of God's power and His laws, but the very gospel of Christ itself which God makes known to all people.

Yes, I am fully aware of Rom. 10:14. "But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" But are *you* aware of Rom. 10:18-20, in which Paul continues the discussion? "But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'" Further, "Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.'"

All of which makes moot the argument that all believers have a duty to evangelize others. For God has undertaken this duty for Himself. Thus, to feel guilty or to make others feel guilty for not evangelizing enough is a despicable evil.

I am not arguing that Christ does not want some people to be evangelists. I am simply saying: a) He reserves the right to 'evangelize' people directly without human intervention (as in the case of

Paul himself); and b) to the extent Christ wants His Church to evangelize, He specially appoints people He deems most suitable for that task and gives them the responsibility of carrying it out. Evangelism is not a task for which *every believer* is responsible. Or well suited.

What else are we to say? If everyone is called upon to evangelize, then we might as well say all Christians are responsible to teach, to become pastors, to prophesy and to be apostles. You cannot just say, "Well, yes some people have a special calling for evangelism, but the rest of us still have a duty to be witnesses of the gospel," unless you treat being a teacher, pastor, prophet and apostle the same way. Textual consistency requires us to understand and treat each of the offices God appoints the same as the others.

Would you ever say, "Well, sure some people are specially called to be apostles, but the rest of us all have a duty to plant churches"? Would you ever say, "Some people are called as pastors, but we all have a duty to shepherd the flock"? Same analysis for teachers and prophets. So in the end, no, you would probably never say those things.

Because if you do, the inevitable conclusion is that all Christians have individual responsibility to perform all of the tasks of the Church, regardless of whether God has appointed anyone to a particular office or not. Which effectively assigns to all believers the same responsibilities as each other, nullifying the special appointment of God. What possible difference can it make for God to select some people for special offices, if in fact all believers will carry out the same tasks anyway? It makes God's special appointments of no effect.

Plus, it does great violence to the concept of the body of Christ, which specifically provides that each member of the body is different, and while they all work together for the benefit of the whole, the function of each member is in fact different from others. See here:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Rom. 12:6-8.

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 1 Cor. 12:8-11.

This is God's plan for the Church, and for evangelism. And it's a good plan. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Gen. 1:31. The last thing anyone needs is a counterfeit plan invented by men. "Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is

falsely called 'knowledge,' for by professing it some have swerved from the faith." 1 Tim 6:20-21.

THE REAL REASON CHURCHES DON'T TEACH GOD'S LAWS

Actually, it's not that difficult to understand why churches today no longer teach what churches used to teach. It's because we no longer practice God's laws. If we don't practice it, how can we teach it? But it is more than just a wilful ignorance of God's laws - it is a wilful disobedience of God's laws. Churches today don't *want* to know about God's laws because they don't *want* to follow those rules anymore. Modern churches have joined the sons of disobedience. Eph. 2:2; 5:6.

Can you imagine a church today teaching that divorce is wrong except in the cases of adultery or abandonment? That a church elder must be a husband of one wife, who demonstrates he is able to manage his household well? That gross immorality (such as adultery, homosexuality or harlotry) is not to be tolerated in the church? Or that a woman should not teach or exercise authority over a man, but is to remain quiet in the church? Don't be absurd. It's laughable. Yet, just as Jesus Himself has not changed over the years (Heb. 13:8), God's laws have not changed with the times either. Nor should they.

I once mentioned to the pastor of a church we were attending that I was concerned a number of men, including those on the worship team up on stage, were wearing hats during the entire church service. I referenced 1 Cor. 11:4 ("Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.") I briefly pointed out that the reasoning given by Paul for this admonition was based entirely on the creation account of Gen. 1. As a result, the admonition was not culturally based, limited as to time, place or persons, but was rooted in the creation of mankind, and therefore was part of the eternal moral laws of God that never change.

The whole conversation on that subject took only as long as it took you to read the previous paragraph, just a couple of minutes. I did not elaborate, wax eloquent, or attempt to preach to the preacher. I just said, "Don't you think that's something we might want to consider?" Do I need to say it? My words fell on deaf ears. No questions came back about whether my analysis was good or bad. No effort was made to say, "That's interesting. I'll look it up." Not so much as a, "I'll mention it to the worship leader and see what he says." He just said, "Nice talking to you."

I know some of the rules I have mentioned are controversial (although, they are only controversial because people don't want to follow them). But men wearing hats in church? That's not controversial. If you grew up in the 1970's or earlier (especially in the 60's or earlier, when most men wore hats), the rule was universally understood and accepted in every church of every denominational stripe. But the pastor I spoke to was 20 years younger than me, and he came to Christ in his twenties (not as a kid like I did), so this common practice was completely foreign to him. That's OK - he can't help that - but his reaction (not even a marginal interest or curiosity) was entirely on him.

You might wonder why there is such an adversity to God's laws among God's people. Part of it is due to a false understanding of the whole *law vs. grace* thing already discussed. Part of it is due to

the shift towards an evangelistic paradigm, where everything a church is and does is viewed through the lens of evangelism. A lot of it is due to a profound ignorance of God's laws among His people. But the main reason, I believe, is that people simply don't want to be bound by those rules anymore. Christians as a group have become disobedient children flaunting their rebellion.

Pleaser allow me to paraphrase from Jer. 5:1-5:

Run to and fro through the assemblies of the Church, look and take note! Search to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her. Though people say, "Praise Jesus," they swear falsely. O Lord, do not your eyes look for truth? You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent. Then I said, "These are only the flock; they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God. I will go to the church leaders and will speak to them, for they know the way of the Lord, the justice of their God." But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had declared themselves free from the laws of God.

Have you noticed? Christians have become very adept at justifying their non-compliance. We want to be inclusive, and not drive people away. We want to minister to the hurting, and not drive them away. We want to make the Gospel appealing, and not drive people away. Allow me to describe what is really going on here: Christians have decided to sacrifice obedience for the sake of evangelism - that somehow those two things pull against each other, so do the one that leads to growth (numerically and financially) and leave behind the one that tends to winnow the flock (and church budgets). Then we clothe our decisions in a false interpretation of the Great Commission to make it look like it was really God's will when it wasn't.

It's pretty pathetic, when you think about it. As if God would saddle His church with a self-defeating task. As if the Church would not prosper if it fulfilled the entirety of the Great Commission. Yet, that's the way people treat it.

The modern church should take a lesson from Judges 7 and the story of Gideon. When God prepared the people for battle, He whittled down the forces from 32,000 to just 300. There was no intention on God's part to be as inclusive as possible. God did not need or want as many people as possible to feel good about serving Him. There was no motivation for God to make military service appealing to the masses. From God's perspective, He could do more with a very few hard core followers, than He could with a great many marginal followers. If only the Church would do the same.

But then, that would require thinking in military terms. Military thinking sees the Christian life as combat, where we fight evil, enemies are destroyed, and victory is marked by conquest. But churches today don't want to do that. The modern church sees the Christian life as an opportunity for ministry, where we help the hurting, tear down walls between people, and success is marked by souls saved. This probably explains why you never hear songs like *I'm In The Lord's Army*, and

Onward Christian Soldiers in churches anymore - songs that used to be staples in children's Sunday School. Lord knows, we don't want to raise confrontational children! Or even worse, kids who grow up to be confrontational adults.

Although, maybe it helps explain why I'm so darn confrontational - because I grew up with those songs as a child. It's staggering to realize how far everyday Christianity has fallen, just in my lifetime. Oh look, I see we've gotten to the root of the problem at last! It can't be you, it must be me. Surely God must be pleased with modern churches that are kinder and gentler, shallow and weak, over those nasty and judgmental churches of the past that kept our nation strong and prevented us from going the way of the rest of the world. *There's no apostasy to see here, folks. Move along, move along.*

Learn to Love the Law of God

While there are scriptures that state Jesus came to save the lost and believers are encouraged to share the Gospel with others, there are no verses in my Bible that I can find anywhere to the effect that when Jesus returns He will measure the Church, praise or reward the Church, or attribute holiness to the Church based upon the number of people saved, converts gained, or the effectiveness of evangelistic outreach. Not one. So I will issue a challenge. If you have such a verse in your Bible, please show it to me. I don't think such a verse exists.

Many Christians believe that when Jesus returns He will ask His Church, "Why didn't you reach more of the lost?" I don't think for one second that is what He will ask. I am absolutely convinced that instead Jesus will ask, "Why didn't you teach and obey my commandments?" But the people can't obey commands they have never heard discussed, and pastors can't teach commands they have never thought about *as commands* (and not merely as a gateway to moralizing, personalizing, allegorizing, Christolizing, and/or evangelizing).

Teach the commands of God *as commandments* and stop viewing them through the lens of something else. We don't need to, and God does not expect us to, baptize God's laws in some religious holy water in order to make them a suitable discussion topic in the Church. God's laws are perfectly good just the way they are and we should teach them without varnish or religious gloss.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward. Ps 19:7-11.

Consider what else the Psalmist knew that the Church has abandoned:

Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the *law* of the Lord!
Blessed are those who keep his *testimonies*, who seek him with their whole heart,
who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!
You have commanded your *precepts* to be kept diligently.
Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your *statutes*!
Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your *commandments*.
I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous *rules*.
I will keep your *statutes*; do not utterly forsake me! Ps 119:1-8.

Yes, I know we're under grace, not law. But we've already covered that. Remember what I said earlier? *A far as non-Jews are concerned, we are under the laws of nature and nature's God no more or less now than we were before Jesus' First Advent. Gentiles are under the exact same laws of God now (including the divine covenants) as we were in 1000 B.C. And 1000 B.C. was when David the Psalmist lived.*

Look at all the legal terminology in Psalm 119: *law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, and rules*. Each of these words is used repeatedly throughout Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible. What could possibly be the reason, I wonder? Is it to give emphasis? Nah, it couldn't be.

I once heard a sermon on Psalm 119 in which the head pastor concluded the psalm was written as an admonition for us to read the word of God. I went up to him after the service and asked him whether the presence of all the legal terminology in the psalm might suggest the possibility that God actually wants us to study his laws. He paused for a second, turned to the woman standing next to me, and said, "And you ma'am - What is your question?" He never spoke to me again, though we had attended that church for several years.

Ten years later, when my son was married by another minister in the same church, we visited the church to help prepare for the wedding. My wife and the head pastor's wife quickly fell into conversation to catch up because at one time we had all been quite close. The head pastor sat in a pew on the other side of the aisle from us and glared at me the whole time.

That pretty much sums up the general receptivity of evangelical pastors to the laws of God. And it's a damn shame. It's not the Church's ignorance alone that brings it shame - it's the stubborn unwillingness of Church leaders to study and teach the principles of God's laws, and their reckless disregard of things God has placed squarely in front of them for correction, reproof and instruction. And focusing on traditional evangelism isn't going to solve the problem.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Please don't take anything I've said as being *anti-evangelism*. I know that some of you, having gotten this far in the essay, will conclude I am anti-evangelism and nothing I can say is likely to alter your opinion of me. But at least know it is not my *intention* to be anti-evangelism.

What is my intention? To demonstrate that teaching the commands of Jesus, *i.e.*, God's laws, is just as important as evangelism is; that teaching God's laws and evangelism are both important to the body of Christ; and that as much effort, resources and divine imperative we attach to evangelism should be matched or duplicated as the effort, resources and divine imperative we attach to God's laws.

And if we have to choose between *inclusiveness* and *obedience* in describing the overall mission of the Church, it is better to err on the side of obedience. Inclusiveness is a false god.

I don't want to remove evangelism from the mission of the Church, I want to balance it out with the full counsel of God in other areas as God intended. This isn't *my* agenda - it is *God's* agenda. I merely point out we haven't been following His agenda as closely as we thought. Don't change the way you look at the Great Commission for my sake - do it for Christ's sake.

APPENDIX

A Kingdom Parable

Once there was a kingdom which consisted of a continent surrounded by water. The king, who was in fact the king of the universe, told his people to watch over his kingdom while he was away. He said, "It has not been given to you to rule over the entire world yet. Manage this continent well, and when I return I will extend my kingdom over the entire earth and you will rule it together with me. If you are faithful over a little; I will set you over much."

And he told his people, "These are my instructions for you to follow while I am gone. Make disciples of all people who come to the kingdom from elsewhere, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you previously. Be my witnesses starting here at the coastlines, and then take the gospel inland until you reach the city of the king. Destroy every opinion raised against the knowledge I have given you, and take every thought captive to obey my commands. Be ready to punish every disobedience, when your own obedience is complete."

With these words, the king went away. The people tried to do as the king instructed, but all of their initial efforts became abandoned and the people gradually moved westward leaving their task largely undone. At one point the people decided to "get organized," putting into place a bureaucracy the king never told them to have. For a long time, the people argued over who was really in charge. Eventually, a splinter group moved further west than all the others and started to make real progress.

Not only did this group of people welcome newcomers from the lands of unbelief who arrived on their shores, but they made real, substantial progress in conquering and occupying the inland areas of the kingdom. They knew that to accomplish their task they needed a plan, not a bureaucracy. So they trained people in personal piety and godly living so they would be mature enough to leave the familiarity of the beach.

The plan called for scouts - brave individuals who would mark out the territory by taking every thought captive to the king's commands - to lead the way. They would have to be followed by pioneers, *i.e.*, those who would establish outposts of godly thought and practical living in every area of life and every area equally, making it easier for permanent settlers to follow. Gradually, the people would fill the whole land of the kingdom as each person made progress towards maturity.

Fundamental to the plan was a recognition that the people were composed of many members who work together, but are not all the same. Each member is free to fulfill his own purpose for the good of the whole. *Some* would need to stay near the beach welcoming new people, but most of the people had other gifts and callings that would need to be exercised inland. They knew that in order to fulfill the king's commands, most people would need to leave the beach.

But as the people made their way inland to the point where they could just glimpse the city of the king in the distance, a group of beachcombers, wise in their own estimation, rose to power and started taking over. The beachcombers, wanting to feel important, started teaching others that

everyone needed to stay on the beach and rescue people coming to the land from across the water. They even said that the mission of the people was not what they thought it was - that their real mission was to welcome as many people as possible from the lands of unbelief.

The beachcombers stopped sending scouts, pioneers and settlers to the inland areas, insisting that when he returned, the king would take everyone to the city of the king. Gradually, the central part of the kingdom became a wilderness again, as the people who had settled there passed on and no one replaced them.

Back on the beach, people started setting up permanent settlements and ministry shops. The barkers would call out to passersby, "Step right up, folks. This is your one-stop shop. We've got creeds, confessions and statements of faith. Everything you ever need to know, and all that everyone can agree on. Don't get caught up in worldly pursuits; all that is true to the Gospel is right here."

Pretty soon, the beachcombers convinced people to build fences and barriers to keep anyone from leaving the beach. At a gate in the fence, there is a stop sign declaring, "Rules (for your own protection): Stop. Get permit to leave the beach. No permits today. Same thing tomorrow." Next to the gate is a salvation workers recruiting station, where people are most enthusiastic. "Saving souls is the most important thing anyone can do. Therefore, it is the only thing anyone is allowed to do."

Anyone who wonders aloud what it might be like to leave the beach for the inland areas is told: "There's nothing out there to see, and if you go, you'll be leaving the Gospel. Also, if you leave, don't expect anyone to support you. In fact, you are supposed to support us here at the beach."

Those who venture into the wilderness and attempt to go back to let others know what they found will encounter the gatekeepers. The gatekeepers tell everyone, "What you think you found is just your opinion. Don't tell anyone your opinions - this will just confuse others. Why can't you be a team player? But in truth we get along just fine without you."

Finally, after many years, the king returned. His people anxiously waited for him to say, "Well done, good and faithful servants." But instead, the king said, "You wicked and lazy servants! You should have made the land occupied and prosperous, but you only stayed on the beaches and left the inland areas unconquered." The people protested, "But Lord, look how many people we have brought into your kingdom! See them all on the beaches here."

To which the king replied, "You should have followed my instructions more closely and paid attention to the weightier matters of the law instead of neglecting them. Your works are but wood, hay and straw, and I will burn them up even though you will survive the fire. Instead of being rewarded, you will be called the least in my kingdom."

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