

# **WORLD MISSIONS TODAY**

**A Theological, Exegetical, And Practical**

**Perspective Of Missions**

*About the author*

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**Boon-Sing Poh**



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WORLD MISSIONS TODAY:  
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This book is dedicated to  
Alan and Joyce Goodfellow,  
former missionaries to Ghana,  
with thanksgiving to God  
for your encouragement and prayer support,  
over the years.



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# PREFACE

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Missions, which is the fulfilment of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, is part-and-parcel of the Christian faith. A theological, exegetical, and practical approach has been adopted to study this subject, with due cognisance given to the history of missions and the observations and proposals of experienced missionaries.

In the first part, the biblical basis of missions is laid down. Like a sturdy tree, missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God. This is the covenantal perspective. Missions is grounded in the atoning death of Christ. This is the evangelical perspective. Missions is crowned by the Great Commission. This is the Amillennial perspective. Seen together, missions is not a set of actions to accomplish any short-term objective. Instead, it is the unfolding of God's will which involves the action of God's people, leading to the gathering and sanctification of the elect, in preparation for their eternal destiny.

In the second part, the presupposition is made that the Great Commission is equipped with its own methodology. The Lord has given the Great Commission as a mandate to the local church, to accomplish the objective of planting local churches. There are three sub-objectives which lead to the main objective, viz. going forth to make disciples of all the nations, the gathering of disciples into local churches, and the teaching and training of the disciples so that they are edified and equipped to contribute to the accomplishment of the Great Commission.

## PREFACE

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In the third part, the prospects of missions are considered. The churches that are founded must develop into what they should be rather than go astray. The Lord is sanctifying the church while the church engages in self-reformation. The grand objective of the Great Commission is the sanctification of the disciples, leading to the sanctification of the local churches which, in turn, sanctifies the universal church. Each generation of Christ's disciples should have a four-generation view of teaching and training others, until the Lord returns to judge the world and to make all things new. While hindrances are to be expected, progress will be made in missions until success is attained. God's eternal decree cannot fail. The Covenant of Redemption, which encompasses the Covenant of Grace, is immutable.

This biblical and holistic understanding of missions will have profound effects upon the local church ministry and the approach to missions. The local church is not only to be missions-minded but to be involved in missions by engaging in a definite programme of local outreach and wider church planting. An awareness of global missions – ranging from tribal to urban outreach, homogeneous to cross-cultural evangelism, and past to present practice – will give one a sense of direction, purpose and destiny. There is no better way to glorify God than to build up the church of Jesus Christ, by serving in a good local church that is involved in missions. Intended as a textbook on missiology, it is expected that this book will be helpful also to pastors, missionaries, and serious Christians of all denominations.

The substance of this book arises from the many times this subject has been taught in a number of places, including in our own church, in Australia, in the United States of America, in the United Kingdom, in Myanmar, in Indonesia, in Sri Lanka, in Nepal, in Hong Kong, and in Zambia. God has graciously guided the involvement of our church in missions, giving us exposure to various situations and giving us understanding of His word. No claim is made that the last word on the subject has been said.

The members of our church have been most supportive of the travels that I often make with my wife. A number of them have joined in various mission trips. My wife, Goody, gets all the credit for being patient with, and taking care of, a less-than-perfect husband. Our brethren in Christ in the various countries mentioned deserve to

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To God be all the glory. Amen.

Boon-Sing Poh,  
Kuala Lumpur, December 2018. (Amended, February 2020.)



**Part I**

**THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF  
MISSIONS**





# One

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## INTRODUCTION

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Typically, books on Church History would cover the subject by breaking it into the following periods: (i) from Christ to Constantine (AD 31/33-300); (ii) from Constantine to Charlemagne (AD 300-800); (iii) from Charlemagne to Martin Luther (AD 800-1500); (iv) the Reformation and Puritanism (1500-1700); (v) Revivals and Missions (1700-1900); (vi) the Modern period (1900-2000). The periods might be named differently and the termini of each period might be further refined, but such a breakdown is generally recognised and accepted. To be noted is that the Modern period is still being written, the perspective and emphases given depending on the theological and ecclesiastical affiliation of the writers. The period before it ended with vibrant missionary activities. William Carey (1761-1834), who has been called ‘the Father of Modern Missions’, inspired many to commit their lives to missions. The Particular Baptist missionary body that was formed to send him and his colleagues to India inspired the formation of other missionary organisations on both sides of the Atlantic. This was followed by the activities of missionaries including Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) in Burma, Henry Martyn (1781-1812) in India and Persia, Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) in China, John Paton (1824-1907) in the New Hebrides, and others.

The revival of interest in Reformed theology in the 1960’s to the present has aroused a renewed interest in missions. In the training of preachers and missionaries, the Reformed Baptists (as the Particular Baptists are called today) have relied heavily on books written by

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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the Reformed writers of other communions. At the same time, the Neo-Evangelicals and the New Calvinists have been actively writing on various subjects, including on missiology. A number of them would call themselves "Reformed" when, in reality, they are Calvinistic in soteriology and have come to appreciate the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, without embracing the fulness of Reformed doctrine and practice. Their views on missions are coloured by the pragmatism of the Modern Church Growth movement and the subjectivism of the Charismatic movement. While not decrying any value in their contributions – for a number of them wrote from sacrificial experience in the mission field – is there not a place to contribute to missiology from a Reformed Baptist perspective? The Scripture will be our sole authority in this endeavour, illustrated by experience on the ground and observations made in pioneering situations. The Modern period (1900-2000) will have to be traversed to arrive at the beginning of the Postmodern/post-Christendom period where we are now. The framework for discussion on missions must arise from a biblical basis of missions.

### 1.1 Modernism And Missions

#### *In the East*

The period 1900 to 1930 was a tumultuous one throughout the world. The political, social and religious planes seemed to intersect during that period, producing upheavals. If the Reformation of the 16th century was a major earthquake of scale 7.5, the period 1900 to 1930 may be regarded as a major aftershock. (Incidentally, 1930 was the year when the United States seismologist Charles Richter invented the Richter Scale for measuring earthquakes.) In the Far East, the revolutionary activities of Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) against the decadent Qing (Manchu) Dynasty culminated in the proclamation of the Republic of China on 1 January 1912. This was the forerunner to the People's Republic of China, proclaimed on 1 October 1949 by Mao Zedong (1893-1976). Sun established bases in Tokyo, Singapore, and Penang among the overseas Chinese in his activities. When the Communist Party led by Mao gained the ascendancy, Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) who was leading the Kuomintang Party founded by Sun Yat-sen retreated to the island of Taiwan to estab-

### 1.1. Modernism And Missions

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lish his base there. Sun Yat-sen was a professing Christian, and so was Chiang Kai-shek.

In the martial arts world, Huo Yuanjia was a towering figure of recent years who managed to unite experts of various fighting styles under the roof of the Chin Woo (Jingwu) Athletic Association in Shanghai, in 1910. A new age of openness to the sharing of knowledge in the martial arts began. Branches of Chin Woo were opened throughout Southeast Asia and has spread throughout the world. After the Second World War, Japan exported its brands of martial arts (Karate, Jujitsu, Judo, and Aikido) to the West, followed by South Korea which exported Taekwondo, Hapkido, and Tangsoodo. All these originated from, or were heavily influenced by, the many styles of Chinese fighting arts. The martial arts took the West by storm. Today, various styles of Chinese Kungfu (martial arts) are in vogue, after Bruce Lee (1940-1973) popularised it through film. The martial arts constituted an important strand undergirding the ethos of Eastern peoples, until recent days when economy and education overshadowed it. Many missionaries and native Christians in China died in the hands of martial arts exponents in the Boxer Rebellion of 1899 to 1901. The highest loss among the missionary agencies was sustained by the China Inland Mission (later Overseas Missionary Fellowship, then OMF International) when 58 adult missionaries and 21 children were martyred in 1900 (Glover, 1990).

From 1907 to 1910 a great spiritual revival came upon the church in Korea (Blair & Hunt, 1977). Presbyterian missionaries had laboured long in that land, at that time undivided into North and South. The Holy Spirit swept thousands into the kingdom of God, in preparation for the suffering to be experienced from 1910 to 1945. When the Japanese occupied Korea in 1910, it was thought that political reasons were behind the rapid growth of the church. This led to severe persecution upon the church. The Japanese attacked Manchuria in 1931, followed by an all-out war on China in 1937. Shinto worship was imposed upon the people in all the Japanese occupied territories, upon pain of imprisonment and torture. Many Christians, including western missionaries, died as martyrs. After World War II, Korea split along the 38th Parallel. While the Christian faith is suppressed in North Korea, it has thrived in South Korea. Today, South Korea is said to have sent out more Christian missionaries than any country in the world.

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In India, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) began agitating against British rule by non-violent civil disobedience from 1915, after he returned from South Africa. Gandhi's vision of an independent India based on religious pluralism was challenged by the Muslims who wanted an independent state. When Britain granted independence to the country in 1947, it was split into a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan. Pakistan was to split when its eastern wing became independent Bangladesh in 1971. William Carey and his missionary colleagues who laboured to translate the Bible into over 30 Indian languages, agitated for the abolition of the *suttee* (the burning of a widow on her husband's pyre), and promoted education and culture, had unwittingly contributed to Indian nationalism. In their lifetime the missionaries saw only a handful of converts, estimated at 700 individuals, who became the firstfruit of more converts and more churches planted in later days. The extensive contribution of William Carey to India as a gospel minister, social reformer, educationist, botanist, and cultural anthropologist was acknowledged by the Indian government in 1993 by the publication of a commemorative stamp bearing his image, 200 years after his arrival.

### *In the West*

In the West, political polarisation between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire) and the Allied Powers (Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, Japan, and the United States) was creating tension. The assassination of the Austrian archduke, Franz Ferdinand and his wife, triggered off the First World War (1914-1918), in which over 16 million people died. After the Allied Powers won the war, the League of Nations was formed in 1919, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, to provide a forum for resolving international disputes. Portugal, Spain, Netherlands, France, and Britain had been exploring the world by sea and colonising nations from the mid-17th century. It was inevitable that the wars that started in the West affected the East. Missionaries had taken advantage of the trading routes and the access to the nations to evangelise, resulting in the common misunderstanding that they were an arm of colonisation and that Christianity is a western religion.

Alas, the League of Nations was unable to prevent the Second World War (1939-1945). Fascism (one-party dictatorship) began to

### 1.1. Modernism And Missions

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assert itself in Italy, militarism grew in Japan, Nazism (one-party dictatorship plus racism) reared its ugly head in Germany in the 1920's. The War began when Germany invaded Poland, with the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) aligned against the Allies (Britain, France, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India, the Soviet Union, China and the United States of America). The Second World War ended with the unconditional surrender of the Axis Powers. An estimated 80 million people died. The United Nations was formed to promote international co-operation and to create and maintain international order, with its headquarters in New York City, United States.

The ecclesiastical world was shaken by Theological Liberalism (Modernism) which started in Germany in the 19th century. Modernism questioned the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture by introducing critical studies of the Scripture texts. It denied the miracles and supernatural events of the Bible, e.g. the virgin birth of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, etc. It would seem that Darwin's Theory of Evolution was having an influence, not only in the social theory of Nazism, but also in the theology of the church. C. H. Spurgeon fought against Modernism in the Downgrade Controversy of 1887, but it continued to spread and infiltrated many churches and seminaries on both sides of the Atlantic. Between 1910 and 1930, the Evangelicals in the United States of America united to counter Modernism in what has been called the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy (or Evangelical-Liberal Clash). A series of books, called "The Fundamentals", were written by various conservative writers and sent out to pastors and seminary students, to counter the claims of Modernism. This was the period when the Chinese evangelist, John Sung (1901-1944) studied in Union Theological Seminary and had his faith wrecked, until he was saved by God's grace in 1927. In Britain, E. J. Poole-Connor contended against the inroads of Modernism and founded the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) in 1922.

The advance of Modernism was contained, but not eliminated, in the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-1930 (Poh, TR, 2017). It was followed by the breaking up of the old Evangelicals into three groups, viz. the Fundamentalists, the Reformed, and the Neo-Evangelicals. The Pentecostals arose at this time to form the fourth group. The Fundamentalists are characterised by a tendency to be over-

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literal in Bible interpretation, the practice of aggressive separation, holding tenaciously to Dispensational Premillennialism, cessation of the extraordinary gifts, and a lack of patience with those who do not hold to the King James Version of the Bible. The Reformed hold to the Five Points of Calvinism, the Five Sola's of the Reformation, Covenant Theology, cessationism, the value of a Confession of Faith, the primacy of preaching, and the Regulative Principle of Worship. The Neo-Evangelicals have a tendency to be ecumenical-minded, emphasise social concerns, are non-cessationist, are open to contemporary worship and the Modern Church Growth approach to missions, and are Postmodernist in outlook. The Pentecostal movement evolved into the Charismatic movement in the 1960's to influence other denominations with its non-cessationism, its emphasis on subjective experiences at the expense of propositional truths, and the practice of contemporary worship. After the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-1930, cross-overs took place when individuals changed convictions while churches seceded, a phenomenon (the Evangelical Realignment) that continues to this day.

### 1.2 Reformed Theology And Missions

A revival of interest in Reformed theology took place from about 1960, when Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) in Britain called upon individuals and churches to separate from compromised churches and denominations (Hewlett, 2016). Not surprisingly, this new interest in Reformed theology spread to North America due to the centuries-old ties across the Atlantic. Accompanying the revived interest in Reformed theology was an interest in missions. Since then, missions conferences have been organised and practical efforts have been made to send out missionaries and to support nationals in church planting. Despite the attempts to be involved in missions, it remains a matter of regret that a holistic view of missions has not emerged, resulting in sporadic and piecemeal approaches.

In Reformed circles, J. H. Bavinck's "An Introduction to the Science of Missions" has been a classic. The author is not to be confused with his uncle, Herman Bavinck of "Reformed Dogmatics" fame. Sadly, this valuable book on missions which was first published in 1954 (the English version in 1960) is not known to many today, being

## 1.2. Reformed Theology And Missions

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treated as somewhat dated. No doubt, not all issues are explored and newer issues have arisen since its publication, but it may be contended that the content is of abiding relevance. It provides a strong biblical foundation to the understanding of missions, without claiming to have said the last word on the subject, especially from the practical point of view.

In the 1960's Liberation Theology, notably from South America, coloured missions and influenced the ecumenical movement, including the World Council of Churches and the Lausanne Movement. Liberation Theology, as propagated by Latin American Roman Catholics, emphasised social concern for the poor and the political liberation of the oppressed. It was picked up and echoed by Neo-Evangelicals, including the likes of Ron Snider and John Stott, in the 1970's. The Lausanne Movement, headed by men including Billy Graham and John Stott, encouraged concerted world evangelisation of "unreached peoples" by ecumenical partnership, social actions, and the preaching of a minimalist gospel to avoid disruption to unity among its proponents.

Around the same time, the Modern Church Growth movement came into prominence. The first leaders were Donald McGavran, Robert Schuller and Peter Wagner. They have produced a new generation of leaders, including the well-known Rick Warren who published the best-seller, "The Purpose Driven Church" (Warren, 1995). The Modern Church Growth movement claims that every healthy local church must be growing numerically, that the 'felt-needs' of the people should determine the strategy of the church, and that the local church should be popular with the world. Words and expressions such as 'contextualisation', 'redemptive analogies', 'homogeneous units', 'cell groups', 'people movements', 'felt-needs', 'seeker-sensitive approaches', 'growing the church', and 'the missional church' are characteristics of the movement. Notable missionary-writers such as Don Richardson who wrote "Peace Child" (Richardson, 1974), and David Sitton who wrote "To Every Tribe With Jesus" (Sitton, 2005) have had considerable influence on the study of missions.

As we enter the Postmodern age in the 21st century, new issues confront us (Wells, 1993). Relativism, which was pervasive in all cultures and suppressed during the Modern age, is making a comeback in opposition to objective certainty. Individualism is insisted upon in opposition to accepted norms. Youthful zeal is glorified

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in opposition to the wisdom of age. Pluralism is favoured while monism/homogeneity is frowned upon ("agreeing to disagree", "inter-faith dialogues", "gender equality", "hate-crime laws"). Popular opinion is regarded as more important than expert knowledge ("the customer is always right", "everything can be found on the internet", "Dr. Google must be right"). These characteristics of Postmodernism are reflected in the importance placed on reader-comments in blogs and webpages, the approaches adopted in "growing the church", the pursuit of "felt-needs" in outreach, and the emphasis on personal satisfaction in worship at the expense of reverence for God. In this Postmodern atmosphere has arisen the New Calvinist movement comprising those who call themselves Reformed simply because they hold to the Five-Points of Calvinism while advocating contemporary worship, the non-cessation of the extraordinary gifts (called 'continuationism', as opposed to 'cessationism'), and the pursuit of personal gratification. The Sovereign Grace Churches which claim to be Reformed and continuationist have been active in missions. The leaders who have had a significant influence upon the New Calvinist movement include John Piper who wrote "Let the Nations be Glad" (Piper, 2010), Allen Thomson and Tim Keller who wrote "Redeemer Church Planting Manual" (Thomson & Keller, 2002), and Wayne Grudem whose "Systematic Theology" is widely used (Grudem, 1994).

### 1.3 Towards a Reformed Baptist Perspective

The revival of interest in Reformed theology from the 1960's occurred mostly among the Presbyterians and the Baptists, until in recent days when it began to influence other communions. The Reformed Baptists trace their origin to the Particular Baptists of the 17th century in Britain. Older churches have been revived and newer churches have been planted, the two streams merging into an international Reformed Baptist movement. Understandably, the process of recovering biblical teaching and practice has not been without its trials and tribulations. Mistakes were made, differences in emphasis were encountered, and polarisation around personalities took place. Some individuals and churches were ahead of their time, others were slow to grasp issues, and yet others veered away from the



### 1.3. Towards a Reformed Baptist Perspective

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norm because of external influences or human weaknesses. By and large, the Reformed Baptists constitute a coherent movement of autonomous churches that are in fellowship with one another to varying degrees, working towards recovering a confessional Christianity that is both vibrant and modest, and upholding the spirit of *semper reformanda* (always being reformed).

The Reformed Baptists have continued the mission-mindedness of their spiritual forebears. The Particular Baptists of the 17th century were well-known for their evangelism and church-planting efforts. William Carey, ‘the Father of Modern Missions’, and many other missionaries arose from their ranks, spurred on by the Great Awakening from the 1730’s. The revivals of the following centuries led to co-operation in missions between churches of different denominations, accompanied by an emphasis on social concerns. While commendable in themselves, these caused a loss in doctrinal integrity among the churches. We have seen how Modernism infiltrated and led astray many churches from the 19th century, leading to the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-1930, and the subsequent Evangelical Realignment which continues to today. With the revival of interest in Reformed theology in the 1960’s, the Reformed Baptists are again poised to be on the forefront of missions. It is here that a holistic understanding on missions is needed to give direction to the churches and to continue with the momentum of missions. Attempts are being made to formulate a biblical missiology but haziness still prevails. Bavinck’s book (Bavinck, 1960) has been about the most cogent articulation on the subject from the Reformed fold, but none will say it has exhausted the subject. Studies on missions have range from the highly academic, e.g. (Hesselgrave, 1979), (Rooy, 2006), to the popularly practical, e.g. (Joslin, 1987), (Sitton, 2005). It is always hard to strike the balance between these two extremes (with no negative connotation meant). Cheesman seems to have accomplished that admirably (Cheesman, 1989), and so have Lane (Lane, 1990). Our approach will have to be convincingly biblical, demonstrating a keen sensitivity to historical, cultural and political factors but not succumbing to the pragmatism and human wisdom of the most experienced missionaries. While we may learn from the contributions of brethren from other communions, have we no contribution to make in the field of missiology?

We contend that the practice of missions (*praxis*) must not be

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separated from its theological and hermeneutical bases. Anything without a strong foundation will be unstable and prone to being "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). We, therefore, begin with 'The Biblical Basis Of Missions' in the first part of this book, before proceeding to the second part, which is 'The Practice Of Missions'. Both parts reveal that missions has an end, or eternal purpose, which should condition the practice of missions. The third part, therefore, covers 'The Prospects Of Missions'. The subject matters under each of these parts are reviewed here to facilitate our study.

### *The root*

Reformed theology encompasses a robust Covenant Theology. Covenant Theology, as developed from the Reformation of the 16th century, diverged into two strands – the Baptist strand and the Paedobaptist strand. Covenant Theology provides the unifying understanding of the revelation of God in the Bible, stretching from eternity past into eternity future. It concerns the unfolding and fulfilment of God's eternal plan of salvation for the elect. It constitutes the root from which missions arises. The imagery of the root is provided by Romans 11:16-18,

For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

The olive tree is used as a picture of God's covenant people – spiritual Israel (as in contrast to natural Israel). The elect already gathered in, from the Old Testament period, are regarded as "the firstfruit", while the tribes of (natural) Israel are regarded as the branches that were broken off. The Gentile believers are from various "branches" of a wild olive tree who are grafted to the cultivated olive tree. All God's elect – whether Jews or Gentiles – partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. They are supported by the root, which is God's eternal plan of salvation. A hardening has come upon

### 1.3. Towards a Reformed Baptist Perspective

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natural Israel, while the gospel is preached among the nations. As the elect among the nations are called into God's kingdom, natural Israel is provoked to jealousy so as to seek salvation in Christ. When the full number of the elect among the nations are saved, the full number of the elect among the Jews will be saved. In that way ("and so", not "and then", Rom. 11:26), spiritual Israel (God's elect from all nations) will be saved. *Missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God.*

#### *The trunk*

In the Bible, trees are used to represent earthly kingdoms which rose and fell (Ezek. 31:3, 10-13; Dan. 4:20-22). Israel and Judah fell, but from the roots would grow a Branch (Isa. 11:1-2). This is the Messiah who would set up God's kingdom which shall never be destroyed, that shall consume all worldly kingdoms, and it shall stand forever (Dan. 2:44). We have seen that this kingdom is represented by the olive tree in Romans 11:16-18. The Lord also uses the grapevine to portray the relationship of believers to Himself. John 15:5-8 says,

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Whatever plant or tree is used to represent God's kingdom, Jesus Christ is obviously the trunk to which the branches are attached. The apostle Paul begins the epistle to the Ephesians with an overview of God's eternal purpose in the salvation of the elect, stretching from eternity past to eternity future (Eph. 1:3-14). All three Persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in this plan, as will be shown in the next chapter. The "mystery" of God's plan is now unfolded in history in the salvation of the elect from all the nations, "according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). The trinitarian God is invoked as the apostle prays for

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the Ephesian Christians to be "rooted and grounded in love", that they might "be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge" (Eph. 3:17-18). The salvation of the elect is rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, shown by His atoning death for His people. The Lord says, in John 12:23-26,

"The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."

Jesus Christ is the grain that fell into the ground and died, thereby producing much grain. He is now glorified. His disciples must abide in Him to produce much fruit. He will be with those who follow Him, for "where I am, there My servant will be also", just as He promises in Matthew 28:20, "and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." *Missions is grounded in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*The crown*

In John 14:16-17 we have,

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

Spiritual fruit would include godly attitudes (Gal. 5:22-23), righteous behaviour (Phil. 1:11), and praise to God (Heb. 13:15). In particular, it refers to leading others to faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:13-16). In the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt. 13:31-32), the seed grows into a tree, "so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches". The church will be a place of shelter to many weary souls. Put together, the branches, the fruit, and also the leaves (cf.

### 1.3. Towards a Reformed Baptist Perspective

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Rev. 22:2) – which together constitute the crown of the tree – refer to the founding of churches that are a blessing to many in the world. It will be shown that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is about the local church planting other local churches. We would need to ask why we have to carry out the Great Commission, how the task is to be carried out, and what sort of churches we want to plant. *Missions is crowned by the Great Commission.*

#### *The methodology and methods*

Once a strong biblical basis is established, we will be ready to proceed to the practice of missions. The right place to begin is the Great Commission itself, for built within itself is its own methodology, from which the methods are to be filled up by reference to other parts of Scripture. Believing in 'sola scriptura', the principles underlying the methods must be drawn out from Scripture, which can then be applied to the varied situations encountered on the ground. Regardless of whether it is urban outreach or pioneering in the jungles, the word of God is sufficient. Is it not the bane of modern missions that the gospel is deemed essential for salvation while the approach to missions is left to human wisdom and pragmatism? Of course, those who attempt to contextualise even the gospel message itself deserve the censure of all true Evangelicals. However, are not the methodology and methods of missions important as well? How serious are we in adhering to 'sola scriptura'?

#### *Consolidation and continuity*

We contend that the work of missions is incomplete without attempts being made to consolidate the gains and to prepare for the next generation to continue with the work. After all, do we not believe that the Great Commission is an abiding mandate until Jesus Christ returns to judge the world? Many would leave out this aspect of missions, treating it as belonging to the realm of Christian ministry. In fact, there are many who subconsciously limit the task of missions to the first element of the Great Commission, namely "going to make disciples of all the nations", ignoring the other two elements, namely of "baptising" and "teaching". It cannot be stated too strongly that the church without the vision for missions is a dying church. It might be a numerically big church, but it is a dying church. This unbroken chain of events – of the local church planting other churches – is to

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go on until the Lord returns. It is imperative that we give attention to consolidation and continuity in missions.

### *The flagship church*

Do we focus on planting more churches or should the focus be on the type of churches we wish to plant? Put another way, do we aim for quantity or for quality? As in many issues, the biblical answer is not an absolute one or the other. In this case, we go wrong by focusing only on local church growth or by focusing on planting many churches that are only Reformed Baptist in name. Rather, we should be planting more churches that are a model to other churches – in spirit, in doctrine, and in practice (Eph. 4:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:15). Churches should engage in reformation while being transformed by the word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. Reformed Baptists have wrestled over the propriety of forming regional associations of churches like what was done by their spiritual forebears – the Particular Baptists of the 17th and 18th centuries. It is proposed that networks of churches should be formed as a natural outcome of church planting efforts, led by the parent-church which may be referred to as the ‘flagship church’. The flagship church leads the way in the effort of constantly being reformed (*semper reformanda*), at the same time co-ordinating the missions effort and the mutual edification of the churches in the network.

### *The end of missions*

The *objective* of missions is the planting of local churches that continue to be sanctified by the Lord. The *end* of missions is the gathering of all the redeemed on the new earth, in the new heaven, to worship and serve God together with the angels (Rev. 21:1). The prospect of the new heaven and the new earth should condition missions, i.e. the manner by which the objective of missions is carried out. An Amillennial understanding of the book of Revelation helps us to see the certainty of *progress* in missions, despite the certainty of *hindrances* to missions, leading to the certainty of *success* in missions. These certainties lead to implications on the manner by which missions is to be carried out. Firstly, a generous attitude towards other Evangelicals in the work of missions is not only necessary but also beneficial and possible, while not compromising on our distinctive theology and denominational convictions. Secondly, the leadership

### 1.3. Towards a Reformed Baptist Perspective

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of ministers of the gospel in missions must not be overlooked, denied, or minimised while encouraging the involvement of the whole church. This contrasts with the clergy-laity distinction of the Orthodox churches (Roman Catholic, Egyptian Coptic, Syrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox) on the one hand, and the pluralistic tendency of much of modern missiology on the other. Thirdly, instead of the patchwork theology and empirical approach of the various missions movements, we would not budge from the authority and sufficiency of Scripture in determining the theory and practice of missions. Furthermore, we posit three aspects of missions that have been overlooked or under-emphasised, namely: (a) the certainty of spiritual decline and apostasy in the church; (b) the spiritual struggle that underlies the advance of God's kingdom on earth; and (c) the Christian hope. These aspects of missions explain and confront certain perceived trends in society better than the knee-jerk reactions of the various missions movements.

#### *Terminology*

We wish to be clear about the terminology used. We use the word "missions" in its plural form to refer to the task of fulfilling the Great Commission (much like the word "premises"). The singular form "mission" carries its many meanings as can be seen in any standard dictionary. 'Mission' is what we do or intend to do, while 'missions' is specific to the mandate the Lord has given to the church in Matthew 28:18-20, and the parallel passages. We may say, "The church has a *mission* to carry out *missions*." We may refer to the place of service as 'missions field' or 'mission field', depending on whether we are emphasising on the nature of the task or on the task to be accomplished. It is more common to use 'mission field' as it is easier on the tongue. God has a *purpose* for missions, which is to accomplish a certain *end* or *goal* in His plan of salvation. The *end* or *goal* of God's plan of salvation is accomplished in the New Testament age by the Great Commission which has an *objective*. The objective of the Great Commission is accomplished by *methods* and *principles* that constitute a *methodology*. The fulfilment of the Great Commission constitutes *missions*. God's *purpose* for missions, therefore, is to accomplish the *end* or *goal* of His plan of salvation, while the *methodology* is to accomplish the *objective* of missions leading to the *goal*. It will be shown that missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God,

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grounded in the atoning death of Christ, and crowned by the Great Commission. Missions has an objective, which is the planting of local churches. The objective consists of three sub-objectives which are the winning of souls to Christ (or evangelism), the founding of local churches, and the training of the disciples. The sub-objectives are integral to the main objective and cannot, therefore be called "secondary objectives". They are defined by the three elements of the Great Commission. The approach we adopt may be illustrated as in Figure 1.1.

### 1.4 Summary

Missions – i.e. the fulfilment of the Great Commission – may be compared to a sturdy tree, for the Lord has given the assurance that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against His church (Matt. 16:8). The tree has three main parts – the root, the trunk, and the crown. The biblical basis for missions consists of three strands of truth: (i) missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God; (ii) missions is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and (iii) missions is crowned by the Great Commission. Each strand needs to be expounded, and the implications drawn out.

The practice of missions builds upon the biblical basis of missions. The Great Commission itself provides its own methodology and points to the biblical methods. The methods or, rather, the principles underlying the methods, may be applied to all situations encountered on the mission field. Attention should be given also to the consolidation and continuation of missions.

The end of missions conditions the practice of missions. The churches we found should be reforming while being transformed by God's word in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our approach to missions should not be pragmatically influenced by trends in society but rather be biblically conditioned. The Scripture alone is our authority in the doctrine and practice of missions.

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## 1.4. Summary

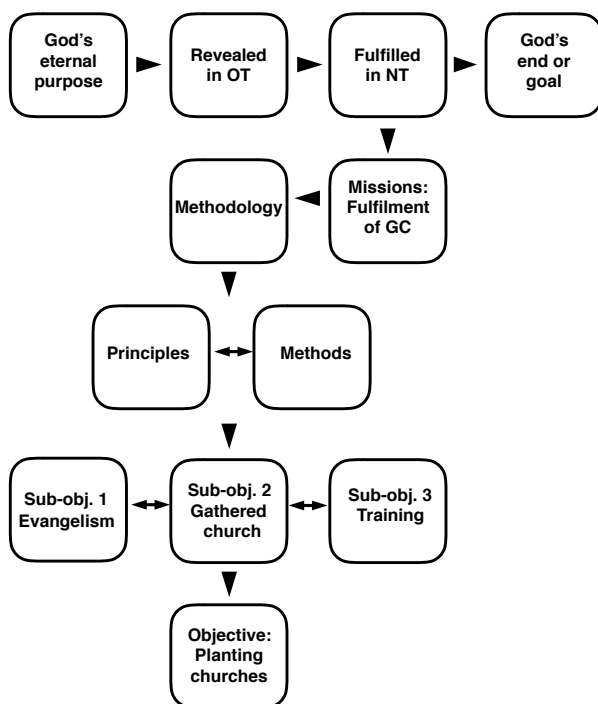


Fig. 1.1: Approach Towards Studying Missions

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## Two

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# THE ROOT: GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

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When Charles Simeon (1759-1836) lay dying in Cambridge with his eyes closed for many hours, he suddenly said to his friend, "If you want to know what I am doing, go and look in the first chapter of Ephesians from the third to the fourteenth verses; there you will see what I am enjoying now (Moule, 1965: 174)." Charles Simeon was an able preacher who influenced many lives in Britain and, indirectly, many lives on the mission fields. His recommendation of chaplains was sought and acted upon by the East India Company. He was a good friend of Henry Martyn (1781-1812), the well-known missionary to India and Persia (now Iran). Taking the cue from Charles Simeon, we will begin our study of Covenant Theology with Ephesians 1:3-14. As will be shown, Covenant Theology lies at the base of missions, which is the execution of the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 and other parts of Scripture.

## 2.1 God's Eternal Purpose

### *Overview*

Ephesians 1:3-14 gives the sweep of God's plan of salvation for His chosen people from eternity past to eternity future. There are three sections, each ending with "to the praise of His glory" (6, 12, 14). The first section focuses on the role of God the Father who pre-

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destined the salvation of His people (3-6). It is revealed that the election, redemption, and adoption of God's people in Christ will redound in praise to the glory of God for His grace (6).

The second section focuses on the role of the Son of God in redemption. It is by His blood, i.e. by His death, that redemption is accomplished, resulting in forgiveness of sins, all according to God's abundance of grace to His people (7-8). It has been revealed to the apostles the mystery of God's will, that "in the dispensation of the fullness of the times" – that is, in this gospel age (cf. Heb. 1:1-2) – all things that are in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, will be gathered together. This is all "according to the counsel of His will" (11), i.e. according to God's plan from "before the foundation of the world" (4). The redemption of the elect is to be "to the praise of His glory" (12).

In the third section (13-14), the focus is on the role of the Holy Spirit. Those who have heard the gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ are sealed by the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell in them. The 'sealing' conveys the ideas derived from a document or letter that is sealed, showing; (i) its authority; (ii) its authenticity; (iii) its security, and (iv) its ownership. The elect on earth have been purchased by Christ and will arrive safely in heaven to enjoy their inheritance in Christ (cf. Rom. 8:16-17). This will be "to the praise of His glory" (14).

Two issues of importance must be settled in the discussion on missions: first, what is the end, or goal, of God's plan of salvation, and second, what is the 'mystery' that had been revealed to the apostles? The answers to these questions, and failure to provide convincing answers for them, have implications on the objectives of missions, the motives and motivation of missions, the methods and methodology adopted, as well as on other issues.

In seeking to answer the first question, what is the end or goal of God's eternal plan, we note that the salvation of the elect is due to God's grace and initiative. The manifestation of the glory of God is the supreme end of redemption (cf. 3:21; 1 Cor. 10:31). The elect and all the good angels will be singing praises to God in heaven because of the wonder of His grace shown in the salvation of undeserving sinners (10 cf. Rev. 5:8-14). God is glorified not so much in the praises sung by His creatures than by the salvation of undeserving sinners by His grace. The singing is the expression of gratitude

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and wonder. The singing does not, and cannot, add glory to God who is already perfect. The worship by His creatures is the response to the manifestation of God's glory in the salvation of the elect. The response of the saved is not to be confused with the end, or goal, of salvation which is to manifest the glory of God in the salvation of the undeserving. We emphasise this because there are those who make the worship of God in heaven the end of missions, thus shifting the focus to a subjective activity from the objective salvation of the elect (Piper, 2010). Similarly, they would shift the objective of missions which is the planting of local churches, made up of saved and sanctified people, to the personal enjoyment of God of those saved (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 6:13, 16, 19; 12:1; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:1-2, 27).

Another way of putting it is that God takes pleasure in His children – the elect, who are the redeemed of the Lord – regardless of whether they pray, or sing praises to Him. It is expected of them to pray and to sing to His praise, but He takes pleasure in them simply because they are His and are with Him. A father is pleased simply because he knows that his children are well, have ready access to him, and are safely gathered together on appointed occasions. The apostle Paul says to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:8), "So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us." The apostle says, in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Worship is part of, and probably the main, activity engaged in by the elect in heaven, together with all the good angels (Rev. 4, 5, 7). We are told in Revelation 7:9-10, '...a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"' The redeemed people of God worship together with the angels in heaven. They serve God in other ways as well. Indeed, all that they do in heaven will be acts of worship to God. There will be no more marriage in heaven. We will still recognise one another, and

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the fellowship between us will be lifted to a level beyond what we have experienced, or are capable of understanding, while on earth. There are many mansions in heaven, and there will be a place for everyone (John 14:1-4). The Parable of the Talents suggests that there will be responsibilities assigned to us in heaven, of varying degrees: "His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord' (Matt. 25:21, 23)", "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away (Matt. 25:29 cf. Rev. 22:12)."

Coming back to Ephesians 1:3-14, we note that after declaring God's eternal purpose (1:3-14), Paul proceeds to expound on how that purpose unfolds in history. We are saved by the same mighty power of God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father with authority over all creation. This is covered in Chapter 1:15-23. In Chapter 2:1-10, Paul shows that God is rich in mercy and love, saving undeserving sinners by grace through faith in Christ, so that we share in Christ's inheritance. To be noted is the statement (2:7), "...that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The end of missions is the manifestation of the glory of God in His grace, and not the worship offered by the redeemed. The salvation of the undeserving, the begetting of sons from all the nations, manifests the glory of God (cf. 2 Thess.1:12; 2:14).

In Chapter 2:11-22 the mystery that had been revealed to the apostles is explained briefly (cf. 3:3). The Gentiles who were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise" are now brought near by the blood of Christ (2:11-13). The same gospel is preached to "those who were near", viz. the Jews, so that the elect among them will be saved by the same method (17 cf. 11). Together, Jewish and Gentile believers become members of the household of God, who grow together into a holy temple of the Lord, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (19-22). In Chapter 3:1-13, Paul explains that this was the mystery revealed to himself, the apostles, and the prophets, viz. "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (6). Paul has been sent to preach to the Gentiles,

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"to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places..." (10-11). Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was to fulfil in part the manifold wisdom of God in bringing the Gentile and Jewish elect together as the church of Jesus Christ. This mystery is explained at length by the same apostle in Chapters 9 to 11 of Romans.

As the apostle proceeds with the unfolding of God's eternal plan of salvation in the gospel age, he is lifted up in ecstasy, saying (Eph. 3:14-19),

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Like an orchestra playing a masterpiece (perhaps like Handel's Messiah), the crescendo is reached. Our hearts are lifted up like Paul's, all our emotions have been bundled together, ready for that grand finale...(Eph. 3:20-21),

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

We can imagine the drums beaten with the last bang, the cymbals clang a last time, the stringed instruments that had been sawn with increasing vigour ending with the last drawn out note. All the members of the orchestra, including the conductor, freeze. There is deathly silence. All our emotions are spent. Our hearts glow with euphoric satisfaction. The doctrinal part of the epistle is finished, to be followed by the practical part. For our purpose, we note that the end of missions is the manifestation of God's glory in the church – by

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Christ Jesus, to all generations ahead of us, until we are all gathered on the new earth, in the new heavens, to serve God – forever and ever.

### *The Covenant of Redemption*

We are now ready to formulate the principles involved in the salvation of God's chosen people from eternity past to eternity future. The terms "eternity past" and "eternity future" make sense to us as creatures who are limited, and confined, by time. God created all things, including the concept of time. He is Himself not bound by time. The Bible reveals that all official transactions, whether between God and men or between men and men, were carried out by means of covenants – 'berith' in the Old Testament, and 'diatheke' in the New Testament. A covenant may be defined as a formal agreement between two or more parties, to bind themselves together for mutual good, in which are attached the terms and conditions (rights and obligations, demands and promises) agreed upon by the parties concerned. In the case of the covenants made by God with men, He takes the initiative and He exercises His right as the Creator to impose the terms and conditions. The divine initiative and the right to impose the terms and conditions upon man are expressed in the 1689 Confessions as follows (1689:7:1),

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures [creatures capable of reasoning] do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life, but by some (a) voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express, by way of covenant.

(a) Luke 17:10; Job 35:7, 8

The eternal purpose of God in the salvation of His people is described by the Covenant of Redemption which stretches from eternity past to eternity future. It is also known as the Eternal Covenant. God's eternal purpose of salvation did not stop with the agreement made in eternity past between the persons of the Trinity. By definition, expressions such as "eternal purpose" and "predestination" must stretch from eternity past to eternity future. In Ephesians 1:3-14 we saw the divine plan of salvation stretching from eternity past to eternity future. We saw that it encompasses the calling in of the



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elect by the gospel and the building up of the church of Jesus Christ, which comprises elect from among the Jews as well as from among the Gentile nations. The Covenant of Redemption, therefore, encompasses the Covenant of Grace which is the unfolding of God's eternal purpose in history.

If the Covenant of Redemption is conceived as stopping where the Covenant of Grace begins in history, how would we describe the salvation of the elect once the Covenant of Grace ends with the judgement of the world? Is there another covenant made between God and the glorified saints in heaven? Such a covenant has never been postulated by anyone and is not found in Scripture. Furthermore, is the Covenant of Grace different in essence from the Covenant of Redemption? If it were, the Covenant of Redemption is grotesquely broken, with the Covenant of Grace joining the parts in eternity past with that in eternity future. Or, the Covenant of Grace will have to be conceived as running parallel with the Covenant of Redemption in history, since they are different in essence. The plain teaching of Scripture is that the two covenants are of the same essence and, indeed, they are one covenant with only that part that emerges in history being called the Covenant of Grace. The 1689 Confession of Faith expresses this truth as follows (1689:7:3),

This Covenant [of Grace]... is founded in that (\*) eternal covenant transaction, that was between the Father and the Son, about the redemption of the elect...

(\*) 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2

The 1689 Confession of Faith mentions only the Father and the Son who were engaged in the Covenant of Redemption. However, the two Scripture references, viz. 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2, only show that the covenant was made in eternity, "before time began", without revealing all the Persons involved. We are told in John 10:26-30,

But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to

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Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.

Eternal life is given by the Son through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. The Holy Spirit is promised to all who believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:9-11; Ezek. 36:26-27). Since the Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son, the covenant made in eternity must have involved the Holy Spirit as well. We are told in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14,

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have seen in Ephesians 1:3-14 that all three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved in our salvation. The plan of our salvation was made in eternity past. All three persons of the Trinity work in harmony with one another, each having His respective role. The Father chose certain people to be saved and gave them to the Son. The Son of God agreed to come to earth to redeem them by His death on the cross. The Holy Spirit agreed to apply the saving benefits of the Son to the elect to effect their salvation. The Holy Spirit is also present in heaven in all His fullness, described as "the seven Spirits of God" in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

The Covenant of Redemption spans human history, and will be completed in eternity future, when all the redeemed of the Lord are gathered together after the judgement of the last day. The present universe will be melted down by fire, and the new heavens and the new earth will be created (2 Pet. 3:10-13). The plural word "heavens" is used in 2 Peter 3:10 according to the Greek concept to include the air around us, the outer space, and the invisible dwelling place of God. Heaven where God dwells is already qualitatively perfect and incapable of being improved upon. It is in God's plan, however, that His dwelling place should include the renewed universe in which is the new earth, where righteousness dwells. Heaven will be on earth, and earth will be in heaven. All the redeemed of the Lord

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will be living on the new earth, which is part of the new universe. The gathering together of the elect on the new earth is called "the marriage of the Lamb". There will be tremendous rejoicing and celebration, known as "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:6-10).

The Lamb's bride is described in Revelation 21:9-14,

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The bride of the Lamb is the church, as we learn from Ephesians 5:22-33, which will be perfect and complete in heaven. The perfection and completeness of the bride is represented by the heavenly city of Jerusalem which is cubic in dimensions. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel represent the elect of God of the Old Testament period, while the names of the twelve apostles represent the elect of the New Testament period. It should be noted that the twelve apostles – not the twelve tribes of Israel – form the foundation of the city. The Scripture, consisting of both the New Testament and the Old Testament, reveals Christ as the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19-22; Matt. 16:18). Worship in the Old Testament was visible, consisting of various rituals such as the offering of animal sacrifices and the cleansing rites. The coming of Christ fulfilled the symbolism of the Old Testament types (Heb. 9, 10), so that believers today worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). The relationship between the New Testament and the Old Testament has been well-

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described thus: "The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is by the New revealed" (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 45-47).

In heaven, none of God's elect will be missing. This has been promised by the Lord (John 6:37, 39), and is a promise of the gospel (Rom. 8:38-39; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The toil and tears, sorrow and pain of earth will be no more for (Rev. 21:3-4),

"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

The blessedness of the redeemed in heaven is described in Revelation 22:1-5,

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

What becomes of the non-elect – the reprobates and the apostates? Their end has been made clear already (Matt. 7:21-23; 25:30, 41; Heb. 6:8; Gal. 5:21-21). The last traces of God's image upon them would be erased as they are consigned to the eternal suffering of hell. We are told in Revelation 21:7-8,

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the

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lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

The eternal state of believers is stupendously blessed, while that of the unbelievers is horrendously awful. The Covenant of Redemption is to be considered from its beginning in eternity past to its end in eternity future.

## 2.2 The Covenant Of Grace Revealed

### *Progressively revealed*

The Covenant of Redemption is one, stretching from eternity past into eternity future, the substance of which is the eternal purpose of God in the salvation of His chosen people. That portion of the Covenant of Redemption that emerges in history is called the Covenant of Grace, the Head of which is Christ. As the name implies, salvation is of grace, i.e. by God showing His mercy to those who are undeserving, through faith in Christ. As a covenant, there are terms and conditions attached, but these are the concomitants of a true covenant, without which it would cease to be a covenant. It is, therefore, inappropriate to regard a covenant as conditional or unconditional. A covenant is different from a contract, which also has terms and conditions attached, but the nature and purpose of which are different from those of a covenant. The terms and conditions of a contract are legally binding, whereas those of a covenant are morally binding. A contract is concerned with employment, tenancy, and sales-and-purchases, while a covenant is concerned with relationship. The Covenant of Grace consists of two basic stages – that of revelation, known as the Old Covenant, and that of fulfilment, known as the New Covenant. Furthermore, the Covenant of Grace includes two aspects – the temporal or ritual aspect, and the evangelical or spiritual aspect – in both the revelatory and the fulfilled stages. In the Old Covenant, the temporal aspect involved the giving of the law of God, of land, of descendants, and of ritual worship – all to give form and direction to God's people, while typifying spiritual realities of the New Covenant, which was still future. The evangelical aspect consisted of promises – of salvation by grace rather than by works, of the coming of a Saviour for sinners, and of the permanent indwelling of Holy Spirit in the believer.

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The Old Covenant consists of various stages of progressive revelation concerning the New Covenant, with each stage centred around an individual, viz. Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. These stages may be called dispensations, which should not be confused with the teaching of Dispensationalism. The stages, may also be regarded as different administrations of the Covenant of Grace, but should not be confused with the idea of administrations used in Paedobaptist Covenant Theology. Due to the potential confusion arising from the use of these terms, we avoid them and choose instead to call each stage the Adamic Covenant, the Noahic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, and the Mosaic Covenant. The Adamic Covenant was primarily a Covenant of Works made with Adam and his posterity, with himself as the head, and secondarily a revelation of the Covenant of Grace which has Christ as its Head. The Abrahamic Covenant was passed down to Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob. The Mosaic Covenant has a number of subordinate covenants, each progressively revealing the New Covenant – the Sinaitic Covenant (Exod. 19-24; Deut. 5-28) which revealed the temporal aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, the Moabite Covenant (Deut. 29-30) which revealed the evangelical aspect of the Mosaic Covenant, the Aaronic Covenant (Num. 25:10-13) which typified the High-Priesthood of Christ, and the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 23:5; Jer. 33:21, 25-26) which typified the kingship of Christ.

### *The Adamic Covenant*

The revelation of the New Covenant in the Old Covenant was made in stages, gradually, and cumulatively. This revelation was first made with Adam as the representative head of the human race (Rom. 5:12-14). The temporal aspect of the Adamic Covenant was revealed in the Garden of Eden before the entrance of sin. The 1689 Confession states this as follows (1689:19:1 cf. 4:2; 6:1),

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience, (a) written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him, and his posterity to personal entire exact and perpetual (b) obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and (c) threatened death upon the breach of it, and indued him with the power and ability to keep

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it.

(a) Gen. 1:27; Eccl. 7:29; (b) Rom. 10:5; (c) Gal. 3:10-12

Perfect obedience to God's law was required to remain in fellowship with God, and to enjoy the greater blessedness that would have been unfolded in the mandate given to Adam had he not sinned: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Gen. 1:28)." The growing blessedness of fellowship with God was symbolised by the tree of life which was present in Eden together with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9; 3:22). While forbidden to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam was allowed to eat from every tree, including the tree of life, until driven out of Eden (Gen. 2:16; 3:22). Although the word 'covenant' is not used, this has all the characteristics of a covenant and has been called the Covenant of Works. Eternal life was to be attained by human effort, viz. that of obeying the law of God. Adam failed to remain in his state of innocence, upon the instigation of Satan who appeared as a serpent, thus bringing the whole human race into sin and the condemnation of the law. Death entered, involving the breaking of fellowship with God, physical death, and eternal damnation in hell. The Covenant of Works has never been abrogated, as is recognised in Chapter 19:1 of the 1689 Confession, quoted above. In Galatians 4:21-31, the apostle Paul contrasts the Covenant of Grace with the Covenant of Works by using the two women (Sarah and Hagar), the two sons (Isaac and Ishmael), and the two places (the Jerusalem above, or heaven, and the earthly Jerusalem, or Mount Sinai). Those who attempt to be saved by keeping God's law must keep it perfectly to attain to eternal life. This, however, is no longer possible after the Fall, since we are guilty in the sin of Adam, and we have inherited the sinful nature of Adam and Eve which makes the perfect keeping of the law no more possible. Romans 3:20 says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

The evangelical aspect of the Adamic Covenant was revealed after the Fall in the "proto-evangel" in which was declared that a Seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent while the serpent

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would bruise His heel. Christ, by His death and resurrection, has destroyed the power of the devil by conquering his last stronghold, which is death (Heb. 2:14-15). 1 Corinthians 15:56-57 says, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 says, "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." The 'all' who are made alive in Christ are the elect. Adam was the representative head of the fallen human race, while Christ is the representative Head of the redeemed race (Rom. 5:12, 17-19). Although the words of the proto-evangel were directed at Satan, Adam and Eve were present in that judicial setting where God was the Judge. The words applied to Adam and Eve, as much as they applied to Satan. After all, it was the Seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent's head. The 1689 Confession recognises the proto-evangel as a revelation of the gospel by stating, in Chapters 20 and 7 (1689:20:1; 7:2, 3),

The Covenant of Works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give forth the promise of Christ, (a) the Seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect, and begetting in them faith and repentance; in this promise, the (b) gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and therein effectual, for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

(a) Gen. 3:15; (b) Rev. 13:8)

Moreover, man having brought himself (b) under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a Covenant of Grace wherein he freely offers unto sinners, (c) life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and (d) promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. (b) Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 3:20, 21; (c) Rom. 8:3; Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:16; (d) Ezek. 36:26, 27; John 6:44, 45; Psalm 110:3

This covenant is revealed in the gospel; first to Adam in the promise of salvation by the (e) Seed of the woman,



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and afterwards by farther steps, until (f) discovery thereof was completed in the New Testament...

(e) Gen. 3:15; (f) Heb. 1:1

Adam and Eve were saved by believing in the promised Saviour – the Seed of the woman. Their sins would be atoned for by the death of the promised Seed, as indicated by the animals that were killed by God for the covering of their nakedness immediately after the pronouncement of the proto-evangel (Gen. 3:21). All this took place in the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve were expelled from there. To the law of God given in the Garden of Eden was added the system of animal sacrifices made familiar in Israel in later days through Moses. That was why, not long afterwards, God accepted the offering of Abel for it involved the laying down of the life of an animal and the shedding of its blood (Gen. 4:3-5). That was why Cain's offering was rejected as it did not involve the right sacrifice. From Adam to Moses, the law of God was written in the hearts and passed down orally (Rom. 5:13-14). We are not surprised, therefore, to read that Noah built an altar to offer up burnt offerings after the flood (Gen. 8:20). For the same reason there was the observance of the Sabbath rest when Israel gathered manna in the wilderness, even before the Ten Commandments were given to the nation at Sinai (Exod. 16:22-23).

The temporal aspect of the Adamic Covenant was made up of a number of elements, viz. the law, many descendants, and the system of worship involving the offering of animal sacrifices. The temporal aspect was necessary to give form to the evangelical aspect, which consisted of the promises. The law restrained the people from sin, exposed their sinfulness, and drove them to seek salvation by believing in the coming Saviour (Rom. 7:7; Gal. 3:23, 24). From the many descendants of the woman would come the Saviour of the world, and the elect who would be saved by faith (Gen. 3:15). The system of animal sacrifices pointed to the necessity of the death of the Saviour to make atonement for sins (Heb. 10:9-10). In the covenant made with Abraham, the temporal aspect was expanded with the addition of the promise of land and the circumcision of the males. The land was a type of the kingdom of God brought by Jesus Christ, which would be in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). Circumcision was a type of regeneration by the Holy Spirit –

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"the circumcision made without hands" (Col. 2:11; Rom. 2:28-29). To the covenant made with Moses was added the written law, the tabernacle, and the priesthood. The law exposed sins and drove man to seek salvation in Christ (Rom. 7:7; Gal. 3:23-24). The tabernacle was a type of the church of Jesus Christ in which God is present with His people (1 Pet. 2:9-10). The Aaronic priesthood anticipated the better priesthood of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:11-15). The temporal aspect was as much part of the revelation of the Covenant of Grace as the promises which constituted the evangelical aspect. When the temporal aspect was kept as a Covenant of Works, it killed.

The Covenant of Grace was not formulated after the Fall. Rather, it arose from, and is part of, the Covenant of Redemption that was made in eternity past, and made its appearance in history after the Fall. The Covenant of Works was *made* with Adam, while the Covenant of Grace was *revealed* to him. The Adamic Covenant therefore consisted of the revelation of both salvation by works and salvation by grace. With Adam, while in his integrity, there was the ability and the possibility of attaining to everlasting life by obedience to the law of God. However, after the Fall, this was no more the case. Adam, and all his posterity, were no longer able to be saved by works, i.e. by the keeping of the law. Instead, salvation is to be by grace through faith in the promised Saviour. Adam's salvation did not mean that the whole human race was saved, for the Covenant of Redemption and, therefore, the Covenant of Grace, has its Head in Jesus Christ, and not in Adam. Salvation would be granted to Adam's fallen race individually, when each person comes to faith in Christ.

### *The Noahic Covenant*

Noah may be considered the second Adam, for from him the human race propagated after the flood. Jesus Christ is called "the last Adam", for with Him the revelation of the Covenant of Grace ended in fulfilment. Jesus Christ is called "the second Man", for He came from heaven to redeem for Himself a people, while the first man, Adam, was made of dust and led his progeny into dust. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49,

And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and after-

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ward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

The revelation of the Covenant of Grace was taken a step farther with Noah. The failure of the Covenant of Works to save is shown in Genesis 6:5-12,

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

God's covenant with Noah was a revelation of the Covenant of Grace, as shown by the subsequent verses (Genesis 6:13-14, 18),

And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch... But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

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While this covenant was announced before the flood, it was ratified after the flood when Noah offered up burnt offerings on the altar he had built. The word 'covenant' is mentioned seven times on this occasion (Gen. 9:9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). The waters that destroyed the world in judgement was the same waters that saved Noah and his family in grace. This was symbolic of the salvation to be effected by Christ in His death and resurrection, pictured by the New Covenant sign of baptism. We are told in 1 Peter 3:18-22,

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

When Noah preached in his days, the Spirit of Christ was confronting the wicked people whose spirits were imprisoned by sin. We are told in 2 Peter 2:4-5, "For if God... did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly..." We have noted that there was a temporal aspect to the covenant made with Adam, which when kept as a Covenant of Works became deadly. The temporal aspect continues to be seen in the Noahic Covenant. Noah had to keep the law of God, to offer up animal sacrifices, and to have many descendants. Not only would the Saviour come from among the many descendants, the elect will be saved from among them. To aid in the fulfilment of the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, God gave a law against murder (Gen. 9:6-7). God promised never to destroy the human race the way He did in the days of Noah, viz. by flood. The covenant made with Noah was "everlasting", just as

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that made with Abraham (Gen. 17:7), Phinehas (Num. 25:10-13), David (2 Sam. 23:5), and the New Covenant (Jer. 32:40). Clearly, the term "everlasting" does not mean "stretching to eternity" but is to be understood as meaning "for as long as this covenant is in force". The covenant made with Noah will last until Christ returns to judge the world, when the earth and the universe will be melted down by fire and remade (2 Pet. 3:10-13). The sign of the covenant is the rainbow, which will continue to appear in the sky until the last day.

### *The Abrahamic Covenant*

As the human race multiplied and scattered around the world, departure from the faith and the teaching of Adam and Noah took place. The likes of Melchizedek, the High Priest of God who must have ministered to many godly families, were still around. Righteous Job is reckoned to have lived in the time Abraham. However, idolatry had obviously defiled many homes. Laban, the cousin of Isaac, accused Jacob of stealing his household gods (Gen. 31:30-35). Under such circumstances, God called Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. Although the word covenant was not used, the characteristics of a covenant could be seen in the the call of God to Abram. The covenant made with Abram, who was 75 years old at that time, is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3,

Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

To this call was added a promise (Gen. 12:7), "To your descendants I will give this land." This covenant was ratified later in a vision, recorded in Genesis 15. Animals that were ceremonially clean – a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove, and a pigeon – were used in the ceremony to ratify the covenant. Except for the birds, the animals were cut in two and placed in two rows. In the darkness of a deep sleep, God announced that Abram's descendants would be afflicted in a foreign land for four hundred years before returning with great possession.

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When the sun set, a smoking oven and a burning torch could be seen passing between the animal pieces. This was to indicate the solemnity of the undertaking, which carried the penalty of death (cf. Jer. 34;18-19). On that day, Jehovah made a covenant with Abram, promising him many descendants who would occupy the promised land of Canaan.

God initiated that covenant, and set the terms and conditions, as seen by the whole procedure of ratification. Abram was the recipient of grace. He was promised many descendants, which he understood to include the Seed who would bruise the serpent's head, as promised to Adam. We are told that Abram believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). This is quoted in Romans 4:3 to show that Abraham (the new name of Abram) was saved by grace, and not by works. It is also quoted in Galatians 3:6 to show that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham, as explained in Galatians 3:7-9,

Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

This passage tells us that the gospel was preached to Abraham. He understood that the covenant made with him and his seed included the greatest of his descendants, Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:16-18 says,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

Abraham was saved by believing in the promised Saviour, not by works such as keeping the law or getting circumcised. His circum-

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cision came later, after he believed and was reckoned as righteous (Gen. 15:6). Circumcision was a seal, or confirmation, of his faith (Rom. 4:11). Circumcision did not secure for him salvation. Faith did. Subsequent generations of Abraham's descendants who were circumcised as babies could not claim circumcision as a seal of their faith, for they had none when circumcised. Circumcision, like all the other elements of the temporal aspect of the covenant, performed the purposes of marking out the people of God from other nations and of pointing to spiritual realities in the New Covenant. Only those who have faith in Jesus Christ – whether Jew or non-Jew – have Abraham as father in the Covenant of Grace. We are told in Romans 4:9-12,

...For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Similarly, we are told in Galatians 3:26-29,

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Abraham must have been much troubled by the command from God to offer up his son as a sacrifice. He, however, overcame whatever doubts there were, believing that "God will provide for Himself

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the lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8). He was willing to sacrifice his son, even though he could not figure out how God would fulfil His promise to pass on the covenant to this son (Gen. 17:19). He was acting in faith, believing in the promises of God. God indeed provided a ram to replace Isaac. This was an affirmation that 'the Lord will provide' – *Jehovah Jireh* (Gen. 22:14). God renewed the covenant promise to Abraham, saying, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Gen. 22:18).

Ethnically, Abraham is the father of the Jews. Spiritually, he is the father of all those who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of whether they are Jews or Gentiles. The Covenant of Grace was revealed to Abraham as the way of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. The Abrahamic Covenant was reaffirmed in Genesis 17:18-22 when a son was promised to Sarah through whom would be passed down the covenant. The covenant made with Abraham was passed on to Isaac (Gen. 26:2-5), and then to Jacob (Gen. 28:10-17), and then to the twelve sons of Jacob who would constitute the nation of Israel (Gen. 49). The twelve sons of Jacob were also referred to as "the patriarchs" by the Jews (Acts 7:9; Gen. 35:22-26). That Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's sons received basically the same covenant is indicated in 1 Chronicles 16:16-17, "The covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac, and confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel for an everlasting covenant..."

### *The Mosaic Covenant*

When Jacob brought his family down to Egypt, it was another step forward in the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham. The descendants of Abraham who had multiplied in Egypt were oppressed by the Egyptians when a new king arose. A deliverer was raised up by God in the person of Moses. The nation was now poised for the next stage of their history. After the manifestation of Jehovah's power in the ten plagues, Israel was allowed to go out of Egypt. As they headed for the promised land, a stop was made at Horeb, where God entered into a covenant with the nation (Exod. 19-24). The Mosaic Covenant was made with the nation of Israel, with Moses as the mediator (Exod. 20:18-19; Deut. 5:5; Gal. 3:19). On Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments were given to the nation on two tables of stone. The tabernacle of worship was set up, involving the offering



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of animal sacrifices and the various other offerings which were administered by the Aaronic priesthood. The covenant was ratified by a worship service in which the law was read out, animals were sacrificed, and the blood of the animals was sprinkled (Exod. 24:1-8). This has been called the Sinaitic Covenant which, in fact, was the temporal aspect of the Mosaic Covenant. The evangelical aspect was yet to be revealed.

From Sinai the nation moved to Kadesh. Twelve spies were sent out to spy out the land of Canaan. Of the twelve spies, only Joshua and Caleb gave a positive recommendation to enter into the land, in obedience to Jehovah's command. The other ten spies discouraged the people and stirred them up to such fear and anger that they rebelled against Moses and the leaders. The LORD sentenced the nation to thirty-eight more years of wilderness wandering, which was characterised by their constant murmuring and the manifestation of God's grace in supplying all their needs. In the fortieth year after the exodus from Egypt, they arrived at the plains of Moab. Here, Moses expounded, elaborated upon, and applied the law to the nation, in preparation for them to enter Canaan. This is recorded in the bulk of Deuteronomy – "the Book of the Law" (Deut. 28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26).

This Book of the Law takes on a distinctly different tone from Chapter 29. We are told in verse 1, "These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb." These words are often glossed over without doing justice to what is clearly stated. There is a reference to a covenant besides the one God had made with the nation in Horeb. The Sinaitic Covenant made in Horeb had been expounded in detail in the earlier chapters of the book. It consisted of the Ten Commandments and the accompanying "statutes and judgments" (Deut. 5:1). This was a revelation of the temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace. It served the functions of revealing future spiritual realities by types, and of driving the nation to seek salvation by grace in the promised Saviour. The prophecy had been given in Chapter 18:18-19, "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will

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require it of him." The temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace, when turned into a Covenant of Works, would bring death. This was the big mistake made by Israel.

Believing in the verbal inspiration of Scripture, and taking the words of Deuteronomy 29:1 plainly, we see here the making of a covenant different from the one made in Horeb. It was made by oath (29:14), and has to be seen as an extension of the covenant made in Exodus 24:1-8. It, in fact, was the evangelical aspect of the Covenant of Grace which contained the gospel. Just as the Adamic Covenant was a revelation of the Covenant of Grace in its twofold aspects, viz. the temporal and the evangelical aspects, so also was the Mosaic Covenant. In the Adamic Covenant the temporal aspect, i.e. the law, was revealed at the same time that the Covenant of Works was made with Adam. A period of time elapsed, the duration of which could have been quite long, before the evangelical aspect was revealed after the Fall. The covenant made with Abraham was similarly drawn out in time – it was announced in Genesis 12, ratified in Genesis 15, expanded in Genesis 17 with the promise of a son, and confirmed in Genesis 22 with Abraham's willingness to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. The Abrahamic Covenant was passed on to Isaac, Jacob, and then to the twelve sons of Jacob – over a period of years. Progressive revelation was involved. The time taken to completely reveal a covenant is not an issue, for "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8).

Understood this way, the Mosaic Covenant is seen as consisting of two parts, the Sinaitic Covenant which constituted the temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace, and the Moabite Covenant which constituted the evangelical aspect of the Covenant of Grace. The evangelical aspect is revealed in Chapters 29 and 30. The remaining chapters of the book should, in fact, be regarded as completing the Moabite Covenant and, therefore, the Mosaic Covenant. Israel was reminded of the need of a work of grace to open their eyes and ears so that they could understand all that the LORD had done for them in the wilderness (29:4). This verse is quoted in Romans 11:8 to show that the spiritual blindness had continued with Israel down the centuries. The gospel revealed in the Moabite Covenant required every individual to make a commitment to walk with God (29:10-20). This included the leaders, the elders and officers, all the men,

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the little ones, the wives, and the foreigners in their midst (29:10-11, 14, 20). A transformed life had to be seen in keeping the law (29:9), failing which the curses of this Book of the Law would be poured out upon the individual (29:20-28). The emphasis on the individual, as in contrast to the community, must be noted (29:18, 19, 20, 21).

The well-known words of 29:29 must be seen in its context, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." The promises and threats of the law were to be heeded, while expecting the LORD to reveal more of His way of salvation in the future. The curses of this Book of the Law set the lower terminus of the period at the end of the Old Testament age, coinciding with the beginning of the New Testament age. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant extended from Moses to Christ. The Levitical Covenant made with Aaron, and extending to Phinehas (Lev. 24:8-9; Num. 25:10-13), and the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7:10-16; 23:5; 1 Chron. 17:11-14), were subordinate covenants in the Mosaic Covenant. These revealed the coming of the Saviour who would be High Priest and King (Heb. 7:1-2; Luke 1:32-33).

The prophecy concerning captivity, under the Assyrians followed by the Babylonians, given in Chapter 28:45-68, is reaffirmed, followed by the return of the remnant (30:1-6). There would be repentance leading to wholehearted commitment to the Lord (30:6, 8, 10). The circumcision of the heart needed for this commitment pointed to the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament age (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:15; Col. 2:11). It would be a work of grace, for "the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants" (30:6). The choice of life or death was dependent upon how one kept the law – either as a means for salvation, or as the fruit of a circumcised heart. This is expressed by the words of Deuteronomy 30:11-14,

For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may

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hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

The apostle Paul quoted these words in Romans 10:6-8 to refer to "the righteousness of faith" that comes by responding to the gospel, in contrast to the "the righteousness which is of the law" (Rom. 10:5). The Mosaic Covenant was an extension of the Abrahamic Covenant, in which was revealed that the attempt to gain righteousness by the law would lead to death while having faith in the promised Saviour would lead to life. This is expressed in the closing words of Deuteronomy 30:19-20,

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

Proceeding on, Chapter 31 reaffirms Joshua as the successor to Moses (31:1-13), with the prophecy that Israel would go astray from their God (31:14-29). The Song of Moses in Chapter 32 recounts the unfaithfulness of the nation (32:1-6) despite God's covenant with them (32:7-14). The Lord would heap disasters upon them for their idolatry (32:15-35) until they come to their senses and realise that no other gods could help them (32:36-38). The true God would show forth His power and mercy, pouring forth His vengeance upon the enemies (32:39-42), and – lo and behold! – the Gentiles are called upon to rejoice with His people, for He would provide atonement for His land and His people (32:43). This verse is quoted in Romans 15:10 and Hebrews 1:6 (Septuagint translation) in reference to Jesus Christ. In Chapter 33 Moses blesses the tribes of Israel in a manner reminiscent of Jacob passing on the covenant blessing to his sons (Gen. 49). In the last chapter, Moses is allowed to survey the land of Canaan from atop Mount Nebo in the Pisgah range. He is reminded that "This is the land of which I swore to give to Abraham,

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Isaac, and Jacob...(34:4)." The Mosaic Covenant must be seen as an extension of the Covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses died on Mount Nebo and was supernaturally buried by God. Joshua was the immediate successor of Moses but not the ultimate successor. The book ends with the note, "But since then there has not risen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face...(34:10)." This points to the Prophet greater than Moses who is to come (cf. Deut. 18:15-18) – who is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 4:25-26; Acts 3:22-23).

## 2.3 The New Covenant

### *Fulfilled*

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..." What had been progressively revealed in the Old Testament was ready to be fulfilled, according to God's will, by the coming of the promised Saviour. Galatians 4:4 says, "...when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons..." The Saviour would fulfil the requirements of the law on behalf of those who are unable to keep it perfectly. His death on the cross would be the perfect sacrifice to pay for the sins of His people. This had been typified by the animals sacrificed in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). By faith in Christ, the punishment for our sins under the law is considered borne by Christ when He died on the cross. By the same faith, Christ's righteousness is reckoned ours so that we are justified (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21-26).

The New Covenant, declared at the institution of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19-20), was ratified by the death of Jesus Christ, and sealed on the day of Pentecost by the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; Ezek. 36:26-27). Salvation is now to be proclaimed to all the nations (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:18-20). Elect Jews and Gentiles will be saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10). They are all sons of God, Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26, 29; Rom. 2:28). Together,

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they become one flock (John 10:16), one holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21), one nation of priests (1 Pet. 1:9-10). Together, they are the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; Rom. 11:26), a people circumcised in the heart by the Holy Spirit, which is regeneration (Rom. 1:28-29; Col. 2: 11; Tit. 3:4-7). In the New Covenant, entry into the kingdom of God is on an individual basis although many might be brought in at around the same time, and in the same locality (Ezek. 18:20; Luke 17:21; Acts 2:38-39). Each believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:2; Rom. 8:9; 1 Thess. 4:7-8). Each believer will be transformed from within, so that the law written on the heart will no longer be suppressed but obeyed (Rom. 2:14-16; Heb. 8:10-12; 2 Cor. 3:3). Although we are not able to live a perfectly righteous life due to remaining sin in us, the power of sin is broken (Rom. 7:24; 8:1-2). In the New Covenant age, "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). The coming of the New Covenant meant that the Old Covenant was obsolete and was ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13). The Old Covenant did not abruptly vanish, but gradually disappeared as the New Testament church was weaned away from dependence on the temple, the animal sacrifices, the dietary laws, and the keeping of holy days (Acts 1:8; 15:6-11; Col. 2:16-17).

In the book of Hebrews, the Old Covenant is the Mosaic Covenant – consisting of the law of Moses, the Aaronic priesthood, the tabernacle of worship, and the animal sacrifices. In the book of Romans, the Old Covenant is extended to include the covenants made with Abraham and Adam. In Galatians, the Old Covenant covers the covenants made with Abraham and Moses. It says in Galatians 3:16-18,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

As in the book of Romans (Rom. 5:14; 10:5), Galatians contrasts the evangelical aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant with the temporal

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aspect of the Mosaic Covenant. Why Abraham and Moses, and why the evangelical aspect of one and the temporal aspect of the other? Firstly, the promised Saviour was clearly announced to Abraham, who "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness", and he became the father of all those who are of faith (Gal. 2:6-7). Secondly, at the time of writing, the Jews were keeping to the Mosaic law as the way of salvation, i.e. they were using the law as a Covenant of Works and not as a revelation of grace. In 2 Corinthians 3, the apostle contrasts the New Covenant with the law of Moses, saying, "...our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:5-6)." The ministry of the apostle involved the law written on the heart by the Spirit of the living God, while the ministry of Moses involved the law written on stones, which brought death for those who kept it as the means of salvation (2 Cor. 3:3, 7). The glory in the ministry of Moses was subordinate to, and derived from, the glory of Christ revealed in the gospel. The glory of the Old Covenant, represented by the glory on the countenance of Moses, was passing away, while the more glorious ministry of the Spirit in the preaching of the gospel remains (2 Cor. 3:8-11).

Pooling together the contrast made between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant in the books of Hebrews, Romans, Galatians and 2 Corinthians, we conclude that the Old Covenant culminated in, but was not limited to, the Mosaic Covenant. The Old Covenant included the covenants made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. These covenants progressively revealed the Covenant of Grace, until replaced by the New Covenant, in which was fulfilled what was formerly revealed. Note the plural, 'covenants', in Ephesians 2:11-13,

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

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The Old Covenant consisted of temporal elements which were types of New Covenant realities, as well as gospel promises which saved those who believed. Those who kept the temporal elements as a means of salvation, in fact, were attempting to be saved by the Covenant of Works, which is still in force. The New Covenant has its own sets of temporal elements, to give form to the church and to express the faith of believers. There are the two special ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. There is worship which includes the hearing of God's word, prayer, and the singing of praises to God. There is the moral law, summarised in the Ten Commandments, that is kept for sanctification, and not for salvation (1689:19:5, 6). There are pastoral care and corrective discipline in the church. When these temporal elements are kept as a means of salvation, the Covenant of Works is being relied upon for salvation, instead of the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace reveals that "The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17)." The law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them (Gal. 3:12)."

### *The two Israel*

One other matter needs to be settled, which is, what becomes of Israel in the age of the New Covenant? We have noted that the Covenant of Grace – in its revelatory part as the Old Covenant as well as in the fulfilment part as the New Covenant – consists of two aspects, viz. the temporal and the evangelical. This is true of all the covenants, including the Mosaic one. The temporal aspect of the Mosaic Covenant is clear, but many miss out on the evangelical aspect. The gospel promises were revealed symbolically by the temporal elements, and explicitly declared on the plains of Moab by Moses in Deuteronomy Chapters 29 and 30. The apostle Paul quotes from this portion of Deuteronomy in Romans 10:5-13, saying,

For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of



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faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Verse 13 of this passage, 'For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"', is from Joel 2:32 in reference to the gospel age (cf. Acts 2:21). The gospel is to be preached to all alike – to both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 10:14-17). Just as not all Gentiles will respond to the gospel call, so also the Jews. This we learn from 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, which says,

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The Jews have a distinct advantage over the Gentiles, for to them "pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God (Rom. 9:4-5)." "Salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22)." However, this does not alter the fact that the gospel must be proclaimed to them as much as to the Gentiles (Rom. 10). They are the natural branches of the cultivated olive tree, introduced in Romans 11. A hardening of heart has happened to the Jews at large, resulting in their blindness to the gospel (Rom. 11:7 cf. 9:18). This has resulted in the gospel being preached largely to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11 cf. 15:27-28). As many Gentiles are saved, the Jews will be provoked to jealousy so that some among them will seek to be

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saved by the gospel (Rom. 11:11, 14). The Jews will be provoked to jealousy simply because "salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:11), and not because the Gentiles have to prove themselves in some ways to provoke jealousy in the Jews. This process will continue until the return of Christ. Paraphrasing Paul, if the fall of the Jews is riches to the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more would the riches be if all the elect Jews are saved (Rom. 11:12)? If their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but the end of the age when Christ comes to resurrect the dead (Rom. 11:15)?

The elect from among the Gentile nations are like branches of the wild olive tree, while the elect from among the Jews are like natural branches from the cultivated olive tree. The cultivated olive tree is spiritual Israel, i.e. the church, consisting of all God's elect. The wild olive tree is the fallen race of Adam. The root of the cultivated olive tree is God's eternal plan of salvation, i.e. the Covenant of Redemption. When both the wild branches and the cut-off natural branches are grafted to the cultivated olive tree, they partake of "the root and fatness of the olive tree" (Rom. 11:17) – i.e. they enjoy the blessings of salvation found in the Covenant of Redemption, which is manifested in history as the Covenant of Grace. Paraphrasing Paul again, blindness in part has happened to the Jews until the full number of the elect from among the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25). The remaining elect from among the Jews would then come in (cf. Rom. 11:11, 14-15). And so all Israel, i.e. God's people (or spiritual Israel), will be saved (Rom. 11:26). Note also that it is "And so" and not "And then". The *manner* of salvation of *spiritual Israel* is meant, not the timing of the salvation of natural Israel. The "And so" relates back to the mutual effects between the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles and to the Jews. It does not relate back to "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" of the earlier verse.

With the arrival of the Saviour, and the advent of the New Covenant, the purpose for the nation of Israel has been fulfilled. The elect from Old Testament Israel have been saved by believing in the promised Saviour. The Old Covenant has passed away with the introduction of the New Covenant. There is no value in resurrecting the temple, the priesthood, and the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. If the Jews are to be saved, they must repent and believe in Jesus Christ. In Matthew 3:9-10, John the Baptist said to

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the religious leaders, "...do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Was the Lord referring to the Jewish religious leaders only or to the whole nation of Israel? Matthew Poole commented on this verse as follows: "...whether it be understood as of the judgment common to all unbelievers, ...or the particular destruction of this nation of the Jews, I shall not determine, though I rather judge the latter probable." The vine and the fig tree are often used as types of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament (Psalm 80:8; Isa. 5:2, 7; Hos. 9:10; Nah. 3:12; Zech. 3:10). It would seem that John the Baptist was referring to the nation of Israel. One thing certain is that mere physical descent from Abraham will not save anyone. Another passage of relevance is Matthew 9:16-17, "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." The rituals of the Old Covenant were not fit for the new wine of life in the Spirit in the New Covenant era (cf. Col. 2:16-17). The new had come and the old was ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13). With the completion of Scripture, the old has vanished away (Heb. 8:10-11 cf. Eph. 2:19-3:7).

The modern, political, nation of Israel is not to be equated with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. We do not question the right of the Jews to exist as a country. We do not deny the reality of the Holocaust in which some six million Jews died under the Nazis. We do not support anti-Semitism, neither do we support philo-Semitism. Our understanding of Covenant Theology requires the gospel be preached to all the nations, including the Jews, without which there would be no salvation, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17)."

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### 2.4 Contrast With Other Systems

#### *A Reformed Baptist view*

A schematic representation will never be able to fully and satisfactorily portray the Covenant Theology presented here. It will, nevertheless, help us see the salient features at a glance. Ours is *a* Reformed Baptist view, and not *the* Reformed Baptist view, for there are nuances among Reformed Baptists on this subject.

Figure 2.1 shows that the Covenant of Redemption has its genesis in the three Persons of the Godhead, in eternity past. It appears in history as the Covenant of Grace, consisting of two parts – the Old Covenant which is revelatory in nature, and the New Covenant which is the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Covenant. Both parts consist of a temporal aspect and an evangelical aspect.

Before the Covenant of Grace was revealed, God entered into a Covenant of Works with Adam in the Garden of Eden. The Covenant of Works is not of the essence of the Covenant of Redemption but serves to disclose and highlight the Covenant of Grace. The law of God was already written in the heart of Adam so that there was a sense of right and wrong in him. The creation mandate was given to him, with full provision of his needs, barring the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:16-17). Since the Covenant of Works was made with Adam and his posterity, it is still in force. However, unlike Adam before the Fall, there is no possibility of his posterity keeping the covenant to gain eternal life.

After the Fall, Adam and his posterity continue to be under the law, which is written in the hearts of men (Rom. 2:15). The Covenant of Grace was revealed to Adam by the promise of the coming of a Seed of the woman, in the 'proto-evangel' of Genesis 3:15. This is the evangelical aspect of the covenant, as revealed to Adam and Eve. Added to the law written in the heart was the ritual of the burnt offering – first shown when "the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). Abel's offering of "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat" (Gen. 4:4), which was accepted by God, shows that the burnt offering had been instituted as the temporal aspect of the covenant.

Noah offered up burnt offerings to the Lord when the flood subsided (Gen. 8:20). The law continued to function in the days of Noah, for he was "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). The



**Fig. 2.1: A Schematic Representation of Covenant Theology**

word 'righteousness' basically means the keeping of God's law. Noah was specifically told he could eat flesh but not with its blood (Gen. 4-5). Furthermore, the law against murder was highlighted. The

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creation mandate of being fruitful and multiplying was renewed, with Noah as the second Adam (Gen. 9:7). The law, the building of the ark, the burnt offering, and the creation mandate constitute the temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace. The ark would have stood as a reminder of God's deliverance from the flood for the future generations, probably to the days of Abraham. The evangelical aspect consists of the promise of salvation for his household, the promise that there would be no more worldwide destruction by flood, and the giving of the rainbow as a sign.

To Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons were given circumcision as an additional element of the temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace. The evangelical aspect of the covenant consists of the promises of a Seed who would be a blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:3, 7; Gal. 3:8, 16), a son of the covenant from whom the Saviour would come (Gen. 17:19), and provision for redemption by a sacrifice (Gen. 22:15-18).

To Moses was given the written law, circumcision, the tabernacle, the animal sacrifices, and the priesthood of Aaron and his sons. These constituted the temporal aspect of the Covenant of Grace, given at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24-40). When the children of Israel arrived at Moab, the law was expounded in which the promise of the coming of a prophet greater than Moses was made (Deut. 18:18). The evangelical aspect of the Covenant of Grace was formally announced (Deut. 29-34), consisting of promises that eyes would be made to see (Deut. 9:4 cf. Rom. 11:8; 2 Cor. 3:7-18), individuals would be saved (Deut. 29:10-20; 30:6, 8, 10), and the Gentiles would be called (Deut. 32:43).

The temporal aspect of the Old Covenant was intended to be a revelation of New Covenant realities. Together with the promises which constituted the evangelical aspect, these gradually revealed the coming of the promised Saviour who would make atonement for the sins of His people, by His death and resurrection. The Jews, however, missed the message of the evangelical aspect and wrongly relied on the keeping of the temporal aspect for salvation. When the elements of the temporal aspect were kept as a way of salvation, they were wilfully relying on the Covenant of Works for salvation, and rejecting the Covenant of Grace. Ever since the Fall, none can be saved by the Covenant of Works.

The types of the Old Covenant have been fulfilled by the antitype,

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namely Jesus Christ, who died and rose from the dead. He is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The hearing of the gospel is the means of salvation for souls (Rom. 10:17). The Holy Spirit is promised to all who repent and believe, sealing the believer unto salvation (Acts 2:38-39; Eph. 1:13). The word of God continues to be used by the Holy Spirit to sanctify the believer for the day of redemption (Matt. 4:4; Eph. 4:30; 5:26). The New Covenant also has its set of temporal elements. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are given to the church as new ordinances of the New Covenant. The completed Scripture is used by the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of believers and the church. The local church, with all its teaching, ordinances, and discipline is used by the Lord to give form to what would otherwise be a formless, or invisible, church. Herein lies a snare – when the temporal aspect of the New Covenant is treated as a Covenant of Works, it kills (2 Cor. 3:4-6). The Roman Catholic Church errs by making the temporal aspect of the New Covenant a means of salvation – including the keeping of the mass, penance, baptism, membership in the visible church, etc.

Throughout the Old Covenant period, Satan was free to act as "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31). With the death and resurrection of the Lord, he has been "cast out", and bound for "a thousand years" (Rev. 20:1-3). Close to the return of Christ to judge the world, Satan will be let loose such that there will be rampant persecution, false teaching, and worldliness. The faith of many will be shaken, while unbelief and apostasy will be rife (Matt. 24:9-13, 24; Luke 18:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). Christ will suddenly appear to expose and destroy the lawless one (2 Thess. 2: 8). The great judgement will take place when all the dead are raised and given their physical bodies. Those found without the righteousness of Christ will be cast into the damnation of hell forever, together with Satan and his agents. The present universe will be melted down and the new heavens and the new earth will be made (2 Pet. 3:11-13). The gathering together of all the redeemed of the Lord, to serve Him for all eternity, constitute the end of God's plan of redemption.

The present contribution on Covenant Theology has the advantages of being simple, being concise, and yet being precise. Of course, our hope is that it has been convincing. It does not overlook differences with the Paedobaptist view on the subject, and stands in stark contrast to Dispensationalism.

## 2. THE ROOT: GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

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### *The Paedobaptist view*

Historically, the Reformed Baptists had understood Covenant/Federal Theology differently from the Reformed Paedobaptists. In each camp, there was no uniformity of understanding on the subject. The Baptist position, in its main outline, was enshrined in the 1689 Confession, while that of the Paedobaptist was enshrined in the Westminster Confession. The first area of difference was that the Baptists saw the Covenant of Works as being propagated in parallel with the Covenant of Grace through history. The Paedobaptists saw the Covenant of Works initiated and stopped with Adam, being replaced by the Covenant of Grace. The second area of difference was that the Baptists saw the New Covenant as different in substance and administration to the Old Covenant, while the Paedobaptists saw both covenants as consisting of the same substance but different in administration. To the Baptists, the Old Covenant only progressively revealed the the Covenant of Grace. It was this revelation that constituted the substance of the Old Covenant. The revelation was made by promises as well as by the types of the temporal elements. The Covenant of Grace did not exist in substance yet as it was not ratified by the death and resurrection of Christ, nor sealed by the Holy Spirit. As noted already, the temporal elements included the law, the promised land, a multitude of descendants, circumcision, the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the animal sacrifices. We do not regard these as constituting the substance of the Old Covenant. Similarly, we would not call the elements of the New Covenant – including the word, prayer and praise, the special ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper – the *substance* of the New Covenant for the substance is salvation, forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and the indwelling of the Spirit.

The Westminster federalism may be summarised by "one Covenant of Grace under two administrations", while that of the 1689 Confession may be summarised as "one Covenant of Grace revealed progressively and concluded formally under the New Covenant" (Renault, 2013). It might be thought that this is a mere matter of differences in definition, when in reality the differences extend into serious practical implications. The Baptists regard the *revelation* of the Covenant of Grace as the substance of the Old Covenant which is different from the *fulfilment* in the New Covenant, while the Paedobaptists regard the promises of the Old Covenant as 'substantially'



## 2.4. Contrast With Other Systems

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the same as the New Covenant and only 'accidentally' different in form, i.e. the differences are unimportant and only incidental to the respective periods of time. Salvation was effectually administered through the types and promises.<sup>1</sup> Since the Paedobaptists equate the Mosaic Covenant with the Sinaitic Covenant, and treat it as a gracious covenant – in contradiction to the teaching of the New Testament (especially in Romans, Galatians, Hebrews) – the New Testament church is seen as a continuation of the Old Testament church. Due to the adoption of this "flat theology", they are able to say that the children of believers today are "covenant children" who should be given baptism, just as the (male) children of the Israelites were given circumcision. Furthermore, the New Testament church government is made hierarchical in some form, similar to that in the Old Testament.

Paedobaptist Covenant Theology fails to give due attention to the discontinuity between the Old Testament dispensation of prophecies, types, and promises and the New Testament dispensation of fulfilment of these prophecies, types, and promises. It does not distinguish between the Sinaitic Covenant and the Moabite Covenant in the Mosaic economy. In recent years some Paedobaptist writers have posited the idea that the Covenant of Works was in some sense republished in the Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant – calling it an "application" of the Covenant of Works but is not the Covenant of Works – taking cognisance of the teaching of the New Testament on the contrast between the Old and the New Covenants (Kline, 2000; Estelle, 2009). This has been rebutted by others who uphold the traditional Paedobaptist view (Venema, 2017). In whichever way it is formulated, it would seem that the federal theology of the Paedobaptists has been crafted to support infant baptism and a mixed church membership. The federal theology of the Baptists, in contrast, leads to the baptism of believers and the gathered church principle (i.e. a regen-

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<sup>1</sup>In this respect, the view of Paedobaptist Covenant Theology is no different from the newer Dispensationalists like C. C. Ryrie, which contrasts with that of the older Dispensationalists like L. S. Chafer in which is found divergent ways of salvation in the various dispensations. The difference between the Neo-Dispensationalism and Paedobaptist Covenant Theology is in the content of faith of the saints in the Old Testament. Paedobaptist Covenant Theology would say the content was "Christ crucified", i.e. the gospel, while Neo-Dispensationalism would say it was faith in God manifested in diverse ways. See Crenshaw & Gunn, III, pp. 343-344.

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erate church membership and the autonomy of the local church).

### *The Dispensational view*

The federal theology of the Reformed Baptists contrasts with Dispensationalism, which claims that God deals with mankind differently in each of the distinct, typically seven, dispensations. Dispensationalism claims that the Bible is to be interpreted literally, with each word taken to mean what it would normally mean in everyday language. Although allowance may be made for symbols, figures of speech and types, a deliberate attempt is made each time to determine the literal meaning. The 1,000 years in Revelation 20 is taken literally as a thousand years of Christ's reign on earth when He returns. Dispensationalism also teaches that God has two distinct peoples – Israel and the church. Israel has forfeited the blessing of God by disobedience and is currently replaced by the church. However, when Christ returns to reign for 1,000 years, Israel will be the focus of His attention again. Most Dispensationalists are Arminian in soteriology, believing that Christ's death was for the sin of everyone in the world, and prevenient grace makes man able to decide to believe in Christ. Some Dispensationalists are Calvinist in soteriology, holding to the Five Points of Calvinism, as well as to Premillennialism. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ for all nations, but Israel will be particularly blessed because of the covenant made with Abraham.

Among those who hold to Dispensationalism are the philo-Semites who condemn Replacement Theology for its claim that the church has replaced Israel as God's people and that the blessings promised to Israel have been transferred to, or are being fulfilled in, the church. The philo-Semites would attempt to convince others of the necessity to support the modern nation of Israel by putting things in an absolute "either-or" situation, with no possibility of neutrality – either one is philo-Semitic or anti-Semitic (Willem, 2001). Passages such as Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-7 (a circumcision made without hands, "they are not all Israel who are of Israel"), Galatians 4:21-31 (Sarah contrasted with Hagar, Isaac with Ishmael), Ephesians 2:14-18 (Christ has broken down the middle wall of separation), and Matthew 9:16-17 (new wine in old wineskins) are ignored or glossed over, and conclusions are made based on assumptions and speculations. Covenant Theology, whether of the Baptist or the Paedobaptist kinds, repudiate Replacement Theology. Covenant Theology holds to the view

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## 2.5. Summary

that there are two Israel – natural Israel and spiritual Israel. Spiritual Israel is made up of the elect from among the Jews and the Gentiles, in both the Old and the New Testament dispensations (using the word not in the Dispensational sense). Those who hold to Covenant Theology are neither philo-Semitic nor anti-Semitic. The love of Christ compels them to bring the gospel to the Jews as they would to other nations. Replacement Theology was dominant in the early church until the Reformation of the 16th century (some would say until Augustine, AD 400), when Covenant Theology took over. Covenant Theology developed into two strands – the Baptist strand and the Paedobaptist strand. From the mid-19th century, Dispensationalism became popular among Evangelicals, while those who are Reformed continue to hold to Covenant Theology.

## 2.5 Summary

The present contribution to Covenant Theology may be summarised by the following points:

- 1 The Covenant of Redemption is seen as stretching from eternity past to eternity future, having as substance the eternal purpose of God in the salvation of the elect.
- 2 The Covenant of Grace is that portion of the Covenant of Redemption that emerges in history. It consists of two parts, the revelatory part in the Old Testament period called the Old Covenant, and the fulfilment part in the New Testament period known as the New Covenant. The Old Covenant consists of a number of subordinate covenants centred around individuals to whom the revelation concerning the New Covenant was progressively given.
- 3 The Covenant of Grace is seen as consisting of two aspects. In the Old Covenant, the temporal aspect consists of the law, a promised land, many descendants, the tabernacle/temple, the priesthood, animal sacrifices, and circumcision, which typify New Covenant realities. The evangelical aspect consists of promises of salvation by grace, of the coming of the God-appointed Saviour, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit to help in the life of faith. In the New Covenant, the evangelical aspect consists of gospel proclamation of the Saviour who has come, the offer of salvation by

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grace through faith, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers. The temporal aspect includes the word preached, the special ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, and the singing of praises to the Triune God. The temporal aspect gives form to the church and sanctification to the believers.

- 4 The Covenant of Works made with Adam and his posterity is seen as operating in parallel with the Covenant of Grace through history until the return of Christ to judge the world. From the Fall of Adam, man could no longer be saved by keeping the law. Salvation is found only in the Covenant of Grace, by grace through faith in Christ.
- 5 The Mosaic Covenant is seen as consisting of two main parts. The first is the Sinaitic Covenant which is the temporal aspect, while the second is the Moabite Covenant which is the evangelical aspect. The Jews made the fatal mistake of using the Sinaitic Covenant as a Covenant of Works.
- 6 There are two posterities of Abraham – natural Israel and spiritual Israel. The beneficiaries of the Covenant of Grace are the spiritual children of Abraham. The gospel is to be proclaimed to both Jews and Gentiles until Christ returns to judge the world.
- 7 The New Covenant operates within the gospel age which began with the coming of Christ to fulfil the promises made in the Old Covenant, and will end with the return of Christ to judge the world and to make all things new. The New Covenant involves the execution of the Great Commission, which is what constitutes the work of missions.

Covenant Theology provides the framework for the interpretation of Scripture. It gives us an understanding of the underlying message of Scripture, which is the unfolding of God's eternal purpose. Missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God.

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## 2.5. Summary

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### Recommended Reading

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# Three

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## THE TRUNK: CHRIST'S ATONING DEATH

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The work of missions is concerned with the fulfilment of the Great Commission. Missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God. It is also grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just like an oak tree, or a mahogany tree, the sturdy trunk holds up the heavy crown while being firmly rooted in the ground. It is the trunk of the tree that we wish to consider here. The trunk connects the roots to the crown of the tree. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which accomplishes the salvation of the elect, arises from the Eternal Covenant, or the Covenant of Redemption. The message of what He has accomplished by His death and resurrection constitutes the gospel which is proclaimed in fulfilment of the Great Commission. The finished work of Christ undergirds the Great Commission.

### 3.1 The Gospel That We preach

#### *Fulfilment of covenant promises*

The gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" is simple enough to be understood by a child, and profound enough to engage the attention of the philosopher. The trunk of the tree is appreciated best by those who have studied the roots. To Adam and Eve was revealed the coming of a Seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent while being bruised in His heel by the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

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This is generally recognised as the first proclamation of the gospel. Adam and Eve were commanded to "be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). The second Adam, viz. Noah, was similarly commanded (Gen. 9:7). Adam and Eve, therefore, had many descendants through Noah. The One who was going to bruise the serpent's head was described as a Seed of the woman, and not "of Adam" or "of Adam and Eve". This was to show that while the Saviour would be truly human but without sin, He would not be a descendant of Adam and Eve. Instead, He would be the Son of God who came down from heaven to be born of a woman, viz. Mary (Luke 1:35; John 1:14; 3:13, 31; 6:33). What was said of John the Baptist was true also of Adam, "...he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth (John 3:31)." It is different with Christ, for "He who comes from heaven is above all." Adam is the head of the fallen human race, while Christ is the Head of the redeemed race (Rom. 5:12-19).

The Seed promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:7 refers primarily to Jesus Christ, and secondarily to the elect who share the same faith as Abraham. It says in Galatians 3:16-18,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

The covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 12 included the promise, "...in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This is explained in Galatians 3:6-9,

...just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.



### 3.1. The Gospel That We preach

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Christ bore the punishment due to the elect for breaking the law. We are told in Galatians 3:13-14,

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Galatians 3:26-29 further makes clear,

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

By faith in Christ our sins are forgiven, for Christ has paid the penalty on our behalf. By faith in Christ we are reconciled to God because Christ's perfect righteousness is reckoned to be ours. This is taught in Romans 3:20-26,

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

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The resurrection of Christ secures for us new life, and reconciliation with God. Romans 5:10-11 says, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." The resurrection of Christ, and the consequent certainty of resurrection of the dead, featured much in the preaching of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:3-4; Acts 2:31, 4:2, 33; 17:18, 32; 23:6). Those reconciled to God are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who is the seal and guarantee of our inheritance in Christ (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit also means that we are adopted as the children of God, as made clear in Romans 8:9, 14-17,

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ...For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God by the imputed righteousness of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and adoption as the children of God constitute 'atonement'. William Tyndale (1494-1536) was supposed to have coined this word, after not being able to find a word that covered all these concepts. The death and resurrection of Christ not only secure the forgiveness of our sins but also reconciliation with God – we are made 'at one' with God, in a moment, leading to the word 'atonement' (at-one-ment). As noted, the word includes also other concepts – propitiation (i.e. the turning away of God's wrath), imputed righteousness, and adoption by God. All these were typified by the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament. So rich is the concept of the atoning work of Christ!

### 3.1. The Gospel That We preach

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#### *The content of the gospel*

The master of any art knows far more than what he imparts each time. What we know of the atoning work of Christ must be effectively preached in public and in personal evangelism – in sufficient fulness to accomplish the intended purpose, in the right proportion so as to avoid overload, and in as attractive a way as possible to retain the attentiveness of the hearers. The Holy Spirit is pleased to make effectual what is effectively preached. The gospel (*euangelion*, i.e. good news of salvation) is expounded at length by the apostle Paul in the book of Romans as "justification by faith" (Rom. 3:28), which is by God's grace "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24)." The same truth is stated more fully in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." This is looking at salvation with God as the reference point. The sinner has to be justified (declared not guilty and treated as righteous) before God, with God as the judge and the offended party.

Looking at man as the reference point, we may ask what has been done to, and for, him in order to make him acceptable, and accepted, by God? God takes the initiative by sending His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die as the perfect sacrifice in the place of sinners to make atonement for sin, for which reason He is called "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)." We may say that the sinner is redeemed (set free through payment made) by Christ's death, while His perfect righteousness is reckoned (accounted) to the sinner who believes (2 Cor. 5:18-19, 21). This is imputation – the imputation of sin to Christ, and the imputation of His righteousness to the sinner. God has been propitiated, i.e. His wrath upon the sinner has been turned away, to fall upon Christ who died on the cross (Rom. 3:21-26).

The mechanics of salvation has been explained in the language of the Bible, which has its own set of terminology. It is the preacher's job to make things clear by explanation, illustration, and application. This constitutes the preaching of the gospel. If it is asked what constitute the content of the gospel, Paul gives us the answer, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). The two basic elements are clear – the person of Christ and the work of Christ. Jesus Christ would need to be proclaimed as the Son of God who has come from

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heaven to take upon Himself perfect human nature, who is the only Saviour appointed by God to save sinners, as promised in the Old Testament Scripture. As to His work, redemption from sin in His death on the cross and reconciliation with God by His resurrection would need to be proclaimed. This is what is meant by everlasting life, for the death and resurrection of Christ liberates the sinner from eternal damnation in hell, and secures for him a living relationship with God, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Both the mechanics of salvation and the content of the gospel are not to be altered – by addition, subtraction or perversion (Gal. 1:6-9).

*From any passage of Scripture*

In Luke 24:44-48, the risen Lord said to His disciples,

Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things."

The Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms are the three divisions of the Old Testament Scripture. The Old Testament Scripture does not merely prophesy the coming of a Saviour but it also reveals that "it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day". Passages such as Isaiah 53:3-6 and Psalm 16:10-11 come to mind,

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by

### 3.1. The Gospel That We preach

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God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

The Luke 24:44-48 passage does not stop there but goes on to say, "...and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations..." Passages such as Isaiah 62:10-12 and Joel 2:32 come to mind,

Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway! Take out the stones, lift up a banner for the peoples! Indeed the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the world: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.'" And they shall call them The Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord; and you shall be called Sought Out, a City Not Forsaken.

And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:32 is quoted in Acts 2:17-21 in reference to the gospel age. It is quoted in Romans 10:10-13 in reference to the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, through faith in Jesus Christ, saying,

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who

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call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Our main point concerning the Luke 24:44-48 passage, however, is this: the gospel message of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" is to be found in every passage of the Old Testament and, by extension, in every passage of the New Testament. This understanding is different from the idea that the gospel message is hidden in some particular passages of the books of the Old Testament. Many writers who hold to the latter view have scoured various Old Testament books to show how "Christ crucified" is taught, viz. in the prophecies, theophanies, and types. The view we are advocating, however, is that when preaching to non-believers, the gospel may be drawn from any passage of Scripture. It is the task of the preacher to determine what constitutes a passage of Scripture – where it begins and where it ends – from which to draw out the message of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". Typically, a passage would consist of five to ten verses. This is not to say that in the systematic exposition of any book of the Bible, the gospel has to be drawn out from every passage. The purpose of the occasion has to be considered. Teaching through a book of the Bible in church is different from a one-off evangelistic meeting or the weekly outreach of the church in which a number of groups are reached with a distinct message of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". The four Gospels of the New Testament, however, by virtue of their main purpose, would yield the gospel most of the time when preached through systematically. The important point to note is that the hearers must see that the message is derived from the passage read. Our authority in preaching lies in the word of God, shown by the open Bible.

The view we are advocating will liberate many churches from limiting themselves to preaching "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" only from the four Gospels, or from some books of the New Testament. The pastor will be able to show to those doing outreach for that week how the passage he is expounding in the pulpit yields the message of "Christ crucified". The passage concerned may be only a portion of what he is expounding in the church. Exposition in the church is done with the luxury of having the time allocated for preaching, whereas outreach to a number of groups is limited to, say, 10 minutes only each time. This will be explained further.

## 3.2 Help From Reformed Theology

### *The Five Points of Calvinism*

It is gratifying to see many today being drawn to Calvinist soteriology. The Evangelical Realignment following the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1910-1930 is still continuing, with gains and losses experienced by all groups. The Reformed Baptists have lost some men to the Reformed Presbyterians, and vice versa, over differences on Covenant Theology. The Reformed constituency has lost some men to the Charismatics, and vice versa, over differences on the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Reformed has lost some men to the Neo-Evangelicals, and vice versa, over social concerns and contemporary worship.

A number of Reformed churches have succumbed to the contemporary worship advocated by the Neo-Evangelicals, and become sympathetic to the continuationism of the Charismatics, much to the consternation of those who remain traditionally Reformed. A number of Charismatics have adopted the Calvinist soteriology of the Reformed while toning down on the practice of tongue-speaking and healing, replacing these with contemporary worship. A number of the latter group have called themselves "Reformed" simply because they hold to the Five Points of Calvinism, without any appreciation of the Five Sola's of the Reformation, of Covenant Theology, of the value of a Confession of Faith, or of the Regulative Principle of worship. Instead, by claiming that they are not "extreme Charismatics", while practising contemporary worship – in which the drum-set and other musical instruments feature prominently, together with the singing of contemporary gospel songs accompanied by hand-clapping and hand-raising – they are able to attract many youths. Their claim to being "Reformed" has confused and misled many. They are better described as "the New Calvinists". (See Williams, 2014.)

We would wish for Reformed doctrine and practice to be more widely appreciated and adopted. Our purpose here is to show the relevance of Calvinist soteriology to missions. Missions, as we have noted, is the fulfilment of the Great Commission as given in Matthew 28:18-20, and other parts of the Bible. Calvinist soteriology impacts the Great Commission on at least three fronts: firstly, in the content of the gospel, secondly on the approach to soul winning, and

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thirdly on the objective of evangelism. Our immediate purpose is to consider how it impacts the content of the gospel. Its impact on the approach to soul winning will be considered under the Order of Salvation, while the impact on the objective of evangelism will be considered under "the three faculties" of the human personality.

Calvinist soteriology has been summarised under the Five Points of Calvinism, easily remembered by the acronym TULIP. In Total Depravity, man is seen as totally depraved in all his faculties – mind, heart, and will (Eph. 2:1-3). The "total" is not in degree, but in extent. Man is not as bad as he possibly can be because God's common grace operates to restrain him from becoming worse. Since he has inherited a sinful nature from Adam and Eve, all his faculties are affected by sin such that he is unable to do work good enough to make up for the sins he has committed, nor is he able to improve himself sufficiently to be accepted by God. In Unconditional Election, God chooses certain individuals out of fallen mankind from "before the foundation of the world", and "according to the good pleasure of His will" to be saved (Eph. 1:3-14). Those chosen will in due time hear the gospel and come to faith in Christ. Salvation is by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ. In Limited Atonement, Christ died with the express intention of saving the elect (Rom. 5:15-19; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; 2:10). In view is not the value of His death but the purpose, not the number of people His death could have saved but for whom He came to die. His death would have been more than sufficient to save the whole human race, but it was not the intention of God to save everyone. The total number of elect is uncountably big (Rev. 7:9-10), although the number of those who perish in their sin is expected to be much bigger (Matt. 7:13-14; 22:14). In Irresistible (or Invincible) Grace, the Holy Spirit will draw the elect to faith in Christ despite whatever initial resistance, doubts, or hindrances in him (John 3:3; 6:44). The preacher does his part of preaching the gospel (Rom. 10:17). He is the instrument used by God, while the hearing of the word is the instrumentality of salvation. The response of repentance and faith may be regarded as the means of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the agent who uses the instrument, via the instrumentality of the proclamation of the word, to save (John 16:8). In the Perseverance of the Saints, the elect who has come to faith will persevere in the life of faith (Rom. 8:30, 38). This will be in spite of the trials that accompany true faith (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12).



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Those who profess faith but fall away without repentance are not truly elect – they are apostates (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 6:4-8). The apostates, the unbelievers, and the non-believers (i.e. those who have not heard the gospel) are the reprobates – i.e. those left out by God in His choice of the elect.

The Five Points of Calvinism was formulated to counter the five articles of faith propagated by the followers of James Arminius (1560-1609) in 1610, in the Netherlands. Arminianism, while teaching salvation by grace through faith in Christ, holds that man's will is not in bondage to his fallen nature and is capable, by the help of "prevenient grace" given by God, to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Arminianism is a mediating position between Calvinism and Pelagianism, a teaching that was countered by Augustine (AD 354-430). Pelagianism does not believe in original sin and total depravity, claiming that man is born with a neutral nature that is moulded by nature and nurture, and has the innate ability to choose between right and wrong. Many Neo-Evangelicals today hold to Arminianism. Covenant Theology reveals that there have ever been only two methods of salvation placed before man – salvation by works or salvation by grace. Any attempt at crafting a mediating position will not succeed for, in the final analysis, it will fall under either grace or works. In the case of Arminianism, its clumsy effort at explaining the mechanics of salvation results in the preaching of a defective gospel, causing many to think that they are saved when they have only made a profession of faith. The use of the "Four Spiritual Laws" by the Campus Crusade for Christ in personal evangelism, and the altar call made during gospel meetings which was popularised by Charles Finney (1792-1875), are cases in point.

The Five Points of Calvinism helps one to understand the gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified", and to be careful of the balance needed in the content of gospel proclamation.

#### *The Order of Salvation*

The Order of Salvation (Latin, 'Ordo Solutis') is a prominent feature of Reformed theology. It is based on the "Golden Chain of Salvation" found in Romans 8:29-30,

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the

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firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

According to this text, the order of events involved in the salvation of the elect include: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. To these items may be added others such as regeneration, effectual calling, repentance, faith, and adoption – based on passages such as John 1:29; 3:3, 5; Acts 2:38; and Ephesians 1:13 – so that the Order of Salvation is refined and more complete. There has never been total agreement between those who have written and taught on the subject, although the order of the basic elements found in Romans 8:29-30 is followed. Among the Puritans, William Perkins and John Bunyan had their respective charts on "The Order and Causes of Salvation and Damnation" based on "the Golden Chain" in which are found agreement on the fundamentals while displaying some differences.

Having a clear understanding of the Order of Salvation will help the preacher and the spiritual counsellor to minister more effectively to others by their preaching and application of the Scripture. A minister of the gospel is a physician of souls. He does not deliver a sermon like a recording machine. Instead, there is dynamic interaction between the speaker and the hearers. Furthermore, he illustrates his message and applies it according to the local situation and the general needs of the people. He may not know the particular circumstances of the hearers and should not abuse the pulpit by targeting individuals known to him. Having said that, his message should be made relevant to the people based on the Scriptural passage being expounded. When counselling individuals, he has to determine the underlying spiritual problems and administer the correct biblical counsel. There is healing in God's word, just as there is the wounding of hearts in preaching. Spiritual wounds and psychological sicknesses are a reality. In 1 Corinthians 11:30-32 the apostle Paul refer to those whose sickness and death were cause by sin. When Jeremiah was surrounded by enemies and feeling down-cast he prayed, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise (Jer. 17:14)."

Preaching wounds, and preaching heals. When the question

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was asked, "Is there no balm in Gilead, is there no physician there (Jer. 8:22)?" the answer expected was "Yes, there is!" The Lord was taunted, "Physician, heal yourself (Luke 4:23)!" not only because He engaged in miraculous healing but also because He was teaching truth that cut through the soul, as the context shows. The apostle Peter comforted persecuted believers by turning their eyes to Christ who "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed (1 Pet. 2:24)." The work of "rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15)" is not only in the explication of the text, but also in its application. Were not the hearers of Peter and Stephen "cut to the heart" upon hearing their preaching (Acts 2:37; 7:54)? Was not Felix afraid when he heard Paul preaching "about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come (Acts 24:25)"? It is the Holy Spirit who convicts hearers "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement (John 16:8)", by the preached word (Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23). However, it behoves preachers to maintain spiritual sharpness so as to be used in the salvation of souls. A good grasp of systematic theology is important. Experience in preaching and evangelism is helpful. An understanding of the state of the hearers in relation to the truth of Scripture will facilitate evangelism and the task of counselling troubled souls. This is where an understanding of the Order of Salvation comes into its own.

We reproduce here the Order of Salvation which has appeared in an earlier book (Poh, TR, 2017:83-86). This order is a refinement of the order given by Dr. Peter Masters in his book, "Physicians of Souls" (Masters, 2002).

All three persons of the Trinity are involved in our salvation (Rom. 8:14; 1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:2). The Holy Spirit is the *agent* who applies the work of Christ to the elect (1 Pet. 1:22-23; Isa. 44:3). He does so by the instrumentality of the hearing of the word of God (Rom. 6:17; 10:17) and, in particular, the gospel of "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 1:6-9). The Holy Spirit is irresistible, or invincible (cannot be overcome) in His work (Eph. 1:19-20; Rom. 8:11). Irresistible Grace is considered under the chapter on Effectual Calling in the 1689 Confession (Ch. 10).

The 1689 Confession (1689:3:6) gives the Order of Salvation as: Election (from eternity), Redemption (in Christ's death), Effectual Calling "to faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season", Justi-

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fication (God declaring the person not guilty), Adoption, Sanctification (the process of growing in holiness), Glorification (preservation unto salvation). This is based on Romans 8:29-30. Together with 1689:10:1, it is clear that Effectual Calling includes the doctrine of Irresistible Grace. Logically speaking, and not necessarily occurring concurrently, there are three important stages in Effectual Calling – Conception, Gestation, and Conversion. Effectual Calling is followed by Reconciliation and Assurance, before Sanctification. Each of these stages consists of two elements:

- i In *Conception*, the word is heard effectually, giving spiritual life to the person (the Internal Call), as the Spirit comes to dwell in him (John 5:25; Gal. 3:2).
- ii In *Gestation*, the sinner is awakened to his spiritual condition and convicted of his guilt before God (1 Cor. 1:23-24; Acts 2:37; 16:29).
- iii In *Conversion*, the convicted sinner is enabled to come to Christ in repentance and faith (John 6:37; 10:27; Acts 11:18; Eph. 2:8-9).
- iv *Reconciliation* with God is accomplished when He justifies us upon faith in Christ, and adopts us as His children (Rom. 3:28; 8:15; 2 Cor. 5:18-21). Also, there follows the experience of forgiveness of sins and peace with God which, together, constitute *Assurance*. This is distinct from growing in holiness, which is *Sanctification* (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 5:22).
- v There might be resistance against the truth along the way, but the elect will finally be saved. God's grace is irresistible/invincible (Isa. 55:11; Jer. 31:18, 33). Throughout, as the word is proclaimed and applied by the preacher, the Spirit is at work in regenerating the elect hearer, enabling him to respond.

A complete Order of Salvation would include Predestination, Redemption, Conception, Gestation, Conversion, Reconciliation, Assurance, Sanctification, Glorification. Effectual Calling covers the work of the Spirit, by the instrumentality of the word, in giving new life in Christ. It includes Conception, Gestation, and Conversion. The

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Gestation period may be short or drawn out. (See 1689:10:1 cf. para. 4 & 15:3). Some Reformed writers leave out Gestation, or place it before Conception, therefore treating Gestation as the work of the Spirit that is not yet saving, as happened in the non-elect who hear the gospel. Regeneration, i.e. the work of the Spirit in bringing about the new birth (John 3:3, 5; Tit. 3:5), results in Effectual Calling (1689:15:1 & 10:1, 2). God is the author of the Effectual Call, while the elect receive the Effectual Calling (cf. Eph. 4:1). Irresistible Grace looks more closely at the work of the Spirit in applying the word to the elect. Looked at from the point of cause-and-effect, Effectual Calling is the effect while Irresistible Grace – conveyed by the Effectual Call – is the cause.

Many writers do not differentiate the call from the calling, i.e. between the subject or author, and the object or beneficiary, of the call. Also, the term "regeneration" is used instead of "initial regeneration" (Berkhof calls it "generation"), and is regarded as "a momentary act", like justification and adoption. For many years the present writer followed Professor John Murray's view of regeneration, treating it as "a momentary act" of the Holy Spirit in giving new life to the elect hearer of God's word (Murray, 1955:87). This view was questioned by Dr. Peter Masters in his book, "Physicians of Souls" who argued for an "elongated" view of regeneration which allows for a period of Seeking before Conversion. Upon closer study of the subject, this writer came to be convinced of Dr. Masters's position, which accords with the view of older Reformed writers. John Bunyan, in his chart on the Order of Salvation, shows that it is the operation of the indwelling Holy Spirit that causes conviction of sins, leading to faith. Louis Berkhof, says this of regeneration (Berkhof, 1941:465):

These terms [regeneration, to beget, to bring forth, to quicken with, etc.] carry with them several important implications, to which attention should be directed. (a) Regeneration is a creative work of God, and is therefore *a work in which man is purely passive*, and in which there is no place for human co-operation. This is a very important point, since it stresses the fact that salvation is wholly of God. (b) The creative work of God produces a *new life*, in virtue of which man, made alive with Christ, shares the resurrection life, and can be called a new crea-

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ture, "created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them," Eph. 2:10. (c) Two elements must be distinguished in regeneration, namely, *generation or the begetting of the new life*, and *bearing or bringing forth*, by which the new life is brought forth out of its hidden depths. Generation implants the principle of the new life in the soul, and the new birth causes this principle to begin to assert itself in action. This distinction is of great importance for a proper understanding of regeneration.

The diagram of the Order of Salvation is as shown in Figure 3.1.

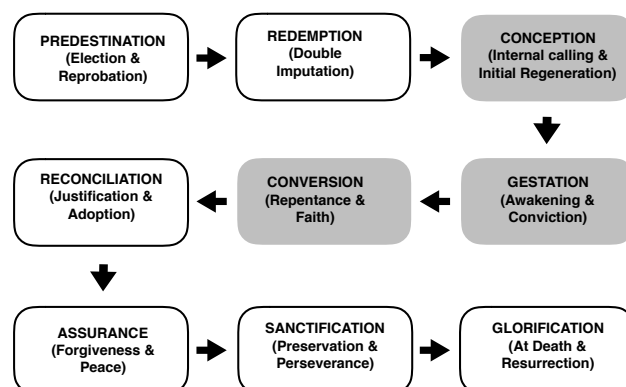


Fig. 3.1: The Order of Salvation

#### *The three faculties*

The concern for effective counselling of troubled souls has led Jay Adams (Adams, 1970) and other men to create a unique system of "nouthetic counselling" ('nouthesis', confrontation with sin) which is claimed to accord with the teaching of the Bible. A vast industry of Christian counselling has arisen and grown to such an extent that there are institutes and seminaries teaching "Christian Counselling", with accreditation boards that are recognised by various

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western governments. Professional Christian counsellors are found in many churches to whom are channelled "the more difficult cases" of counselling the pastors are unable to handle. The Christian Counselling movement has obviously developed into something quite different from what was envisaged by the early founders. There are now voices of warning and dissent raised against the movement, e.g. that of Martin and Deidre Bobgan (Bobgan, 1994), and E. S. Williams (Williams, 2009).

In his classic book on missions, J. H. Bavinck devotes a part of the book to Elenctics (Bavinck, 1960). The term "elenctic" is derived from the Greek verb 'elengchein', and the noun 'elengchos' (conviction of guilt). From various New Testament texts, it is argued that the word is regularly translated as rebuking, including the idea of the conviction of sin and a call to repentance. The burden of Elenctics is to effectively preach the gospel on the mission field such that the heathens might be truly saved. The discussion on Elenctics intersects with apologetics, contextualisation, anthropology, philosophy, culture and religion. This field of study has not been isolated and absolutised, as has happened with Christian Counselling. Concerns have been raised, however, over the place of apologetics and the directions taken in contextualisation on the mission field. A tendency – if not a danger – of Elenctics is to be too wide-ranging in its coverage that the original end is lost sight of. There is a proper place to know the culture and religion of the target group. There is a proper contextualisation that is involved in the presentation of the gospel in a different culture. However, in all things that are right, good and true, the danger of going astray must be guarded against.

In both Christian Counselling and Elenctics, there is the commendable attempt to address the issue of effectively applying the word of God to win souls and to comfort troubled souls. It is recognised that the Holy Spirit alone effectually uses the word of God to transform lives. Here, we propose the application of truth to the hearer at a more fundamental level, viz. that of his personality. It is necessary to define the terms we use. A human person consists of body and soul (Matt. 10:28; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:34; James 2:26). Some Bible verses appear to teach Trichotomy – body, soul, and spirit (1 Thes. 5:18; Heb. 4:12) – but they are capable of being explained reasonably by Dichotomy. The body is physical matter while the soul is invisible spirit. The essence of the person is the soul, which is

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housed in the body to express life in a physical world (Heb. 12:23; Rev. 6:9-11). When a person dies, his lifeless body is buried and turns to dust, waiting to be resurrected on the last day. The soul lives on, going either to heaven or to hell, waiting to be clothed with the body when resurrected on judgement day. The living person expresses himself as a *personality* which consists of three faculties – the mind, the affection (or the heart), and the volition (or the will). In the Bible, the heart is often used in reference to the soul, or the inner being of the person, for example (Mark 7:21-23):

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.

For our purpose here, we will use the heart as the faculty of feelings, such as those of love, joy, anger, hatred, fear, persuasion, conviction. The will is the faculty that makes decision and choice, leading directly to actions. The mind is the faculty of thought, of reason, of understanding. Connected with the mind is the ability to remember, which we do not treat as a separate faculty. Augustine of Hippo is supposed to have held to the view that the human personality has five faculties, viz. the mind, the heart, the will, the conscience, and the memory. The Reformers and the Puritans generally held to the view we are propounding here, viz. that there are three basic faculties – the mind, the heart, and the will. This was their assumption which is discernible in their writings, and which seems to have biblical support (Rom. 1:21; 6:17; 2 Tim. 1:7; Phil. 1:27). Occasionally, they speak of the conscience as a separate faculty. Keach's Catechism of the Particular Baptists, and the Shorter Catechism of the Presbyterians, have this question and answer,

Q. What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.



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The three faculties, as they relate to salvation, is explained by Berkhof (Berkhof: 1941:471) as follows:

*The relative order of calling and regeneration.* This is perhaps best understood, if we note the following stages: (1) Logically, the external call in the preaching of the Word (except in the case of children) generally precedes or coincides with the operation of the Holy Spirit, by which the new life is produced in the soul of man. (2) Then by a creative word God generates the new life, changing the inner disposition of the soul, illuminating the mind, rousing the feelings, and renewing the will. In this act of God the ear is implanted that enables man to hear the call of God to the salvation of his soul. *This is regeneration in the most restricted sense of the word.* In it man is entirely passive. (3) Having received the spiritual ear, the call of God in the gospel is now heard by the sinner, and is brought home effectively to the heart. The desire to resist has been changed to a desire to obey, and the sinner yields to the persuasive influence of the Word through the operation of the Holy Spirit. *This is the effectual calling through the instrumentality of the word of preaching, effectively applied by the Spirit of God.* (4) This effectual calling, finally, secures, through the truth as a means, the first holy exercises of the new disposition that is born in the soul. The new life begins to manifest itself; the implanted life issues in the new birth. *This is the completion of the work of regeneration in the broader sense of the word, and the point at which it turns into conversion.*

The above quote not only assumes the three basic faculties in the human personality, but also shows the relation between the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration to the instrumentality of the preaching of God's word. Not discussed is the role, or the place, of the conscience. We consider the conscience not as a separate faculty, but the felt effect produced by the interaction between the three basic faculties (Rom. 2:15; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Tim. 4:2). When the action is not according to what is known in the mind as right or true, the heart will feel pangs of shame, guilt and even fear while the conscience

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will turn against self to condemn. The reverse is the effect when the action is according to what the mind knows to be right or true – the conscience will feel good. We may proceed a step further and say that the attitude of the person is the combined effect of the mind and the heart working together which might, or might not, issue in action. Reading the attitude, and probing the conscience, without being rude, presumptuous, or brutal constitute effective evangelism. The Lord put up with the rather forward attitude of the Samaritan woman while revealing the truth about Himself, finally exposing her dark life to true worship that is possible only through knowing Christ as the Messiah (John 4:7-26). In the case of the woman caught in adultery, the direct thrust made at the scribes and Pharisees skewered their mind, heart and will with such effect that their conscience rendered them powerless as they slunk away. At the same time, the woman's wounded conscience was treated with kind words of grace – "no condemnation, sin no more" (John 8:1-11).

As in personal evangelism, the objective of gospel preaching is to bring all three basic faculties of man into subjection to Christ as Mediator, who occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. For this objective to be achieved, the gospel must be proclaimed in such a way as to appeal to the conscience. The apostle Paul imitated Christ in His preaching. Felix was alarmed by Paul's preaching, Festus was agitated, and Agrippa was challenged (Acts 24:25; 26:24, 28). The 1689 Confession (8:10) says this of Christ's three offices, "This number and order of offices [Prophet-Priest-King] is necessary." While regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, the preacher is used as the instrument to bring the word of God to the hearer. His words, his personality, and manner of presentation of the message are all used by God to bring the sinner to faith. How much of a doctrine is to be explained, and where the emphasis is to be placed in his message, are affected by his interaction with the hearers. The preacher is to apply the truth to the conscience of the hearers, with the aim of bringing their minds to submit to Christ as Saviour, their hearts to rely on the blood of Christ for cleansing, and their wills to obey Christ as King. In all this, the primacy of the mind must be recognised (cf. Rom. 6:17; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Tim. 1:7). Change is to be brought about by addressing the mind with the truth of Scripture, in such a way as to convince or convict the heart, leading to resolve in the will to act. In a gospel message, and all teaching for that

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matter, there will be the explanation, illustration and application of the Bible passage. All these components of gospel proclamation are made to bear on the mind, to penetrate to the heart, and with the intention of moving the will to act. In that way, the hearers' consciences will be pricked, nudged, and challenged. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to transform the total personality – in mind, heart, and will – leading to repentance and faith, true salvation has taken place. The dynamics of a soul meeting other souls will be discussed further under the Great Commission.

The process of gospel preaching, considered logically, may be illustrated by the diagram below:

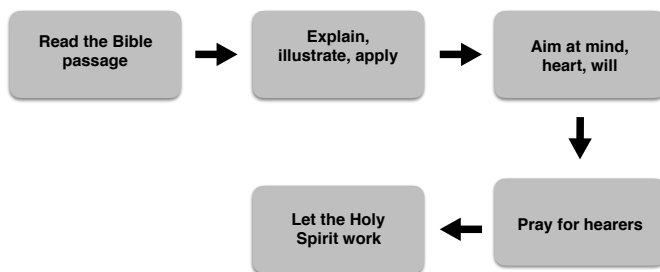


Fig. 3.2: The Process of Gospel Preaching

The three offices of Christ also has application to the life of the local church. As Head of the church, Christ is Prophet, Priest, and King. The church that is submitted to Christ's headship will want to be right in doctrine, corresponding to Christ's prophethood. The number and order of Christ's offices is essential. From correct doctrine, the church must proceed to have worship that is according to Scripture, corresponding to Christ's priesthood, and then to have the biblical form of church government, corresponding to Christ's kingship. The number and order of Christ's offices also has relevance

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in the manner of accomplishing the reformation of the church. As a general rule, the doctrine, worship, and government (including discipline) of the church must proceed in that order. When attempting to reform the church, the members must be taught the truth in the mind, and be convinced of the truth in the heart, before they are willing to implement change. Is it not the case that Arminian activism places the emphasis on the will, while Charismatic subjectivism places the emphasis on the heart? Woe to those who claim to be Reformed if they emphasise doctrine in the head at the expense of love in the heart and obedience to the word!

#### 3.3 Summary

Missions is grounded in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. The death of Christ fulfilled the covenants of promise in the Old Testament, and accomplished the salvation of the elect. Salvation is by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone. All three persons of the Holy Trinity are involved. The gospel content must include the person and the death of Christ, which may be drawn out from any identifiable passage of Scripture. A clear understanding of the content of the gospel is important, which is helped by a clear understanding of the doctrines of grace. A clear understanding of the Order of Salvation helps the preacher and the evangelist to assess the state of the hearers in order to tailor the message to their immediate needs, and to effectively counsel troubled souls. The human personality is made up of the three basic faculties of mind, heart, and will – the interaction between which produces the effect known as the conscience. Gospel preaching that pierces the conscience is more likely to bring the mind, the heart and the will under subjection to Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

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## Four

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# THE CROWN: THE GREAT COMMISSION

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We have seen that missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God. Missions is also grounded in the atoning death of Christ. We will show here that missions is crowned by the Great Commission. The crown of a tree is its most visible part. It is supported by the sturdy trunk which is deeply rooted. We will explore the Great Commission in its broad outline by asking the questions, "Why is the Great Commission 'great'?" "What should constitute the motivation for missions?" and "When will missions end?"

### 4.1 Why The Great Commission Is "Great"

The command given by the Lord to the apostles in Matthew 28:18-20 has been called "the Great Commission". It says, 'And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.' Why is this command of the Lord called "the Great Commission"? There are many reasons.

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##### *The last command*

One reason is that it is the last command of the Lord before He was taken up to heaven. We know how it is that people tend to utter the most important matter just before parting ways. Other matters may have been said, but the last instruction is the most important because it is intended to be remembered by the other party. This command is given at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. It is as though Matthew wishes to leave his readers with this command ringing in their ears. The command is repeated in Acts 1:8, before the Lord Jesus Christ was taken up to heaven. It seems clear that the Lord intended His disciples to remember this last command of His after He had gone away.

##### *A repeated command*

Another reason is that this command was repeated many times after the Lord's resurrection. It is not only recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8, but also in Mark 16:15-16 and Luke 24:46-49. This occurred in different settings, and on different occasions. The very fact that it was repeated that many times shows the importance of this command.

##### *The "greater works"*

There is a third reason why this command has been called "the Great Commission", namely that it involves the "greater works" promised by the Lord. In John 14:12 the Lord Jesus says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." Bible commentators, like William Hendriksen (Hendriksen, 1976), argue convincingly that the "greater works" referred to here are the works connected with the preaching of the gospel. When Jesus Christ was on earth, He was confined to the region of Palestine. His ministry was short-lived. In three years of public ministry, He was cut off. He knew, however, that His work would be continued through His disciples. It was His intention that it should be carried on by the apostles and the disciples after them. This is what He prayed for in the high-priestly prayer of John 17.

As far as the extent and scope of gospel preaching are concerned, we are able to cover more than the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not confined to the land of Palestine, nor to the Jewish people alone. We



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are able to reach more peoples – more nations, or tribes, or ethnic groups – than were reached by the Lord. We are, in fact, doing the "greater works" that the Lord had promised to His disciples. Of course, no disciple can be greater than the Master. In terms of what we are, whether considered individually or collectively, we can never be greater than the Lord. But in terms of the works that He has assigned to us, we are accomplishing more than what He did when He was on earth. He is the One who has given us these "greater works", which are encapsulated in the Great Commission.

##### *An abiding command*

The fourth reason why this command is regarded as great is because of its abiding nature. The Lord intended the gospel to be carried to all nations in the world. In their lifetime, the apostles could reach only the peoples in the regions around the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, the Lord promised to be with His disciples "to the end of the age". This will not make sense unless we understand it to mean that the Lord will be with the apostles and all other disciples after them, as is indicated in the high-priestly prayer of John 17. The Great Commission is a command to God's people until the end of the age. From that point of view also, it is "great".

##### *The culmination of prophecies*

There is a fifth reason why this command is truly great. It is the fact that it constitutes the culmination of all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the ingathering of God's people, both Jews and Gentiles, to be members of Christ's body. This is the "mystery" that was revealed to the apostles, namely, that the gospel concerning "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2) is to be preached to all nations (Rom. 16:25-27; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 3:1-7).

##### *A mandate with a clear objective*

The sixth reason why this command is great is the fact that it is no ordinary command. The stature of the giver, the actual recipient, and the overall objective makes this command take on the status of a Commission. The command comes from none other than the King of kings and the Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). It was planned in eternity past that the Son should judge the world (John 5:22, 26-27). The resurrected Lord is now glorified. He is seated on the throne in heaven, ruling over the universe. It does not

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appear yet that all things are under His authority and rule, but the process of bringing all things under His rule has begun. We are told this in Philippians 2:9-11,

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is clearly stated also in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. The Trinitarian God is sovereign and in control of all things from the beginning, and will be in control of all things to all eternity. As the Son of God born incarnate, i.e. as the Son of Man, He began to execute His rule from when He was glorified. The Great Commission was given to the church by the risen Lord on the eve of His glorification. The recipient of this command is the church militant, that is the church that is on earth – consisting of all true believers who are gathered as local churches. The overall objective is to build up the church of Jesus Christ by planting local churches. The sub-objectives include the making of disciples of all the nations, the ordering (i.e. the putting into order) of local churches, and the sanctification and training of members of the local churches.

A mandate given to the church militant to accomplish the exalted task of building up the church of Jesus Christ, through the planting of local churches, is rightly called "the Great Commission".

##### *The uniqueness of the gospel age*

This last reason deserves more attention because it links the Great Commission theologically to the atoning death of Christ and to God's eternal purpose. In other words, it helps us to see the Great Commission as the crown of the tree that is supported by the trunk of Christ's atoning death, and which is rooted firmly in the eternal purpose of God. Acts 2:17-21 is a key passage which says,

17 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your young men shall see visions,

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Your old men shall dream dreams.

18 And on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;  
And they shall prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in heaven above  
And signs in the earth beneath:  
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
Before the coming of the great and awesome  
day of the Lord.

21 And it shall come to pass  
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord  
Shall be saved.'

The apostle Peter was explaining the phenomenon of tongue-speaking, in which the apostles were taking turns to proclaim the gospel in different languages that they had not learned before. Peter quoted from the Old Testament prophet Joel which declared the uniqueness of the gospel age. There are three parts to the prophecy. The first part consists of verses 17 and 18 which describes the beginning of the gospel age when the Holy Spirit was poured out on God's people, causing them to prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams. In other words, there would be signs and wonders among God's people, as was happening on the day of Pentecost. The second part of the prophecy consists of verses 19 and 20 which describes the end of the gospel age. There would be upheaval in the universe, affecting the earth and other planets and stars. The sun will turn dark while the moon becomes like blood. These signs would accompany the return of the Lord to judge the world. These signs correspond to the description of the Lord's return in Matthew 24:29-31 and Revelation 6:12-17. The signs among God's people marked the beginning of the gospel age, while the signs in the heavenly realm will mark the end of the gospel age. The third part of the prophecy consists of verse 21, which is the period marked out by the signs at the beginning

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and at the end. During this period, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved". In other words, this is the period when the Great Commission is carried out.

The uniqueness of the gospel age as prophesied by Joel may be compared to special events such as the Olympic Games. The Games open with celebration – including a parade of the teams, speeches, cultural shows, and fireworks. The Games also close with celebration of like nature. The celebrations are at the beginning and the end of the Games only. In the period between the celebrations, the various teams compete against one another in the various events, for that is why they have come together. We do not expect the celebration at the beginning to continue through to the end. Similarly, the signs marking the beginning of the gospel age were not expected to last through the gospel age. Those who claim the continuance of the extraordinary signs of the Holy Spirit are not only mistaken in their understanding of Scripture, but fail to see the purpose of those signs. The expectation of those signs and the claim of tongue-speaking, healing and prophecy are a serious distraction to the proclamation of the gospel.

The Great Commission is the means used by God to call out the elect, in fulfilment of the covenant promises of the Old Testament. The gospel that is proclaimed to all the nations is used by the Holy Spirit to apply the atoning death of Christ to the elect. The redeemed of the Lord are gathered into local churches so that their faith may be nurtured. As the believers are edified by the word in the local churches, the universal church of Jesus Christ is being sanctified and cleansed by the Lord – "...with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27)." We see, then, that souls are saved in the gospel age by the fulfilment of the Great Commission, to await the gathering together of all the redeemed of the Lord during "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9). "And they shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 22:5)."

Our view of the uniqueness of the gospel age, coupled with our view of when the world will end (see below), means that we see the millennium (1000 years) of Revelation 20 figuratively and being fulfilled now. The events recorded in the chapter are not to be taken as happening chronologically. The book of Revelation is a book of

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prophecy that is full of visions and symbolism. This is no license for us to engage in wild and fanciful interpretation. The normal rules of interpretation still applies, e.g. taking the text plainly, in context, comparing Scripture with Scripture, understanding the obscure in the light of the clear, etc. We are in agreement with William Hendriksen's outline of the book which sees it as portraying the gospel age in parallel symbolism, instead of chronologically. Yes, we hold to Amillennialism, and not to Postmillennialism or Premillennialism, believing it to be the most consistent view of Eschatology. The seven churches of Asia in the first three chapters of the book are a reference to all the churches of the Lord throughout the gospel age, for seven is the number of God's perfection. There were other churches in the Roman province of Asia that are not included, e.g. the churches in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Troas (Acts 20:6; Col. 4:13). Similarly, the "one hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel" of Revelation 7:4ff. is not to be taken in a literalistic manner. The millennium of Revelation is the gospel age that began with Christ's first coming (some would say with Pentecost) and will end with Christ's return to judge the world. We are in the "last days" (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; etc.), when the Great Commission is carried out so that the elect may be called out of darkness, into God's kingdom (Col. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9).

We see, then, the unique place of the Great Commission in the eternal plan of God. The Old Testament prophesied of the calling in of the elect from all nations to be God's covenant people. The New Testament elaborates on how the gospel is to be carried to all nations for the calling out of the elect. If the Great Commission encapsulates such an all-pervasive truth of the Bible, the failure to carry out that Commission is serious indeed!

The Great Commission is a command that is truly "great". The gospel age is unique in the plan of God.

## 4.2 The Motivation For Missions

What should provide the motivation to carry out the Great Commission? To answer this question, we begin by an analysis of the Great Commission.

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##### *An analysis*

The Great Commission was given in slightly different forms, on different occasions, in the New Testament. The fullest account is found in Matthew 28:18-20. It consists of three parts. There is the *preamble*, or introduction, in verse 18. There is the *precept*, or rule of action, in verses 19 and 20. There, finally, is the *promise* found at the end of verse 20. Each of these parts may be regarded as serving the purposes of providing the *power*, the *motive*, and the *comfort* to the execution of the Great Commission. We may summarise the Great Commission in a table.

<b>Preamble</b>	<b>18 "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.:</b>	<b>Power</b>
<b>Precept</b>	<b>19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;"</b>	<b>Motive</b>
<b>Promise</b>	<b>"and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."</b>	<b>Comfort</b>

Fig. 4.1: Analysis of the Great Commission

##### *The precept*

We begin with the *precept*, which constitutes the main thrust of the Great Commission. The sentence is actually couched in the imperative sense. We are taught in school that a sentence can be in the inquisitive sense, or the declarative sense, or the imperative sense. A sentence given in the inquisitive sense is actually a question. A mother may say, "Children, have you brushed your teeth?" That is in the inquisitive, in which an inquiry is made. The children may answer, "We have brushed our teeth." That will be a sentence in the declarative sense, since it declares, or makes a statement. Instead

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of asking a question, the mother may say, "Children, go and brush your teeth." That will be a sentence of the imperative sense. It is the giving of a command.

In the original Greek, the precept consists of a main clause, "Make disciples of all the nations". This is in the imperative sense. It defines for us the task to be carried out. Attached to this main clause are three participles – namely, "going", "baptising", and "teaching" – which are also in the imperative sense. These participles define for us the objective of the Great Commission, which is the planting of local churches to build up the church of Jesus Christ. Put together, we have a sentence which comes across clearly as a command, which is not lost to us in the English translation.

### *The motive*

This leads us to consider the motive for carrying out the Great Commission. Since its main thrust – the precept – is basically a command to accomplish a clear objective, it is actually a duty that is laid upon us to carry out. We have no choice in the matter. It is not an option. It must be carried out. Failure to do so will be tantamount to rebellion against our Lord and Saviour. It will be tantamount to rejecting Him as the Head of the church. As God's people, we do want to obey Him! As a redeemed people, we do want to follow our Lord and Saviour! Joyful obedience is a mark of true discipleship.

We know that everything we do must be to glorify God. We are reminded of what the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory God." We wish to do everything to the glory of God – including the carrying out of the Great Commission. That will be the *ultimate* reason for everything that we do. However, the *immediate* reason for carrying out the Great Commission is obedience to a command of the Lord.

Our obedience to the Lord is to be a joyful one. Not only do we wish to do it to the glory of God, we wish also to do it out of love for Him. We are able to love God because He first loved us. If we love God, we should also "love our neighbours as ourselves", as the Lord teaches in the Gospels. There may also be other legitimate motives for carrying out the Great Commission, such as love for perishing souls, concern for friends and relatives who are living in ignorance of the gospel, the shortness of time to do God's work, and desire to

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see God's name honoured in the world. These motives, however, are secondary to obedience to the Lord. We would maintain that joyful obedience to the Lord constitutes *the immediate and primary motive* for carrying out the Great Commission.

##### *The preamble*

We consider, next, the preamble to the Great Commission. A command will need to be obeyed. But where are we to get the power to carry it out? The task spelled out for us is itself so daunting. We are to "make disciples of all the nations". We may have the desire to obey the Lord, but we may not be equal to the task.

Consider the nature of the task – we are "to make disciples" of others. If you understand what is involved in this, you will know that it is beyond human ability to accomplish. Who can convert a sinner who is "dead in trespasses and sin"? Who can change his nature? Can an Ethiopian change his skin? Can a leopard change its spots? We know that a sinner cannot change himself. We know also that, left to ourselves, none of us can change him.

Consider also the scope of the task – we are to make disciples *of all nations*. Not only are we required to reach out to individuals, we are also required to reach out to various ethnic groups – for, that is what "the nations" (Greek, *ta ethne*) mean. An individual cannot accomplish all this. The whole church together cannot accomplish all this. Yet, it is required of us to carry out the Great Commission! We know that it is not expected of us to accomplish it in a lifetime. But, surely, it is required of us to do our utmost to contribute to its fulfilment.

Combine these difficulties with our own infirmities, and you will see the sheer impossibility of anyone accomplishing the task. How often it is that we are cast down because of our own sins and the many discouragements that beset us! We are sinners living in a sinful world, in which the devil reigns. Friends and foes alike may constitute hindrances and discouragements to us. Not all our friends will see things the same way with regard to the fulfilment of the Great Commission. The enemies of the gospel make deliberate efforts to frustrate the spread of the gospel. The devil uses various means to prevent us from preaching, and the hearers from responding to, the gospel.

It is here that we come to appreciate the authority of Christ be-



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hind the command. We are sent forth to the task by none other than the King of kings, and the Lord of lords! It is the Lord of glory Himself who is entrusting us with this commission. We, therefore, go forth in His name – by His authority and in His power! Who can stop us? Who dare to oppose us? He who attempts to stop us is fighting against the Lord and Master of the universe! He who dares to oppose us is opposing the One who sends us! You would remember what happened to Saul when he persecuted the Christians. While on the road to Damascus, the Lord appeared and questioned him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" The Lord did not say, "Why are you persecuting *the church*?" but "Why are you persecuting *Me*?" In our weakness, we look to the Lord for strength. His grace is sufficient for us!

##### *The power*

The power, or ability, to carry out the Great Commission, therefore, is from the Lord. Remember what the apostle Paul says about the preaching of the gospel: "To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily (Col. 1:29)." Remember also what he says in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?" The Lord will enable His people to preach the gospel.

The power to convert souls also is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. The word of God will be used by Him to convert sinners. The Spirit of God will use the proclaimed word to transform souls and give them spiritual life. God will honour the means He has appointed to call out the elect from the world. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17)." When people are converted, it will be because they have "obeyed the truth through the Spirit", and "been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever (1 Pet. 1:22-23)."

##### *The promise*

There also is the promise of Christ's presence. The *precept* provides

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us with the motive for missions. The *preamble* gives us the power to carry on the work. The *promise* comforts us in our trials. Yes, trials there will be if we are intent on carrying out the Great Commission! Which faithful servant of God has not suffered? The Lord Himself suffered. His apostles suffered. If we are going to be useful to the Lord, we must be prepared to suffer for the faith. Those who do not persevere to the end will drop out of the race. Those who do not have the grit – the endurance – will not be able to accomplish much good. That is because "Rome was not built in a day" – converts are not made overnight, and a local church is not built in a day.

We have Christ's enabling power to do the work, and we have His promise to be with us to the end. We know that the Lord is faithful, and He will not break His words. He is not like men, the most trustworthy of whom cannot be fully trusted. Often it is that we are greatly disappointed by the people we trusted. This is something that we learn as we get older – the circle of trustworthy friends becomes smaller and smaller! There have been times when we wonder who will fail us next. And we have often wondered whether it is worthwhile continuing in the work. Friends may become enemies. The most sincere and loyal of friends is but a man. He is capable of falling. The Lord, however, will not fail us. Everything else around us might crumble, but the Lord will be with us still. Thanks be to the Lord for such an assurance!

##### *The comfort*

We derive comfort from the promise of Christ's presence as we serve Him. He is present to guide, strengthen and protect us, as well as providing us our needs. The apostle Paul was comforted by the assurance of the Lord's presence in a period of intense ministry in Corinth, plagued with opposition from the enemies of the gospel (Acts 18:9-11):

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Another passage should be linked to the promise of Christ's pres-

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ence in the Great Commission, i.e. John 12:24-26,

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

This writer confesses to being perplexed by the many well-known commentators who interpret the second part of verse 26 as a reference to heaven, "...and where I am, there My servant will be also." We know that the last part, "him, My Father will honour", concerns heaven, for it is a clear teaching of Scripture that those who are faithful to the Lord will be honoured by the Father when we arrive in heaven (Matt. 25: 21, 23; Rom. 8:17). The sentence before it, however, is concerned with the presence of the Lord during service. The commentators seem to have come to a different conclusion by a comparison with the words in John 7:34 and 36, "You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come." While the immediate context of John 7 concerns the departure of Christ to heaven, that of John 12 is about self-denying service arising from whole-hearted commitment to Christ. One should at least allow for the possibility of understanding John 12:26 in the light of its immediate context, and by comparison with Acts 18:9-11 and Matthew 28:20. The missionary Charles R. Marsh expressed these thoughts – self-denying service, suffering, and the Lord's presence – in his poem (Marsh, 1976):

I wanted to sow in a fertile field  
That bordered a pleasant land,  
Where fellowships sweet their joys would yield,  
And comfort be mine to command.

He gave me instead, a barren spot  
In a land that was wild and drear,  
Where peril and hardship must be my lot,  
Af far from all I held dear.

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But I learned that the field of His choice was fair,  
Far better than any beside,  
For the Master, also, laboured there –  
My strength, my Companion and Guide.

##### *The motivation*

There is a difference between "motive" and "motivation". The motive is the reason or rationale behind an action. The motivation is what impels us to action. We have the motive for carrying out the Great Commission, we have the power provided for its accomplishment, and we have the comfort of Christ's presence in the process of carrying it out. These three – the motive, the power, and the comfort – should, together, give us the *motivation* to carry out this glorious task.

We know what it is like with people who have no motivation to do anything. Everything is done in a listless, half-hearted way. When the spirit is crushed, all motivation is destroyed. It is a terrible thing to have no motivation to live the Christian life. That is why we must be so careful not to crush the spirit of any believer who is intent on serving the Lord. We must not break the bruised reed; we must not quench the smoking flax. Woe to those who cause Christ's servants to stumble! William Carey carried with him into the mission field "an abashing rebuke" from a senior pastor for advocating missions to the heathens (Appleby, 2007). Of the twelve spies sent out to survey the land of Canaan, only Joshua and Caleb gave a positive report (Num. 13, 14). Few are the ones who have the spirit of Joshua and Caleb today!

We are discussing the motivation for carrying out the Great Commission. We note that the apostle Paul suffered much in the ministry. Yet, he refused to allow his motivation to be extinguished. Hear what he says in Colossians 1:24, 28-29, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church...Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." Look at another example. In 2 Timothy 2:10, the apostle says, "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain

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the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

The Great Commission is truly "great". For it to be fulfilled well, God's people must capture the right motivation for missions.

### 4.3 When Missions Will End

To determine when missions will end we need to determine the scope and objective of the Great Commission. The Matthew 28:18-20 passage is the fullest account of the Great Commission but it is, by itself, not the full account. To have the full account, we must look at the parallel passages – including Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:36-49; and John 20:19-23 – as well as the teaching given on other occasions, including Acts 1:6-8 and Matthew 9:35-38. The last of these passages is particularly instructive.

The occasion was when a great crowd of people gathered around the Lord to hear Him preach. We are told that the Lord was moved with compassion upon seeing the multitudes who came to Him. This is a characteristic of the Lord – He looked upon the spiritually needy people around Him with compassion. He was capable of strong actions – as when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the temple area. He was also capable of using strong words – as when He rebuked the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, vipers, and whitewashed sepulchres. The dominant characteristic of our Lord's ministry, however, was His compassion for the souls around Him. This is consistent with His role as the Good Shepherd, who had come to die for His sheep. We are told that "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd (Matt. 9:36)." This shows that our Lord was not merely concerned to save souls, but also to have them gathered into local congregations in which His people may be properly shepherded. The founding of local churches was always in the mind of the Lord. This is the objective of the Great Commission.

#### *Spatial and temporal aspects*

Practically speaking, the founding of a local church begins with the salvation of souls. The Lord said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest (vv. 37-38)." If we stop to ponder for a moment, it becomes clear that more is said than

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is at first apparent. If the Lord was concerned only for the crowd of people immediately before Him, He could have preached to them there and then, and saved as many of them as He wanted, by an act of His divine power. Or, He could have assigned His disciples to minister to them in groups immediately – as He did when He fed the five thousands and the four thousands – and saved as many as were destined to be saved. The work would have been done. There would have been no need for the disciples to pray for labourers. But the words employed by the Lord show that He was referring to the general situation, and not to the particular situation before Him; and He was referring to the situation that extends to the future, and not just to the moment. There is thus a spatial as well as a temporal aspect to the Great Commission.

The spatial aspect is clear to all. In Matthew 28:19, we are told, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations..." Mark 16:15 says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature..." Acts 1:8 says, "...you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The Great Commission requires that we take the gospel to those who are afar off. This has been well understood by generations of Christians, and it has spawned many missionary bodies which sent out preachers to every corner of the earth. In the Matthew 9 passage, we must understand that the Lord was seeing the crowd before Him as a microcosm of the multitudes in the world. The Lord's burden was not just for the crowd immediately before His eyes. Labourers must be sent forth to reap the harvest farther and farther away. This is the spatial aspect of the Great Commission.

There is also the temporal aspect to the Great Commission. We are told in Matthew 28:20, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The Lord promises to be with His people to the end of the age. The apostles did not live to the end of the age. The Lord could not be referring to them only. He must have meant the apostles and all the disciples after them. In what sense will He be with His people? Put another way, in connection with what task will He be present with His people? Most Christians would answer, "In connection with carrying the gospel farther and farther afield." The answer appears to be so obviously correct in view of its context. Yet a closer scrutiny shows that that is only part of the answer. We are not saying that it is the wrong answer, but that it is only part of the

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answer.

To get the full answer, we must remember that salvation comes to people individually, and not by virtue of their birth into a Christian family or a Christian community. Another way of stating this truth is that the *manner* of salvation is individualistic, while the *end* of salvation is communal. An individual who is saved must get baptised to become a member of a local church. Since salvation comes to people individually, the gospel needs to be proclaimed, not only to raw pagans, but also to the children and grandchildren of those who have already believed. When a family or a community turns to Christ, we must ensure that the gospel is proclaimed to the subsequent generations. Otherwise, that community or family will become nominally Christian, whose members are unregenerate. Today, many so-called Christian nations are in such a state. Britain and America are only Christian in name – the true Christians number only a few percent of the total population. The Arab countries used to be centres of Christianity in the time of the apostles, but have become pagan after being conquered by the Muslims. The *Orang Ulu* (Highland Peoples) in Sarawak, Malaysia, experienced two main waves of revival in the 1960s and the 1970s (Lees, 1979), but they are today largely nominal. Such communities need to be evangelised as much as those that have never heard the gospel. This is the temporal aspect of gospel preaching.

We see this teaching given in Acts 2:39 as well. On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached a powerful sermon which led to the conversion of about three thousand souls. In the sermon, he called upon the people, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Verse 39 follows, "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." This verse has been much controverted in regard to baptism – whether infants born to believers are to be baptised. But we must not be diverted by the controversy to the extent that we fail to see the plain teaching contained in it. The promise of salvation – including the remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit – is given to the immediate hearers, to their children (i.e. their descendants), and to all who are afar off. This is not a blanket promise to all and sundry, but to "as many as the Lord our God will call." All are saved in the same way, namely by the calling of the Lord, when

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the gospel is preached. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17)." The apostle is saying here that the same message of salvation heard by the crowd before him needs to be preached to the subsequent generations as well as to those who are afar off. These are the temporal and spatial aspects of the Great Commission.

Coming back to the Matthew 9 passage, we need to see also the temporal and spatial aspects of the Lord's words. He says, in verse 37, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest." The apostles were representatives of the churches. A command or teaching given to them, which is not tied to their unique office as apostles, or to the unique circumstances of the time, is meant for all the churches through the ages. Just as the apostles were commanded to pray for labourers, churches today must pray for labourers. If the harvest was plentiful and the labourers few, in the time of the apostles, so it is today. The crowd before the Lord's eyes was a microcosm of the multitudes throughout the world; it is also a microcosm of the multitudes down the centuries. The people who were there at that time needed to be saved, and so did their descendants. The spatial and temporal aspects of the gospel must not be missed in this passage of Scripture.

##### *When the world will end*

This leads us to the question, "When will the world end?" This is prompted by the common understanding of Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." Many are those who claim that the end of the world will coincide with the evangelisation of all the nations of the world. This belief is then used to bolster motivation to evangelise as many nations as quickly as possible, so as to hasten the coming of the Lord. However, there are many problems, both theological and practical ones, connected with this understanding of the verse. Firstly, there is the theological problem that we will then be able to predict, to a high degree of proximity, the time of the Lord's coming, which will contradict the teaching of the New Testament that no one knows that time (Matt. 24:36). Secondly, there is the practical difficulty of determining what constitutes a language group, for as a language is divided



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and subdivided, the boundaries between sub-dialects become more and more blurred. Although a case can be made out that a nation is distinguished primarily by its language, the method of defining a nation solely by this criteria is actually a human, and not a biblical, one. If this understanding of when the world will end is wrong, as we are contending, the possibility exists that the Lord might not come for another millennium, or more, after the last "nation" in the world has been evangelised. Is the church then to rest complacent while waiting for the Lord's return, since the Great Commission will have been successfully carried out, according to this view?

For the correct understanding of Matthew 24:14, we must note that the emphasis is on the preaching of the gospel to all the people of the earth, and not on the differentiation of the people into different nations. The verse says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." The phrase "as a witness to all nations" is explanatory of the preaching to all the world. All the inhabitants of the world, regardless of ethnic groups, are to be reached by the gospel. Among those who hear the gospel, some will be saved while others will harden themselves and be condemned (Ezek. 33:8-9; 2 Cor. 2:15-16). With all the preaching engaged in by all Christians, the greater part of the world does not hear the gospel because the labourers are always few. Many in the world will perish without hearing the gospel, while others will perish even with the hearing of the gospel. The case with the elect is different, however. Not a single one of them will be lost. The normal method, ordained by God, for them to be saved is by the hearing of the gospel (Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23). The urgency in gospel preaching lies in the need for all the elect to be called out of the world by the gospel. Indeed, the context of Matthew 24:14 shows that the objective of gospel preaching is the calling out of the elect from the world. Verse 13 says, "But he who endures to the end will be saved." The next passage, from verse 15 to verse 28 (which many understand to be a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70) also concerns the elect (see vv. 22 and 24). The verses following, which obviously refer to the return of the Lord, again have the elect in view (see v. 31).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In Matthew 24:14, the word translated "world" is actually *oikoumene*, used only a total of 12 times in the New Testament, and not the more commonly used

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Based on these considerations, we conclude that the objective of the Great Commission is the calling out of the elect from the world to be gathered into local churches, while the scope of the Great Commission covers "all nations", i.e. all people, regardless of ethnicity, culture, language, or the time they live in. The truth that none of God's elect will perish is taught clearly in various parts of the Bible, e.g. John 10:27-28; Romans 11:26; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Genesis 19:22. This is the doctrine of "the Perseverance of the Saints", which is the alternative name for the doctrine of "the Preservation of the Saints". Matthew 24:14 is saying that the end will come when all the elect are called out of all the nations, and not when all the nations are evangelised. The calling out of all the elect might – or it might not – coincide with the evangelisation of the last "nation", no matter how it is defined. The important point is that we have a responsibility of proclaiming the gospel to all until the Lord returns, even when all "nations" have been evangelised. Those who associate the end of the world with the evangelising of the last nation on earth have not only wrongly understood Matthew 24:14, but also confused the objective of the Great Commission with the scope of the Great Commission.

##### *Where Christ is not named?*

What we have learned thus far appears to contradict the approach of the apostle Paul in his missionary endeavours, for he says in Romans 15:20, "And so I made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation." Here, the apostle seems to be concerned only with the spatial aspect of the Great Commission, and not with the temporal. A little thought will show that that is not the case. Firstly, it is to be noted that the Great Commission was being carried out for the first time, covering the first generation of hearers. The temporal aspect need time to come into effect, for it is to the subsequent generations that this aspect of the Great Commission applies. Secondly, it is to be noted

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word *kosmos*, which is found over 180 times in the New Testament. The word *oikoumene* is derived from the word *oikos*, which means a house or a dwelling place. A better translation of the word is "inhabited earth" rather than the more general "world". The emphasis falls on the inhabitants rather than on the habitat. The phrase "as a witness to all nations" is the adjunct to "preached in all the world". The conjunctions "and then", *kai tote*, should be linked to the preaching of the gospel to all the world, and not to the adjunct.

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#### 4.3. When Missions Will End

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that the apostle did not mean to be understood in a crass, literal, sense of him not wanting to preach wherever there was already a Christian witness. This is clear from the fact that he was ready to preach in Rome, which was already evangelised by others, for he says, in Romans 1:15, "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."

What, then, did the apostle mean when he said that he aimed to preach where Christ was not named? Was he engaging in rivalry with other preachers? Was he attempting to avoid misunderstanding with those who founded the church in Rome? To both questions we answer in the negative. The apostle had his own sphere of ministry, as is clear from 2 Corinthians 10:13-16, but that does not mean he was not in fellowship with other churches, nor that he isolated himself from others. He was, in fact, in close touch with other churches and was well-informed of the situation elsewhere. Within his own sphere of ministry, gospel work was carried out with the involvement of the churches in that sphere (Acts 20:4; 2 Cor. 8:16-24). By implication, there was at least another sphere of ministry, revolving around the church in Jerusalem, in which the other apostles were based (cf. 1 Cor. 9:5). Churches in the two main spheres of ministry were obviously in touch with one another and working in co-operation. This is indicated by the facts that brethren from the church in Jerusalem came to Antioch to preach (Acts 15:1, 24), that the churches in Paul's sphere of ministry contributed to the need of the churches in Judea (Rom. 15:25-26; 2 Cor. 8:1-7), and that Peter wrote to the same churches that Paul had written to (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

The immediate context of Romans 15:20 shows that Paul was referring to his ministry as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ (see vv. 17-21). He was consciously fulfilling his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles (v. 18; Gal. 2:7-9). It was a ministry unique to an apostle, which no other Christian today can imitate. We are not denying that the apostle's ministry was also a fulfilling of the Great Commission, which is applicable to all churches until Christ returns. What we are saying is that the apostle was not minimising, much less negating, the temporal aspect of the Great Commission.

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### 4.4 Summary

The Great Commission is truly "great". It is given by the risen Lord, to the church, as an abiding command, to reach all the nations with the gospel. For it to be fulfilled well, God's people must capture the right motivation for missions. The motivation for missions arises from the knowledge that it is the risen Lord who has given us the command, which we want to joyfully obey, since it is accompanied by the promise of His presence to comfort, protect and empower us. The Great Commission has a spatial, as well as a temporal, aspect. The church must stretch its gospel efforts to reach people in distant places as well as to the people of the future generations. The gospel must be proclaimed to raw pagans as well as to nominal Christians. The objective of the Great Commission is the calling out of the elect to form them into local churches. The scope of the Great Commission covers all the people in the world, of all generations, till Christ comes again.

It is appropriate to close with an application. You have just had a good meal, and the host says, "Its time to wash the dishes." The host will not be too pleased if you allow him to proceed with clearing and washing the dishes all alone, while you remain seated. When the Lord told the apostles, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest", they knew that they were not just to pray, but to consider becoming the labourers who were so much needed. Today, the disciples of Christ must consider becoming the labourers themselves, while praying for other labourers to be raised. Have you prayed about becoming a labourer in the harvest?

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- 3 Hendriksen, William. 1980. *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*. Baker Book House.
- 4 Lees, Shirley. 1979. *Drunk Before Dawn*. OMF International (UK).

#### 4.4. Summary

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5 Marsh, Charles R. 1976. Too Hard For God?. Echoes of Service.

#### **Recommended Reading**

1 Lees, Shirley. 1979. Drunk Before Dawn. OMF International (UK).

2 Marsh, Charles R. 1976. Too Hard For God?. Echoes of Service.



**Part II**

**THE PRACTICE OF  
MISSIONS**





# Five

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## THE METHODOLOGY

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The biblical basis of missions lays the theological foundation for the practice of missions. Missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God. It is grounded in the atoning death of Christ. It is crowned by the Great Commission. In practical terms, missions is concerned with the execution of the Great Commission. A command that constitutes a mandate to the church to the end of time would be expected to carry within itself its own methodology. It will be shown that the Great Commission, in reality, is a command to the local church to plant local churches. For the task of missions to be carried out purposefully and intelligently, there must be a clear grasp of the subject of church planting.

### 5.1 A Command To The Local Churches

Many Christians make the mistake of applying the Great Commission to themselves individually, without reference to the local church. Preachers have made the same mistake of applying it in an individualistic way to their hearers. The Great Commission, however, is a command to the local church. A local church, of course, is made up of individual members. The individuals must be involved in carrying out the Great Commission but the actual recipient of the Great Commission is the local church. Put another way, the Great Commission is given to the members of a local church considered collectively.

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### *What is a local church?*

The word "church" is used often in a loose and imprecise manner. We should be more precise in the use of the word. In the Bible, it is used either in reference to the universal body of Christ or to the locally gathered groups of believers. The local church is made up of baptised believers who are covenanted together to worship and to serve God in the way prescribed in the Bible. All the New Testament churches were covenanted communities of baptised believers. They were communities modelled after the nation of Israel. As a nation, Israel was the covenantal people of God. The Old Covenant, however, has been replaced by the New. This we learn from Hebrews 8:6-7, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." Just as the nation of Israel was the community of God's people in the past, New Testament churches are communities of God's people today. Hebrews 8:10 applies the covenant language of the Old Testament to the churches of the New Testament, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he reminded them of God's covenant, saying (2 Cor. 6:16), "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people." It seems clear that when Paul first founded the church in Corinth, the believers were gathered together to solemnly pledge themselves to the Lord. They committed themselves to one another as a body to serve and worship God. The same may be said of the churches in Macedonia. Paul says, in 2 Corinthians 8:5, in reference to the collection for the saints, "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." The churches were made up of believers who had solemnly pledged themselves to the Lord, and to uphold the inspired teaching of the apostles.

The teaching on church life in the New Testament will not make much sense if the churches were not made up of baptised believers who were bound together by oath. Baptism itself was a means by which the new believer solemnly pledged to follow the Lord and to be a member of the local church. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members

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of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." The apostle Paul is speaking of the church in Corinth. If this were a loosely gathered group of people, with no commitment to one another, it would not be possible to say, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:6)." In another place the apostle says, "I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together (2 Cor. 7:3)." "To die together and to live together" is strong language that would be quite out of place if not seen in the light of the covenant that bound the church together, including with Paul, when it was first founded. There was involved an explicit church membership, as shown by the "uninformed or unbelievers" who were distinguished from the members of the church (1 Cor. 14:23-24, cf. 5:4-5). The New Testament church was more closely knit than many would care to admit today!

#### *Who were the apostles?*

In the vision of Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem represents the complete church of Jesus Christ, made up of elect from both the Old and the New Testament dispensations. It has twelve gates on which are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, who represent the elect from the Old Testament time. The twelve foundations of the city have the names of the twelve apostles who are representatives of the elect in the New Testament age. While on earth, the apostles represented the churches that were being founded. They were the church in embryo. Once this truth is grasped, a number of passages in the Bible begin to make better sense.

In Matthew 18:15-20 the Lord gives teaching on how to deal with personal offence. The offending brother is to be confronted privately, then with witnesses, and finally – if he still refuses to hear – the matter is to be brought to the church. The question is, where was the church at that time? The church, as we know it, was not yet founded. The first church came into existence at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the gathered disciples of Christ. Prior to the event, the disciples were only a loosely gathered group of people. At Pentecost, they gathered with clear intent and purpose –

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"with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1). They did so in anticipation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which the Lord had told them about, in Acts 1:4-5.

From Pentecost onward, the church began to develop. The church in Jerusalem was at first ruled by the apostles. Not long after, deacons were appointed to help in administering the mundane affairs of the church (Acts 6:1-7). In Acts 14:23 we read of the appointment elders in each of the churches planted by the apostle Paul. We know that elders were appointed also to help the apostles in ruling the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:6, 22, 23). The most well-developed teaching on church life is found in the pastoral epistles of Paul, written in the later period of his ministry. We see, in all this, a process of development in the life of the New Testament church.

The Lord anticipated the founding of churches all over the world. In John 12:32, He looked ahead to the gathering in of the elect, saying, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." In the high priestly prayer of John 17, He prayed for Himself, for the apostles, and then for those who would believe through their word. Coming back to Matthew 18, we must understand that the reference to the church was made in anticipation of local churches being planted later. The Lord was giving the teaching on church discipline to the apostles so that they could pass it on to the churches which would be founded later. Today, all churches regard the teaching of Matthew 18 as binding. There is the tacit recognition that the apostles were representatives of the local churches. They were receiving the teaching on behalf of the local churches of the New Testament age.

### *The two ordinances*

Consider next the two special ordinances, which some people call "the sacraments", of the church. Two special ordinances have been instituted for the local church, viz. baptism and the Lord's Supper. When the Lord's Supper was first instituted, it was between the Lord and the apostles. The apostles then passed on this teaching to the local churches. In 1 Corinthians 11:23, Paul says, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread..." It is clear that Paul had taught the Corinthian church the Lord's Supper when it was first founded.

### 5.1. A Command To The Local Churches

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If two special ordinances have been given to the churches in order to be observed until the Lord returns, when was the ordinance of baptism instituted? Where do we find the teaching given that it is to be practised to the last day? We know that the Lord was baptised by John the Baptist. We know also, from John 4:1-2 that the Lord assigned His disciples to baptise believers. All this was done before His death and resurrection. After His resurrection the Lord gave the Great Commission which contains, among other things, the command to baptise new disciples. It is there that we find the warrant to baptise believers. Since the Great Commission is an abiding command, baptism must be practised to the end of the age.

*Who are the recipients?*

It is not difficult now to answer the question, "Who are the legitimate recipients of the Great Commission?" Since the Great Commission was given to the apostles, it was meant for the local churches everywhere. That is because the apostles were representatives of the local churches. They received the command directly from the Lord, and the local churches receive it through them. Put another way, the Great Commission was given *immediately* to the apostles, and *mediately* to the churches.

The responsibility of fulfilling the Great Commission, therefore, lies with local churches, and not with para-church organisations, nor with individuals. Today, there are many individuals who, out of misguided zeal, set themselves to the task of fulfilling the Great Commission. They are not committed to the life of any local church, and they attend church only at their convenience. They look upon the evangelisation of the lost as their chief service to the Lord. We are not saying that this is wrong in itself. They are wrong, however, in doing it out of the context of the local church. They are answerable to no one but themselves. Since the Great Commission has been wrested out of the proper context of the church, they are only able to fulfil it partially.

It is to be noted that the Great Commission involves three basic activities – going out to make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Holy Trinity, and teaching them to obey all of the Lord's commands. These sincere, but misguided, individuals are able to fulfil only the first part, viz. that of going out to make disciples. When disciples are made, they have no authority to baptise them. If they

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baptise them, it should be with the purpose of incorporating them into the life of the local church. They, therefore, are obliged to turn the new converts to the church. Otherwise, they will have to baptise them without making them members of any church. If that is done, they only multiply the number of free-lance Christians like themselves who are uncommitted to the church. And they are unable to teach the new converts all the Lord's commands in the context of the local church.

Then, there are the many para-church organisations that proliferate in today's world. In the past, mission-boards and committees of various kinds were set up by churches to carry out gospel work. These were bodies established by local churches, and not by individuals. The para-church organisations of today are largely established by individuals, and administered independently from the local church. They may be missionary organisations, or they may be involved in some other gospel work. Some of these have done much good work, and should not be condemned out of hand. Others have created confusion and done much damage to the cause of Christ in the world. When challenged, some para-church organisations have wrongly claimed the Great Commission as the warrant for their existence. Para-church organisations are not local churches. The warrant of their existence lies not in the Great Commission but in the general truth that Christians may work in fellowship together to further the cause of the gospel. If the Christians involved in these organisations are members of local churches, and recognise the centrality of the local church in the purpose of God, there should be no problem. Instead of claiming that their organisations exist to help churches, they should rather see that they need the help of churches. Bearing in mind what has been said, we see that there are some para-church organisations that are worthy of the support and encouragement of local churches, while there are many others which would be better dismantled.

The Great Commission has been entrusted to the local church. The early Christians understood this truth well. The responsibility of fulfilling it, therefore, was not confined to the apostles. Instead, the members of the very first church – that in Jerusalem – began to bring the gospel to others immediately. In Acts 2:47, we read of a significant phenomenon, which is often missed. It says, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." We

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## 5.2. A Command To Plant Churches

find the same phenomenon described in Acts 5:14, "And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women..." People were being saved daily. How could that possibly happen if the members of the church had not been witnessing daily? Without the sowing of the seed, there would have been no harvesting. It could not be that the apostles only were witnessing but rather, the whole church was involved in evangelism. We see this confirmed in the subsequent chapters of the book of Acts. It says in Acts 6:7, "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." In Acts 8:4 we read, "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."

The Great Commission is a command to the local church. It is not a command for the apostles only. It is not a command to church leaders only. It is not even a command to individual believers, much less to para-church organisations. It is a command to believers who are members of a local church.

## 5.2 A Command To Plant Churches

The Great Commission is a command directed to local churches. It is also a command to plant churches. Three considerations drive us to this conclusion.

### *The correct understanding*

The correct understanding of the Great Commission drives us to the conclusion that the planting of local churches is intended. Consider, first, the scope of the Great Commission. We are required to make disciples "of all the nations". This is primarily a reference to ethnic groups, and not to political entities, or countries. Of course, we often find a certain ethnic group concentrated in one particular country. But we may also find many ethnic groups in one particular country, or one particular ethnic group scattered in many countries. The point we are making is that we must not be misled by the modern usage of the word "nations", which is synonymous with "countries".

### *The scope*

The original Greek for "the nations" is *ta ethne*, from which we get the English word "ethnic". In Acts 2:5, we read of devout men who

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came "from very nation under heaven". Here, the reference is to the Jews and proselytes who came from the regions around Judea and who spoke languages other than Hebrew. On other occasions "the nations" is translated as "Gentiles", that is, people other than the Jews. In Acts 13:46, for example, we read of Paul and Barnabas saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles." The Jews rejected the gospel, so Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles, or "the nations".

To reach "all the nations" would require travelling to the places. As noted already, we may find various ethnic groups in one location, in which case the travelling would not be so extensive. The thrust of the Great Commission, however, is that other peoples elsewhere must be reached with the gospel. That is why the Great Commission, as recorded by Mark, reads, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." And it is recorded in Acts 1:8 as "...you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Christians throughout the ages have understood this point. David Livingstone travelled all over Africa to reach the various nations. William Carey crossed the seas to reach the peoples of India, and translated the Bible into more than thirty languages. Surely, we can see that it would have been impractical to bring all the converts back to the mother church from which the missionary came. The Lord did not intend the converts from all over the world to be brought to the mother church in Jerusalem!

If that is the case, what are we to do with the new converts? Surely, we cannot let them float about aimlessly without a local church to attach to. The converts should be gathered into local churches. The very scope of the Great Commission requires the planting of local churches.

### *The three elements*

Then consider the three elements found in the Great Commission – "going", "baptising", and "teaching". The first element involves going into the world. We are not to wait for hearers to stream into the church to hear the gospel. A few odd individuals may be moved by God in His own mysterious ways to come to church. That would be the exception rather than the rule. The rule is that believers are to go to the people outside the church and invite them to come in to hear,



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### 5.3. Apostolic Examples

or better still, to bring the gospel to them. That is the first element of the Great Commission, which defines how it is to be carried out. It is not the only element, and it must not be separated from the other elements.

Many sincere and zealous Christians notice only the first element, which is to go into the world to make disciples. They would go witnessing to other people and feel happy when the hearers profess belief. Many of those who profess belief often turn out to be unconverted – that is, they are not true disciples of Christ. A mere profession of faith does not constitute true conversion. And even if these Christians are careful that true disciples are made, nothing more is done other than teaching the new converts to keep private devotion. The Great Commission, however, requires that the new disciples be baptised, which means incorporating them into the membership of the local church. In a pioneering situation, the new disciples would have to covenant together to become new local churches that subsequent believers may be incorporated into, through baptism.

The third element of the Great Commission is to teach the new disciples to observe all things commanded by the Lord. They are not to be taught only the elementary things of the faith but "all the things commanded", which would mean the teaching of the whole Bible (cf. Acts 20:27). This can be done only in the context of the local church. The new converts have to be given systematic teaching and pastoral care. They have to "grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ", which is a gradual process (2 Pet. 3:18 cf. Eph. 4:11-16). This can be accomplished well only in the atmosphere of a spiritual family, which is the local church.

### 5.3 Apostolic Examples

Apart from understanding correctly the Great Commission, as given by the Lord, we must consider also the apostolic examples. This is probably the best way to be convinced that we have understood the Great Commission correctly.

#### *The apostles*

First, we consider the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul. He was sent out with Barnabas by the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). They went around making disciples and gathering them into local

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churches. In Acts 14:23 we are told specifically that they "appointed elders in every church". To the apostles, a local church was not a loose gathering of believers but believers who were properly constituted into churches and, ideally, had elders ruling over them. We know that Paul continued to do the same thing in the subsequent missionary journeys because we read of him meeting with the elders of the church of Ephesus, in Acts 20, which was planted earlier in his second journey.

Not only was Paul and his colleagues doing this, the other apostles who were based in Jerusalem were also planting churches. In 1 Corinthians 9:5 we read these words, "Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" Here, Paul was defending his apostleship. We are able to glean from his words the practice of the early church – the churches had been sending out men, accompanied by their wives, to plant churches! Just as the apostle Paul had been travelling around to plant churches, so had the other men who were based in Jerusalem.

This is confirmed by Acts 9:31-32, "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied. Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda." Two things are clear. First, many churches were already established throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria by that time. Second, Peter, and others, were in the habit of travelling to plant new churches and to strengthen the existing ones.

### *The early churches*

From these examples, you might get the impression that only the apostles, and the churches with which they were immediately associated, engaged in church planting. This is not the case, however, for the apostles appeared to have taught each of the churches to be involved in church planting as well. This might sound preposterous to many, but we can prove the point. First, we look at 1 Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours..." Who are the "all who in every place call on the name of

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### 5.3. Apostolic Examples

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Jesus Christ our Lord"? This is often interpreted to mean "all believers throughout the world". The letter of Paul to the Corinthians is then taken to be one that was addressed to all believers everywhere. While this may be a legitimate application of the verse, it is unlikely that it was the original meaning intended by the apostle.

Like the other books of the Bible, this epistle arose from a certain historical setting. Paul was addressing the various problems faced by the Corinthian church – such as sectarianism, immorality, the eating of food offered to idols, and others. It is known that churches in a region were in the practice of sharing the epistles of the apostles. We know that the churches in Asia did this, for we read in Colossians 4:16 these words, "Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." It would appear that Paul was doing just that when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians. He wanted the epistle to be read by other believers in the region of Achaia. This is spelt out explicitly in his second epistle. We read in 2 Corinthians 1:1, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia."

This shows that the church in Corinth was in touch with groups of scattered believers in the region of Achaia. These were probably believers who gathered regularly to worship and to pray. The church in Corinth would have been exercising pastoral oversight over these scattered groups, until such time as they could become viable churches. Preachers would have visited them regularly to preach, exhort, or at the very least, to read to them the apostle's epistles.

We consider another example. Acts 9:32 says, "Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda." In verse 38, we have these words, "And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them." The two congregations, in Lydda and in Joppa, were in contact with each other. We are told earlier, in verse 31, "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." The churches are referred to according to regional groupings. In Galatians 1:1 we read of "the churches in Galatia", and in Revelation 1:4 we read of

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"the seven churches which are in Asia".

When we piece all this information together, the picture that emerges is that of an extremely dynamic, and yet organised, situation – in which each church had its satellite works in the surrounding region, preachers were being sent out to minister to these groups until they became viable churches, and these continued in fellowship with one another as regional groupings of churches. The New Testament churches were truly active and more missions-minded than is commonly realised. Like an organised army – a nest of ants, or a hive of bees – each was busily engaged in planting churches.

The early church understood the Great Commission as a command to plant churches.

### *Our spiritual forefathers*

We must cover the last point very quickly, namely the example of our spiritual forefathers. Our interpretation of Scripture should not be dictated by how others have understood it, but it would be foolish of us to act as though the Holy Spirit only enlightens believers in this generation and not those of the past. It will be helpful to consider how the early Independents had understood the Great Commission.

When we make a careful study of the 1689 Confession of Faith, we would discover that they had worked through many issues that we have not even thought of. Take, for example, Chapter 26 of the Confession of Faith, which deals with the church. It is spelt out clearly that the ordination of elders should involve fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands by the eldership of the church, while the ordination of deacons is to involve prayer and the laying on of hands. Fasting is not laid down as a requirement for the ordination of deacons. This is just what is taught in Scripture. Although this is a relatively minor point, it does bring home the truth that the Particular Baptists had thought through many issues which may have escaped us.

When a study is made of the history of the Particular Baptists in the seventeenth century, you will be shaken to know how active and systematic they were in church planting. John Bunyan, for example, used to ride on his horse to visit the various preaching outposts for a week or two before returning to his home-base in Bedford. This practice of planting churches continued through to the eighteenth century. The same was done by the other Independent churches, of

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#### 5.4. A Biblical Methodology

whom the Particular Baptists were part – each church had its own network of satellite groups. (See Lovegrove, 1988; Poh, 2013.) The point we are trying to make is that the early Independents seemed to have grasped the teaching well – that the Great Commission requires the planting of other churches.

These, then, are the three considerations which drive us to the conclusion that the Great Commission is, in reality, a command to plant churches – firstly, the correct understanding of the command itself; secondly, the example set by the apostles and the early church; and thirdly, the example set by the Independents of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The planting of local churches constitutes the objective of the Great Commission.

### 5.4 A Biblical Methodology

We distinguish between methodology and methods. One dictionary definition of methodology is "a system of methods and principles for doing something". The *methodology* of missions, therefore, cover the *methods* and *principles* of missions. The methods are the techniques and sets of action taken to accomplish something. Our focus here is the methodology of missions. We have seen that the Great Commission contains within itself the methodology which is that the local church is to plant local churches until Christ's return. The importance of adopting this methodology has to be seen in the light of the recovery of the Reformed faith in recent years and the approaches to missions adopted by others up to the present.

#### *The state of missions*

The Reformed faith began to be recovered in the 1960's. This involved the recovery of such precious truths as the sole authority of Scripture, the doctrines of grace, the primacy of preaching, and the centrality of the local church. These were truths that stirred the hearts of many, and led to enthusiasm in the defence and propagation of that system of truth known as "Calvinism". Many lives and churches were transformed. People began to have a new appreciation of the Reformation, the writings of the Puritans, and the value of the Confessions of Faith that arose from the Reformation, including the Three Forms of Unity, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. As the Reformed faith

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spread, the realisation dawned upon Reformed people that it was not enough to build up the church in doctrine without bringing the gospel to the lost. The churches had been growing mainly through winning hungry sheep from the doctrinally shallow churches. Reformed churches appeared to be too concerned about maintaining doctrinal purity in the church and establishing the faith of believers, without a matching enthusiasm for winning souls to Christ.

Realising this, some Reformed men began to emphasise the necessity of evangelistic preaching in the church and the need to be concerned with missions. They stood in contrast to those who advocated praying for genuine revivals, in view of the prevalence of Arminian revivalism (Murray, 1994) and what was regarded as a spurious Charismatic revival (Masters & Whitcomb, 2016; Masters, 2013). The Reformed men who emphasised outreach and missions were not opposed to prayer for revivals, while those who emphasised prayer for revivals were not opposed to missions. The difference between them appeared to be a matter of emphasis. Quite many Reformed preachers travelled around the world to visit churches which the Lord has raised up by the hands of local preachers. We are not decrying the value of preachers traveling to visit like-minded churches and to speak at Christian conferences. We are only pointing out that such travels do not constitute true missions, nor can they be a replacement for it. The few Reformed missionaries sent out to pioneering situations have operated very much on the bare bones of biblical principles which they learned from seminaries. As they acquire experience on the mission fields, churches treat them as experts on the subject upon their return on furloughs. On another front, there are native pioneers who have been used of the Lord to plant churches in their own countries but similarly lack a holistic biblical view of missions. In short, the recovery of interest in missions has not been matched by a clarity on missions up to the present.

### *Models of missions*

As we survey the world scene, the methodology of missions adopted seems to fall into four basic models which arose from different perceptions on the Great Commission. There have been gifted individuals who engage in missions by focusing on the first element of the Great Commission, namely "to go and make disciples of all the nations". This would be largely an individual enterprise, involving

#### 5.4. A Biblical Methodology

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the mentoring of other individuals. Appeal for funding and prayers might be made through newsletters and, nowadays, through the internet. There might be personal attachment to local churches but, in so far as the work of missions is concerned, it is largely a private matter. If there are sufficient number of disciples made in a locality, a loose fellowship – and possibly a church – might be started which does not emphasise on denominational characteristics. Instead, the emphasis would be on the development of indigenous characteristics for the church. Before long, another gifted individual from among those mentored would arise to have his own disciples. This is the Mentoring Model.

The second model is that of starting an organisation to recruit missionaries to carry out the work of soul winning. Many missionary organisations started as an arm of a grouping of churches which, with time, became detached from the churches. The Particular Baptist Society For The Propagation Of The Gospel which sent William Carey to India was originally an arm of the Northamptonshire Association of Particular Baptist Churches. It became an independent Society after the death of Andrew Fuller, the last of the founding member, and had its headquarters moved to London (Appleby, 2007:251). The China Inland Mission, now OMF International, was started by James Hudson Taylor in 1865 as an independent missionary organisation. Ethnos360, formerly known as New Tribes Missions, was started by Paul Fleming and a group of friends in 1942, based in Florida, United States of America. It claims to be supporting over 3,000 missionaries in over 20 countries in the world. The starting of missionary organisations that are independent of the local churches, although with the aim of planting churches, seems to be driven more by pragmatism than by biblical considerations. (No negative connotation is implied.) If at all related to the Great Commission, it will be its second element that may be appealed to, namely, "baptising them...", in which the new believer is incorporated into a community. The Organisation Model would have a membership that is governed by rules, and full-time workers, boards of trustees, and directors. As the organisation gets bigger, it becomes more difficult to monitor what is happening on the ground, and more funds are needed to upkeep the organisation. There is also the danger of the organisation departing from the original purpose for which it was founded.

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The third model is based on the third element of the Great Commission, namely "teaching them..." Bible schools, seminaries, or Bible colleges are opened to train up preachers, with the belief that it is the quickest and most effective way to win souls or to plant churches. It is claimed that the Lord trained up the apostles to be preachers – to win souls and to plant churches. There is a failure to see that the apostles were the church in embryo, and that the Great Commission is a command that is given to the local church, and not to a school. The School Model will inevitably emphasise on paper qualifications, and cause many a pastor or missionary to have the ambition of moving on to become seminary lecturers or professors. Surveys have shown that only a small percentage of the graduates are engaged in full-time gospel ministries. This, of course, does not minimise the value of such institutions but it questions the vaunted claim that the School Model is most effective in accomplishing the Great Commission.

We are left with the Local Church Model which we believe to be biblical, since it arises from the Great Commission itself. Newly planted churches should, ideally, work together with the churches that planted them. A fellowship of churches will naturally arise. This seems to be what is envisaged in the 1689 Confession (Chap. 26:14),

*...so the churches (when planted by the providence of God so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it) ought to hold (e) communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.*  
(e) Rom. 16:1, 2; 3 John 8, 9, 10. (Emphasis added.)

This seems consistent with the apostle Paul's approach of having his 'sphere of ministry' (2 Cor. 10:12-16). Although the church in Antioch was originally under the pastoral oversight of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22-26), it soon developed its own sphere of ministry with Paul leading the missions. The church in Jerusalem had its own sphere of ministry (Acts 9:31; 1 Cor. 9:5). The geographical areas of the two spheres of ministry might have overlapped at some points (Acts 15:1; 2 Pet. 3:14-16). Paul's own sphere of ministry, based in the church of Antioch, spawned other spheres of ministry – one based in the church at Ephesus (Rev. 1:11), and another in Gala-



## 5.5. Summary

tia (Gal. 1:2). Apart from such groupings of churches which revolve around a common founder or a common mother-church, there is nothing to prevent like-minded churches that arose independently to come together in close fellowship, to engage in the work of missions. Reformed Baptists have been wrestling over the issue of associationism, with some advocating a stronger structured kind compared to others. The churches in that fellowship, or association, may operate a seminary to train preachers and missionaries, and engage in other works together for mutual edification and for the furtherance of missions.

The four models we have discussed here may be represented by the diagram below.

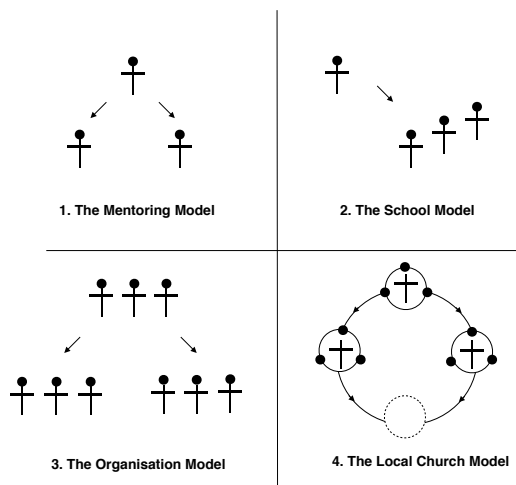


Fig. 5.1: Models of Missions

## 5.5 Summary

The Great Commission carries within itself its own methodology of missions. It, in fact, is a command given to the local church to plant local churches. The planting of local churches, therefore, is the objective of the Great Commission. As we survey the world scene of missions, four models of missions are discernible, viz. the Mentoring

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Model, the Organisational Model, the School Model, and the Local Church Model. Except for the Local Church Model which we believe to be biblical, the other models are deficient in that they are based on only a partial teaching of the Great Commission, or on pragmatic reasons.

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- 1 Appleby, J. 2007. *I Can Plod: William Carey and the early years of the first Baptist Missionary Society*. Grace Publications Trust.
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- 5 Murray, Iain H. 1994. *Revival & Revivalism*. The Banner of Truth Trust.
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### Recommended Reading

- 1 Appleby, J. 2007. *I Can Plod: William Carey and the early years of the first Baptist Missionary Society*. Grace Publications Trust.
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# Six

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## MAKING DISCIPLES

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We have noted that the Methodology of missions encompasses the principles and methods of missions. The principles derived from Scripture are to be followed. The methods found in Scripture are to be followed as far as possible, with allowance made for adjustment to local or particular situations. The three elements of the Great Commission provide us the locus of discussion.

### 6.1 Establishing The Principles

Here, we focus on the first element, which is "going therefore and make disciples of all the nations". This is one of the three sub-objectives of the Great Commission. Bringing the gospel to others require making the effort of travelling to them. Non-believers known to us might accept the invitation to come to a meeting once or twice, after which they would lose interest. Attending a meeting made up largely of strangers, and discoursing on a subject they are not equipped to understand, is like taking a fish out of the water. Getting them to attend the meetings regularly is expecting too much. It is therefore necessary to take the gospel to them.

#### *Travelling in circuit*

The Lord sets the pattern of how to bring the gospel to others. We are told in Mark 6:6, "...Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching." The word "circuit" (*kuklo*) carries with it at least two ideas

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– firstly, the activity was planned; and secondly, the activity was repeated. It is very much like the F-1 Circuit of today, which refers to motorsport racing – it is a planned and repeated event. After showing the apostles how it was to be done, the Lord sent them out two by two "to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:2). He similarly sent out the seventy disciples to preach (Luke 10:1ff.). Evangelism was obviously planned.

In this regard, we differ from the emphasis of Roland Allen (1868-1947), an Anglican missionary who served in China in the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPA) from 1895-1903. In his essay "The Spontaneous Expansion of The Church And the Causes which Hinder It" of 1927, he advocated spontaneous evangelism of the kind that is more a people movement, in which there is minimal organisation by the church (Allen, 1927). The essay consists of nothing but personal observations and opinion on how missions should best be done, with not a single Bible text quoted, much less expounded. His earlier book, "Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?" first published in 1912, attempts to expound on Paul's approach to missions in which is shown that he was primarily guided by the Holy Spirit and that his emphasis was on souls saved rather than on establishing structured churches (Allen, 1912). The book is peppered with assumptions, upon which are attached assertions that will not convince the careful reader. The carrot and the stick are used. His castigation of the missionary methods of his contemporaries constitutes the stick while his proposal of spontaneous evangelism by native Christians the carrot. This is much like the tactic adopted by the philo-Semitists, of which Willem Glashouwer (Glashouwer, 2012) is an example – bash anti-Semitism, while putting forward what is dubious, namely, a version of Covenant Theology that is actually Neo-Dispensationalism. Allen totally overlooks the orderly churches founded by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 14:40; 1 Tim. 3:15) which involved the repeated visits to the the same churches (Acts 14:21), the appointment of elders in each church (Acts 14:23), and the 'traditions' he passed to the churches (2 Thess. 3:6-9 cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33).

We see that while spontaneous evangelism by the members of the church should continue and be encouraged, the church must also have organised outreach. Generally, the church elders, and especially the pastor, are to take the lead in this. Jesus Christ is the

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Head of the church who occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. This is a truth which we will return to often. Here, the kingship of Christ comes into play – the elders are to display the kingship of Christ by leading the church into spiritual battle. In the old days, the kings used to lead their armies into battle during the spring season (1 Chron. 20:1). It will be expecting too much of the members of the church to initiate preaching groups or preaching points. They are not trained for this task. They have families and careers to take care of. They would be willing to take part in the outreach once the groups or points are set up, but to expect them to initiate such groups or points would cause them unnecessary stress.

### *Preaching groups and preaching points*

We have referred to the preaching groups and points without defining what those are. In Acts 20:20-21, we have these words:

I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle was referring to the preaching of the gospel – "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ". He did it publicly and from house to house. Note that Paul has said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." Paul did not just imitate Christ in behaviour and attitude, but also in ministry. This we have seen concerning his understanding and execution of the Great Commission. Here, it should be seen that he was imitating Christ as well in how to make disciples. It involved both methods – publicly and from house to house. The methods of outreach are shown to us, but they are often overlooked. If not overlooked, one or the other of the methods only is adopted.

What is preaching publicly, and what is preaching from house to house? What is the relation between these two? A public meeting is one in which there is no homogeneity in the audience. Old and young, male and female, the educated and the uneducated, etc. are present. A normal worship service in church would be regarded as a public meeting. Here, Paul is referring to public meetings held outside the normal places of worship, such as when he preached daily in the market place in Athens, as recorded in Acts 17:17. Preaching

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from house to house would be more private in nature. Since unbelieving families were reluctant to come to the gathering of God's people, Paul brought the gospel to them in their homes. The Lord engaged in public preaching, as everyone knows. However, He also preached from house to house, when He travelled in a circuit. In Luke 10:5-8 we read these words,

But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you.

The seventy disciples who were sent out two by two did not enter every house in each city. If they had entered every house, it would have been impossible to complete the circuit, even given that the cities were not as big as those of today. Instead, only selected houses were approached, a number of which would have been those already known to the disciples or were recommended to them by their relatives and friends. In His journeys to Jerusalem, for example, the Lord was in the habit of visiting the home of Lazarus. The houses that welcomed them would be visited again in the next journey that they undertook.

In the mind of many would arise the objection that preaching from house to house like this would constitute inefficient use of time and effort. Would it not be better to gather everyone together to hear the gospel? We are back to where we started when we showed that non-believers are adverse to meeting together with others to hear the gospel. Two houses may be within walking distance of each other, and yet the people are reluctant to come together on a regular basis to hear the gospel. To the people, it is like intruding into another family. It is when spiritual hunger begins to grip them that they are open to the suggestion of coming together for a meeting. When this happens, we have a preaching point instead of a preaching group! When two or three households gather together like this, we can assign one of the persons to organise the meetings. In the urban settings of today, most people can be reached by handphones

## 6.1. Establishing The Principles

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and it would be easy to arrange for the meetings. If the preaching point is within reasonable distance from the church, it can be arranged for the whole group to be fetched to attend the worship services, say, once a month, until such time as they are ready to attend church every week. The weekly meetings continue to take place on the other weeks at the assigned preaching point.

### *Until converted or unwanted*

Why would the same house that welcomed the Lord's disciples be visited again in their next journey? Wouldn't that mean not many houses were visited when more could have been visited? The answer lies in the first element of the Great Commission, "going therefore and make disciples of all the nations". The aim was to make disciples, which required going to the same household to preach the gospel until the people were converted or the preachers were unwanted. When unwanted, they would go to another house, as shown in the Luke 10:5-8 passage. It is not the Lord's intention that we preach to every household, and every individual in the world, for that would be impossible. But shouldn't we cover as many people as possible so that more people would stand the chance of being saved? That would be the general thinking of many, but not the Lord. The aim of the Great Commission is to make disciples, and not to make many contacts.

We see this principle being practised by Paul in his missionary journeys. In Acts 17:2-4, we are told that Paul preached at Thessalonica:

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

When the unbelieving Jews tried to attack the believers, the brethren sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea (verse 10). While at Corinth, the same thing happened (Acts 18:4-8):

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And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

Another passage should suffice to prove the point. We read of what happened in Ephesus in Acts 19:8-10,

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

There are times when the hearers do not wish for us to preach to them. Some might even be hostile and rude, slamming the door in our faces. Others might lose interest after one or two visits and refuse to continue despite our persuasion. When rejected, another group can be formed to fill that slot of time.

### *Identifying the people groups*

The first element of the Great Commission requires us to make disciples of all the nations. The "nations" is a reference to ethnic groups characterised chiefly by the languages spoken. We have noted that as a language is analysed, the dividing line between dialects and sub-dialects become blur so that it becomes more difficult to classify which constitutes a "nation". In the highlands of the state of



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Sarawak, Malaysia, missionaries debated over whether to consider the Lun Bawang and the Kelabit as two different tribes as the similarities between them were considerable. The two communities could communicate with one another by speaking their respective dialects. It was decided that the Bible should be translated into Lun Bawang only.

In missions, the term "people groups" are in vogue. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, while Peter was to the Jews. Paul, however, did not limit himself to the Gentiles, nor Peter to the Jews. In every city that Paul went to, he sought out the Jews in the synagogue to preach to first, making that the beachhead to reach out to the Gentiles. Similarly, Peter did not limit himself to preaching to the Jews, for he was called upon to preach to Cornelius and his household as well. The identification of people groups facilitates the approaches adopted, the languages or dialects to be used, and the preachers assigned to them. Today, in an urban setting, there are the migrant workers, the factory workers, the businessmen and businesswomen, the university students, the slum-dwellers, etc. In a rural setting there are the housewives, the farmers, the aged, and the children. In all settings, there are the friends and neighbours, relatives and colleagues. These groups may be reached out to by forming preaching groups and preaching points in the way we have described above.

#### *The duration, frequency and language used*

There are still a few matters to clear up before we gather the principles together to propose the methods or techniques to use in outreach. One question is how long should a meeting last? The answer is that it should be for as long as it takes to convey clearly the gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" to the hearers, from the passage that is read out to them. The full gospel need not be a long gospel. The meeting should ideally end with a short prayer. Together – reading the passage of Scripture, drawing out the gospel from the passage, and closing in prayer – can all be done in ten minutes for each group. Those who are used to hearing a full sermon in church might find this incredible, for it is not normal for a Reformed meeting in church to have so short a message. The norm is to hear a 45 minutes long message. However, we are here not dealing with meetings in church but with outreach to the community. Each circuit might consist of 4 to 6 preaching groups which would require at least 2 hours,

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including travelling time between the groups, if all the groups are in on that day.

It is to be noted that true outreach requires the reading of the passage of Scripture to establish our authority, i.e. to show that the message is from the Bible and not merely from ourselves. We do not believe in the ideas that have been bandied around concerning evangelism – including the need to build friendship before evangelism, the need to earn the right to preach, to have a pretext to invite people to an evangelistic meeting, etc. In outreach, we are going out as Christ's ambassadors, clothed with His authority, to accomplish the task of preaching the gospel. We do not see Christ's disciples sent out two by two merely to engage in social visits. Similarly, we do not see the apostle Paul merely befriending people to prepare the way for future preaching. Instead, each visit involved the proclamation of the gospel. We find it surprising that many native pastors we have supported in church planting have had difficulty doing just this. So pervasive are the general ideas of evangelism that they have difficulty approaching people as servants of God, who have come to preach the gospel from an open Bible.

As to the frequency, weekly visits are most effective. God has created seven days in the week so that His creatures function best under the rhythm of the weekly cycle. However, the harvest being plentiful and the labourers being few, fortnightly meetings might be adequate in some situations so that different groups are reached out to on alternate weeks. In exceptional situations, monthly meetings might be engaged in as it is better to have less frequent meetings rather than to have none.

A frequently encountered problem is the choice of language to use in outreach. In the New Testament, Koine Greek appeared to have been used among the various nations as it was the *lingua franca* in the Roman Empire. The choice of language to use today would depend very much on the situation and the people involved – both the reached and those doing the outreach. The missionary might not have learned the native language well enough, or the migrant workers might not have learned the local language well enough, in which case conveying the gospel across adequately might not be possible yet. However, if there is already an elementary command of the language to survive in that country, the gospel can be conveyed across adequately. The making of disciples requires the *hearing* of

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the gospel, for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). It is required only for the preacher to be able to read the Scripture passage, or to have one of the hearers read the passage, before the gospel is proclaimed from the passage read.

While it is legitimate to reach out to a particular ethnic group, the church that is constituted subsequently should be open to all. The time would come when the common language of the area, i.e. the *lingua franca*, has to be used so that no ethnic group feels left out. Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews, but the churches they planted were all multi-ethnic. It would seem that ethnic churches in a cosmopolitan area is an unbiblical concept, contrary to the teaching that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28)."

#### *Safety and precautions*

The safety of the preachers require special mention. The Lord has warned us of dangers, saying, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16)." A willingness to lay down one's life for Christ is expected of those who serve Him in the mission field (John 12:24-26). We are told to fear God rather than man, who can only destroy the body while God can destroy both the soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28). Teaching like this inspires the foolhardy and the committed alike. The former will rush into missions full of bravado, ready to die the martyr's death. The latter would go onto the mission field full of fear and trembling, praying quietly that the Lord will keep him strong and not allow him to dishonour His name when the time comes. An earlier generation of missionaries seemed to have this latter quality, while the modern generation seem to display the earlier kind. How do we know? Are we being to judgemental? Are not the new generation of missionaries doing great work on the mission fields? Have they not proved themselves by being doers instead of merely being hearers of the word?

Our purpose here is not to judge or condemn anyone. After all, the purpose of writing this book in the first place is to instruct and to edify, by opening up the word of God. We wish to point out one disturbing aspect of missions indulged in by some missionaries, namely their free and open use of the internet to disseminate infor-

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mation. They are too visible on the social media – revealing their biographies, their families, their plans, their work, and the people they interact with. While it is essential to disseminate information so that the supporters can pray intelligently, and contribute funds for the work, there are some aspects of Christian work that need not be revealed to the world. Not all pictures of individuals and places need to be divulged. We issue this caution from personal experience as well as through conversation with veteran missionaries. The enemies of the gospel may hinder the work, or do worse things. Did not the Lord say we are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves? The Lord says in another place (Matt. 7:6), "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces." These words have applications to the missionaries serving on the mission fields. We are not to reveal our strategies and plans to those who have no right to know. We are to act in self-preservation and the preservation of our brethren in similar situations. While the gospel is light to the world, and our good works should shine in the world (Matt. 5:16), it is another thing to divulge potentially sensitive information to the world.

In the outreach we are engaged in, each team that is sent out would consist of at least two men and up to five persons. Any more than five persons will be too big a team that might frighten those being visited or attract too much attention of the neighbours, to the embarrassment of those being visited. Although the apostle Paul had at times a bigger team, it was his practice to break them up into smaller teams along the way (cf. Acts 20:2-6). Each of our teams would be led by a male member of the church who normally speaks at each meeting. In some potentially dangerous situations, one of the men would stay on guard even during prayer at the end of the meeting. He would have been instructed to cry out, "Hey, what are you doing!" or "Pastor, watch behind you!" or some such words. We must quickly add that these are precautions we have taken but we have not had to face a life-or-death situation yet. There had been occasions when a kitchen knife or a sickle had been paraded in our sight, but by continuing to talk calmly we were able to avert escalating tension.

An unresolved struggle for Christian leaders is whether it is right to leave the flock when their lives are in danger. The apostles chose

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to stay in Jerusalem to oversee the flock when there was severe persecution against the church (Acts 8:1, 14). The early church, which faced severe persecution often, debated this and related issues. Should those who denied the faith be accepted back into church when they repented? Should pastors flee, leaving the flock to face danger by themselves? The early church father, Tertullian (AD 160-220), opposed flight to avoid persecution. As a general rule, we believe it is right for us to defend ourselves and to run for our lives if confronted by unreasonable men. This is especially the case if the preacher is not native to the area. When the Lord was about to be cast down the cliff, He evaded the attackers by His miraculous power (Luke 4:28-29). When the Jews attempted to stone Him, He hid Himself and escaped (John 8:59). Paul had to escape by night from Damascus, being let down the wall in a large basket (Acts 9:25). On another occasion, he and Silas escaped by night to Berea from their pursuers (Acts 17:10). Paul escaped from his enemies in order to continue preaching the gospel. If Paul had stopped preaching out of fear, Satan would have scored the victory. Paul and his companions seemed to have taken the words of the Lord to heart: "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another (Matt. 10:23)." Our friends in Indonesia had had to flee for their lives in the middle of the night when the Jihadists started killing the Christians in a village. In another part of the country, during the same period of tension, the Christians had had to organise armed vigilante groups to guard their families from being attacked by the enemies who were intent on killing them. A number of people had been killed for their faith in that region. A pastor was subsequently disciplined by his denomination for taking part in the vigilante forces. In Pakistan, a pastor known to us fled the country when his life was in danger. He is now faithfully serving the Lord in a western country. It is hard to prescribe fixed rules for situations like these. May the Lord give us wisdom when the time comes!

What of the safety of the believers, i.e. of the disciples made in outreach? As a general rule, all disciples of Christ may flee if there is outright persecution of the Christians. In Acts 8:1, we read of the persecution against the church in which Saul was involved: "At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." While the apostles chose

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to remain in Jerusalem, many believers were scattered – "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word (v. 4)." The important thing is that they did not deny the faith but, instead, were active in preaching the word ('evangelising'), until Philip came to preach ('to proclaim') Christ to the people. Although given the liberty to flee, believers must be taught the expectation of suffering and dying for the faith. In His teaching on facing persecution, the Lord emphasises not fearing the persecutors (Matt. 10:27-33):

"Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

There will be those who have to die for the faith because there is no possibility of escaping, or because of the unexpected nature of the attack. Many are familiar with how Jim Elliot and his four friends were speared to death by the Auca Indians in Ecuador (Elliot, 1981). When we read of George Turner and Henry Nisbet escaping the cannibals of Tanna in the New Hebrides, by night in a small boat, we do not consider that cowardice (Cromarty, 1997:76). There were many missionaries and Chinese Christians who died in the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901 in China. The colossal task of documenting the revivals and the martyrdom of Christians in China is being undertaken by Paul Hattaway (Hattaway, 2007). Martyrdom has happened in other parts of the world, up to today. Hence our caution to those who are too visible on the internet and the social media. We do not seek death, but if death comes to us because of our faith and service to the Lord, so be it! Tertullian, whom we have referred to, is supposed to have written, "The more you mow us down, the more

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quickly we grow; the blood of Christians is seed. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." We have referred to the Lord's words in John 12:25-26, "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."

A perennial issue that might never be resolved in missiology is whether "extraction evangelism" should be practised. In tribal situations, the converts remain in their culture to be "salt of the earth and light of the world". In other cultures, the converts face expulsion from their community – with possible death if they choose to remain. This is where the mentor-disciple approach works well as a *method* of evangelism, but not as a *methodology* of missions. One-to-one evangelism is more effective than group evangelism in such cultures, but what do we do with the converts? The need for Christian fellowship, and strict adherence to the biblical methodology would require that the converts are brought together to form a local congregation – even if they have to meet secretly. Long-term, this constitutes a strain on faith. At the same time, it keeps faith vibrant. With the advent of modern technology such as the use of face-recognition cameras and the like, the likelihood of being detected by the authorities and organised enemies of the gospel becomes greatly accentuated. In recent years a number of people, including Christians, have disappeared under what is believed to be have been "enforced disappearances" in Malaysia. The abduction of Pastor Raymond Koh was caught on CCTV when some fifteen masked men took him away in broad daylight (Youtube, 2017). Up to the time of writing, the fate of those abducted is not known.

Acting in self-defence is different from acting in malice or revenge. The teaching of the apostle Paul on this matter is clear (Rom. 12:17-21):

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap

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coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Learning to forgive those who have harmed us is not easy. Being willing to give in when there is unreasonable demands made upon us is also not easy. The Lord says (Matt. 5:38-42),

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

This teaching does not contradict the liberty to defend ourselves or to run when our lives are in danger. It concerns how to handle the sense of outrage and anger in our hearts when mistreated. We are not to harbour resentment, bitterness, or thoughts of revenge. Instead, we pity our enemies and show them love and kindness whenever possible. Often, the lion's den is within us (Heb. 12:15). Injustice and pain caused to us are hard to bear. The same done to our loved ones is harder to bear. The Lord says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9)." The apostle Paul writes, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28)."

### 6.2 The Methods Proposed

Exceptional situations call for exceptional actions. The faithful Christian would act within the bounds of biblical teaching under all circumstances. In Luke 12:11-12, the Lord promised the apostles that, "...when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." Those who have been obeying God's word in ordinary circumstances may expect the same extraordinary



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help of the Holy Spirit under exceptional circumstances. While the principles are always followed, the methods might need adaption to the circumstances. It took the Lord's disciples and the apostle Paul months to complete a preaching circuit. With today's vastly improved transportation and communications, a circuit can be completed in a few hours or a few days. If anything, more can be done, which we have not been doing. A time of persecution, civil disorder, or natural disaster would disrupt our normal routine and methods. Let us, then, follow the principles and methods taught in the Bible when normal circumstances prevail.

We summarise first the principles (in italics) and methods expounded above.

- i *The local church must engage in organised outreach, without discouraging the spontaneous outreach of the church members.*
- ii *Outreach involves travelling in circuits, with each team led by a male member of the church. Each team consists of at least two men and having up to a maximum of five persons.*
- iii *Each circuit consists of a number of preaching groups, normally started by the church leaders, particularly the pastor.*
- iv *The same groups are visited each time – with the Bible passage read, the gospel proclaimed, and the meeting ending with a short prayer – until souls are converted or the preachers unwanted.*
- v *It is sufficient to spend about 10 minutes for each group, using the language that both the preachers and the hearers know, to convey the full gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" from an open Bible.*

### *Organised outreach*

The pastor has to take the lead in forming preaching groups so that teams from the church can follow up with regular outreach later. The shopping malls, the wet markets, and community events provide ample opportunities to get to know individuals and families when name cards, phone numbers and addresses are exchanged. A casual arrangement is made to visit the family with the express purpose of holding Bible Study in their home. In the first meeting, the pastor is

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accompanied by his wife, an elder, or some members of the church. A few other groups are similarly started. A group might consist of one or two individuals, with other members of the family refusing to join in. It might be as big as ten persons, such as encountered in a migrant workers' hostel. After two or three meetings with these family groups, a team from church led by an elder or a male member begins to take over, visiting these groups in circuit. Before long, a number of such circuits will have been formed.

A good time for the teams to be out on such circuits is the Sunday afternoon, after the morning service and lunch. Those going for outreach would gather together, seated in a circle. The pastor appoints the team members to be under each team leader. In our small church, we have an average of four teams going out each Sunday. The pastor uses the passage, or part of the passage, that he intends to preach from in the evening service in church. He reads out the passage, and gives the outline of the message that the teams would use for outreach. A typical message would consist of two or three sentences of introduction, two or three points drawn out of the passage which cover the person and work of Christ, each point having an illustration if appropriate, and certainly an application. The message concludes with an exhortation to repentance and faith in one or two sentences. The pastor prays before the teams go out to cover the three to five groups in their respective circuits. The pastor should lead one of the teams. Depending on whether all the groups are in their homes, each team would take about two hours to cover the circuit.

In our church, we have an additional team going out on a Saturday night, from 8.00pm to 12.00 pm, covering five to seven groups of migrant workers in their hostels or rented houses. The workers finish work between 7.00pm and 10.30pm. Each group arrives home at a different time to cook, to eat and to have a shower before bed. We adjust our time such that they are reached within an hour after their return from work, before they turn in for the night. Since our visit is for ten minutes of study, a total of about fifteen minutes is spent with each group. The workers are from Nepal, India, and Myanmar. We use the little Malay that they have learned to convey the gospel to them, after the Bible passage is read. In the first group visited, one of the workers would be asked to read the passage in his own language, from a Bible which we bring along. The

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reading is recorded on handphone, and played back via 'bluetooth' transmission to a mini-speaker in the subsequent groups.

Every Sunday afternoon, our teams reach out to some thirty people. Every Saturday night, the one team that goes out reaches up to about twenty people. Together, we reach out to about fifty people every week. Although it is the same people reached out to each week, they are hearing the gospel each time. The question might be asked, "Have there been conversions from these efforts, with additions made to the church?" Our answer would be, "It is God who gives the increase." We do not believe that the correctness or effectiveness of an approach in evangelism is measured by the number of converts made. Rather, it is measured by conformity to the revealed principles, and by how closely we follow the methods of Scripture where possible.

### *Weekly gospel meetings*

It would be quite amiss to fail to mention the need for a weekly gospel meeting in church. We do not mean having a meeting other than on a Sunday, such that the church is overloaded with extra meetings. The Fourth Commandment requires that the whole of the Lord's day be set aside as holy (Exod. 20:8-11). This means beginning the day with worship and ending the day with worship, just as there was the morning sacrifice and the evening sacrifice in the Old Testament (cf. Num 28:4, 9). The churches in the New Testament would have kept to this pattern of beginning the day with worship and ending the day with worship. The first believers were meeting in Solomon's Porch in the temple precincts where sacrifices were offered in the morning and the evening (Acts 5:12). After the resurrection of the Lord, the first day of the week became the Christian rest day (1 Cor. 16:2). It was during an evening service that Paul spoke in Troas, when a young man sank into deep sleep and fell down from the third storey (Acts 20:7ff.).

By having two main services on the Lord's day, there is opportunity to devote one service to teaching believers while the other service is devoted to preaching a distinctly evangelistic message. Members are encouraged to invite their friends and relatives, neighbours and colleagues, to the evangelistic meeting, which is normally the evening service. The time between the two services is filled well with other avenues of service such as visiting the sick, teaching the

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children's Sunday School, going out in teams to do outreach, or staying back in fellowship with others. Not everyone need be involved in the outreach organised by the church as the other avenues of service are just as legitimate. Furthermore, individuals differ in gifts and physical disposition. By having a definite gospel service every week, not only would visitors hear the gospel but also the regulars, a number of whom would not be converted yet. It is to be noted that the idea of "rest" on the Lord's day is not inactivity but stopping one set of activities, viz. those done on the other six days of the week, to engage in another set of activities.

This point about keeping the Lord's day should be seen in the light of the style of ministry in the church, which will be expounded in a later chapter. It will be shown that the style of ministry inherited by many pastors is not quite in accordance to Scripture. It is to be noted that an earlier generation of missionaries taught the new converts to keep the Lord's day, to the great benefit of the believers and as a witness to the people around them. This was the case with William Carey in India and Hudson Taylor in China, to mention only two among the many.

### *Special occasions*

We operate a children's Sunday School in which children are fetched from their homes to join with the children in church to be taught the Bible. This includes children from an aboriginal village and a Tamil community. Once a year, there would be an Open Day (or Prize-giving Day) to which the parents are invited as well. There is also an outing made for the children once a year – to a park, the zoo, a waterfall, or the local fire-station – for a picnic or a pre-arranged visit, in which a gospel message is preached before or during the trip. Similarly, we have a special occasion for the migrant workers on Christmas eve, in which the gospel is heard, book-gifts are given out, and food is served. There is also an evangelistic meeting on Christmas day to which those reached on Sunday afternoons are invited. One of the preaching points visited regularly by a team is a geriatrics hospital. Special meetings are held in the hospital on festive occasions, including during Christmas day and the Lunar New Year. The hospital staff would bring the patients together in the wheelchairs to hear hymns sung by a team from our church, followed by a gospel message. Pre-packaged gifts of oranges, chocolate bars and a tract

or booklet would be handed out to both the patients and the staff.

## 6.3 Confrontation With The Occult

### *The reality of the occult*

This writer grew up immersed in what may be called the Chinese Religion – a folk religion consisting of the amalgamation of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, brought along by most overseas Chinese from China before the rise of Communism in the country. Buddhism gives intellectual and philosophical satisfaction to the adherents, Confucianism binds the family together in its emphasis on filial piety and ancestral worship, and Taoism provides the mystical and spiritist aspects to the religion. We were familiar with a medium going into a trance, revealing secrets and foretelling the future, offering cures for illnesses and protection from calamities, speaking in unknown tongues that were interpreted – on some occasions by an Indian woman who spoke Hokkien (or Fujian, a Chinese dialect). I carried in my wallet strips of yellow paper and cloth with red markings which were protection amulets, until converted to faith in Jesus Christ. A neighbour had an old grandmother we dubbed "the black magic woman", who would go into trances and conjure up the spirits of the dead, speaking in voices different from normal, which the relatives swore were those of the departed. On one such occasions, the old woman was crying away, claiming that there was a leak in his roof – speaking through the spirit of the deceased man – through which rain water was pouring in. This was interpreted to mean that the tomb of the deceased had to be repaired.

With this background, it is understandable that when converted I was much troubled by the Charismatic movement and their tongue-speaking and dancing during worship. I thought the God of the Bible was "clean", yet there were professing Christians involved in what I regarded as "unclean" practices belonging to the occult. With growth in understanding of the Bible, I came to understand that the Charismatic movement was a departure from genuine Christianity. A careful study of the Bible convinced me that the tongue-speaking and prophecies of the movement are not that described in the New Testament. This was later published as a book entitled "Tongues, Prophecy, Healings..." (Poh, 1997). I am not surprised that scien-

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tific studies show that the tongue-speaking of the Charismatics bear resemblance to the mystical practices of pagan religions. A sister-in-Christ described an experience familiar to me. She accompanied an aunt to a Chinese temple in Singapore, but refused to enter the sanctuary. Her aunt came out later with a perplexed look, saying to her niece that the medium, while in trance, pointed in the direction of the niece and said, "Her God is greater than me. Her God is greater than me."

### *Cessationism*

Holding to the cessationist position on the extraordinary gifts does not mean denying the reality of the occult, nor of God's ability to perform miracles and to intervene in extraordinary ways in the lives of His people. Cessationism claims that the signs, wonders and miracles were performed by the apostles and prophets to authenticate their offices and their words (2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4; Mark 16:16 cf. vv. 11, 13, 14, 20). These, and the gift of tongues, were revelatory and sign gifts which have been withdrawn with the completion of the Bible. No one today may claim to have the gift to perform these signs when, where, and how he pleases. To do so would be to act contrary to the teaching of Scripture. It would be to call into question the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Cessationism does not alter the fact that God is sovereign and may act in extraordinary ways according to His will. Guidance sought is different from guidance given. We seek guidance from the all-sufficient word of God, through prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit to give understanding. We do not seek extraordinary signs, dreams, or visions but we are not surprised when God chooses to guide or protect us in extraordinary ways. The 1689 Confession of Faith states this truth as follows (1689:5:3),

God in His ordinary providence (g) makes use of means; yet is free (h) to work, without, (i), above, and (k) against them at His pleasure.

(g) Acts 27:31, 44; Isa. 55:10, 11; (h) Hos. 1:7; (i) Rom. 4:19, 20, 21; (k) Dan. 3:27.

Cessationism allows for God to act sovereignly according to His will. In a missions situation where the Bible has not been translated, dreams and visions might be given to the people to prepare them

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to hear the word from the mouth of the missionary. As the word of God is proclaimed, and translated, we would expect the dreams and visions to trickle away. There is no necessity for the missionary to be dismissive of, nor to encourage, such dreams and visions. The best course of action when confronted with those who claim to have dreams and visions is to calmly guide them to the teaching of the Bible. Trust in God is shown by trust in His word. His word declares that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17)." The true Evangelical believes in the sole authority of the Bible, the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, and the imperative of proclaiming the gospel to all. There are Neo-Evangelicals today who have been influenced by the continuationism of the Charismatic movement. They would encourage believers to seek guidance by dreams and visions, and non-believers to seek to know Jesus Christ through dreams and visions. This is particularly seen among those who serve among the Muslims. It would seem that trust in the word of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit, has been eroded. There will be the problem of being certain of the faith of the Muslim convert who claims to have had a dream or vision of the Lord. There will be the problem of weaning him off reliance on the dreams and visions if he is a true believer. The missionary might claim that the dreams and visions are only a crutch in the infancy of his faith, but why introduce an unbiblical idea to stumble him? What makes the Muslim so special as to require something more than hearing the gospel? God's way is to be "born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever..." (1 Pet. 1:23).

In our early ministry of planting the first Reformed Baptist church in Malaysia, we taught our members never to dabble in the occult, and not to fear evil spirits. We are told in 1 John 4:4, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Two church members were renting a room with a Taoist man who was heavily involved with the occult. In the front hall of the house was an altar full of idols which were worshipped with candles burning. One evening, after coming home from doing outreach, the two young men gingerly walked past the altar to go to their room. A gust of wind caused the candle lights to blow horizontally away from them. Inexplicably, the hideous looking idol placed at the topmost shelf fell off, onto the altar table. The

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two young men quickly entered their room, feeling quite unnerved. The following morning, the eyes of the Taoist man followed them as they emerged from their room to go to their classes at the university. When told what had happened, I advised the two men to move out and rent another room elsewhere.

We have witnessed to people who are staunchly Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim. To today, some of the migrant workers we reach out to every week have Hindu and Buddhist idols in their place of stay. While in Sri Lanka, a girl screamed and fell down motionless during a meeting. Our church-planter brother-in-Christ counselled everyone to remain calm. As the commotion died down, the brother read a portion of the Bible and asked me to pray. After ensuring that the girl was breathing, we left her alone. A few minutes later, she sat up and asked for some food. We do not look for evil spirits to cast out, but when confronted with manifestation of possession, we read the Bible and pray. We are acutely conscious of the presence of evil forces, but our trust is in the Lord and our commission is to make disciples of all the nations. When we look for evil spirits to cast out, we will find many and end up being exorcists rather than preachers of the gospel. Converted people would willingly want the idols and charms associated with their past to be destroyed. A video of one such cleansing is in the internet link given below (Poh, 2016). The struggle to adapt to the culture one is raised in, without compromising the faith, is by no means unique to tribal situations (Poh, 1989).

### 6.4 Differences With Others

#### *In methods*

The idea of evangelism promoted in many circles in recent years is that it is to be done spontaneously by individual believers instead of it being organised by the church. There are those who even advocate "providential evangelism", that is, leaving evangelism to providential openings without any planned effort, which smacks more of hyper-Calvinism – an age-old error. The emphasis is on "proclamation by life" before "proclamation by words", following the ideas of modern evangelism that "We must earn the right to speak", "We must build bridges and win trust before preaching", etc. If there is any degree



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#### 6.4. Differences With Others

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of organisation by the church, the methods would involve indirect gospel proclamation such as opening a Christian cafeteria, having a roadside book-table, the distribution of tracts, etc. While not decrying the value of these methods, they should be seen as secondary to, or supportive of, the direct work of proclaiming the gospel. We have noted that the Lord did not send out His disciples two by two to "build bridges" but to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God. We have noted that the apostle Paul did not merely make friends in his missionary journeys to create opportunities for future gospel proclamation. Instead, he sought out people to proclaim the gospel to them.

We have not neglected using special occasions such as Christmas and the Lunar New Year to bring the gospel to others. Many churches hold such meetings as well. However, most of them have neglected having a dedicated gospel service every week and having organised outreach in the manner we have described every week. While God can save souls who hear the gospel just once, the command is for us to make disciples of all the nations by preaching to the same people regularly until they are converted or we are unwanted. Short of organising mass evangelism of the Billy Graham kind – in which a vast amount of money, time, and effort is spent – how many unconverted people actually come to the special meetings? The number is generally not big. Wouldn't it be good if those same people are reached out with the gospel every week instead of just during the special occasions?

The internet and social media is now resorted to by many, not only to propagate what they believe but also to win souls and to draw people to church. Again, we should not denigrate modern technology, for they can be very useful when wisely harnessed for the spread of the gospel. However, anything that is right, good, and true can be abused or misused. We have mentioned the unwise exposure of missions strategies and pictures of personnel in sensitive ministries to the world. Another area of concern is the propagation of teaching that may not be quite up to mark, by those who are not recognised teachers of the churches. While it is not our place to curtail anyone's right to use the social media, the church at large needs to be educated about absorbing information from the internet. It is incongruous for a person who is not a recognised teacher in the church to be giving authoritative teaching on the internet where

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his identity is hidden. Any bona fide teacher would declare his credentials on the internet – not to promote himself, but to provide assurance concerning his teaching. Furthermore, unsolicited material can be irksome to those who receive it, whether by email or other social media. Yet another matter of concern in the digital age is the tendency to minimise the importance of a living soul bringing the gospel to other souls. The Lord has promised to be specially present when two or three believers are gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20). There is something about souls meeting together that cannot be replaced by electronic communication. By extension of this reasoning, there is something special about a missionary living in the midst of those he is reaching out to. The Lord who created the heavens and the earth, and who knew the end from the beginning, had taken into consideration the advances in technology in the digital age. The Great Commission still requires souls to bring the gospel to other souls.

### *In content*

There are others up to par with meeting with souls on a regular basis to proclaim the gospel, but use questionable material and methods. One such example is the effort of those who promote the use of the Alpha Course in outreach, the content of which is Arminian and Charismatic. Their zeal is commendable but we question the material and method used, in which high pressure decisionism is involved. The course has also been taken out of the local church context, in which a para-church organisation runs the meetings for churches, or draws people from churches to attend the meetings. Disagreement with them here does not mean we are questioning their sincerity or their faith, nor their right to propagate what they believe. We are mindful of what is taught in Romans 14:4, "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls." We are here proposing a return to the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3), in which outreach is done on a weekly basis, following the principles and methods taught in the Bible.

We have mentioned the missionary organisation called Ethnos360, formerly known as New Tribes Missions. It is basically Fundamentalist in theology, holding to Premillennialism, cessationism, and a literal hermeneutics. It has done great works in many parts of the

#### 6.4. Differences With Others

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world – providing strong training to the missionaries, translating the Bible into many languages, and suffering many casualties on the mission fields. Like any big organisation, it also has its fair share of problems. It also holds to the idea that a new tribe, or people group, must be taught the Scripture chronologically, starting from the book of Genesis all the way to Jesus Christ and the teaching of the New Testament. The process might take months and even longer. We would regard this as "chronological preparationism", in which is the belief that the hearers must be prepared in advance with the historical background of the Bible before they hear the gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". The Puritans were wrongly accused of holding to "preparationism" by requiring the preaching of the law before the presentation of the gospel. Preaching the law in conjunction with the gospel, however, is different from preaching Bible history for a sustained period of time before the message of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" is heard.

While it is possible to make out a case that the apostle Paul proclaimed the gospel differently to a Jewish audience compared to a Gentile audience, care must be taken to distinguish between a difference in methods and a difference in principles. When speaking to Jews in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-43), Paul presupposed a knowledge of God's word. When speaking to pagan Gentiles in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) Paul appealed to creation as his starting point. Other differences may be listed (see e.g. Joslin, 1982). The account of the interaction with the pagans at Lystra (Acts 14:8-20) is too brief and in the context of a skirmish with the people who were trying to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods and is insufficient to be used for comparison. In both Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:23, 28-41) and Athens (Acts 17:18, 30-31), the message of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" was proclaimed, with the promise of forgiveness of sins and the call for repentance, just as would be expected from Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22-25). The differences in approach, in emphasis, and in points of contact are matters connected with method and not with principle. We must not make too much out of the differences in method. The method to be employed for a particular audience will largely be determined by experience and dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide us. This is what Paul meant when he said "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some (1 Cor. 9:22)." The principle is still the same all the time, viz. to

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proclaim the full gospel from a Bible passage such that the minds of the hearers understand, their hearts are suitably affected, and their will stirred to obey the call to repent and to believe. To make something that is essentially connected with method into a principle that is invariably and rigidly applied is to go seriously astray. This, we believe, is what has happened with chronological preparationism.

### *Simplicity in Christ*

Our friends local and overseas have been sceptical of the principles propounded here – of preaching the gospel from a chosen passage of Scripture, of preaching to the same people until they are converted or the preacher unwanted, and of travelling in circuit to preach. Our brethren in Indonesia, Myanmar, South Korea, and America have questioned the viability of such an approach in their own settings. They claim that their situations are different from ours, that our culture is naturally warm and welcoming, and that the individualism and suspicion of strangers in their situations would make this approach impossible. The same incredulity has been encountered in our own situation. One of the underlying causes of tension that led to the eventual breakup of the fellowship of churches in our pioneering situation may be traced to this matter. Our approach to outreach is known to the other pastors and stood as an indictment to their lack of interest in implementing it. Pastors who lack the courage to meet with strangers will not be able to inspire confidence in the church members to do likewise. Growth in their churches is by believers coming from other churches. However, we have proved that this can be done even in foreign countries by reaching out to households in Myanmar ever since our involvement in that country. To this day, these households are visited in circuit each time that we visit the country, to preach the gospel to them. We are attempting to integrate these groups into the local churches that have been planted by native pastors. We have started similar household groups in one part of Indonesia. If the principles of this approach are drawn from the Scripture, and the methods follow closely those of the Bible, our case is strong. As other principles are unfolded in the subsequent chapters, more differences with fellow brethren will be uncovered.

## 6.5 Summary

One of the three sub-objectives of the Great Commission is to go and make disciples of all the nations. Principles and methods bearing on this sub-objective have been drawn out from the Bible, many of which have been overlooked or ignored by many churches. These include: (i) the church engaging in organised outreach; (ii) teams travelling in circuit to preach "publicly and from house to house"; (iii) preaching to the same people each week until they are converted or the preachers are unwanted; and (iv) preaching the full gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" from a Bible passage. Practical issues such as identifying the people groups, the duration and frequency of the meeting, the language to use, and the safety of the preachers and converts have been discussed. Peaceful times should provide ample opportunities for churches to engage in outreach by following closely the principles and methods found in Scripture. Other methods may be adopted but always keeping to the principles of Scripture.

We must not use the number of converts made to measure the correctness or effectiveness of our approach, for it is God who gives the increase. We have been doing outreach as described for more than thirty years. We have tried to pass this understanding of outreach to other churches, sadly with not much success. Others seem to have their own approaches, carried out with what degree of regularity we do not know. No doubt, there are those who have been doing outreach persistently, while others have not. If the principles and methods advocated here are biblical, should they not be adopted? The spiritual needs are great. If a hundred churches were to do what we have been doing, many more souls would have heard the gospel each year. If a thousand churches were to do it the number would have been multiplied considerably more.

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## Seven

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# THE FOUNDING OF CHURCHES

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The second element in the Great Commission is the baptising of the disciples in the name of the Holy Trinity. The immediate task commanded is to baptise the disciples. The baptism of disciples, however, is for a purpose which is to incorporate them into the membership of the local church. This presupposes the existence of a church, without which a new church is to be constituted. The gathering of a local church, therefore, is involved. Seen in this light, the command to baptise the disciples includes more than the mere act of baptising but involves the founding of a church. This constitutes the second sub-objective of the Great Commission, which has to be accomplished by methods and principles to be determined from the Bible. Obviously, there are implications to the greater objective of the Great Commission, which is the planting of local churches. Here, the sub-objective is concerned with the procedures of founding a local church. We shall, therefore, cover these three matters in turn – the form of the church, the character of the church, and the membership of the church. The principles and methods of gathering together a church follow from there.

## 7. THE FOUNDING OF CHURCHES

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### 7.1 The Form Of The Church

The Great Commission is rooted in the eternal purpose of God. It is also grounded in the atoning death of Christ. The Covenant of Grace is unfolded in history in two phases which are separated by the advent of Christ – called the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The concept of covenanting in the Old Testament is carried over to the New Testament. This is seen in the covenant of the church, or the Church Covenant.

What is the Church Covenant? The covenant of the church is, in fact, the response of God's people as a community to the terms of the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace is basically a one-sided covenant. God sets the terms of the covenant. He calls the elect out of the world, cleanses them of their sins by the blood of His Son, and renews their nature by the power of the Holy Spirit. He binds Himself to them as their Father, and accepts them as His children. He requires that His people respond to the call of the gospel by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He requires the believers to bind themselves together as local churches, and to obey His commandments.

The terms of the covenant, however, must not be equated with the response to those terms. We must remember that a covenant is an agreement made between two or more parties. In the Covenant of Grace the two primary parties involved are God and His people. Note that when God saves people He does so individually, and never by communities. Individuals cannot be saved by proxy. The salvation of the head of a household does not mean that every member of that household is automatically saved. Each one of them must repent and believe in Christ to be saved. This has implications on the mission field. The salvation of the headman of a village, or the king of a nation, might facilitate greatly the evangelisation of those under him. But care must be taken to distinguish true converts from those who merely profess faith. Once saved, the individuals are incorporated into a community – the local church. It is God's will that His people be formed into local churches throughout the world. For this to happen, the community of God's people must respond to the terms He has set, so that He will be their God and they shall be His people. The *response* of the community of God's people to the terms of the Covenant of Grace constitutes the covenant of the church. A



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local church is established as soon as a group of believers covenant together to worship God and to serve Him as a body.

### *Covenanting in the OT*

Is the idea of covenanting together a biblical one? Does God really require His people to respond to the terms of His covenant? In answer to these questions, we shall look at a few Old Testament passages, and then proceed to the New. It says in Exodus 24:3, 'So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has said we will do.'" Here, the nation of Israel agreed to the terms set by God. Moses then wrote down all the words of the LORD, which became known as the Book of the Covenant (vv. 4, 7). During a service of worship, in which sacrifices were offered, the nation solemnly bound themselves together, saying, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient (v. 7)."

There are many more passages we can look at, but we shall limit ourselves to just one. In Nehemiah 9, we read of how the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem gathered together to hear the word of the Lord and to confess their sins. It was a worship service. In verse 38 we have these words, "And because of all this, we make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it." How they actually sealed the covenant we do not know. What is meant is clear. The leaders affirmed the written covenant on behalf of the families and tribes by placing their seal upon it, which is equivalent to our practice of placing our signatures to a document. The list of the people who "signed their names" are given in Chapter 10.

### *Covenanting in the NT*

We move on to the New Testament. It is to be noted that there is a continuity between the two testaments, just as there is a discontinuity. The Covenant of Grace is one. God is calling a people to Himself. He will be their God, and they shall be His people. If God expected His people in the Old Testament to respond to the terms of the covenant, He would require His people in the New Testament to respond as well. Although no explicit statement is given to show that the New Testament believers covenanted together to become

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churches, there are sufficient indications which leave us without doubt that they actually did that.

First, we look at 2 Corinthians 6:16-18. Verse 16 reads, 'And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: *"I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*' This quotation is from Ezekiel 37:26-27, which speaks of the new covenant that God will establish with His people. Here, in 2 Corinthians 6, the apostle Paul applies it to the church in Corinth. This shows that the local churches in the New Testament age are the covenantal people of God.

Next, we look at 2 Corinthians 8:5, "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." Paul is here referring to the Macedonian churches, which had contributed a generous gift for the famine-stricken churches in Judea. When the Macedonian churches were first founded, each of them were made up of believers who had committed themselves as a body to the Lord, and also to the apostles' teaching. The early Independents understood these words as referring to the members covenanting themselves together as churches. This verse is often quoted by them in support of the practice of covenanting together as a church. The 1689 Confession states this in regard to the local church (1689:26:6),

The members of these churches are (m) saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ; and do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves, to the Lord & one another by the will of God, (n) in professed subjection to the ordinances of the gospel.

(m) Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; (n) Acts 2:41, 42; 5:13, 14; 2 Cor. 9:13<sup>1</sup>

The third passage we shall consider is Acts 2. In verse 1, we have these words, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." The expression "with one

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<sup>1</sup>This writer believes that the last proof-text, namely 2 Cor. 9:13, was meant to be 2 Cor. 8:5.

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accord in one place" is significant. The expression "with one accord" simply means they were in agreement with one another. In Acts 1:14 and Acts 4:24, the people were "with one accord" in prayer. This was necessary in corporate prayer, so that all might respond to the prayer of anyone in their midst by saying "Amen" (1 Cor. 14:16). In Acts 2:1 the expression is "with one accord in one place", showing that they were gathered with one heart, in a certain place, for a purpose.

In order to determine why it was that they gathered together, we must look back to Acts 1:8 where the Lord said, "but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The subsequent verses in Acts 2 show that the Holy Spirit came down upon the gathered disciples, just as had been promised by the Lord in Acts 1:8. This shows that in Acts 2:1 the disciples were gathered by prior agreement. Take note that this was after the disciples had come together on earlier occasions to pray (Acts 1:14), and on one occasion, to appoint an apostle, who would function as an elder. (The word "office" in Acts 1:20 means "the position of an overseer".) From all these considerations, we draw the conclusion that the disciples had been preparing for covenanting together as a church, on the day of Pentecost. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit was the affirmation and blessing of God upon them, for on that day the first New Testament church was born!

### *Covenanted communities*

With this understanding of the covenanted community, we will begin to see the New Testament churches in a different light. The churches were not loose gatherings of believers, but believers who had bound themselves by oath to be the local expressions of the body of Christ. So, we read of the three thousand souls who were "added to them" in Acts 2:41. There was this identifiable body of believers already in existence in Jerusalem, to which were added the new believers. It was as a covenanted community that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42)." It is significant that the existing group of disciples is described as "altogether the number of *names* was about a hundred and twenty" in Acts 1:15, showing that a membership list was kept.

This is not the description of a loose gathering of people, but of

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a people who were definitely committed to one another because of their commitment to the Lord. It is with this understanding also that we read Acts 4:32, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul..." They were "of one heart and one soul" as a covenanted community. This expression should be compared with the words used in 2 Chronicles 15:12, "Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul...", and verse 15, "And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around."

This understanding of the New Testament churches helps us to understand certain passages in a different light, including 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 14:23-24; 2 Corinthians 7:3. We leave out the first two passages for later, when explicit church membership in the local church is discussed. Here, we consider 2 Corinthians 7:2-3,

Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.

Self-styled false apostles had come to Corinth to draw away the hearts of the Corinthian Christians. They had assailed the apostleship of Paul so that he now had to defend himself and appealed to the Corinthian Christians to remain loyal to what he had taught them. He used strong words "to die together and to live together" which are hard to understand unless seen in the light of the Church Covenant. When Paul founded the church in Corinth, he was numbered among them as members of the new church. He was their teacher, spiritual father, and pastor. The church members had bound themselves together by covenant, so that it was not inappropriate for Paul to use the expression "to die together and to live together".

This understanding of the local church also helps us to appreciate the significance of baptism. The Great Commission teaches us to make disciples of all the nations, to baptise them, and to teach them to obey all the Lord's commands. We have seen, in Acts 2:41, that the newly converted souls of about three thousand were *added* to the existing smaller group of disciples. What this tells us is that

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baptism has the purpose of incorporating the person who is baptised into the membership of the church. Churches of different traditions have disagreed on the subject of baptism – that is, on whether believers only are to be baptised, or their children are to be included. These churches are also disagreed on the mode of baptism – that is, whether it should be by full immersion, by sprinkling, or by pouring. All the churches, however, are agreed on the purpose of baptism, which is to initiate the person into the membership of the church.

What we are asserting here is this – if the purpose of baptism is to be accomplished at all, there must be an explicit church membership. We cannot have an explicit, visible baptism, but a vague and indistinct church membership. This, however, has not been recognised by everyone.

### *Explicit membership*

We have seen that in any covenant, two or more parties are involved. In the covenant of the church, the primary parties are God and the local community of believers who form the church. The local church, as a body, agrees to abide by the terms set by God in the covenant – to obey His word, to worship, and to serve Him in the way prescribed in the Bible. At the same time that the covenant is being made with God, the members are making an agreement between themselves. They are binding themselves to one another, to worship and serve God in the agreed way. The members of the church are committing themselves to one another, so that they become bound to one another as members of the church by oath. There is thus an individualistic aspect to the Church Covenant as well as a communal aspect. As a community, the believers bind themselves to God. As individuals, they bind themselves to one another.

The individualistic aspect of the covenant is not lost sight of in the Bible. In 2 Chronicles 23, we read of the nation of Judah reaffirming the covenant before God. It says, in verse 16, "Then Jehoida made a covenant between himself, the people, and the king, that they should be the LORD's people." We quoted earlier from 2 Chronicles 15:12, when Judah made a covenant with God. We should now read that verse together with the subsequent one: "Then they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their souls; and whoever would not seek the LORD God of Israel was to be put to death, whether small or great,

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whether man or woman." Giving allowance for the death penalty in the Old Testament, the point is that the covenant was not a loose agreement, but one that was entered into knowingly by the members of the community. The individuals were binding themselves to one another, and together, to God.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel had an explicit membership. There were non-citizens who sojourned among them. There were others who were incorporated into the nation – people like Ruth, Rahab, and the Gibeonites – but they had to come on the terms of the nation. They had to accept the laws and customs of Israel, and to worship Jehovah as their God.

We now see that the Church Covenant gives rise to the idea of an explicit church membership. The membership of a local church must be clear-cut. Only those who agree with the terms of the covenant may become members. Only those who have willingly taken the oath are to be regarded as members. These people alone constitute the membership of the church. Note, by the way, that the making of an oath involved either the placing of one's hand under the other person's thigh (Gen. 24:2; 47:29) or "the giving of the hand" (1 Chron. 29:24; Lam. 5:6; Ezek. 17:18). The latter has been understood to mean the raising of the right hand above the shoulder, a practice which is still in vogue today (cf. Ezek. 20:5, 6, 15, 23, 28, 42). It is the method that should be used when a group of believers covenant together to be a church.

In the New Testament, an indication of explicit church membership is found in 1 Corinthians 14:23-24,

Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all.

The "uninformed and unbelievers" were not members of the church in Corinth. This is not a reference to one category of people, but to two, namely "the uninformed" and "the unbelievers". This is repeated, but with the two categories reversed, namely "the unbeliever" and "the uninformed person". It is quite obvious that the un-

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informed persons were strangers to Corinth, perhaps believers who were passing through. The unbelievers and the uninformed persons were not members of the church that was gathered together.

Another indication that there was an explicit church membership is found in 1 Corinthians 5 when church discipline was exercised upon a sinning member. We are told in verse 4 and 5,

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

There had to be an explicit membership before the sinning member could be removed from it. The members were considered to be "inside" the church while those in the world were regarded as "outside" the church, as is clear a few verses on (1 Cor. 5:12-13):

For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

The practice of covenanting together to form a local church, and having an explicit church membership, are concepts taught in the Bible.

## 7.2 The Character Of The Church

Baptist Covenant Theology takes into consideration the continuity and discontinuity of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The continuity between the Old and the New Testaments has been expressed as "The New Testament is in the Old concealed, and the Old Testament is by the New revealed." The gospel of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" is concealed in the Old Testament (Luke 24:44, 46-47). This is seen also in Galatians 3:8, 'And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, *"In you all the nations shall be blessed."*

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There is also a discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New. The Lord had already prepared His disciples for the change from the old dispensation to the new. "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment... Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins... (Matt. 9:16-17)." A key passage on this subject is Hebrews 8, in which the primary emphasis is on the discontinuity between the Old and the New covenants. The continuity is there, of course, but the emphasis is on the discontinuity. In fact, throughout the book of Hebrews, the writer emphasises the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. It says in Hebrews 8:6, in reference to Christ our High Priest, "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." Then, in verse 7, the two covenants are contrasted, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for the second." Similarly, we have in verse 13, 'In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.' Clearly, this chapter is emphasising the difference between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant.

### *Different promises*

What are some of the major differences between the two covenants? Firstly, the promises are different. We know that the promises of the Old Covenant pertained mainly to the temporal aspects of life. In the Old Testament time, God's promises had to do with length of days, increase in the number of people, seed time and harvest, national privileges, peace and abundance on earth. In the New Covenant, the promises are spiritual and eternal in nature. There is reconciliation with God, there is the gift of the Holy Spirit, there is peace, hope and joy, and the various other benefits of salvation. These spiritual promises were revealed in the types of the Old Covenant. The revelation of the Old Covenant has now become reality in the New Covenant. The promises of the New Covenant were understood by Abraham, who "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Gal. 3:6). Abraham understood that these promises were connected with the coming Saviour: 'Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ (Gal. 3:16).' These spiritual promises are not to be confused with the



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temporal promises directly connected with the temporal aspect of the Old Covenant. So, the promises are different in the New Testament, as compared with the Old Testament.

### *Different subjects*

Secondly, the subjects are different. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel alone was considered the people of God. As has been noted, there were some from other nations who joined Israel. They had to come on the terms of the nation of Israel – adopting their customs and beliefs, and worshipping their God. It was in that way that they became members of the nation. There was a clearly defined membership. The situation is different in the New Covenant. People from all nations are called to become the people of God. The Lord had said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself (John 12:32)." The Great Commission says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... (Matt. 28:19)." The apostle Peter, at Pentecost, applied Joel's prophecy to the New Covenant age that had dawned, saying, "And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved (Acts 2:21)." The gospel is to be preached to all nations, and not just to the Jews. God's elect will be called out of all the ethnic groups. The people of God in the New Covenant age will be made up of believers from all the nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues.

### *Different worship*

The third difference lies in the manner of worship. Chapters 7 to 10 of the book of Hebrews show that the Old Testament method of worship – which involved ceremonies, external rites, sacrifices, and types – has been replaced by the simplicity of worship of the New Testament. Of course, the New Testament way of worship involves various elements – including prayer, reading of Scripture, preaching, singing, the collection – but these are strictly acts of worship, of adoration and praise to God. The contrast between the simplicity of New Testament worship and the elaborate Old Testament rituals of animal sacrifices and other offerings is so obvious. The emphasis in New Testament worship is on heart-religion. Worship is now to be "in spirit and truth (John 4:23)". The covenant relationship between God and the community of His people actually came into effect, or was made effective, by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ,

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the Lamb of God. Jesus Christ's death on the cross of Calvary was the turning point in the programme of God for His people. That is why we read in Hebrews 12:24, "... Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and... the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." Abel offered acceptable sacrifice to God, while his brother Cain offered sacrifice that was without blood. We must remember that God had already instituted the system of animal sacrifices from the time of Adam. Many people make the mistake of thinking that it was instituted at the time of Moses. Moses only wrote down what had been taught orally before that. That is why we read of Abel offering up acceptable sacrifice.

The point made in Hebrews 12:24 is this – the system of animal sacrifices of the Old Testament age is over. All the animal sacrifices pointed to the coming of the Saviour of the world, namely Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. The shedding of Christ's blood ratified the New Covenant that God has made with His people. Those who come to faith in Christ in the New Testament age are members of God's kingdom. The believers of the Old Testament age looked forward to the coming of the Saviour, trusting in His future work to save them. When the Saviour finally came, the age of anticipation was over. The reality has replaced the shadow; the antitype has replaced the type. The New Covenant has been instituted in place of the Old. It is a better covenant, since it involves spiritual reality, and not merely symbols. With spiritual reality comes worship that is "in spirit and truth".

### *Church Covenant and Constitution*

The continuity of the Old and New Testaments requires that God's people today covenant together as distinct local churches, upholding a Church Covenant and a Church Constitution that have been agreed upon. The discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments requires that members of the church be baptised believers and that the worship service be that of the New Testament age. The Church Covenant is basically an oath taken by the participants to bind themselves together as one, and to God, to worship and serve God in accordance to Scripture. Many church covenants have come down to us from the Reformation, the most famous among the Particular Baptists being that of Benjamin Keach's (George, 1996). The Church Covenant is read out during a covenanting or constitut-

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ing service, which is basically a worship service held specially for that purpose. The mother-church would be involved, with representatives present for the occasion. (In certain missions circles, the terms "mother-church" and "daughter-churches" are frowned upon, mainly due to the influence of Postmodernism. We retain them, however, for ease of communications.) Representatives from like-minded churches ("sister-churches") might be invited to be present as well.

The Church Constitution consists of broad statements of belief, rules and regulations that spell out the privileges and responsibilities of the members, and procedures for meetings. The Church Constitution must not be too detailed such that it becomes practically inaccessible to the average church member. A heavy tome of rules, regulations and procedures would require some individuals to become experts in the laws of the church to monitor, interpret and arbitrate – turning the church into an unwieldy institution. At the same time, the rules and regulations should be sufficiently adequate to guide the members, to give form to the church, and to allow for progress in gospel endeavours. The Church Constitution would have to be taught to the prospective members before the new church is constituted. The series of studies we conducted to prepare the prospective members for covenanting together as a church has been used many times over, and has been compiled as a book (Poh, 1997).

Until suitably qualified elders and deacons are appointed to office, some members of the church may be appointed to carry out the task of Church Secretary to record the minutes of the members' meetings and to make announcements during the worship services, and that of Church Treasurer to take care of the finance of the church. In a pioneering situation, the missionary would function as the pastor of the church, at least for a time, until a suitably qualified man is appointed to that office. It is never wise for the pastor to handle the finance of the church. Transparent accounting practices should be put in place from the start, with the collections counted by the Treasurer in the presence of a helper who also signs the account for the week, as a witness.

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### 7.3 The Membership Of The Church

Who should constitute the members of the church? Put in other words, what is the matter, or substance, of the church? The character, or nature, of the New Testament church, arising from the discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, has been considered. The New Testament church is made up of regenerate people who have trusted in the Lord and are filled with the Holy Spirit. They are believers from all the nations. They worship God "in spirit and truth".

#### *A regenerate membership*

Put all these characteristics together, we find that only genuine believers are members of the New Covenant community. No unconverted person qualifies to be a member. We have seen that in the gospel age, "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved". The members of the New Covenant community are those who have called on the name of the Lord. This is underlined in Hebrews 8. From verse 8 to 12, the inspired writer applies a number of prophecies of the Old Testament to the members of the New Covenant. Verses 10-11 say, 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.'

The command to baptise disciples in the Great Commission must be seen in this light. Baptism incorporates the new believers into the membership of the local church where they are nurtured in the faith. New disciples are like newborn babies who must be taken care of. They need to be fed God's word on a regular basis. They need spiritual guidance for their life in Christ. They also need protection from false teaching. We are told in 1 Peter 2:1-3,

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

The controversy over the baptism of babies born to believing par-

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ents has continued for centuries. This practice was criticised early by Tertullian (AD 160-220). The mode of baptism has also been controverted over. Here, we confine ourselves to the teaching of the Great Commission. A command of such great importance cannot be unclear as to its precept. The subject of baptism is a disciple of Christ – one who is converted by the hearing of the word. That would exclude infants who are still incapable of hearing and understanding. The command is to baptise, which cannot possibly be in various ways. How did the apostles understand the word ‘baptizo’ (to baptise) at that time? Could it be possible that they were unclear whether that meant immersion, pouring, or sprinkling? Could it be possible that they understood it to mean all three modes? The natural understanding of the command, together with the meaning of the word ‘baptizo’, require immersion to be the mode.

It is clear that all members of the New Covenant community are regenerate. For that reason, we will only accept converted people for baptism and membership in our church. We can be wrong in our assessment of whether a person is a believer or not, but that should not stop us from making an assessment. After all, Scripture gives us enough – yea, more than enough! – teaching on what constitutes genuine conversion. What we look for, therefore, is a *credible* profession of faith.

#### *The necessity of baptism*

At this point, we are confronted with a problem. If every regenerate person is a member of the universal church of Jesus Christ, shouldn’t he be admitted to the local church regardless of his belief, and regardless of the way he has been baptised? This is a common question, which consists of two parts. We shall deal with each part in turn, beginning with the differences on baptism.

Baptism has a meaning, and it has a purpose. We have considered the purpose of baptism, which is the incorporation of the person baptised into the membership of the local church. The meaning of baptism is that the person who is baptised has been regenerated – made new by the Holy Spirit. It follows that only those who have a credible profession of faith should be baptised. Baptism must not be administered indiscriminately to all who desire to be baptised. It must not be administered to babies, who are incapable of making a profession of faith. This is where the discontinuity between the Old

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and the New Testaments comes into play. In the Old Testament, all male children of the nation of Israel were circumcised. This was the Old Covenant sign of membership in the community of God's people.

The circumcision of the flesh was meant to point to the necessity of the circumcision of the heart – that is, to regeneration. Membership in God's kingdom is defined by a changed nature, wrought by the Holy Spirit – and not by the physical sign of circumcision. Not everyone in the nation of Israel was saved. Only those who had faith in the coming Saviour were saved. It is not our purpose to expand on this here. Our intention is only to emphasise that baptism is meant for those who have repented of their sins and trusted in Christ for salvation. Circumcision pointed to the *necessity* of regeneration in the person circumcised. Baptism points to the *reality* of regeneration in the person baptised. Baptism is a *new sign* of the New Covenant. This is clear from Colossians 2:11-12, "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." The relationship between the Old Covenant sign and the New Covenant sign may be represented by the following diagram:

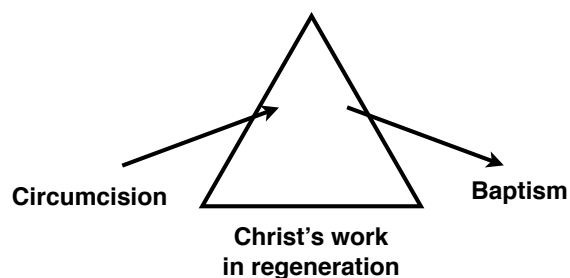
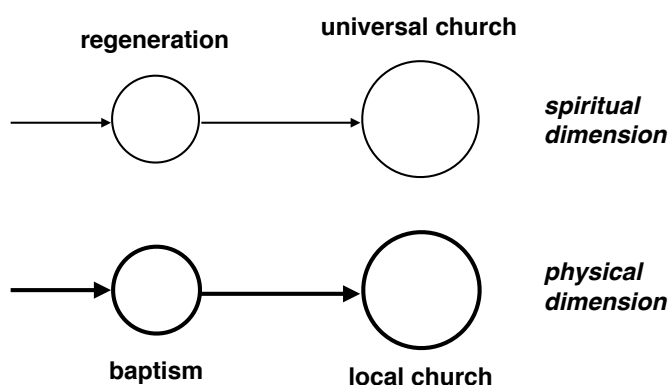


Fig. 7.1: Relationship between Circumcision and Baptism

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Baptism also has a purpose, namely to incorporate the person into the membership of the church. Regeneration leads to membership in the universal church of Christ, while baptism leads to membership in the local church. The local church is the visible expression of the universal church on earth. Baptism is the visible expression of regeneration wrought in the heart. The spiritual realities are reflected in the physical expressions. The physical dimension runs parallel to the spiritual dimension. They must not be confused and confounded. We may represent these truths by the following diagram:



**Fig. 7.2: Relationship between Regeneration and Baptism**

We can see from this diagram that it is incorrect to cross over from regeneration to the local church, just as it is incorrect to cross over from baptism to the universal church. To do the latter would be to practise "baptismal regeneration", whereby the mere act of baptism is regarded as having regenerated the person. To do the former would be to practise what I call "regenerational baptism", whereby the mere fact of the person's conversion is accepted without him getting baptised. This would be improper. It would be to go against the teaching of the Bible. The Great Commission requires that we baptise those who have become disciples of Christ. The teaching of Scripture requires that we show forth our regeneration by water bap-

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tism. We have quoted Colossians 2:11-12. There are other passages, e.g. Rom. 6:4, "therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life", and 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." This is not the place to expound on these passages. All we are doing is to emphasise that water baptism is necessary to show forth regeneration, barring exceptional circumstances.

### *The importance of a Confession of Faith*

Baptism, under normal circumstances, should lead to membership with the church. If the belief of the candidate is opposed to that of the church, problems will arise later. Not only that, the church will be accepting someone who does not agree with the belief of the covenanted community. How, then, can he be accepted as a covenant member? Thankfully, the new believer's understanding of biblical teaching is often limited, at the same time that his spirit is tender and teachable. He willingly submits himself to baptism, and willingly enters into membership with the church to learn more of the Bible's teaching. This might not be the case with a long-time Christian from another church who wishes to join our church.

It is here that we see the crucial importance of having a clearly defined body of truth for the church. The fact that the new disciples are to be baptised "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" alerts us to the doctrinal integrity of the church. The trinitarian formula may be seen as a declaration of who the church belongs to, and what the church stands for. It is into that church that the believer is incorporated as a member. Theology is important for the church. It is all too easy to say that "We hold to no creed but the Bible." Every church claims to hold to the Bible as its authority, and yet we find them so diverse in doctrine and practice. The diversity is so marked that it would not be possible for us to be in fellowship with some of them. They can be extremely liberal, or they can be so rigidly legalistic. We know the situation around us too well! What accounts for such diversity in belief? Some hold to the traditions of their denominations, with no desire to reform themselves in accordance to the truth of Scripture. Others sincerely hold to beliefs that



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arise from wrong interpretation of the Bible. Furthermore, among those who are truly submitted to the authority of Scripture, there are differences in maturity of understanding.

In view of the situation, it will not be right for the church to be content with "just the Bible". The Bible is meant to be understood. It is meant to be studied, and taught. The Holy Spirit will guide all sincere believers into the truth. However, it is not possible for one particular individual to search out all the truths of Scripture in a lifetime, and to see all of them in the right perspective, in their right relations, and in their right proportions. It is here that we need to recognise the work of the Holy Spirit in God's people in the past. Just as the Holy Spirit enlightens us to understand the Scripture today, He has enlightened other believers in the past. It will be tragic if the church were to try to "re-invent the wheel", to discover everything from scratch. Rather, we must build on what has been built up by others. This does not mean we blindly accept everything that has been handed down to us. That would be to follow human traditions instead of the Bible. What we are advocating is the need to build on the truths that have been discovered, tested, and systematised by our spiritual forefathers. We need the historic Confessions of Faith. A Confession of Faith is so helpful to the life of the church. In our churches, we uphold the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, believing it to be the most mature Confession of Faith that arose from the Reformation.

The Great Commission requires that the disciples be taught to observe all the Lord's commands. Here, we are over-stretching ourselves to the next element of the Great Commission. In reality, all the elements are interlinked. We mention this here only in its relevance to the establishment of a local church. The churches planted by the apostle Paul were each grounded in "the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)". Every church that is planted should be able to state what it believes of the Bible's teaching. A mere Statement of Faith, consisting of just a few points of doctrine, is not good enough. It is able to show that we are an Evangelical church. It is not a sufficient basis on which to found a church. We need something which declares more fully what we believe to be the Bible's teaching. At the same time, we do not wish to be so detailed that the document becomes a tome on systematic theology! When that happens, we will be in danger of allowing no room for differences of opinion on secondary

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matters. The Confessions of Faith that arose from the Reformation were produced to meet this need. A confession faith defines what a church believes. It gives stability to the faith of the members, and protects them from wrong teaching. It also helps to maintain the integrity of the church in the years to come. This is a subject that will be raised again when we consider the consolidation of the work of missions. Suffice here to say that we want to plant churches that will fulfil their roles in the furtherance of the Great Commission in the years to come. Ours should be confessional churches, and not those that merely pay lip service to the Confession of Faith. Without good theology, there will be no sound practice. What is the point of planting many churches that soon go astray?

A church ought to have a Confession of Faith. The church that has not a Confession of Faith is bound to face doctrinal trouble sooner or later. We advocate the 1689 Confession of Faith to be adopted by all newly planted churches.

### 7.4 Principles And Methods

Bearing in mind that principles are to be kept always, and methods are to be followed as far as possible, we list down the principles (in italics) and accompanying methods covered thus far:

- 1 *Only those who show a credible profession of faith are to be baptised.*  
A credible profession of faith is needed for baptism. It is shown by a change in mind, heart, and will in the person converted. Has he understood the gospel of "Christ and Him crucified"? Has he been convicted of his sin and guilt before God? Has he repented and is he walking in faith? A period of time often is needed to determine the genuineness of conversion. In the apostolic time, baptism was carried out soon after profession of faith because the likelihood of false conversion was greatly minimised by the facts that it was a time of persecution, the disciples were interacting with one another almost daily, and the apostles who had the gift of discernment were still around.
- 2 *Baptism has the purpose of incorporating the person into membership of the local church.* Preparation for baptism must, therefore, include preparation for membership. The meaning and purpose

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of baptism have to be taught, including the privileges, responsibilities, and liabilities of membership.

- 3 *The local church is formed by baptised believers who covenant together at a worship service convened specially for that purpose.* In a pioneering situation, the new believers will have to be baptised, and then prepared for covenanting together as a church. A Church Covenant, a Church Constitution, and the Confession of Faith have to be introduced.
- 4 *The local church that is founded should be doctrinally sound so as to fulfil its role in the furtherance of the Great Commission.* The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith should be made its doctrinal basis, declaring what is believed to be the system of teaching taught in Scripture.

It is obvious that in an established situation, an individual believer is added to the church by baptism. The process of preparing him for baptism would include observing the person for a period of time (normally for a minimum of six months), getting the consent of the church members, and preparing the candidate for baptism and membership by introducing to him the Confession of Faith, the Church Constitution, and the Church Covenant. Once baptised, it is normal to have the new member sign the membership book – to express agreement to the Church Covenant that is inscribed.

What of the pioneering situation? Synodical churches start new branches without a covenanting service. The consecration of a new branch is different from the constituting of a new church, just as the confirmation service of a person sprinkled when a baby is different from the actual baptism of a believer. Some independent churches follow the synodical churches unthinkingly in this practice of consecrating "new branches", failing to see that this contradicts the concept of independency.

How is a new church gathered? A close study of the New Testament reveals that new congregations may be founded by one or more of these methods:

- 1 By *sending* (Acts 8:5; 13:1-3; 1 Cor. 9:5; Luke. 9:1ff; 10:1ff.): Philip the evangelist who preached in Samaria and elsewhere was based in the Jerusalem church. Paul and others were sent out

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by the church in Antioch. The apostles in Jerusalem travelled to preach. The Lord sent out the disciples two by two.

- 2 By *scattering* (Acts 8:4-5; 11:19-26): Disciples who were scattered by persecution evangelised and became gathering points at which Philip preached. The church in Antioch was founded when a great number of people believed through the preaching of those scattered by persecution. In the 17th century, the Particular Baptists in the armies of Oliver Cromwell planted churches wherever they were stationed (Poh, 2013). Today, scattering takes place because of studies, jobs, and business.
- 3 By *gathering* (Acts 16:13; 19:1-7, 8-10; 17:1; 18:4): Paul gathered believers out of groups of non-believers. He met Lydia at the gathering of Jewish women in Philippi. He met with the gathered disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus, who became the first-fruits in Ephesus. It was his practice to seek out gathered Jews in the synagogues of the cities he visited to preach to them, until he was unwanted. Today, there are students gathered in campuses, retired people gathered in parks, foreign workers gathered in hostels and other places, and shoppers gathered in malls. We need to secure a hearing for the gospel from the gathered people, and then meet them on a regular basis.

John Owen (Owen, Vol. 16:36-37), perceptibly pointed out how church-power is communicated to God's people. In the case of an individual believer, *faith* is required of him in order that he may have the right or power to become a child of God (John 1:12). In the case of two or three believers, *mutual consent* must be added to individual faith before there can be the right or power to meet in Christ's name for mutual exhortation, instruction, admonition, and prayer (Matt. 18:19-20). For a group of believers to exist and function as a church, a *covenant* is needed before there is the right and power given to not only mutually edify one another, but also to exercise discipline (Matt. 16:16-18; 18:15-18). Before a group of believers is constituted as a church, it exists as a fellowship under the oversight of an established church. This is in recognition of the fact that once the church is planted, it will be in communion with other churches. A fellowship, without such oversight, has no right to function as a church as there is as yet no covenant binding the people

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together. It exists only for mutual edification, without the power to exercise discipline over the people. The power possessed by a church is given by Jesus Christ, and is awesome in its effects upon individuals. When abused, it can cause tremendous damage. In the Bible, we have the example of the new believers in Samaria coming under the oversight of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:14). Similarly, the gathered believers in Antioch were under the oversight of the church in Jerusalem until it became independent (Acts 11:22ff.; 13:1-3).

We may summarise the steps required in the establishment of a church as follows:

- \* Steps to be taken: (i) Make disciples; (ii) Baptise the believers; (iii) Adopt a Confession, a Constitution and a Covenant; (iv) Hold a covenanting service; (v) Ordain a pastor, or elders, by the overseeing church.
- \* A covenanting service is like a normal worship service except: (i) it is presided by the overseeing church; (ii) the message is suited to the occasion; (iii) the members raise their right hands to read the Church Covenant (cf. Ezek. 20:5, 6, 15, 23, 28, 42); (iv) the new members sign the membership book in which is the Church Covenant; (v) the Lord's Supper is held for the new members on this occasion, with the possibility of extending it to other believers subsequently.

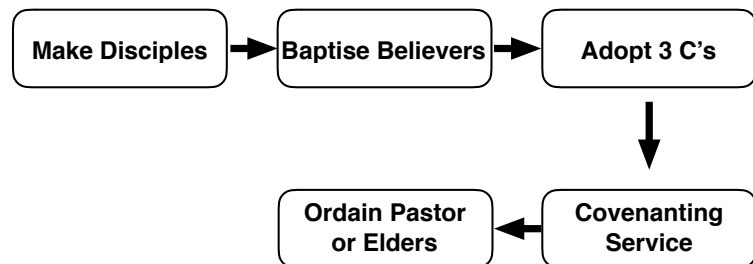
This is shown diagrammatically in Fig. 7.3.

##### *Towards autonomy*

In a pioneering situation, there is often the need to decide when the newly founded church should become autonomous and be independent from the mother-church. Long reflection in missiology has led to the consensus that the ideal of the church becoming self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating should be achieved as soon as possible. If ties are held on for too long, the new church might develop a dependent mentality. If allowed to become independent too soon, the new church might not be ready to stand on its own feet and soon face unnecessary problems. We cannot help comparing this with raising a child. As a general rule, administrative independence begins when there is a board of elders appointed, consisting of at least the pastor and another elder (cf. Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1).

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**Fig. 7.3: Steps in Constituting a Church**

Deacons can be appointed later. Ruling elders are needed to help the pastor in the onerous task of ruling the church, and to protect him from potential criticism and accusation by disgruntled members and non-members. They are also needed to prevent the church from being led astray by the pastor who may be young, who has backslidden, or who introduces novel doctrine or unbiblical practice. Only suitably qualified men are to be appointed into office, based on the teaching of 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:5-9. Ideally, they should be men who know the doctrinal standards, the constitution, and the history of the church. There is always the tendency to appoint men simply because of the perceived need for office-bearers, when they might not be suitably qualified. Of course, there is the opposite danger of waiting for the perfect men to become available, and never finding them.

While the basic principle of the Three-Self is sound, there have been nuances among those who advocate it. The missionaries of the early 20th century understood it to mean independence from foreign support and control. The government of China has taken it to mean the non-involvement of foreign governments and no funding from outside the country. Some missionary societies are adopting the

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approach of working alongside local churches. Others would focus on adopting native men to plant churches. Here, we would point out that the Three-Self Principle does not mean the local church working in isolation, with no fellowship and no co-operation with other churches. Indeed, our understanding of the Great Commission requires that the newly founded church works in cooperation with the mother-church and the other churches in that sphere of ministry.

Financial independence for the new church might take time, but should not be stretched too long. There is no glory involved in depending on outside support forever. Rather, the church should support its own pastor as soon as possible, and consider being involved in the support of ministries elsewhere. Conservatively speaking, ten working members contributing 10 percent each of their income should be able to support the pastor fully. In the nation of Israel, the eleven tribes supported the Levites in their ministry. Much will depend on the pastor to lead, teach, and motivate the members to become financially independent of outside support. Furthermore, if the focus is upon the edification of souls rather than on the procurement of buildings, there will be spiritual growth that leads to generous and sacrificial givings. In most situations, it is good enough to meet in rented premises, in homes, and even under trees – at least until there is a steady core of members. This might be thought an exaggeration, but we have been involved with new congregations that started under mango trees and coconut trees in Sri Lanka.

In pioneering situations, problems are encountered often between the supporters (or sponsors) and the supported. William Carey and the mission in India had to sever ties with the supporters in Britain when misunderstanding and disagreements developed between them (Appleby, 2007). One common problem is the demand for proper accounting by the supporters, either of the monthly support or of money sent for certain projects. While the receiver should practise good accounting of money received, the supporters must be realistic in making demands for proper accounting. As a general rule, the supporters should have sufficient trust in the receivers before they agree to support them. The supporters are often too detached from the mission field to understand the constraints that make detailed accounting difficult. With the improved transportation of today, the supporters should send representatives to the mission field to observe the work done and to give advice where necessary. K. P.

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Yohannan devotes a whole chapter in his book on missions to show how unreasonable it can be for supporters to demand close accounting from those busily working on the ground (Yohannan, 2004). In the days of the kings of Judah, it was not required of those who repaired the temple to give account "for they dealt faithfully" (2 Kings 12:15; 22:7).

Those supported must have the maturity and commitment to the Lord to never want a lifestyle that is higher than the average family among the people they are ministering to. Missionaries from overseas generally come from countries that are economically better than that of the mission field. The native pastor who aspires to live as well as the foreign missionary would soon become ineffective as he appears to be climbing up the social and economic ladder, in the eyes of his own people. The type of house he lives in, the modern amenities that he acquires, and even the style of ministry he develops have to be carefully assessed as to their necessity and suitability. In the first place, the foreign missionary should have been careful not to set a bad example of living too far above the average family in the mission field. In terms of ministry, building up a biblically strong local church – not necessarily numerically big – should be the primary emphasis and not the starting of various secondary ministries such as running an orphanage, a printing press, a Bible school, and the like. A biblically strong local church will be submitted to Christ's headship in His prophethood, priesthood and kingship. It will have a balanced ministry of teaching the believers, engaging in outreach and church planting, and doing good works quietly in conjunction with preaching and teaching God's word (Poh, TR, 2017). Such a church will be a model church to other churches that are planted. It will normally be the flagship church with its own sphere of ministry. It might, in due time, have visibly strong secondary ministries such as an orphanage, a Bible school, and a church magazine. But there must be the clear understanding that these are not essential elements of the ministry of a local church, nor of the Great Commission. The secondary ministries built up from the years by the foreign missionary and his mission must not be wrongly understood to be essential elements of a local church.

Having defended those supported, it needs to be said that in the history of missions there have been many supporters who have been short-changed despite their trust in those supported. Missions



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has become a means of pecuniary gain. One Pentecostal pastor in Myanmar boasted that he writes 100 letters every year to addresses culled from the internet to seek financial support, adding that if only one were to respond positively it would make his effort worthwhile. A group of churches from a Pentecostal background in Dhaka, Bangladesh, has been claiming itself Reformed Baptist and writing to churches overseas seeking help in innocuous projects such as translating good books, gradually progressing to seeking financial support for various ministries. When scrutinised, the men involved would turn nasty and send forth condemnatory letters in response. However carefully assessment is made beforehand of the native pastors, there will be disappointments from some of them. This is the risk that goes with missions. Risks are involved in any worthwhile venture. We have to commit things to the Lord when bitten. Withdrawal from involvement is not the solution. We must learn to plod on and not be dragged down by discouragement. Some unhealthy and wrong methods by which those supported attempt to become self-supporting include the following:

- 1 Accumulating properties and starting businesses in order to generate money for gospel work. Church members might be enlisted to run the businesses. In the process, the church engages in commercial activities to generate income, contrary to the principles of not being entangled in the affairs of this life (2 Tim. 2:4) and relying on God's people to give to gospel work (Mal. 3:8; 1 Cor. 9:8-12; 2 Cor. 8:7; 9:6-8; 1 Tim. 5:18).
- 2 Two-timing by getting support from two or more sources without their knowledge, so getting more than is needed. This is dishonesty, which should not have been heard of among God's servants. Retribution from the Lord is known to have come upon those who practice such deception.
- 3 Switching sponsors to extend the period of support, often by generating grievances of some kind against the first sponsor as an excuse to break ties.

#### *The indigenous church?*

It may be objected that our discussion on missions and the type of

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churches to be planted would have not much relevance to tribal missions and pioneering works in heathen nations. It would seem that such matters suit urban situations in which the people reached out to are those who have had a higher education. On the surface, that might appear to be the case. We need to remember, in the first place, that urban missions is just as important as, and probably more important than, tribal missions. To tribal missions belong the glamour, along with the personal suffering, of those called to this work. However, without the support of the urban sending churches, tribal missions would be near impossible, short of relying on the less than biblical approaches to missions. Secondly, without making any value judgment, there are more souls to be won in the urban areas than in the jungles. Thirdly, the biblical approach, as seen in the example of the apostle Paul, is to reach out to the centres of population from which the gospel then fans out to the more rural places. Ephesus is a case in point. It was a major city in which four great trade roads passed through. Paul ministered there for three years (Acts 20:31). Timothy, Tychicus, and the apostle John all served in that church. From that church, the other churches in Asia were planted. Urban missions must not be allowed to be eclipsed by tribal missions in missiology.

Having said that, this writer confesses to having a tender spot for tribal missions. In the Bario Highlands of Sarawak, Malaysia, missionaries laboured among the tribes for years before revival broke out in the 1960's and 1970's (Lees, 1979). Some interior tribes lived such debased lives that the authorities expected them to die out before long. Upon receiving the gospel, lives were transformed and the health of the communities improved tremendously. The next generation were healthier and taller than their parents, and became more well-educated. Within two to three generations, the tribes were transformed from head-hunters to civil societies. Today, the television sets, handphones, and computers are used by the people in the highlands – powered by solar energy. Many of the younger generation are settled in the coastal cities, making up the membership of the congregations founded there. Sadly, the subsequent waves of revival were heavily influenced by the Charismatic movement which had been spreading like wildfire throughout the world since the 1960's. This writer met one of the early missionaries from Australia who lamented that "the church has departed from

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the word of God". Another missionary from the United Kingdom, described how the missionaries were caught off guard by the arrival of revivals and did not know what was happening. They wrote back to the sending churches to send whatever literature that was available on the subject of revival. The church that was subsequently formed had difficulty deciding the form of government to adopt – the difficulty arising, no doubt because of the different denominations the missionaries came from, but also because they had no clear understanding or conviction over this subject. The newly founded church finally adopted a system that has been described as a "modified Presbyterianism".

These episodes alert us to the exciting prospects of tribal missions in many parts of the world. They also alert us to the need for missionaries who are more well-grounded and all-rounded in their training before embarking on missions. Observant and experienced missionaries have made the same recommendations (see e.g. Cheeseman, Ch. 19, 1989). A tribal group we have interacted with for some years on an island in Indonesia has begun to wear clothes that we are familiar with, while some of the people are still wearing loin cloths. We see before our eyes the transformation that is taking place in the community – with many families settling down in a village instead of continuing a nomadic lifestyle, a primary school being opened by the authorities in the village, with frequent motor-boat trips made by the villagers to the more developed villages along the coast. We expect that the next generation of converts will be wrestling with issues like the form of church government, the training of pastors and Bible teachers, and the biblical way of worship. Indeed, within one generation, lives can be so transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit such that the savage becomes the saint. Did not this happen to those who killed Jim Elliot (Elliot, 2003)? Why must new churches re-invent the wheel and fight the battles of the past? We acknowledge the need to be wise in not introducing alien cultural forms into the newly-found faith of the natives, and the necessity of adapting to the local culture without compromising the truths of the Bible. However, the pendulum might have swung too far the other way, such that the overweening desire to build an indigenous church has hampered the adoption of legitimate, and even necessary, biblical practices.

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### 7.5 Summary

The second sub-objective of the Great Commission is the baptising of the disciples in the name of the Holy Trinity. This requires that faithful churches be planted. Being rooted in the eternal purpose of God, covenant commitment to the church is required of the converts. Being grounded in the atoning death of Christ, only those who show a credible profession of faith are to be baptised. The New Testament church is made up of baptised believers who voluntarily covenant together to worship and serve God in accordance to Scripture. In a pioneering situation, a new church is constituted by holding a covenanting service, by which is adopted a Church Constitution, a Confession of Faith, and the Church Covenant. The church should work towards being administratively and financially independent, while fulfilling the Great Commission in fellowship with other like-minded churches. This requires great wisdom and sensibility, just as wisdom and good sense are needed in determining the character of the church that is planted in the local situation.

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### **Recommended Reading**

- 1 Poh, B. S. 1997. A Multifaceted Jewel: Studies on the Local Church. Good News Enterprise.
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# Eight

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## TEACHING IN THE CHURCH

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The third element of the Great Commission is teaching the baptised disciples to observe all things commanded by the Lord. If the second element of the Great Commission requires the establishment of a local church, of which the new disciple becomes a member, the third element requires that the ministry of the local church builds up the faith, and equips the members of the church for service. Three areas, therefore, need to be addressed – the ministry expected of the church for its members, the training of full-time labourers, and the involvement of the local church in the wider work of missions. Since the training of full-time labourers deserves extended treatment, it will be left to the next chapter. A key text for the ministry in the church is 1 Timothy 5:17, while a key text for the wider work of missions is 2 Corinthians 10:15-16.

### 8.1 The Ministry Of The Local Church

A hard working pastor is a time-honoured truism that few would question. Being hard working is one of a number of characteristics of the minister that brings him much respect. However, drastic changes have occurred in the church such that what were traditionally true need not be so anymore. Just as the style of worship is no longer what it used to be, so also the style of ministry. Beneath the external styles are the undergirding principles, which have been changed. Many a pastor today are not working hard, not because

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they are inherently lazy, but because they have been taught a different understanding of the gospel ministry in churches and seminaries. Our aim is to make a reasoned plea for a return to the old style of "labouring in word and doctrine".

### *The context*

Our text is 1 Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." The context of the verse is important. The passage, from verses 17 to 22, follows the one on the treatment of widows, from verses 3 to 16. The church took care of widows who were in financial difficulty (1 Tim. 5:3 cf. Acts 6:1). Widows who had relatives to take care of them were to be excluded. So also those who were living in pleasure, and those under sixty years old. Moving on to the present passage, the idea of giving honour is continued but applied to the elders of the church. Three sections are discernible. Verses 17-18 concerns *honouring the elders*. Verses 19-20 concerns *correcting the elders*. Verses 21-22 concerns *selecting the elders*.

As in honouring widows, honouring the elders does not mean financial support only but giving to them the due respect. In the case of widows, respect is due for their age and circumstances. In the case of elders, respect is due to them for their office and the nature of their job. If honour is given to the widows, double honour is to be given the elders. The "double" does not mean twice the amount of normal honour, for honour is abstract and cannot be quantified. What it means is an abundance of honour. This is how the word is used elsewhere in the Bible when the things are abstract or there is no amount given for comparison. In the book of Revelation, Babylon, which represents worldly allurements, is described as fallen and receiving her due punishment. We are told in Revelation 18:6 that God will "repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her." In Genesis 43:12, Israel allowed his sons to return to Egypt and they were told to "take double money in your hand" – note, not "take double *the amount of* money". We read in Isaiah 40:2, "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." The "double" in these instances does not mean a fixed amount but an abundance.

In the second section of our passage, accusation against an elder



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must not be entertained unless there are two or three witnesses. This does not mean the elders do not receive the accusation from one person, or that the one accuser must have two or three persons present to bear witness to him bringing the accusation. Rather, it means that if there are two or three separate but similar accusations, or the accusation is backed by one or two others who saw the wrong committed, then action is to be taken. The accused elder is to be rebuked in the presence of all the other elders, that the rest also may fear committing the same wrong. The church is not mentioned here. Instead, the context requires us to understand that the rebuke is administered before the other elders. Also, the sin (Gk., *hamartano*) is not of the grave and public kind – such as fornication, heresy, and drunkenness (Gal. 5:19-21) – which would require the matter being brought to the church for the elder to be removed from office (cf. 1 Cor. 5:4-5).

In the third section, a solemn charge is given to ensure that the correction of a sinning elder is carried out without prejudice and partiality. This is required in dealing with everyone and every issue in the church, but it is particularly needful for the eldership. The health and direction of the church depends to a great extent on the eldership. When an elder sins, the effect is more damaging than when another member of the church sins. The elders, and particularly the pastor, are vulnerable to attacks from other people, including backslidden church members, envious pastors of other churches, and enemies of the gospel (Phil. 1:15-17; 2 Tim. 1:15; 4:10, 14-15). The integrity of the eldership should be guarded from the beginning, when an elder is selected. The injunction to "observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality", extends to the choice of a candidate for the eldership. Only suitably qualified men are to be nominated and placed before the church for approval. We do not choose a man simply because he is popular, influential, well-educated, or rich. Appointing an unsuitable man out of fear or favour will result in our being responsible to some degree when he sins. We do not want to "share in other people's sins". We want to keep ourselves pure (v. 22).

### *The text*

We come back to our text, which is 1 Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those

## 8. TEACHING IN THE CHURCH

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who labor in the word and doctrine." All the elders are expected to rule well. They are worthy of an abundance of honour by virtue of their office, and by virtue of their work. The extent over which rule is exercised by the elders must not be confused with the extent of the elder's power. The power of the elders is limited to, and by, the teaching of the Bible. The extent of their rule covers all areas of church life – including the maintenance of the building, the use of church funds, the running of the children's Sunday School, etc. The deacons, and other members of the church, might be the ones placed in charge of the various departments of the church, and executing the decisions of the church, but they do so under the oversight of the elders. The manner of rule by the elders is such that they make decisions within the eldership, led by the pastor, which are then brought to the congregation for its consent. Once consent is obtained, the decisions become those of the church.

There are two categories of elders – those who rule only, and those who both rule and teach the word of God. For convenience, those who only rule have been called "ruling elders" and those who both rule and teach are called "teaching elders". The word "especially" (Gk., *malista*) means "most of all" or "above all". There is a comparison involved. This comparison is between the elders, not the work they perform, as claimed by some (Waldron, 1997). The honour is given to the men, not to the abstract functions of the men. By comparing with Ephesians 4:11, we know that the teaching elders are also the pastors of the church. The context of that passage shows that full-time preachers are referred to, viz. apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. The first three categories are extraordinary officers, which have been withdrawn after the foundation of the New Testament church by the completion of Scripture (Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 1:1-2; Rev. 22:18-19). Only the "pastors and teachers" remain. The pastors are teachers of the word. It is to be noted that in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2, the verb "to pastor" is used, while in Ephesians 4:11, the noun "pastor" is used. What this means in practice is that all the elders together share the responsibility of ruling and pastoring the church, but the pastor alone is set apart full-time to teach the word of God. The pastor, therefore, is normally the leading elder in the church. There can be more than one pastors in the church, although that is seldom the case, but one of them should be recognised as the leading elder. This was the

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view of John Owen, which coincided with that of the early Particular Baptists (Poh, Keys, 2017). Said John Owen (Owen, 16: 117):

"There are *elders in the church*; there are or ought to be so in every church. With these elders *the whole rule of the church* is interested; all these, and only they, do rule in it. Of these elders there are *two sorts*; for a description is given of one sort *distinctive* from the other, and *comparative* with it. The first sort doth *rule* and also *labour in the word and doctrine*. ...They are...not elders only, but moreover pastors or teachers. ... They are elders, with the addition of pastoral or teaching authority. But there are elders which are not pastors or teachers; for there are some who rule well, but labour not in the word and doctrine, – that is, who are not pastors or teachers." (Emphasis original.)

The next thing to note is that those who labour in word and doctrine are to be set apart full-time by the support of the church. This is shown by verse 18, 'For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."' Financial support is included in the "double honour" mentioned in verse 17. All elders are to be abundantly honoured, especially the pastor, by setting him apart full-time for the ministry of the word. This has given rise to the term "honorarium", meaning payment for voluntary service. In practice, most churches are able to support the pastor only up to the level of his basic needs. At least this has been the experience of those who minister in pioneering situations. Our small churches can hardly give us enough to constitute "double honour". Churches should work towards supporting their pastors sufficiently, based on their needs. The amount will have to be adjusted as the needs change, such as when children arrive at schooling age, etc. The time would arrive when the children go to college or university, and the churches are unable to provide sufficiently to cover these needs. There is no obligation placed upon the church to cover needs like these, for like any family, ways must be found to cover these needs, e.g. by taking study loans, etc.

The point to note is that pastors, by the nature of their calling, must depend on God's often fickle people to provide for their needs.

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This is what faith in God is all about, and what is required in those who are called to full-time ministry. We read in 2 Timothy 2:4, "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." This is followed by verse 6, "The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops." While the passage is speaking of more than financial support, it surely includes the support of pastors in the full-time ministry. Coming back to 1 Timothy 5:18, we can definitely say that the verse is speaking of financial support. By comparing with 1 Corinthians 9:6-12, we know that this is the case. 1 Corinthians 9:6-7 say, "Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?" Verse 9 uses the same words of 1 Timothy 5:18, saying, 'For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about?' From these considerations, we conclude that full-time ministry is the norm set for the New Testament church. While there may be situations where a pastor has to engage in part-time work or even engage in a bi-vocational ministry for a period of time, the norm should be pursued. Appeal is often made to the example of Paul who engaged in tent-making to supplement his needs, but that is not to be regarded as the norm for the church. In Acts 20:34-35, he tells us that he provided for his own necessities to set an example for the church to support the weak. The example was set for the church (as represented by all the elders), not for the pastor, and it concerns the support of the weak, not how the pastor is to be supported. We are convinced that 1 Timothy 5:17-18 teach the need to support a full-time ministry. This is one implication of "the priority of the ministry".

We summarise what have been covered thus far. The view of eldership advocated here belongs to the historic Independent view of church government, practised by the paedobaptist Congregationalists and the Particular Baptists of the 17th and 18th centuries. This view of eldership consists of these principles: the priority of the ministry, the validity of ruling elders, the unity of the eldership, rule by elders, and rule with consent (Poh, Keys, 2017). Independency is today held by a large number of Reformed Baptist churches. However, there are those that do not hold to this view of the eldership but to

one called the Absolute Equality View or the Parity View.

## 8.2 To Labour In Word And Doctrine

We propose here a model of ministry that has been explained elsewhere in greater detail (Poh, TR, 2017) namely that within the church, we must submit ourselves to the headship of Christ, while in relation to the world, we must follow the pattern of ministry set by Christ. As Head of the church, Christ occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. In the pattern of ministry set by the Lord, the church must engage in teaching the believers, preaching the gospel to win souls and plant churches, and doing good works in conjunction with teaching and preaching. While this model of ministry sounds new, it can be proved to be biblical and therefore to be followed. Furthermore, it will be shown that, although not enunciated in this way, the elements of this model have been advocated by an older generation of writers, including John Owen. Let us proceed step by step.

### *Prophethood*

Within the church, Christ's prophethood is concerned with doctrine and the word of God. It falls upon the pastor of the church to "labor in the word and doctrine". The expression "word and doctrine" is literally "word (Gk., *logos*) and teaching (Gk., *didaskalo*)". The word for "labour" (Gk., *kopiontes*) means "to work hard to the point of exhaustion". The pastor's duty is to labour in the study of the word of God and in preparation of the sermon. He is also to labour in teaching the word to others. Sermon preparation and sermon delivery involve hard work and much work. Each week, there is not just one message to prepare but at least three – one for the Sunday morning service, one for the Sunday evening service, and one for the mid-week Bible Study. Special occasions such as a conference, a seminar, and a church camp will require extra sermon preparation. In expounding on the need to preserve the truth or doctrine of the gospel, and to defend it against all opposition, John Owen has this to say (Owen, 16:83):

"It is evident what learning, labour, study, pains, ability, and exercise of the rational faculties, are ordinarily re-

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quired unto the right discharge of these duties."

### *Priesthood*

Christ's priesthood is concerned with worship, prayer, and pastoral care in the church. In the Old Testament, Aaron presided at the worship of the tabernacle, helped by his sons the priests, and the Levites. In the New Testament, we have no more priests of the Old Testament sense but we are all priests, instead (1 Pet. 2:9). We believe in "the priesthood and prophethood of all believers". That means we have the right to draw near to God without human intermediary, and to preach his word without being ordained. However, this truth must be understood in the perspective of the overall teaching of the Bible, taking into consideration "the centrality and uniqueness of the local church in the purposes of God". The priesthood of all believers is no license for us to do as we like (Rom. 6:18). It requires instead the need to do things in God's way (1 Cor. 14:26, 40). Similarly, the prophethood of all believers must be correctly understood in the context of the local church. Not everyone is gifted in teaching (1 Cor. 12:29), nor has the right to teach as he likes in the church (1 Cor. 14:33; James 3:1). The days of the prophets and apostles are over. The norm for us today is that the pastor leads the worship services, and he is to be the regular preacher and teacher in the church. Gifted brethren who are recognised by the church may engage in preaching when called upon to do so. The 1689 Confession summarises these truths as follows (1689:26:11):

"Although an obligation lies on the elders or pastors of the churches to be urgently preaching the word by virtue of their office, yet the work of preaching the word is not exclusively confined to them. Therefore others who are also gifted and qualified by the Holy Spirit for the task, and who are approved and called by the church, may and ought to perform it."

### *Kingship*

Christ's kingship is concerned with church discipline, church government, and outreach. In addition to preaching in the main meetings of the church, the pastor is to lead in the local outreach and the

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wider church planting. The gospel is not only to be preached publicly, i.e. before a mixed assembly (whether in church or outside the church), but also from house to house (Acts 20:20-21). Local church growth is to be pursued at the same time as wider church planting (2 Cor. 10:15-16). Outreach points are to be started by the elders of the church, so that teams consisting of other members of the church may visit the groups weekly to proclaim the gospel message. The pastor has to travel to preach elsewhere and initiate the planting of churches. His ministry is not confined to a geographical district or "parish". We reject the territorial church concept. We would echo John Wesley, "The world is my parish." This truth needs emphasis today in Reformed circles. Many a Reformed pastor have been influenced by the view of ministry advocated by Anglican writers, notably Richard Baxter (Baxter, 1974) and Charles Bridges (Bridges, 1976). These pastors have a lopsided emphasis on teaching believers and not on reaching out to win souls. They may travel to speak at conferences and church camps, but that is not the same as travelling to win souls and to plant churches. This was not the case with the Separatists of the 17th and 18th centuries – the Particular Baptists included. The eminent scholar, Joseph Angus (Angus, 1895:183-190), perceptively noted: "Two peculiarities distinguish the Baptist history of the seventeenth century. It was the age of public disputation; and ministers devoted a large amount of time to evangelistic work" (Angus, 1895). John Owen spoke similarly (Owen, 16:85):

"When, therefore, there are great opportunities and providential calls for the preaching of the gospel unto the conversion of souls, and, the harvest being great, there are not labourers sufficient for it, it is lawful, yea, it is the duty of pastors of particular churches to leave their constant attendance on their pastoral charge in those churches, at least for a season, to apply themselves unto the more public preaching of the word unto the conversion of the souls of men."

### *The pattern of Christ's ministry*

We have considered the need of the local church to conform itself to the three offices of Christ. In this work, the pastor plays a leading role, which requires that he labours in word and doctrine. He has

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to teach in the church. He has to lead the church in worship. He has to lead the elders in opening up outreach and preaching points. He may delegate some of these tasks to the appropriate men, but he bears the overall responsibility. We have to consider also his responsibility of ministry in relation to the world. The Lord has set the pattern of teaching the word to God's people, preaching the gospel to win souls, and doing good works in conjunction with preaching and teaching (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). The apostle Paul says, "Imitate me just as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). He imitated Christ not merely in personal life, but also in ministry. We learn that he engaged in preaching the gospel "publicly and from house to house" (Acts 20:20-21), he declared "the whole counsel of God" to the believers (Acts 20:27), and he engaged in good works (Acts 20:35). He also shows us his understanding of the Great Commission by being based in the church at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26), being sent out by the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3), engaging in planting churches (Acts 14:21-23), and returning to report to the church at Antioch (Acts 14:27).

### *Comparing with John Owen*

John Owen, in delineating the special duty of pastors, puts it this way: "Though the church be the only subject, it is not the only object of gospel ordinances, but that is various. For instance, – the *preaching of the word*: its first object is the *world*, for conversion; its next, *professors*, for edification" (Owen, 16:80). Owen goes on to say: "Ordinances, whereof the church is the only subject and the only object, cannot be administered authoritatively but by officers only, – (1) Because none but Christ's stewards have authority in and towards his house as such, 1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 24:45; (2) Because it is an act of office-authority **to represent Christ to the whole church**, and to feed the whole flock thereby, Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2" (Owen, 16:81). (Boldface added.)

We have developed on the truth that pastors "represent Christ to the whole church" by specifying the offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King and how these are to be applied within the church. We have also shown that Christ's pattern of ministry in relation to the world is to be followed, viz. by teaching believers, preaching the gospel to win souls, and doing good works in conjunction with preaching and teaching. Although not spelled out in these terms,



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Owen taught basically the same thing when he expounded on the duties of pastors under the following heads (Poh, Keys, 2017: 249-252):

- 1 To feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word.
- 2 Continual fervent prayer for the flock.
- 3 The administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- 4 To preserve the truth or doctrine of the gospel, and to defend it against all opposition.
- 5 To labour for the conversion of souls unto God.
- 6 To be ready, willing, and able, to comfort, relieve, and refresh, those who are tempted, tossed, wearied with fears and sorrows, in times of trial and desertion.
- 7 Sharing with all members of the church in their trials and troubles, whether internal or external.
- 8 Care of the poor and visitation of the sick.
- 9 Responsibility over the rule of the church.
- 10 Responsibility over the communion of churches.
- 11 To lead a humble and exemplary life.

It can be seen that the view of ministry advocated here coincides with that of John Owen, although enunciated in a different way. A true appreciation of the duties of the pastor will cause him to cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things (2 Cor. 2:16)?" We are thrown back on the Lord, who says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9)."

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### 8.3 Contrary Voices

We have quoted much from John Owen, the doyen of Independency. In his days, he noted that there were those who were not following the biblical teaching of ministry, simply because "the multitudes of those who undertake this office are neither in any measure fit for it, nor do either conscientiously attend unto or diligently perform the duties that belong unto it (Owen, 16: 89)." I would like to be more generous in my estimate of pastors today. I would say that many are suitably qualified to be in office, and therefore gifted enough to carry out the duties of office. However, they have been inadequately trained in seminaries, and exposed to examples of ministry that are less than adequate. In short, they are not lazy, but do not know how to "work hard to the point of exhaustion" in ministry. Some reasons for this state of affairs are as follows.

#### *Ministerial burnout*

Firstly, there is the idea floating around that the minister must beware of "ministerial burnout". I checked out on Google and found *104,000 entries* under "ministerial burnout". They include articles, books and video uploads carrying titles such as "Ministerial Burnout", "Ten Rules To Avoid Burnouts", "How to Avoid Burnout In Ministry", etc. My guess is that all faithful ministers of the gospel have experienced physical fatigue from work, emotional stress due to difficult church situations, and marriage breakdown hazards. There are those who have broken down emotionally and physically to the point of being out of ministry. To such I offer my sympathy. "It takes one to know one", used in the positive sense. A Chinese idiom says, "It takes a scholar to recognise a scholar." Ministers of some experience are thankful to God for their preservation and continuance in ministry. We must look to the Lord for wisdom and strength to face the trials of ministry.

The church has to understand what is involved in a faithful ministry. Quoting Owen again, "All churches may do well to consider the weight and burden that lies upon their pastors and teachers in the discharge of their office, that they may be constant in fervent prayers and supplications for them; as also to provide, what lies in them, that they may be without trouble and care about the things of this life (Owen, 16: 90)." We are told in Hebrews 13:17, "Obey

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those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." The point we are making, however, is that while not underestimating the reality and danger of ministerial burnout, the danger of failing to work hard in the ministry must also be avoided. There is always the danger of swinging from one extreme to another, and I believe this has happened in some circles. The overmuch exposure to warnings on ministerial burnout has caused many pastors to swing to the opposite extreme of not working hard enough in ministry.

#### *Fear of the "one-man show"*

The second cause of lack of hard work in the ministry is the style of worship that is in vogue today. Following the advance of the Charismatic movement from the 1960's was the undermining of the authority of Scripture. It is claimed that the sign gifts of tongue speaking, prophecy and miracles have been revived. The idea of having many persons on the platform to share their gifts is wrongly supported by passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:26, "How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." Soon, the style of worship is altered to include dancing in church, hand clapping and hand raising while singing, and the solo presentation of songs. Instead of the piano or the organ, other instruments are introduced. New choruses and gospel songs replace the singing of hymns. Contemporary worship has replaced traditional worship in many churches. Today, even churches that do not advocate dancing, tongue speaking and prophecy, have a pop-band to accompany the singing. The underlying principle adopted is that there should not be a "one-man show" in worship. Many pastors fear being accused of practising the "one-man show". The fear of men causes them to allow men and women to take part in different aspects of the worship service. It is claimed that this is merely the *delegation* of duties when, in fact, there is a *dereliction* of duties. The worship service is no longer led by the minister.

#### *Various views of eldership*

A third reason for the absence of hard work in ministry is the view of

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eldership held by many churches. A plurality of elders is advocated. It is argued from the Bible, and practised with a desire to involve as many as possible, with the view of "recognising each other's gifts". This, as we have noted, has been the trend in worship, which is now carried over into the eldership. The distinct role of the pastor is eroded by calling the other elders "pastor". We have seen that 1 Timothy 5:17 mentions only two sorts of elders – ruling elders and teaching elders. The teaching elders are the pastors. In most churches, only one pastor is sufficient to meet the need of the church and to be supported financially by the church. The churches today, however, understand 1 Timothy 5:17 as teaching many sorts of elders, all of whom may be called pastors. There are the "senior pastor" who handles the preaching, the "pastor of missions", the "pastor of counselling", the "pastor of worship", the "pastor of youths", etc. The choice of the hymns and the management of the worship service is left to the "pastor of worship", leaving the "senior pastor" to only deliver God's word. The other tasks such as outreach and pastoral care are left largely to the other "pastors". The "senior pastor" is left with little to do. We see here, the danger of the Absolute Equality View of eldership, also called the Parity View, propagated by some Reformed Baptists. Although they do not practise contemporary worship, their ideas of "the plurality of elders" and "the diversity of elders" would play up to the pervasive idea of leadership which we describe here. By calling all the elders "pastor", and delegating tasks to these various "pastors", the preacher ends up with less duties for himself. If there are two preaching pastors, the task of preaching is effectively halved between them.

### *Interactive Bible Study*

A third reason for the undermining of the pastor's responsibility is the style of Bible study practised in many churches, which has been given the respectable name of "Interactive Bible Study". After the Bible passage is read, the persons present in the meeting each contribute his/her view on leading questions put forth by the leader. At the end of the session, the leader summarises what has been learned from the interaction over the Bible passage. If the group is made up of immature Christians who are led by an immature Christian, they would merely be "sharing their mutual ignorance". Whatever the merit of this approach of studying the Bible, it is not the bib-

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lical meaning of "teaching". In the Bible, the teacher prepares his message to present to the audience. There might be questions asked after, or during, the message, but there is a teacher who teaches (cf. Mark 13:1ff.; Acts 2:37; 28:24-25). An adaption of the Interactive style of Bible Study is the discussion over the message preached in the worship service of the previous Sunday. The pastor is spared the need of preparing a message for the Bible Study.

#### *Inadequate view of worship*

A fifth reason is the failure to have two main services on the Lord's day. This is part-and-parcel of the lack of clarity on the doctrine of worship. The fourth Commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." There is a failure on the part of many churches to see that the *day* itself is to be kept holy. In the Old Testament, the Sabbath day began with the morning sacrifice and it ended with the evening sacrifice (Num. 28:4, 8). This practice was carried over into the New Testament, as seen in the morning service and the evening service of the Lord's day (Acts 20:7ff.). There is also the failure to understand that the word "rest" does not mean inactivity. Instead, it is ceasing to do one set of activities which are carried out on the other six days of the week, to engage in another set of activities not normally carried out on the other six days. God has set the pattern for us, by stopping His work of creation to engage in the work of sustaining the creation (Heb. 4:10). We are to spend the Lord's day well by engaging in acts of piety, necessity, and mercy (Isa. 58:13; Neh. 13:15-22; Matt. 12:3-5, 11-12). When there is only one main service on the Lord's day, the pastor has only one message to prepare per week. If the Interactive Bible Study approach is adopted, or discussion over the Sunday sermon is done during the mid-week Bible Study, the pastor need not prepare another message. The moot question is, "What about the bigger churches that find it necessary to have more than one service on Sunday?" The extra services are acts of piety, which do not constitute a problem. There should be clearly two main services, however, one to begin the Lord's day, and the other to end the Lord's day. Since the same worshippers attend these two services, the messages have to be different.

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### 8.4 Wider Church Planting

We have expounded on 1 Timothy 5:17, showing that it teaches the need for all elders to rule well, and for the pastor "to work hard to the point of exhaustion". The ministry of the word is demanding to the extreme. Although the pastor is answerable to the other elders and to the church, he has no human boss to oversee him in his work. Instead, he is expected to lead the church, making sure that it is kept spiritually healthy and faithful in service to the Lord.

We emphasise that our intention is not to criticise those pastors who fail to truly "labour in word and doctrine". We are pointing out the various causes of a defective view of ministry which has led to many sincere pastors being paid to do little in the church. Pastors are those who have received the call of God to ministry. They must arise from the lethargy that has been imposed upon them by the many faulty ideas of leadership, worship and ministry that are prevalent today. May God help us as we engage in this task.

We may summarise the principles as follows:

- i *The pastor of the church should provide regular feeding of the word to the members so that they grow spiritually and are useful in the Lord's service.* Beginning and ending the Lord's day with worship provides the opportunities to build up the faith of the believers and to win souls for Christ. A week-night Bible Study provides the opportunity to ground the believers in the truth.
- ii *The elders of the church, led by the pastor, should involve the members in the local outreach and in wider church planting.* Local outreach has been considered in detail in the previous chapter. Wider church planting is expanded on below.
- iii *The local church should submit to Christ's three offices of Prophet, Priest, and King.* Constant assessment, with reformation when and where necessary will prevent the church decaying as happened to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 & 3.
- iv *The pattern of ministry set by the Lord is to be followed, in which there is teaching of believers in the church, winning souls in the world, and quietly doing plentiful good works.* This applies to local outreach as well as to wider church planting. The pastor should

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#### 8.4. Wider Church Planting

travel to initiate church planting, or visit churches planted by missionaries sent by the church or by adopted missionaries.

##### *Co-operation in missions*

We must expand on a principle raised above, namely that local outreach must go hand-in-hand with wider church planting. Those hearing this for the first time might find it incredulous. If the church is new and small in size, is it expected to be involved in wider church planting? We answer in the affirmative. First, we compare the church with the newly converted person. We would not prevent him from witnessing immediately, for what he has known of the gospel to be saved may now be passed on to others so that they, too, can be saved. It is as he begins witnessing that he grows in knowledge, experience, and confidence. Similarly, the new church is to be involved in wider church planting. If we were to wait till we are ready, when will that be? The Parable of the Talents shows, among other things, that we are required to do our utmost, and no more. Secondly, we are expected to work in fellowship with other like-minded churches. By working together, more can be accomplished. Thirdly, the New Testament churches set for us the pattern that every local church should have its satellite works which would become independent churches in due time (Acts 8:14; 11:22, 27; 1 Cor. 9:5; 2 Cor. 1:1).

2 Corinthians 10:15-16 is a key passage that shows us two important things: (i) like-minded churches are to co-operate in the work of missions; (ii) a mutually beneficial relationship, a symbiosis, exists between local church growth and wider church planting. The apostle Paul operated as a team, involving men from the churches within his sphere of ministry in the work of missions. Paul was sent out from the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3), to plant churches in various cities (Acts 14:21-23), before returning to report to the sending church (Acts 14:27-28). In his missionary journeys, he enlisted Timothy from Lystra (Acts 16:1), and other men from the other churches that had been established (Acts 20:4-6). The church in Corinth was plagued with problems, which required much attention from Paul. The apostle wrote to them saying that "...as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you..." If the Corinthians

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were to sort out their local problems, they would need less attention from Paul who could then focus on the wider ministry. The Corinthian Christians would be able to contribute funds and workers to the wider work. When the workers returned, the news of the wider work which they brought back would fuel much prayer and praise in Corinth.

In our own situation, a common fund for missions was started – called the Missionary Support Fund (MSF) – that was administered by one church but accepting contributions from other churches. The Fund is used to support local pastors and the adopted native missionaries in other countries to do the work of church planting, until their churches could be self-supporting. We operate on a "3 + 2 + 2" formula, in which reviews of the amount of support would be made after three years, another two years, and the final two years. Ideally, the church should become financially independent by the end of the seven years. In practice, the period of support often stretches to longer, to as long as eleven years. The church representatives, usually the pastor and another man from his church, would meet together once every two months for a Fraternal Meeting. The meeting would last the whole morning, in which a talk is given by one of the pastors, followed by discussion, a break, a time of sharing and prayer, and ending with lunch together. A preaching point that is started and which has become quite stable is often placed under the care of the nearest constituted church. Each of the works overseas is visited at least once a year – to teach, to observe, and to advise as needed. At each place visited, a church leaders' seminar is held over a morning, ending with lunch together, organised by our native missionary. Leaders of neighbouring churches are invited to hear three sessions of talks on a theme, given by us, the visitors. That way, the supported missionary learns together with others, while others are exposed to the truth we hold dear to. The supported native pastors have to attend the annual Ministers' Conference held in our church in Kuala Lumpur – for fellowship, intensive teaching, and the presentation of a brief missions report that is usually accompanied by a slideshow. Some of the leaders of the other churches, known to us through the church leaders' seminars, are invited to come as well. Since we are dealing mostly with third-world countries, we have to pay for their airfares from our Missionary Support Fund.



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#### 8.4. Wider Church Planting

##### *Competition in missions*

A sad feature of missions is the sense of rivalry from other churches that are not in our sphere of ministry. The apostle Paul told the Corinthian Christians, "We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God has appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you." The church in Jerusalem had its own sphere of ministry which geographically covered Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:31; 10:5; 1 Cor. 9:5; Acts 8:5; 21:8). The church in Antioch was initially under the supervision of the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:22). Although there were these two spheres of ministry – one based in Jerusalem and the other in Antioch – there was good fellowship between them, with visitations made, although not always ending with happy outcome (Acts 15:1; 21:7-11). Paul collected funds for the needy in Judea (Acts 11:29-30). Peter wrote to the churches in the province of Asia after the martyrdom of Paul (1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 3:14-16). The apostle John settled a long time in the church in Ephesus, which was founded by Paul, until his death. Such fellowship is as it should be – "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity (Psalm 133:1)!"

When there was revived interest in the Reformed faith in the 1960's, many Reformed churches grew numerically because of attracting believers from other churches who were starved of good teaching in their former churches. This did not constitute 'sheep stealing'. Rather, the Reformed churches grew good grass, and other sheep were attracted to them. It would have been wrong to turn away such hungry sheep. However, much as such a ministry is justifiable, the kingdom of God overall has not grown. We should work at local outreach and wider church planting, to win souls to Christ.

It is a different thing when a church deliberately infiltrates other churches to draw away their members. This is sheep stealing, based on the strategy of 'to plunder rather than to nurture'. In the 1890's Evangelical missionaries in China found the Roman Catholics adept at stealing away their converts. The problem became so bad that books had to be written to show the difference between the two creeds (Hattaway, 2018:47). A church in Singapore that claims itself to be Reformed, holding strongly to a Reformed Confession of Faith, has been doing the same thing – bringing upon itself the appellation of 'a Reformed cult'. Another church in Kuala Lumpur which calls itself Reformed, when in reality it is New Calvinist, has been

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infiltrating other churches and drawing away their young people. It takes pride in being a growing church, but its growth is at the expense of other churches. It, too, has brought upon itself a bad name in Christian circles. Such churches are heavily influenced by the ideas of the Modern Church Growth movement, in which success is seen in numbers, and attrition (loss of members) is an indication of defective leadership or church-life (Hinton, 1985).

Apart from 'sheep stealing' there has been the phenomenon of the stealing of shepherds. Preachers would attend conferences with the view of making contacts with the foreign delegates, to draw them away to become their own missionaries. A church in Singapore drew away one of our missionaries in Myanmar by offering him a better pay package. Another church in Singapore attempted to draw away a pastor in Nepal with an offer of good financial support, but was turned down. Another church in Kuala Lumpur made contact with some delegates at our conference and began visiting them in Indonesia with the view of supporting them as their missionaries. This ugly phenomenon has been seen elsewhere. When China opened itself to the world after self-imposed isolation for centuries, foreign preachers rushed in, purportedly to help the churches there. Their offer of financial help and the deliberate attempt to reach out to the second or third-tier leaders soon resulted in the house churches splitting into fragments (Yun, 2002:234).

Our support of native missionaries has been done with care. We would never adopt a man without assessing him for a period of time, by having him attend the church leaders' seminar which we conduct in his locality and having him attend our conference in Kuala Lumpur a couple of times. Background checks would be made with church leaders known to us in the place. Despite that, we have made mistakes and been short-changed by those we supported. However, we have never been accused of 'stealing shepherds' or 'stealing sheep', nor of causing churches to split. In this connection, it is our policy never to have the location of our church building or meeting place geographically in proximity to another Evangelical church – i.e. to be as close as being next door, or in the same block of buildings, to one another. We do not want to convey to the world the wrong impression that we are in competition with each other. The turf is big enough for everyone, and there is so much work to be done. Normally, the combined effort of all the Evangelical churches

#### 8.4. Wider Church Planting

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in any one location has not reached out to more than 10 percent of the population. Sad to say, not all churches share the same sentiment or policy that we hold to. Our appeal to other churches is that we should practice good ethics in the work of missions, instead of undermining one another. After all, we are on the same side of the battle, serving the same Lord. The harvest is plentiful and the labourers are few, and no single church or constituency can meet all the needs.

##### *Consolidation in missions*

We turn to the happier subject of consolidating the gains in gospel work. As the number of churches grow, and more people are involved, the likelihood of disagreement will be heightened. Spiritual maturity is needed to handle differences – a matter easier said than done. We have to give allowance for differences in understanding, in exposure, and in personality. During the Puritan age, Richard Baxter was supposed to have bandied about the ancient saying "in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity". For this to be practical, there must be agreement in what constitute the essentials and the non-essentials. To confessional Reformed Baptists, the truth is paramount – the more truth we share in common, the closer is the possibility of fellowship. The fellowship with other churches has been represented by the concentric circles as shown in Figure 8.1.

We have come to realise over the years that maintaining unity between the churches is not an easy task. Adherence to the same doctrine and practice do not seem to be enough to hold the churches together. What else is needed? Ephesians 4:1-6 says,

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The second half speaks of the basic doctrine and practice we hold

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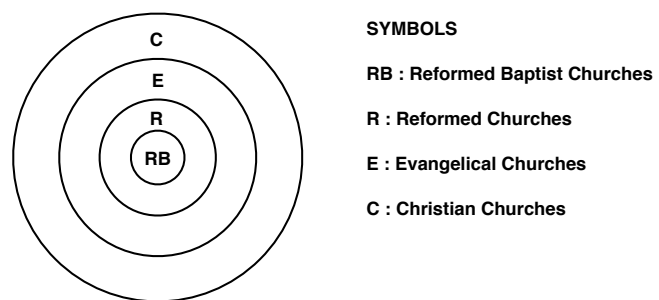


Fig. 8.1: Degree of Fellowship with Other Churches

in common. That should be the starting point in considering the unity between the churches. Doctrine should not stand alone. It should lead to practice. We have seen that Jesus Christ, as Head of the church, occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest and King. The church should submit itself to Christ's three offices, which means that the doctrine, worship, and government (and governance, i.e. the form and practice) must be correct. It is hard to be in fellowship with a church that has doctrine alone right. The Regulative Principle of worship must be adhered to, reflected in the style and content of worship. Correct church government must be practised, in which biblical church discipline is upheld. Then, note that the Ephesians 4 passage shows the necessity of a right spirit. There must be lowliness and gentleness, longsuffering, a bearing with one another in love, a common desire to keep the unity and peace that comes from being Spirit-filled. The leaders of the churches, and especially the pastors, play a significant role in this. The church seldom rises above the spirituality of the leaders. Leaders must take the lead.

Among Reformed Baptists there exists differences on how closely a grouping of churches should fellowship together. There are those who advocate a rules-based association, to varying degrees of or-

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ganisational tightness. There are others who believe in loose fellowship between the churches. The New Testament churches appeared to have operated closely in regional groupings – the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:31), the churches in Asia (Rev. 1:11), and the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2). The churches that are spawned from a common mother-church would be expected to be in close fellowship with one another. Common interest and personal friendship between church leaders might also draw their churches together, in this age of improved communications and transportation. Believing in the autonomy of the local church, it would not be possible to stop a church from breaking away to plot its own course. It would be ideal to part ways amicably, rather than in bad blood. Sadly, there is often the spirit of rivalry between those who are otherwise agreed on doctrine and practice. The apostle Paul tells us of those who preached the gospel out of wrong motives, with the intention of causing him harm (Phil. 1:15). We might ask, how did Paul know that this was happening? In the dynamics of human interaction and exchanges of words, this would have become clear. It is to be expected that one who is faithful to God's word will experience desertion (cf. John 6:60, 66; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17; 4:9-15). It is near impossible to find a faithful church that never experiences a split in its membership (cf. 1 John 2:19). From this discussion, three possible scenarios are envisaged:

- i The planted church works in fellowship with the mother-church and other like-minded churches, until scenario (ii) takes place. This is the ideal situation.
- ii The planted church decides to part ways amicably and plot its own course, for some good reasons. This situation is seen in the church of Antioch which developed its own sphere of ministry under the leadership of the apostle Paul, the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Acts 11:22-26; 13:1-3). The church in Ephesus similarly developed its own sphere of ministry (Rev. 1:4).
- iii The planted church decides to part ways in a bad spirit from the mother-church and other churches in the same sphere of ministry. Often, an excuse is found to accuse the mother-church or the founding pastor, to justify breaking away. While recognising that differences between individuals (cf. Acts 15:36-41; Gal.

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2:11-21) and between churches (cf. Acts 15:1-5, 22-33) are to be expected, a Christ-honouring spirit must be maintained and unfounded accusations must be avoided.

It would be expected that any grouping of churches will have a flagship church and a flagship publication, around which the group rallies. Jerusalem appeared to be the flagship church of the grouping in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Antioch was another flagship church in Paul's sphere of ministry. In Asia, Ephesus became the flagship church. It was the mother of the Asian churches. It is mentioned first among the churches in Asia (Rev. 1:11; 2:1). A flagship publication is useful in holding the churches together once an identifiable grouping becomes fairly stable. After all, it is truth that holds the churches together. It was the practice of the Particular Baptist churches from the beginning of the 19th century to rally around a few magazines that were produced (Oliver, 2006: Chap. 12). It is obvious that the flagship church has to be a model for other churches in its ministry. It is obvious also that the flagship church need not be the one that hosts the flagship publication. As noted already, recognised teachers (not necessarily pastors) of the churches should be the ones who contribute regularly to the publication. Having a publication too early might drain resources and take time away from the more crucial tasks of planting and building up the churches. In today's digital age, a website would fulfil the same function. Similarly, holding a combined conference and a combined church camp once a year will help to keep the unity of the churches and to edify church members. From among the many groupings of churches might arise, in due time, one that has the resources to train full-time preachers and missionaries. This subject requires extended treatment, and is left to the next chapter of this book.

### 8.5 Summary

The third element of the Great Commission requires the teaching of disciples and the training of teachers and missionaries. The recovery of a biblical ministry seems to be much needed in many Christian circles. Pastors must recover the hard work taught in the Bible – to provide teaching to the flock and to lead the church in outreach and missions. The local church should be constantly assessing itself and

reforming according to the three offices of Christ – in its doctrine, worship, and governance. It should also follow the pattern of the Lord in ministry, in which is the teaching of the members, the winning of souls, and the doing of good works. Local church growth should go hand-in-hand with wider church planting. Like-minded churches co-operating together in missions allows for more to be accomplished. Rivalry and unethical practices should be avoided in missions. As the work of missions progresses, thought must be given to consolidating the work.

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## Nine

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# THE TRAINING OF PREACHERS

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We have not completed the discussion on the third element of the Great Commission, which is teaching the baptised disciples to observe all things commanded by the Lord. A strong teaching ministry in the local church is essential to build up the faith of the members and to equip them for service. There is also a need to identify and train those who are called by God to full-time ministry, in various capacities – including pastors, missionaries, teachers of the Bible, and workers in various supportive capacities. We consider first a brief history of ministerial training, followed by the state of ministerial training today, and conclude with a consideration of the type of workers that we wish to produce.

### 9.1 A Brief History Of Ministerial Training

The training of preachers and missionaries has had a long history. The immediate question before us is whether ministerial training should be formal or informal, in a church-based seminary setting or in a privately run one, including the granting of academic degrees or merely aiming at competency in preaching. In short, is an educated ministry to be preferred over an effective ministry? Are they mutually exclusive? The factors that give rise to differences of opinion on this issue lie in history. We shall therefore consider the historical

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factors here.

### *The Pre-Reformation Period*

We begin our story with John Wycliffe (1330-84), the "Morning Star of the Reformation" (Wood, 1984). Europe had been engulfed in Roman Catholic superstition for centuries. John Wycliffe was a theologian who taught in Oxford University. He resisted the authority of the Pope, challenged the indulgences, and rejected the confessional. He affirmed the biblical teaching on faith: "Trust wholly in Christ; rely altogether on his sufferings; beware of seeking to be justified in any other way than by his righteousness." With the help of his friend John Purvey, they translated the Bible into English – believing that every Christian should have access to the Scripture in his own language, instead of hearing it in unintelligible Latin.

Wycliffe's followers became known as Lollards, who travelled everywhere preaching and distributing tracts. Wycliffe wrote three important books, which were brought to Prague by two visiting faculty members of the university there. These writings were to influence John Huss (1369-1415), a priest and professor of theology at Charles University. Through the Moravians, i.e. the followers of John Huss, Martin Luther came to know the writings of Huss and Wycliffe. Luther was to be used by God to spark off the Reformation in 1517, resulting in Protestant churches being founded throughout Europe.

Note that up to this point, theological education was closely connected with the universities, founded throughout Europe from century to century since the days of Charlemagne (742-814), Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire (Bogue & Bennett, 2000:209). The University of Oxford began in 1096 while the University of Cambridge was founded in 1209. These were to be the two leading universities training preachers for the Church of England.

### *The Reformation in Britain*

William Tyndale (1494-1536) was a leading figure of the Protestant Reformation in England (Edwards, 1988). He translated the New Testament into English. (Wycliffe's Bible was never printed and made widely available, since Gutenberg's printing press appeared only in 1440.) Although Tyndale's translation of the Old Testament was not completed before his death, his work became the basis of

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translations of the Bible into English, including the King James Version of 1611.

The Church of England broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534, during the reign of King Henry VIII. During the reign of King Edward VI (1537-53), Archbishop Thomas Cramer invited the Italian-born theologian Peter Martyr, and the French theologian Martin Bucer, to help with the Reformation in England. These men occupied the chairs of theology in Oxford and Cambridge, respectively. It is to be noted that the Puritan movement consisted of those who attempted to reform the church from within and those who stayed out because they believed that the church was beyond the possibility of reform. The latter became known as the Separatists, or radical Puritans. Between 1661 and 1665, Parliament passed a series of Acts, called the Clarendon Code, which were designed to enforce conformity to the worship of the state church. One of these was the Act of Uniformity of 1662, which required all ministers to conform to the Book of Common Prayer. From scruples of conscience, 2,000 ministers refused to conform and were ejected from the state church. They joined the Dissenters, or Nonconformists.

The Nonconformists were now denied theological training in the universities, nor could they teach there. Growth in numbers among their churches continued despite persecution of the Dissenters from 1662-1672 and from 1680-1685. The passing of the Act of Toleration in 1689 granted partial religious liberty to the Nonconformists, which did not include the opportunity of theological training in the universities. Theologically, how did the Nonconformists thrive?

#### *Dissenting seminaries*

The Great Ejection of 1662 swelled the ranks of Nonconformity, swamping it with men who had been trained in the universities. Together with the earlier Separatists, many of these men engaged in the training of preachers by personal tutelage in their homes. Some examples include the following. There was a Richard Franklin who studied at Cambridge and served in the Church of England until ejected in 1662. He set up a private academy in his own home to train young men for the ministry. He continued this work from 1665 till his death in 1698 (Bogue & Bennett, 2000:212-214). Among the Particular Baptists, Richard Sampson was sent from his church

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in Plymouth to be trained under a Mr. Thomas in Bristol in 1689 (Ivimey, 1811-1830:138ff.). Mr. Thomas was an ejected Nonconformist Baptist pastor who had been training men for the ministry. This was before the Bristol Academy began to operate under Bernard Foskett, based in the Broadmead, open-communion, Particular Baptist church. Two early ministers of the Broadmead church – Thomas Hardcastle and George Fownes Sr. – were trained at Cambridge University. (There were two Particular Baptist churches in Bristol. The one in Pithay practised closed communion.) In London, the Particular Baptists had two able leaders who were university trained, namely, Benjamin Cox (1595-1664) and Hansard Knollys (c. 1599-1691) (Poh, 2013:26, 28). Knollys was trained in Cambridge, while Cox was trained in Oxford.

The seminaries that started after the Great Ejection may be classified into three types: the first had tutors for a limited time; the second had tutors that continued the work to the next century; the third had several tutors that constitute what we would call a faculty, today (Bogue & Bennett, 2000:224). The first type were strictly private academies, in the sense that they were operated by individual ministers of the gospel. (The Log College founded by the Presbyterian, William Tennent Sr., at Neshaminy, Bucks County, Pennsylvania in 1726 was of this type. It operated in a log house of size 20 feet by 20 feet, producing able students who featured prominently in the religious revivals known as the Great Awakening (Alexander, 1968).) The second and third types were denominational seminaries. An example of the second type was the academy in London operated by the Independents, whose first tutor was Dr. Isaac Chauncy (Bogue & Bennett, 2000:222-224). The third type were public academies controlled by a group of trustees, which were established after the Act of Toleration in 1689 (Hayden, 2006:63). One such was the Bristol Academy operated by Bernard Foskett. The teaching medium was English rather than Latin. It was one of the few academies which trained only theological students, while the majority trained students for a variety of professional work. It is to be noted that all these seminaries were church-based, that is, they were operated by churches or by individuals who were ministers of churches. It was only from the late 18th century that seminaries and missionary societies broke away from accountability to the churches which first started them, and the phenomenon of para-church organisations be-

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gan to proliferate.<sup>1</sup> Before coming back to the Bristol Academy we need to backtrack a little.

The need for an educated ministry had been an issue with the Particular Baptists for a long time. In as early as 1651, Thomas Collier was arguing that 'human learning' was not necessary to an effective ministry. One should rather seek the power of the Spirit of Christ instead of making an idol of human learning (Hayden, 2006:21). The Baptists had suffered persecution alongside the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, which drew them closer together. One result of the interaction between them was the realisation by the Baptists that the other two denominations placed a great emphasis upon a learned ministry (Hayden, 2006:64). When the first General Assembly of the Particular Baptists met in London in 1689, one of the decisions taken was that of strengthening the ministry among the Baptist churches by starting a fund which would be handled by nine of the London ministers. The money was to be used to encourage ministers in their travels to preach the gospel and to strengthen churches, and to assist suitable candidates in the pursuit of formal theological study, including "attaining to the knowledge and understanding of the languages, Latin, Greek and Hebrew" (Hayden, 2006:14).

After the Act of Toleration of 1689, the Particular Baptists held four General Assemblies in London. The first General Assembly of the Particular Baptists of 1689 was well attended, but subsequent ones not so because opposition to the ministerial fund seemed to weigh on the delegates' minds. In the fourth General Assembly of 1692, it was decided that there would be two General Assemblies in the subsequent years – one to be held in Bristol, the other in London. The branch in London failed to meet because of the continuing controversy over congregational hymn-singing among the prominent leaders. The 1693 Assembly in Bristol acknowledged that human learning was not to be equated with Spirit-given ability to teach the word of God, and that the knowledge of the biblical languages "in itself is not essential, nor absolutely necessary to constitute a Minister of the Gospel" (Hayden, 2006:18). The churches continued to meet as the Western Association, but was plagued with doctrinal

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<sup>1</sup>This happened to the Bristol Academy after 1770 (Hayden, p. 129), and the first Particular Baptist Missionary Society after 1818 (Appleby, 2007, p. 251). Religious, educational and moral societies proliferated from the end of the 18th century (Poh, 2013:251, 252).

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controversies. It was reorganised as the Western Baptist Association in 1733, by the initiative of Bernard Foscett (1685-1758), the pastor of the Broadmead church in Bristol. The 1689 Confession was adopted as its doctrinal basis. Arminian churches were excluded from membership. Once the doctrinal matters were resolved for the Association, Foscett turned his attention to the training of an educated ministry under the provisions of Edward Terrill's bequest. Terrill was an elder of the Broadmead church who kept a record of the church's history. The Bristol Academy, which started functioning in 1734, trained over 70 students in the next 25 years, up to the death of Foscett. It continued functioning after that, while the London churches struggled over the training of ministers.

The success of the Bristol Academy has been attributed to a number of factors, including: (i) the perseverance and able leadership of Bernard Foscett; (ii) the availability of funds due to the bequest of Edward Terrill; (iii) the belief in an educated ministry, which has been there from the beginning; (iv) it was based upon a single church rather than dependent upon a grouping of churches or an Association (Hayden, 2006:21, 64, 207).

### *Dissenters today*

The tension between an educated ministry and a practical ministry continues to today. Differences of opinion do not fall neatly into one of these two positions, as definitions differ and the boundary lines do not all coincide. A general understanding of an educated ministry is one in which a minimum academic qualification is set for admittance, a structured approach to study is adopted, only academically qualified tutors/lecturers teach, and an accredited degree is granted upon completion. A practical ministry is generally understood to be one in which no minimum academic qualification is needed for admittance, pastors with practical experience do the teaching, godliness of life in the student is sought, and practical proficiency for the job is aimed at.

The arguments *against* an educated ministry include: (i) academic achievement is not mentioned as a requirement for ministry in such passages as 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:5-9; (ii) the Lord did not choose highly educated men to be His immediate disciples; (iii) the approval of God is more important than the approval of men; (iv) preaching is not to be limited to trained preachers only

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but to all who are gifted. The arguments *in favour* of an educated ministry would include: (i) the school of the prophets is seen in the Old Testament; (ii) the Lord's training of the Twelve is a pattern for the formal training of preachers; (iii) the primacy of preaching and a high view of Scripture requires that preachers be trained in "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15); (iv) common sense requires that academic qualification for admittance, and on completion of study, be indicated by an accreditation system that everyone is familiar with (cf. 1689 Confession, 1:6, where common sense is appealed to).

Most people who have wrestled with the training of preachers would hold to a position that straddles both sides of the divide. What truly matter to them are: (i) a degree should not be looked upon as more important than being filled with the Spirit for service; (ii) the accrediting body should not be one which requires compromise on the doctrinal position of the seminary; (iii) a high standard of education should be maintained regardless of whether a degree is offered. An incident that occurred closer to our time illustrates these concerns. At the official dedication of the London Bible College which today is known as the London School of Theology, in 1958, the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached against the mere pursuit of degrees at the expense of true spirituality and zeal for God. His message had a dampening effect upon the staff and students, including the principal, Ernest Kevan (Brown, 2012:Ch. 16). This being a perennial issue, the College had consciously chosen to offer accredited degrees from London University. Furthermore, it was a theological college – not a seminary – which trained gospel workers of all kinds, although emphasising on the training of men for the pastoral ministry.

Today, the country of Indonesia requires an accredited degree for anyone to teach in any institution – whether public schools, Christian schools, or seminaries. All such institutions are required by law to be registered with the Department of Religion. In Malaysia, schools and colleges need to be registered and validated by the government before being able to take in foreign students. The seminaries that operate in the country are accredited by Christian bodies and, as such, have had difficulty taking in foreign students. Many countries require proof of proficiency before granting specialist permits to foreigners who intend to teach in schools and seminaries. These are some practical considerations that favour a formal approach to

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ministerial training. A sampling of the situation that prevails are as follows. The London Reformed Baptist Seminary, operated by the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, offers a high standard of instruction for the ministry which is non-accredited. The Grace Ministerial Academy in Manila, Philippines, offers non-accredited training. A number of Reformed seminaries in USA offer online or residential courses that are accredited by Christian bodies. The Puritan Reformed Seminary in Michigan, USA, offers degrees that are validated by the state of Michigan.

Up to this point, we have used the terms academy, seminary, school and college interchangeably. Although there are nuances in the use of these terms in different parts of the world, the following explanation gives the general understanding. A university is an institution consisting of a number of faculties, each faculty dealing with a broad discipline, e.g. engineering, economics, theology, etc. Each faculty consists of a number of colleges, schools, or departments, each dealing with a specific sub-discipline. For example, in the Faculty of Engineering, there are the College of Civil Engineering, the College of Mechanical Engineering, the College of Electrical Engineering, etc. In the Faculty of Theology, there are the College of Pastoral Studies, the College of Religious Education, the College of Biblical Counselling, etc. A stand-alone college, therefore, offers education in a specific discipline at the level above high school, and leading to a Bachelor degree. From the mid-19th century, those colleges that offer the Bachelor degree after four years of study are called university colleges while those that offer a Diploma (called the Associate Degree, in USA) after two years of study and a Certificate after one year of study continue to be called colleges. Note, by the way, that the term 'school' is a general one meaning any institution where people learn – including colleges and universities. When used in its more restricted sense, schools offer teaching that is below the college level.

Traditionally, a seminary is a stand-alone institution that specifically trains men for the pastoral ministry, pitched at the Bachelor degree level and above, although a formal degree may not be conferred. In many situations today, men who have had a Bachelor degree in another discipline may desire to be trained for the pastoral ministry. The Master degree in Divinity or Theology is therefore offered by the seminary, requiring two to four years of study. Obvi-



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ously, one who already has a Bachelor degree in Theology would require less time to get a Master degree. What about men and women who do not possess a Bachelor degree, but desire to be trained for some gospel ministries? They would study in a Theological College that offers a Bachelor degree in Divinity, Religious Knowledge, or Theology. A seminary that does not seek accreditation from a higher body, or validation from the civil government, might also call itself a Ministerial Academy. One that offers theological training for men and women for all forms of gospel ministry, without seeking accreditation, would call itself a Bible School or a Bible Institute.

The main issue, however, is not to be forgotten. A high standard of training is to be aimed at, without compromising on the cultivation of personal godliness and practical usefulness in ministry. Allowance must be made for the training of those who may not be too well-endowed with academic ability but are nevertheless Spirit-filled and able to be useful in the Lord's service. Were not the Lord's first disciples made up of such, in contrast to Paul, the apostle "born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:8)? Back to the history of ministerial training in Britain, it is to be noted that by the mid-19th century, concern was expressed over the tendency of Baptist colleges to emphasise academic achievement at the expense of spirituality in the students (Appleby, 2007:306). Presumably, this concern would have applied to the Bristol Academy as well.

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The Dissenter's spirit is very much alive in Reformed circles today. The pursuit of godliness alongside quality training for the pastoral ministry is the aim of Bible colleges and seminaries. There seems to be a lack of interest in the training of men, and women, who desire to be in ministries other than the pastorate. Is it not a pity that such individuals have had to seek theological training in non-Reformed institutions? There is also disagreement over the issue of accreditation. Those inclined to the right who prefer non-accreditation should not castigate those inclined to the left who believe in the value of accreditation. All are agreed that when scholasticism and academic degrees are pursued for their own ends, one would have departed from studying "to be approved to God (2 Tim. 2:15)".

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The imperative of training ministers of the gospel has never been questioned. Every denomination of churches has its own training schools. This has been the case from time immemorial. A key passage on ministerial training is 2 Timothy 2:2, "the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." This verse must be understood in context, in its plain sense, and compared with other relevant scriptures. Our basic aim is to establish the fact that formal ministerial training is envisaged and enjoined. What is commanded in this verse? How is the command to be carried out? These are the basic questions we seek to answer, and to apply to ourselves today.

### *The truth to be passed down*

The executive word in the verse is 'commit' or 'deposit' (Gk., *parathou*), the noun of which is found in Chapter 1:12, 14. It is in the imperative, aorist tense – a command to be carried out decisively. The command concerns the things that Timothy had learned from Paul, which was to be passed down to faithful men, with the view that they teach others. While four generations of godly teachers are referred to here, the intention is clear – the system of truth which Paul received and which has been passed on to Timothy, was to be handed down to later generations faithfully until Christ returns. Paul's teaching was no different from the teaching of the other apostles (Gal. 2:9). What Timothy learned from Paul was no different from what others had learned from him. There were "other witnesses" who had learned the same things from Paul. The Scriptures teach a system of truth that may be clearly defined. In Jude 3, it is called "the faith". In Acts 20:27, it is referred to as "the whole counsel of God". Then, in 1 Timothy 6:20 and 2 Timothy 1:12, 14, it is called the "deposit" in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible – translated as "what was committed to your trust" and "that (good) thing which was committed to you" in the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible. Here, Paul calls it "the things you have heard". While not all parts of the Bible are equally clear, and not all Christians are always agreed on every point of doctrine, it will not do for us to be vague on the teaching of the Bible.

The Creeds and Confessions of Faith handed down to us are attempts to define that faith. Consider the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Heidelberg Confession, the Westminster Confession, and

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the 1689 Baptist Confession as examples. In these documents, the doctrine of God, of salvation, and of the Christian life are clear. In the present passage of Scripture, we are told in verse 10, "I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Timothy was to train teachers who would pass down the truth in order that the elect might be saved through its proclamation, and be prepared for eternal glory. We are told in verse 5, "If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules." Faithful obedience to God's word is needed to complete our spiritual race and arrive safely in heaven. In verse 15 we have these words, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." There is such a thing as "the word of truth" that needs to be handled with accuracy and care.

The command, then, is to pass down the system of truth of the Bible to future generations, by training faithful teachers of the word.

### *The type of persons to be trained*

Timothy was to select faithful persons for training. He was himself a faithful man although he seemed to have been somewhat timid (2 Tim. 1:7, 8; 1 Cor. 16:10). In verses 3 and 4, he is singled out as an example of the sort of people he should train. We read in verses 3 and 4, "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." Timothy was perhaps the most trustworthy and able man ever trained by Paul (1 Cor. 4:17). He had learned well in the school of adversity. He had the ability to discern errors and to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:14, 15 cf. 1 Tim. 4:15-16), and he was an experienced evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Verse 2 must be seen in this light – Timothy was to "commit these to faithful men..."

Faithful men are men who are loyal to God and to His truth. He keeps covenant with God, and will pass on the truth without change in content or in intent. The Prophet Hosea had an unfaithful wife. Israel was unfaithful to the Lord. We are not to be unfaithful to our God and Saviour. A faithful man will pass on the truth of God faithfully to the next generation. Another thing about a faithful man

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is that he is full of faith. Stephen, one of the first deacons of the church in Jerusalem, was "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5). Our text is plainly referring to training that is over and above that found in the normal ministry of the church, to which all church members are open to. It is the training of those who are serious about gospel ministry, just as soldiers are enlisted for service. In short, persons with proven spiritual character and giftedness are to be trained to pass on the truth.

Not all who are formally trained need enter full-time ministry, or to remain in full-time ministry for ever. The circumstances in a person's life may change and God's providential dealings with individuals differ. However, we would expect that all those who seek formal training are serious Christians, among whom would be many who are thinking of full-time gospel ministry of some kind. Indeed, we would expect many of them to have had a clear sense of calling to the gospel ministry. However, a seminary that only accepts those with a clear sense of calling might be depriving those who are not yet sure of their calling. This is true especially of the younger men. It takes time for many men who are called by God to come to an assurance of their calling. C. H. Spurgeon's policy for his Pastors' College was to accept only men who were already in ministry but lacked training. Such a policy worked well for his time, although we would question whether he missed out on the opportunity to train many who were contemplating ministry. Then, we must consider those who desire theological training with the view of engaging in the supportive ministries of the gospel – those who would become elders and not pastors, those who would become Bible translators and book reviewers, those who would become religious teachers in schools, etc.

The training envisaged is for faithful and spiritually gifted persons who would be in full-time pastoral ministry, primarily, but not excluding others who would be in the supportive ministries of the gospel.

*Including women!*

We put forward here a point on ministerial training that may horrify many – namely that women are to be included in formal theological training. We want to quickly add that we do not mean women may become ministers in churches, for they are specifically excluded

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from the elder's office in the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Those passages clearly require that a man (Gk., *andros*) of one wife may be considered for office (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). The apostle Paul specifically forbids women to teach in the public services of the church (1 Tim. 2:11-15; 1 Cor. 14:34-35). Teaching in church is linked to the wielding of authority over men, which is clearly forbidden to women (1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 11:3, 10). This is based on God's will from creation (1 Tim. 2:13-15 cf. Matt. 19:4). We do not believe in the ordination of women to office – whether that of the elder or that of the deacon. We are aware that some churches have deaconesses, although not believing in the appointment of women elders or women pastors. The appeal to 1 Timothy 5:3ff. (on the support of widows) for the office of deaconesses is not convincing to us. The elder's office is a clearly defined one, and so is the deacon's. Having made that clear, it is to be noted that the word translated as "men" in 2 Timothy 2:2 is the general word for "people" or "persons" (Gk., *anthropos*), as is found elsewhere, e.g. in 1 Timothy 2:1; 2 Timothy 3:2. This is different from the word for males (Gk., *andros*) used in other instances such as 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6. It seems odd that Paul, who is so clear about the role of women – forbidding them to teach and to hold office in church – does not use the word for males, and uses instead the general word, "persons", here.

It is to be noted that women are not forbidden to be involved in gospel ministry by accompanying their husbands, ministering to the needs of the missionary team, and even witnessing to unconverted men. In Romans 16:1, Paul says that Phoebe is "a servant of the church in Cenchrea" who "has been a helper of many and of myself also". In Romans 16:3, the couple Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned as "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus". In verse 6, Mary is described as one "who laboured much for us". In verse 7, the couple Andronicus and Junia are "my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles (i.e. messengers or missionaries)". In verse 12, the sisters Tryphena and Tryphosa (meaning "delicate" and "dainty") "have labored in the Lord". In the same verse, we are told that "Persis also laboured much in the Lord". In Philippians 4:3, Paul refers to Euodia and Syntechē as "women who laboured with me in the gospel". It seems clear that some of the men who accompanied Paul in ministry had brought along their wives, and some single women had

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been helpers in gospel work in the places where Paul preached. Paul asks in 1 Corinthians 9:5, "Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" If the practice of taking along the wives in gospel ministry was so well-established in the church of Jerusalem, we would expect it in Paul's ministry as well. These ladies would have taught the women and children, and possibly even men as well when the occasions called for it. Women are forbidden only to speak in the public services of the church, but not in witnessing to unbelieving people, including to unbelieving men.

Another thing to note is that the verb "to teach" (Gk., *didasko*) is used in our text, and not "to preach" (Gk., *kerusso*) or "to exhort" (Gk., *parakaleo*). In the New Testament, "teaching" is a general term that covers all modes of imparting knowledge by words (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:11; 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; James 3:1). It is shown in Ephesians 4:11-16 that the teaching of God's word to build up the faith of believers is an important aspect of the church's ministry. The general act of teaching may be subdivided into two distinct modes of delivery of God's word, viz. teaching (used in the more specific, technical, sense) and preaching. The Lord engaged in teaching and preaching (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). If there were no difference at all between the two activities – although allowing for considerable overlap between the two – why are two different words used? We have noted that women are forbidden to teach in the public services of the church. Such public teaching would be considered as "preaching", since a mix congregation of men and women, including the elders, would be present. However, there is no explicit command forbidding women to teach the children and other women – whether in the home or in the church (2 Tim. 1:5 cf. 3:15; Tit. 2:3-5). Instead, there is explicit command for older women to be "teachers of good things" and to "admonish the young women" (Tit. 2:3, 4). While the men are to engage in teaching and preaching, the women may engage in teaching (the word used in its limited, technical, sense) only. From the many examples in the New Testament of women who were engaged in ministry by accompanying their husbands, and under the leadership of men, would it not be an asset if such women are trained today?

We contend that 2 Timothy 2:2 includes the training of men and women for the supportive ministries of the gospel, although the em-

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phasis is upon the training of men for full-time pastoral ministry. In practice, this would require that the school makes arrangement for separate accommodation of the male and the female students, and for married couples. Rules of appropriate behaviour between them will be needed in the sustained interaction in the school.

### *The establishment of a school*

We have considered what is commanded by our text. The command is for the system of truth of the Bible to be passed down to men and women who are godly and gifted, who are to teach others. Along the way, we alluded to the fact that this is formal training that requires the establishment of a school. This is what we shall show next.

Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment in AD 64. After preaching in Crete, Paul left Titus on the island with the instruction, "...you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city (Tit. 1:5)". He had similarly left Timothy in Ephesus with the same task – to set in order the things that were lacking, and to appoint elders in every city in Asia. This is deduced by parallel reasoning, and from 1 Timothy 3:15, which says, "...if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." These words follow the qualifications needed for the appointment of elders and deacons in the same chapter of 1 Timothy. Paul wrote his second epistle to Timothy round about the year AD 67, during his second Roman imprisonment. By that time, the church in Ephesus had existed for about 17 years. Ephesus had spawned a number of other churches in the Roman province of Asia. In "Jensen's Survey of the New Testament" (Jensen, 1977:375), we are told that "Timothy's ministry extended to all the local congregations in and around Ephesus, so any reference in this book [of 1 Timothy] to the 'mother church' at Ephesus includes the satellite churches as well." Following the example of the Lord, who trained the Twelve on the move, Paul had trained Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphroditus, Luke, and a number of other men while on the move (Acts 20:1-6). However, the pioneering days were now over. The churches needed to be stabilised and the members built up in the faith (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). A school for the training of teachers was needed. From these considerations, we believe that 2 Timothy 2:2 is about the establishment of a school to

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train teachers of God's word on a formal basis.

It must be noted that Paul was familiar with formal theological training. He was himself a student in the school started by the most celebrated rabbi of the day, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3 cf. 5:34). Gamaliel's school in Jerusalem was known to have catered for 500 students (Santala, 1994). Paul was further trained as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; Phil. 3:5). The schools to train the scribes and Pharisees had a long tradition. The Jews were familiar with "the school of the prophets" in the Old Testament, started by Samuel at Ramah (1 Sam. 19:19-20). In the days of Elijah and Elisha, such schools flourished in Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2 Kings 2:5), and Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38). The "sons of the prophets" lived in colonies for religious training, to study the law and its interpretation. They became teachers and preachers who denounced the sins of Israel (1 Kings 20:35-42; 2 Kings 17:13). In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Levites were trained to be teachers of the Law (Neh. 8:7-9; Ezra 7:10). With such historical precedent and personal experience in training and being trained, it should not surprise us that what the apostle Paul had in mind was a school for the training of teachers of the word.

If Paul intended Timothy to establish a formal training school, as we are claiming, where would the needed tutors come from? Did Timothy have a team of able and qualified tutors to help him teach? During his second Roman imprisonment, Paul desired to see Timothy before his demise (2 Tim. 4:9). Mark appeared to be with him in Ephesus at this time (2 Tim. 4:11). Paul was sending Tychicus to replace Timothy during his absence (2 Tim. 4:12). Timothy was to see Paul in Rome by travelling via Troas (2 Tim. 4:13). William Hendriksen comments that "Troas was not far from Timothy's headquarters at Ephesus (Hendriksen, 1983:323)." On an earlier occasion, Paul had wanted Titus to join him in missions (Tit. 3:12-13). He was sending Artemas or Tychicus to replace him in his absence. Two other men, Zenas and Apollos had been with Titus in Crete to help in the work there. We see from all this arrangement that there were other men available to help Timothy. Furthermore, as Timothy engaged in training teachers, there would be those among them who graduated and became teachers together with Timothy (cf. Acts 13:1; 14:23). Timothy had been trained to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15), an expression meaning "to cut straight" – referring to the exactness required in trades such as carpentry and the



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tent-making Paul was involved in. Timothy had also gone through the rigours of training in evangelism and church-planting, involving hardship, hard work, and perseverance (cf. 2 Tim. 2:3-7). The intellectual and practical training that he received while accompanying Paul would have formed the basis of his training of others. We can be sure that it was not a problem for Timothy quickly to have a team of qualified helpers to operate the training school.

The school to be established by Timothy was to maintain a strong missions-mindedness. We know that men like Timothy and Titus did not merely focus on their local ministry and neglect wider church planting. The principle that local church growth must go hand-in-hand with wider church planting is set down by Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:15-16, "...not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment." Local church growth is alluded to in the increase in faith of the Corinthian church, while wider church planting is explicitly stated. In Acts 20, when Paul met with the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he showed that he had preached the gospel (vv. 20-21), taught the believers "the whole counsel of God's word" (v. 27), and quietly done much good works (v. 35). The apostle had consciously followed the threefold ministry set by the Lord in Matthew 4:23 and 9:35. As a teacher of the church in Antioch, Paul took time off to carry out the Great Commission (Acts 13:1-3). As the pastor in Crete, Titus took time off to join Paul in wider church planting (Tit. 3:12).

The Nonconformists of the 17th and 18th centuries understood this principle well. John Owen (1616-1683) spoke typically: "When, therefore, there are great opportunities and providential calls for the preaching of the gospel unto the conversion of souls, and, the harvest being great, there are not labourers sufficient for it, it is lawful, yea, it is the duty of pastors of particular churches to leave their constant attendance on their pastoral charge in those churches, at least for a season, to apply themselves unto the more public preaching of the word unto the conversion of the souls of men (Owen, 16:85)." Sadly, this principle of ministry is largely lost to many Reformed pastors today because of being unwittingly influenced by the writings of Episcopalian writers, especially Richard Baxter and Charles Bridges,

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who hold to a settled ministry that is tied to the territorial church concept (Baxter, 1974; Bridges, 1967). Many Reformed preachers today travel distances around the world to speak at, or attend, conferences and church camps, which is different from travelling to win souls and to plant churches.

The school to be started by Timothy was to train those who not only would teach in the churches but also engage in soul winning and church planting. Those to be trained included men who would become pastors of churches, as well as men and women who would be engaged in other gospel ministries.

### *Firmly church-based*

We have noted that the church in Ephesus was the "mother" of the other churches in Asia. The book of Revelation mentions "the seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev. 1:4) when, in reality, there were more than seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. We know, for example, that there were churches in Colosse (1 Col. 1:2), Hierapolis (Col. 4:13) and Troas (Acts 20:7). Being a book of prophecy, "seven" is used as a round number to symbolise the perfect and complete number of Christ's churches throughout the gospel age, which will end with His return to judge the world. Paul spent over three years in Ephesus, during which time he preached the gospel (Acts 20:20-21), taught the disciples "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), and quietly did much good works (Acts 20:34-35). As noted already, he was imitating the Lord's pattern of ministry, taught in Matthew 4:23 and 9:35. Paul understood that the Great Commission is a command to the local church, to plant other local churches (Acts 13:1-3; 14:21-28). The principle of "the centrality and uniqueness of the local church in the purposes of God" was never lost sight of.

We have noted that in the New Testament, churches are mentioned according to regions – "the seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev. 1:4), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), "the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria" (Acts 9:31), and "the churches of Macedonia" (2 Cor. 8:1). There were a number of churches in Crete (Tit. 1:5). The churches in each region were in close fellowship with one another – sharing in teaching (Col. 4:13), good works (2 Cor. 8:1), preaching the gospel, mutual support, and prayer (Acts 16:1-5; 17:10, 14; 1 Thess. 1:6-8). Were the regional groups of

## 9.2. Ministerial Training Today

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churches bound together by rules? It would seem that rules-based associations had not come into existence in those days. Today, there is much discussion on church associationism. While this is not the place to discuss the issue, it is appropriate to note that the 1689 Confession seems to recognise the natural fellowship that binds churches that are planted by the same person(s) or spawned from the same church(es). We read of these words in the 1689 Confession (Chap. 26:14): "...the churches (*when planted by the providence of God* so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it) ought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification." (Emphasis added.)

Since a training school is part-and-parcel of gospel ministry, it should be firmly church-based, i.e. held accountable to the church, or churches, which operate it. It should never be allowed to become a para-church organisation. Historically, this was not the case – schools and missionary societies became independent of the churches that started them, and soon departed from the original beliefs and objectives.

### *The norm for us today*

When Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ", it must be understood that he intended us to imitate him not just in Christian living but in gospel ministry as well. Timothy was an apostolic delegate, carrying out the instructions of his mentor. In Philippians 3:17, Paul said, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." Note the plural in the last words of this verse. The Philippian believers were to follow the example of others, such as Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:19, 20), as well. The ministry of the apostolic delegates was an extension of the ministry of Paul. Knowing that his death was near, Paul's instructions to Timothy, including the establishing of a training school, were his last. Whether or not Timothy managed to see Paul in Rome before his death is not known. The important thing to note is that Timothy was inheriting the ministry of Paul – one that transitioned from the foundational apostolic age to the normative age of the gospel. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33 show that local churches are to adopt certain practices, regardless of cultural and geographical differences, because of the unchanging underlying principles. Our text,

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2 Timothy 2:2, must be seen in this light. John Owen states that an apostolic example "hath the force of a divine institution" (Owen, 16:197). In other words, the establishment of a training school is a norm for churches today.

This, of course, does not mean that every church is able to carry out this work, and that every pastor is sufficiently equipped for this task (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 12:29; James 3:1). All we are saying is that there is a duty placed upon the church in every generation to train up teachers of the word. "The harvest truly is plentiful, and the labourers are few (Matt. 9:37)." While we pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers, we must also train such labourers. The sovereign Lord is pleased to use means. Just as Timothy was to train up persons who were faithful to pass down the truth, so must we today. Practically, a church that is better endowed in a grouping of churches must undertake this task. Suitably qualified tutors are to be appointed, to teach suitably qualified students. The students are to be trained to become "diligent" workers who are "approved of God", who "do not need to be ashamed", who are able to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

What we have learned up to this point may be summarised as follows:

- i A training school is to be established when a number of churches have been established;
- ii The training school is to be based in the church best able to carry out this work;
- iii The training school is to be operated in fellowship with like-minded churches.
- iv The training school is to consist of a faculty of qualified and experienced tutors.
- v The training school is to produce men for the pastoral ministry, primarily, and men and women for the supportive gospel ministries, secondarily.
- vi The training school is to produce teachers of the word who are able to edify the local church and engage in wider church planting at the same time.

## 9.2. Ministerial Training Today

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In days gone by the complaint against seminary-trained men was that they were "man-made" ministers (Bogue & Bennett, 2000:I:207). Asperion was cast upon formal training, the claim being that to be filled with the Spirit is different from acquiring "human learning" (Hayden, 2006:21). Today, there are people who continue to protest that academic qualification does not necessarily make good preachers. This is a case of pitting one extreme against another, or using one extreme to justify another. While C. H. Spurgeon was a mighty preacher without seminary training, he nevertheless started the Pastors' College to train men for the ministry. Similarly, the mighty preacher Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones did not receive formal theological training but he encouraged the establishment of the London Theological Seminary, LTS, (not to be confused with the London School of Theology, LST) to train men for the ministry. Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones were not against formal training *per se* but against the mere pursuit of academic degrees. With that, no one in his right mind would disagree. However, is the pursuit of theological degrees wrong under all circumstances? In the busyness of the infancy years, the starting of a training school would not be viable. With time, a training school would be needed to ensure that a continuous stream of preachers are produced, without which the "plateau effect" would set in. This is when the conferment of degrees and the need for validation of the school become useful, and even necessary. God uses means to further His cause, and formal training for ministry is one of them. Some men can become self-made preachers. The majority of men need the rigours of seminary training to become "man-made" preachers, who are nevertheless godly and seeking to be used by God. It is not for us to judge the godliness of those who pursue degrees.

### *Urban and rural settings*

A well-planned programme of training will aim at a high academic standard without compromising on devotion and practice. It will cater for the different abilities and needs of the students. Ideally, the training should be integrated with the life and ministries of the local churches involved, including participation in mission trips. The weekly Bible Study of the church should be of such a standard that it can be integrated into the syllabus of the college – for example, biblical book studies, biblical ethics, etc.

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In a rural setting, literacy projects might be needed which can be undertaken as part of the compassionate ministry of the church or mission. The training of preachers, teachers, and evangelists will have to be adjusted in its content and level of expectation. We have noted that often, in the next generation, the level of expectation will be higher due to better education. While it is necessary to adjust to the local situation, the biblical principles and methods are to be followed. The churches founded must be submitted to Christ's three offices. The ministry of the churches should be modelled after that of Christ – including teaching the believers, reaching out to win souls, and doing good works.

Situations might differ, requiring adaptation in the methods but never the principles. The Protestant church in South Korea today is said to have sent out the most missionaries among all the nations of the world. We might think that is expected of a first world country, for it has come a long way since the revival years of the early 1900's (Blair & Hunt, 1977). However, stagnation seem to be settling upon the church in South Korea, with many of their own numbers moaning that a worldly professionalism is seen in the churches today. A contrasting situation is that of Nagaland, a state in the northeast of India. Revivals swept through the region in the 1950's, followed by other waves in the 1960's. Despite being a relatively poor mountainous state that is largely rural, the Naga church pledged to sent out 10,000 cross-cultural missionaries in the 1970's (Hattaway, 2006). Many have gone to unreached tribes and ethnic groups throughout Asia. Today, the more mature church leaders are expressing concern that a spiritual dullness is settling upon the churches. There is a yearning for revival to come again to refresh the church. Revival is the work of the sovereign God. While waiting for revivals to sweep through the nation again, the reformation of the churches is needful, including the training of preachers, teachers and missionaries to lead in local outreach and wider church planting. The spirituality of a church is not dependent on the economic standing of the nation.

### 9.3 The Workers We Seek To Produce

Are preachers born or made? Believing in the sovereignty of God, and seeing the Great Commission as rooted in the eternal purpose

### 9.3. The Workers We Seek To Produce

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of God, we would have to give the answer that preachers are born, and not made. God in His sovereignty not only chose certain people to be saved, but also equips them with the necessary gifts to serve. At the same time, we know that the sovereignty of God encompasses human responsibility and the use of means. We would, therefore, add that preachers who have been equipped by God would be identified by the church and should be trained to sharpen their gifts for service. This applies not only to preachers but also to all categories of gospel workers and supporting staff – including evangelists for local outreach and other specialised outreach (e.g. reaching out to students, migrant workers, etc.), missionaries for the foreign fields, teachers in the churches, etc.

#### *Qualifications*

The officers of the church and their qualifications are discussed in detail elsewhere (Poh, *The Keys*, 2017). Suffice here to note the following. The New Testament shows that only two ordinary offices remain for the local church, namely that of elders and deacons (Phil. 2:1). For that reason, the qualifications needed for these offices only are prescribed in the New Testament (1 Tim. 3:1-11; Tit. 1:5-9). The extraordinary offices of apostles, prophets and evangelists have been withdrawn (cf. Eph. 4:11). The office of evangelist, as occupied by Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Philip (Acts 8:5-6, 13; 21:8), included the ability to perform miracles. As noted already, there are two categories of elders – the pastor who is the regular teacher in the church, and the ruling elders who rule the church together with the pastor. In addition to having the qualifications required of the elder, as listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:5-9, it is required that the pastor has a calling from God to be a minister of the gospel (Eph. 4:11). This calling consists of two aspects – the internal and the external. The internal calling is made known to the person by a growing impulsion to serve God in full-time ministry, the providential dealings of God with the person to equip him for service, and the possession of the qualification of an elder to a high degree. The external calling is shown by the recognition of the church that he is a suitable candidate for the ministry, the respect others have for him as a man of God, and often by souls that are brought to faith in Christ through his witness.

The work of the pastor is primarily to teach the word of God, to

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lead the eldership in ruling the church, and to lead the church in local outreach and wider church planting. Although the extraordinary office of evangelist has been withdrawn, the function of that office is subsumed under that of the pastor (2 Tim. 4:5). The function of the evangelist may be performed by others who are recognised teachers in the church. When set aside full-time for local outreach, he is often referred to as the evangelist, or full-time worker, of the church. When set apart full-time to plant churches, he is often referred to as a missionary. Whether in the local church or on the mission field, supportive workers are needed – to reach out to women and children, to print literature, to run schools, to run hospitals, etc. – who also are referred to as missionaries. All these workers, although not occupying offices in a local church, are expected to possess the qualifications listed for elders and deacons. They are to be men and women "of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3).

Those sent out into the mission fields should possess the high qualifications needed of a pastor. This applies to women missionaries, although they do not hold office as elders in the sending church. Just as Paul and Barnabas were the most capable men in the church at Antioch, we should send out the best of our men and women to be missionaries. Not all are called to full-time missionary service. Some of our best men and women will serve in the home church according to God's will for them. However, the need for the highest level of qualifications should be upheld for those who are sent out. Poorly qualified men and women have caused more harm than good on the mission fields. Graham Cheesman has delineated the qualifications expected in a missionary along the same line that we have proposed, including the missionary call, physical qualifications, the academic qualifications, the psychological qualifications and the spiritual qualifications (Cheesman, 1989: Chs. 18, 19). A similar emphasis is made by Denis Lane (Lane, 1990: Chs. 3, 4). Those who have not proved themselves in the home church are unsuitable to be sent out. Much as we desire to see more men and women become missionaries, only those equipped by the Lord are to be sent out.

### *Support of the pastors*

One delicate matter which nevertheless has to be discussed frankly



### 9.3. The Workers We Seek To Produce

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is the support of pastors. An earlier generation of missionaries have had to wrestle with this issue. One such missionary was the Welsh Baptist Timothy Richard who has been hailed as "one of the greatest missionaries of any branch of the Church". Together with his wife Mary, they arrived in Shandong in 1870, serving there until the death of Mary in 1903. Timothy Richard continued serving the Lord throughout China for many years before leaving in 1916 due to poor health. He died in 1919. As with other missionaries, Richard strongly believed the Chinese churches should stand on their own feet with as little foreign help as possible. Said Richard (Hattaway, 2018:32),

The principle was adopted of doing nothing for the Church which it could and ought to do for itself...In fixing the salaries of the pastors the desire was not to make them rich men but respected men, and it was felt that the pay of the native schoolmaster was a very good guide. By the plan adopted the pastors live in their own homes, attend to their farms in the busy harvest season and give about nine months of their time entirely to the Church.

Our brethren in Nepal have adopted the practice of giving each pastor a buffalo which produces milk and works the family paddy field. This has to be a temporary measure, for the norm set in Scripture is that the minister of the word is to be supported by the congregation (1 Tim. 5:18; 1 Cor. 9:6-12). By definition, they are the elders with suitable biblical qualification and are called by God to the ministry of the word (1 Tim. 5:17; Eph. 4:11). Paul might have engaged in tent-making to minimised dependence on support from the churches, and also in order to give to the poor (Phil. 4:14-19; Acts 20:34-35), but that was unique to himself. We are to imitate Paul in other matters but not in this (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1). Many are the pastors in pioneering situations who are ordained without examining their biblical qualification and calling. In a place where the people are generally poor, there will be many who would offer themselves for full-time service to get a regular income. It would have been better to accept them as full-time evangelists or teachers, without ordaining them into office. We must wait for God's time to raise up those who are called to the ministry. Such men often have

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to wrestle with giving up more lucrative jobs. It takes greater faith to trust God to provide through His often fickle churches, compared to earning a living. We do not want to encourage the trend in some circles of having a bi-vocational ministry. One called by God should be supported in God's way.

### *The labourers for the harvest*

A healthy local church is like a family with a wide range of people – including little children, young men and women, and fathers and mothers in the faith (1 John 2:12-14). It is like the human body with many members – each doing his or her part for the good of the whole (1 Cor. 12-14). Each church has to do its part in local outreach and wider church planting. The local church is central and unique in the purposes of God. Souls are uniquely precious in God's sight. In the local church, the Lord has promised that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matt. 18:20)." Similarly on the mission field, the Lord requires that souls be sent out to meet with souls to make disciples of them. He promises to be with the church in this work "to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Do we not see that in the training of labourers souls must interact with souls as well (2 Tim. 2:2; Acts 20:4-6)? Truths are not only to be taught but also to be caught. Learning is not only accomplished face to face, but also shoulder to shoulder. We might call this "the principle of accompaniment". There is still a place for the residential training of labourers, and for the training of residential missionaries, even in the digital age.

When like-minded churches are in fellowship for mutual edification and wider gospel work, more is achievable. A school for training a steady stream of full-time workers, even if small in number each time, will go a long way to fulfil the need for labourers in the mission fields. We are reminded of the spatial and temporal aspects of the Great Commission. We are reminded of its abiding relevance through this gospel age, until Christ returns. We are to have a four-generation view of training that Paul had when he instructed Timothy: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2)." Paul was one generation, while Timothy was the second. Timothy was to train a third generation who would teach the fourth (cf. Joel 1:2-3). If each generation of believers has a

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#### 9.4. Summary

four-generation view of training labourers for the harvest, we would be imitating Paul, who imitated the Lord. We see now the words of the Lord in Matthew 9:36-38 in a different light,

But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

#### 9.4 Summary

Men are to be trained for the pastoral ministry. Both men and women should be trained for ministries other than the pastorate. There is disagreement on the value of issuing accredited degrees, although this is not an option in some countries. The establishment of a school to train gospel workers is not an option but a command of Scripture. This is a task to be undertaken by a well-established church, in fellowship with like-minded churches. The aim is to train gospel workers who are able to heed the admonition, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Souls must meet with souls, in training and in missions. A four-generation view of training labourers for the harvest is needed. May we heed this injunction. May God have all the glory. Amen.

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**Part III**

**THE PROSPECTS OF  
MISSIONS**





# Ten

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## THE FLAGSHIP CHURCH

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Our study of the Great Commission as contained in Matthew 28:18-20 and related passages is not yet complete. The process of analysis, which we have engaged in, must be followed by synthesis. Our understanding of the constituent parts of the Great Commission must be put together so that they are seen as a system. We do not want to commit the proverbial error of failing to see the wood for the trees – to be so absorbed in examining the trees to the extent of forgetting why we were in the forest in the first place. We wish to establish churches of the kind intended by God, as shown in the Scripture. That involves the concept of the flagship church, alluded to in earlier chapters which require further elucidation.

### 10.1 Analysis And Synthesis

We have adopted the following *a priori* assumptions in our analysis of the Great Commission:

- i The Bible is our sole authority in all matters of faith and practice;
- ii Jesus Christ is the sole Head of the church;
- iii The Great Commission carries within itself its own methodology.

All true Evangelicals would not deny the propriety of the first two assumptions, which the Reformed Christians glory in. The third assumption flows from the previous two. The Great Commission is

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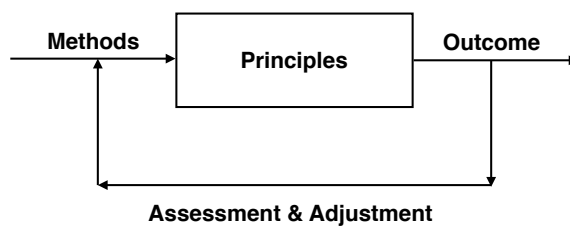
often considered in some of its parts in discussions on missions, without proper exegesis of the whole. Indeed, in the process of working out the practice of missions, these three assumptions are often overlooked. Instead, approaches that consist of a mixture of pragmatism and biblicism have been adopted, producing views of missions that are less than satisfactory.

We have engaged in the analysis of the Great Commission, a process which is crucial to any serious investigation of any subject (Ritchey, 1991). This applies to theology as much as to other fields of study. For instance, when preparing a sermon from a passage of Scripture, analysis is carried out by applying the rules of interpretation to arrive at the correct meaning, and to draw out principles. The analysis is followed by synthesis when the findings are arranged to constitute a message with a definite theme, in which illustrations are used and applications are made to the prospective hearers. It remains for us to synthesise our study of the Great Commission.

In our analysis, we have drawn out principles and methods connected with the Great Commission. We have noted that the principles derived from Scripture must be followed all the time, while the methods of Scripture are to be followed as far as possible, with allowance made for adjustment to local or special situations. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is a command to the local church to plant other local churches. The constituent parts of the Great Commission show that we are to make disciples in order to constitute them into local churches, and to establish the disciples in the faith. The methods, principles, and outcome may be represented by the diagram in Figure 10.1.

The principles adduced in our study of the Great Commission include:

- i Local church growth must go hand-in-hand with wider church planting;
- ii The gospel must be preached from a chosen passage of Scripture with the Bible opened;
- iii Preaching the gospel is to be done publicly and from house to house;



**Fig. 10.1: The Process of Reforming the Church**

- iv Preaching in circuit is to be engaged in, i.e. to go to the same households or preaching points on a regular basis, until the people are converted or the preachers are unwanted.

The methods adopted by the local church, or a grouping of local churches, to plant other local churches will be in accordance to these principles. Similarly, the outreach efforts of a local church to win souls to Christ are to be carried out in accordance to these principles. People groups need to be identified and reached according to their circumstances. Preaching teams of two to five persons are to be sent out on regular circuits. A *team* consists of those who bring the gospel, while a *group* consists of those who hear the gospel. A *group* may be just one person, or some five persons of a household, or some fifteen persons in a migrant workers' dormitory. When done on a weekly basis, two to five groups would constitute a circuit. The *methods* of outreach would differ according to the circumstances. Children might need to be fetched to church for Sunday School classes, migrant workers might need to be visited after their working hours, the outreach team might need to be men only on some occasions, two languages might need to be used at the same time, and a recorded Bible passage (by handphone) in the native language

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might need to be played (from a mini-microphone via bluetooth) before preaching in the common tongue. Urban situations might entail travelling in a car, while rural settings might require travelling on a motorbike or by boat. Such adjustments to local circumstances need not break the established principles.

The 'Outcome' is the type of churches we wish to found. It is obvious that the churches planted would generally take on the characteristics of the parent-church, with due allowance given for differences necessitated by local circumstances. The eagerness to plant indigenous churches should not be at the expense of overlooking the biblical characteristics required of all churches. Indeed, we might question the propriety of emphasising the planting of *indigenous* churches rather than *biblical* churches. In the former, attention is focussed on the externals of the churches while in the latter, it is on the spiritual character of the churches. The concern that alien characteristics will be introduced into local situations will not arise if the emphasis is placed on being biblical rather than being cultural. There are non-negotiable biblical characteristics that churches must strive to have. These cannot be ignored under the excuse of cultural differences or the demands of local circumstances. That there are non-negotiable characteristics expected of churches is seen in Paul's reminder to the Corinthian church of what he "ordained in all the churches", of practices that do not belong to the "custom" of "the churches of God", and of the fact that "God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 7:17; 11:16; 14:33). It is also seen in John being commanded by the Lord to write to admonish the seven churches in Asia, in the book of Revelation (Chaps. 2-3).

In less than 50 years of existence, the churches in Asia were departing from the faith. Except for the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev. 2:8-11; 3:7-13), each of the other seven churches in Asia was issued a warning to repent of wrongs, despite having many things right. Just as constant repentance is needed in the Christian life, constant reformation is needed in the life of the church. In the personal life, self-examination is needed. In the life of the church, feedback in the form of self-assessment and adjustment is needed. Churches might begin well but go wrong in later years. Others might have been taught wrongly, or inherited wrong practices, which need to be corrected. The process of adjustment and correction in order to be more biblical in doctrine and practice

### 10.1. Analysis And Synthesis

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has been called 'reformation'. If wrong principles are adopted, no amount of feedback and correction can get the church to be where it should be. An adjustment for the better in one direction will be accompanied by departure in another direction.

Apart from guarding against the possibility of going astray, there is the positive exhortation for the local church to be sanctified – "...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27)." The sanctification of the universal church occurs when local churches are sanctified and cleansed "with the washing of water by the word". Just as the individual believer must grow to spiritual maturity and be ready for life in heaven (2 Pet. 3:18), so also the local church. In heaven, everyone will be made perfect. The imperfection of the present life will not affect or hinder our transformation to perfection in heaven. However, there are degrees of blessedness in heaven (cf. Luke 19:16-19). One would want to have a head-start upon arrival in heaven, to receive the blessing of the Lord and to serve Him there (Matt. 6:19-20). Similarly, the bride of Christ would want to prepare herself to be holy and without blemish for when the Lord comes to fetch her for marriage (Rev. 19:6-8). There is a responsibility placed upon local churches to be sanctified by God's word.

This leads us to the consideration of the type of churches we ought to be, and desire to establish, and the concept of the flagship church. In a local church, the spirituality of the members rarely rises above the spirituality of its leaders. Church leaders must be selected carefully. Church leaders must also grow and remain fresh spiritually. In a network of churches, the spirituality of the planted churches seldom rise above that of the flagship church, especially in the earlier years. The flagship church should set itself as the example for the other churches.

There are, therefore, three strong reasons why the church should be reforming itself. Firstly, the church is in danger of going astray while in the world. Secondly, the church is being sanctified by the Lord in preparation for heaven. Thirdly, the church must set itself as the model for other churches that are planted.

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### 10.2 The Ideal Church

We have heard often that there is no perfect church this side of life. While that may be true, it should not deter any church from striving to be better. Our analysis of the Great Commission has revealed the ideal church that we should strive to be, and that we want to establish. Here, we have deliberately used the words ‘to establish’ and not ‘to plant’ because a newly planted church will take a while to be strengthened to become a model church, albeit imperfect. The work of carrying out the Great Commission is not complete merely by gathering the baptised disciples into a local church, much less by winning souls to Christ only. All three elements of the Great Commission must be engaged in – viz. going to make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Holy Trinity in order to constitute them into a local church, and teaching them to observe all the Lord’s commands. All three elements are to be carried out until the end of the age. What are the characteristics of the ideal church? The results of our analysis may be summarised under three headings.

#### *The three offices of Christ*

Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church universal, which is invisible in the sense that the true believers are known only to God (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18) (Poh, *The Keys*, 2017). Since the universal church manifests itself in the world as visible local churches, Christ is also the only Head of each local congregation. As Head of the church, He occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. A church that submits to Christ’s headship will submit to Him in His three offices. Prophethood is linked to the preaching, the teaching, and the doctrine of the church. Priesthood is linked to the worship (including the ordinances), the prayer meeting, and pastoral oversight in the church. Kingship is linked to the government, the discipline, and the missions of the church.

The churches that we want to establish must clearly be submitted to the headship of Christ in His three offices (Poh, 1997). A church that is submitted to Christ’s prophethood will exhibit the primacy of preaching in its worship services, the pre-eminence of teaching in its overall life, and the importance placed on correct doctrine, often shown by adopting a good Confession of Faith. A church that

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is submitted to Christ's priesthood will uphold the Regulative Principle of worship (Reisinger & Allen, 2001; Aniol, 2015:162-172), the correct administration of the ordinances, and the importance of corporate prayer. A church that is submitted to the kingship of Christ would want to implement the biblical form of church government, uphold corrective discipline, and engage in local outreach and wider church planting.

Jesus Christ is also the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). As Mediator, He occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. The three offices of Christ not only help us to understand what the church should be like within itself, but also how to go about reforming ourselves. A believer will submit to Christ in His three offices. Prophethood is linked to the mind of the individual – the faculty of knowledge, thought, and reasoning. Priesthood is linked to the heart, or affection, of the individual – the faculty of feeling, conviction, and persuasion. Kingship is linked to the will, or volition, of man – the faculty of choice, decision, and action.

The 1689 Confession states this of Christ offices – "This number and order of offices is necessary... (1689:8:10)." Not only must the number be kept, the order must also be observed. In the reformation of the church, the members must be given correct teaching until they are convinced, leading them to correct actions. To demand for action, without the heart being persuaded of the truth known in the mind, would result in resentment. To appeal to the emotion without understanding the reason for certain actions would result in only temporary changes. All three faculties of the human personality must be addressed, generally in that order, viz. the mind, the heart, and the will. This does not exclude the possibility that, under exceptional circumstances, the order might have to be ignored but with the view of returning to the norm of that order in due course.

### *The threefold ministry of Christ*

The Lord's ministry included preaching the gospel of the kingdom to save souls, teaching to build up the faith of disciples, and doing good works in conjunction with preaching and teaching (Matt. 4:23; 9:35) (Poh, 2017). The apostle Paul tells us to imitate him just as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). We are not only to imitate Christ in His character (2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 2:5-8), but also in His ministry (Phil. 4:9; 1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:1-7; 3:10; Tit. 1:5). How did Paul

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know of the Lord's method of ministry? From the direct revelation he received from the Lord as well as from the oral and written witness of the other apostles and early disciples.

As an apostle, Paul received direct revelation from the Lord. In Galatians 1:12, he says this of the gospel, "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ." The instruction on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23ff. was received directly from the Lord: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you..." In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." Much of what Paul taught came by direct revelation from the Lord. However, we must not limit the Lord to this mode of revealing His will to Paul. Many of the Old Testament prophets knew the will of God from the writings of the earlier prophets. A case in point is when Daniel knew, or was reminded, of the seventy years set by the Lord for the exile of His people from the writings of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2).

Paul also learned of the Lord's ministry from the verbal and written accounts of the other apostles and early disciples. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, he says, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..." Paul's conversion occurred around AD 30 (Bruce, 1977: 475). Born in Tarsus, he was brought up in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3) at the time of the Lord's public ministry. He would have known the facts about Christ, and might have heard Him preaching while an unbeliever. He would have heard these gospel facts about Christ taught by the Christians whom he persecuted. His encounter with the risen Lord confirmed the truth of these gospel facts. Continuing with his narrative, Paul says, "...and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." A large part of what he says obviously had been transmitted to him by the other apostles and early believers. Ananias who ministered to Paul when he was converted, and other disciples in Damascus, couldn't have kept quiet



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about what they knew of the Lord (Acts 9:10-19). In Romans 16:7, Paul says, "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." One understanding of these words is that the ministry of Andronicus and Junia with the apostles in Jerusalem, before Paul was converted, was well known and appreciated by the apostles. Being fellow prisoners with Paul would likely mean that they had shared the same cell or adjacent cells at some point, during which notes would have been exchanged between them.

In 1 Corinthians 9:14, Paul says, "Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel." While it is possible that this teaching was also revealed by the Lord, it would seem more likely that Paul was referring to the Lord's teaching in Matthew 10:10, "...a worker is worthy of his food." We have noted that some scholars are of the view that Matthew's Gospel was already in circulation by AD 50. Paul would have access to Matthew's Gospel. Paul's first missionary journey began in AD 46. The first epistle to the Corinthians was written in AD 55. Paul's third missionary journey was from AD 53 to 57, when he stopped at Miletus in the later part of that journey. He summoned the Ephesian elders to meet him, during which time he reminded them of his earlier ministry in Ephesus (Acts 20). The first missionary journey was carried out in obedience to the command of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-3). The subsequent journeys were carried out in obedience to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 (Acts 15:36ff.; 18:23ff.). All the journeys fulfilled the demands of the Great Commission and were patterned after the missions of the Twelve and the Seventy (Matt. 10:1ff.; Luke 9:1-11; 10:1-12) – starting from the local church in Antioch, to plant local churches, travelling in circuit, preaching publicly and from house to house, preaching the gospel of "repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ", preaching until the hearers were converted or he was unwanted.

Extending our view even wider, we see that Paul's ministry was modelled after that of the Lord in that he preached the gospel to save souls (Acts 20:20-21), he taught the disciples "the whole counsel of God" in his three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:27), and he engaged in good works (Acts 20:35), saying, "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give

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than to receive.” The apostle, whose outstanding characteristic was preaching and teaching God’s word, had quietly been doing much good works at the same time (cf. Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:18-21; 9:1-5; Tit. 3:8, 14). The apostles of Christ never elevated good works above preaching and teaching, neither did they neglect good works (Gal. 2:10). They were mindful of the Lord’s words in Matthew 6:3-4, “But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”

In missions circles, ‘holism’ has been pitted against ‘prioritism’ – one emphasising social transformation, the other emphasising spiritual transformation, respectively. I have interacted on this issue elsewhere (Poh, 2008:49-51) and reckon it sufficient to reproduce the relevant words here:

...in order of importance, the means to be used [for reaching the unreached] should be: (i) the personal presence of the missionary, living among a people and bringing the gospel to them directly; (ii) the use of tools such as literature and electronic broadcasts as complements to verbal gospel proclamation; and (iii) the use of those tools when the presence of missionaries is not possible. All these means are meant to bring the gospel to the hearers. The danger of missionary endeavours turning into mere social activities is very real. A missionary doctor may end up healing the sick without healing the soul. A radio broadcast may end up becoming Christianised entertainment devoid of gospel proclamation.

What we have discussed above are the methods of delivery of the gospel, their relative importance, and inherent dangers. More serious are the methods of outreach, or approaches to soul winning, which may be classified under three categories: (i) Level 1 approaches, which involve direct gospel delivery of all sorts which we have considered; (ii) Level 2 approaches, in which good works (or social concerns and community projects) constitute the front end of contact with souls, which is accompanied by secondary gospel presentations; (iii) Level 3 ap-

proaches, in which good works are carried out with the aim of paving the way for future gospel presentations. Level 1 approaches do not need elaboration here. Examples of Level 2 approaches include opening a rural clinic in which all the patients are required to hear a short gospel message before seeing the doctor, running a kindergarten in which the teaching contents are based on the Bible, giving free tuition to students which begins with twenty minutes of gospel proclamation, and the like. Level 3 approaches are purely community projects or social works that provide a Christian presence, to show forth the love and concern of Christians in practical ways. My contention is that Level 3 approaches cannot be regarded as true missionary work unless it is coupled to Level 1 approaches. For example, a play school is operated to take in only toddlers of those who attend church on a regular basis, and a bakery is started to provide employment in a poor community at the same time that there is active evangelism and church services.

In a closed community where evangelism is illegal or dangerous, Level 3 approaches have been attempted such as working as language teachers and doctors, or opening factories to provide employment to the people. If those approaches are not accompanied by definite attempts to befriend and win the trust of individuals so that the gospel can be shared, despite risks, they cannot strictly be called missionary work. Of course, it is within the right of Christians to engage in Level 3 approaches if they insist to do so, but they are merely engaging in good works, which are different from missionary work.

Paul's ministry was modelled after the threefold ministry of Christ. The churches we found should engage in a ministry modelled after the threefold ministry of the Lord.

### *The Three-Self Principle*

The local church, as seen within itself, should be submitted to the three offices of Christ. The local church, as seen in relation to the world, should have a ministry modelled after the threefold ministry

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of Christ. The local church, as seen from without, should be characterised by the three marks of being self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. This has been observed by others and called the 'Three-Self Principle' (Nevius, 1899).

Self-governance arises from the nature of the local church which consists of baptised believers who are gathered together voluntarily and bound by covenant to worship and serve the triune God, in accordance to the Scripture. This is 'the gathered church' principle (Poh, *The Keys*, 2017). Christ the Head has given the power of rule to the membership of the church, which power is executed by the elders (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17). The elders rule by making decisions which are consented to by the gathered church (1 Cor. 5:4-5; Acts 15:22). This is the principle of 'the autonomy of the local church'. Local churches are independent of one another, yet they voluntarily have fellowship with one another for mutual edification, mutual protection, and concerted propagation (Rev. 1:9-20; 2 Cor. 8:18).

Self-propagation arises from the Great Commission which is a command given to the local church, to plant other local churches (Matt. 28:18-20). All the necessary power to carry out the Great Commission has been given to each local church, although a group of local churches may voluntarily act in fellowship in order to accomplish more. The church in Jerusalem spawned many churches (Acts 9:31), and so did the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). Just as the church in Antioch did not rely on directives from Jerusalem to engage in missions, so also the church in Thessalonica did not rely on directives from Antioch (1 Thess. 1:8).

Self-support arises from the teaching of the Lord as given to the apostle Paul. The ministry of the word in a newly founded church may be supported by external help for a time but it is God's will that the church should work towards being self-supporting. In connection with those who "labour in word and doctrine", Paul quotes from the Old Testament these words (1 Tim. 5:17-18), 'For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages."' That these words apply to those who "labour in word and doctrine" is confirmed by 1 Corinthians 9:3-12, where the same Old Testament passage is quoted and applied to full-time preachers. It is often claimed that Paul engaged in a 'tent-making ministry', that is to say he made tents to earn a

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living while preaching the gospel. This argument has been used to support the so-called 'bi-vocational ministry' which is much in vogue in some circles. However, in Acts 20:34-35, Paul tells us that he provided for his own necessities and for those who were with him for the purpose of setting an example to care for the weak. In this particular instance, Paul makes it clear that he is not setting the example of how the ministry of the word is to be supported in the local church. Rather, he is setting the example of how the church is to care for the weak. The norm for us today is that the members of the church should support the ministry of the word (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:3-12).

When does the newly founded church become self-governing? A preaching point turns into a local church when the baptised believers covenant to bind themselves together as one. A church may exist for a time without elders of its own, while functioning under the oversight of the founding church (Acts 14:23). It may become autonomous, at least administratively, when an eldership (or presbytery) exists with at least a pastor and a ruling elder (Acts 14:23 cf. 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Tim. 4:14 cf. 2 Tim. 1:6). A church that has only a pastor, or only a ruling elder, should place itself under the oversight of another established church. A church that has more than one ruling elders may function for a time without a pastor, while seeking for one. When the prospect of finding a suitable pastor is bleak, the church should place itself under the oversight of another church for its well-being.

When does a newly founded church become self-propagating? The church should begin to be involved in local outreach and wider church planting immediately, according to its ability. If it is able to do more, then more should be done. If it is able to do little, let the little be done. The church is not to wait until 'it is ready' before being involved in missions, just as a new convert should not wait till 'he is ready' before bearing witness to others. We are never more ready than when spiritual life is given to us – both as individuals and as a church. Our abilities and opportunities grow as we use what little gifts and resources we have. "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much (Luke 16:10)." Self-propagation requires the leadership of a pastor. While the church engages in outreach and church planting, according to its ability, from the beginning,

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self-propagation truly occurs when a pastor is appointed to take the lead. This is clear from the example set by Paul and the Lord (Acts 15:36; Luke 9:1; 10:1). Local outreach and wider church planting constitute spiritual warfare – the weapons used being the word of God and prayer, coupled to careful planning (Eph. 6:17-18; Luke 9:52). In the Old Testament times, kings led their armies into battle (2 Sam. 11:1). Under normal circumstances, the pastor of the local church must take the lead. In exceptional situations, a godly and able ruling elder provides the leadership until a pastor is found or when the new pastor is settled into ministry.

When does a newly founded church become self-supporting? In the nation of Israel, the tribe of Levi was supported by the other eleven tribes (Num. 18:21, 24). God's people contributed a tenth of their produce (Lev. 27:30, 32), and additionally gave to special needs (Deut. 12:6-7, 17-19; 14:28-29). The tithe should be seen as still applicable to God's people in the New Testament age. The principles of giving are clearly taught in the New Testament – we are to give regularly, willingly, according to our ability, and privately (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:3-4; 9:6-15; Mark 12:41-44). There are those who consider the principle of 'giving according to one's ability' as abrogating the tithe. In the absence of explicit abrogation of the tithe, it is better to see tithing as 'giving according to one's ability'. It should be possible to support the pastor fully if there are ten earning members who contribute ten percent of their income regularly. Over and above the support of the pastor, the ministry of the church often involves extra expenses, especially in the areas of hospitality, missions, and helping the weak. Furthermore, expenses are involved in the maintenance, or rental, of the place of worship. Instead of ten working members, twelve might be needed who contribute ten percent of their income, for the church to become self-supporting. Other expenses needed by the church would be made up for by the contribution of non-members and visitors in the congregation. The principle of 'giving privately' means that the members are not required to make known the amount that they give, nor should they be made to pledge giving any fixed amount.

It might take time for a newly founded church to become fully independent of the founding church. Often, self-governance and self-propagation are achieved earlier while self-support takes longer. Blessed is the church that becomes self-supporting early in its ex-

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istence! Blessed is the church that is not only self-supporting but also supporting other new works! God who owns "the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10) has declared (Mal. 3:10):

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

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The churches we desire to establish should have the characteristics of submission to Christ in His three offices, engagement in the threefold ministry of Christ, and adherence to the Three-Self Principle. This is looking at the church from within, looking at the church in relation to the world, and looking at the church from without. This paradigm of "looking from within", "looking from without", and "looking in relation to the world" may be expressed also as "looking up in relation to God", "looking within to our character", and "looking out in relation to others". This paradigm is discernible in many scripture passages, although not always in that order, e.g. Gal. 5:22; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; etc. By this paradigm, the bride of Christ is being sanctified so that it will be worthy of the Groom on the wedding day (Rev. 19:6-8). To establish churches that show these characteristics, the founding church must itself show these characteristics. As more churches are planted, and working in fellowship together, the founding church would function as the flagship church. In the old days, a fleet of ships would have a leading ship which carried the special ensign of the commanding officer, called the flagship. The flagship would generally be larger and more well equipped than the other ships. In actual combat, the preference would be for the flagship to be faster while carrying more firepower. The term 'flagship' has been used widely in many spheres of life – in banking, business, education, etc.

The concept of the flagship church is found in the Scripture. The church in Jerusalem spawned many churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria after Pentecost (Acts 9:31). The apostles and the brothers of the Lord were travelling about planting and strengthening

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the churches (1 Cor. 9:5; Acts 9:32ff.). When the gospel was received in Samaria, the church in Jerusalem was informed, upon which Peter and John were sent to settle the situation (Acts 8:14). Similarly, when the gospel was received in Antioch, the church in Jerusalem was informed and Barnabas was sent to settle the church (Acts 11:20-26). The church in Antioch soon developed into a flagship church under the leadership of Paul, "the apostle to the Gentiles" (Acts 11:25-26; 13:1-3; Gal. 2:6-10). The church in Antioch spawned many churches through the ministry of Paul and other missionaries, in a sphere of ministry that was vast (2 Cor. 10:12-16). The church in Ephesus developed into a flagship church among the churches in Asia. It is mentioned first among "the seven churches in Asia" (Rev. 1:11), and addressed first in the admonition to the seven churches (Rev. 2:1). Since Revelation is a book of prophecy, the number 'seven' should be seen as symbolic of all the churches of Christ throughout the gospel age. Paul spent three years in Ephesus to establish the church, from which other churches were planted. There were actually more churches in Asia than the seven mentioned in the book of Revelation, including in Colossae, Hierapolis (Col. 4:13), and Troas (Acts 7:20; 2 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 4:13).

What should be the characteristics of a flagship church? The flagship church should be the model for the newly planted churches – in doctrine, in practice, and even in spirit (cf. Eph. 4:1-6). The flagship church takes initiatives, acts as a centre of reference, and coordinates the work of missions. It may not be numerically large but is biblically strong – as shown by its submission to the headship of Christ in His three offices, its engagement in the threefold ministry of Christ, and its adherence to the Three-Self Principle. It shows respect for the associated churches which are autonomous and independent, love for them in desiring their wellbeing, and generosity in sharing gospel blessings with, and from, them. The concern for correctness in form, in substance, and in service all arise from the presence of Christ by His Spirit in the church, and among the churches (Eph. 3:20-21; Rev. 1:12-20).

The concept of the flagship church – planting and establishing other churches which continue to co-operate in the work of missions and in mutual edification – seem to have been grasped by the English Separatists of the 17th to the 19th centuries (Lovegrove, 2004). Although there is nothing to prevent an independent, like-



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minded, church from joining an existing network of churches in its vicinity, the network of churches envisaged by the early Separatists were made up of churches spawned directly by a flagship church, or indirectly by other churches in the network, or "sphere of ministry" (2 Cor. 10:13-16). Some of these networks of churches formed into more structured 'regional association of churches', while others remained unassociated (Poh, 2013: Ch. 6). This seems to be what is meant by the compilers of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (1689:26:14):

As each church, and all the members of it are bound to (d) pray continually, for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places; and upon all occasions to further it (everyone within the bounds of their places, and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces) so the churches (*when planted by the providence of God* so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it) *ought to hold (e) communion amongst themselves* for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification. (Emphasis added.)

(d) Eph. 6:18; Psalm 122:6; (e) Rom. 16:1, 2; 3 John 8, 9, 10.

Each church in the network should engage in constant reformation as and when needed, based on feedback and self-assessment in the areas of submission to Christ in His three offices, engagement in the threefold ministry of Christ, and adherence to the Three-Self Principle. The eldership of the church plays a key role in the assessment and the review of the life of the church. Being in close fellowship with like-minded churches, especially those within the same network of churches, is an asset. The role of the likes of Jethro to Moses (Exod. 18:13-27) and Aquila and Priscilla to Apollos (Acts 18:24-28) should be valued. Continual self-assessment and reformation are needed because: (i) it is required by the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20); (ii) it is demanded by Scripture (Rev. 2-3). The role of the flagship church comes to the fore here (Rev. 2:1; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; Eph. 4:1-6). The flagship church should be a role model for the other churches. It should consider the welfare of the churches in

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its network or sphere of ministry, in the long term – including their growth to maturity, their involvement in missions, and the training of preachers and gospel helpers. Helpful literature might be made available, invitation might be extended to join local outreach efforts and wider missions trips, and an avenue of training workers might be started.

We have referred to the flagship publication and other ministries such as the training school for preachers, orphanages, etc. These entities need not all be under the direct administration of the flagship church. Gifts, resources, and opportunities differ among the churches and the ministers involved. When the network of churches becomes too big, or when the unique opportunities of gospel ministry demand it, or when the peculiar circumstances occasion it, one of the churches may develop into a flagship church in its own right. All the churches should rejoice in this, as it is a happy development in which fellowship between the churches, and between the networks of churches, are maintained. Parents are happy, and everyone rejoices, when children grow up and set up homes of their own. Similarly, when a new network of churches evolves out of an existing network every church should rejoice. There is no necessity for carnal rivalry between churches in the same network, or between networks of churches. Sadly, breaches of fellowship often occur, followed by unhappy parting of ways.

We harbour no illusion about fellowship between churches, or between believers. We are sinners, interacting with other sinners, in a fallen world. Although redeemed by the blood of Christ, remaining sin in us and the provocations of the world will cause many disappointments, heartaches, and sorrow. Misunderstandings, differences of opinion, envy, and jealousy will come into play to disrupt fellowship between brethren. Paul – and we can be certain, the other apostles as well – had their fair share of these (Acts 15:1-29, 36-41; 2 Cor. 12:11-21; 13:7-10; Gal. 2:11-21; Phil. 1:15-17; 2 Tim. 1:15; 4:9-10, 14-15). Issues will have to be dealt with, and relations will have to be mended as best we can, but the work of missions must continue on – in obedience to the Lord, and to the glory of the triune God.

## 10.4 Summary

Analysis and synthesis are necessary procedures carried out in any serious investigation of any subject. Our analysis of the Great Commission yields principles and methods that must be synthesised into a system in which the methods employed yield the results desired. The principles of Scripture must be followed all the time while the methods of Scripture are to be followed as much as possible, with allowance for adjustment to local or special situations. Although it is impossible to find a perfect church on earth, the Scripture puts before us the characteristics of an ideal church which we should strive to be, and to found. The ideal church should submit to Christ in His three offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. Its ministry should be modelled after the threefold ministry of Christ. It should uphold the Three-Self Principle of being self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting. The flagship church in any network of churches should set the example in all these areas. Constant self-examination and reformation will be needed to stay on course. Instead of carnal rivalry, there should be mutual care and support among the churches arising from the presence of Christ, by His Spirit, in their midst. The work of missions must continue despite the inevitable disruptions in fellowship between believers, and between churches.

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### Recommended Reading

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## Eleven

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# THE END OF MISSIONS

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A tree growing well is firmly rooted in the ground. It is also relentlessly stretching forth to the sky, reaching for the sun which beckons. The tree of missions is firmly rooted in the eternal purpose of God. It is also routed (no pun intended) to the eternal gathering of God's people in the new heaven, on the new earth (Rev. 21:1 cf. 2 Pet. 3:13). This is true because the Covenant of Redemption is one, stretching from eternity past into eternity future, the substance of which is the eternal purpose of God in the salvation of the elect. That portion of the Covenant of Redemption that emerges in history is the Covenant of Grace.

The Covenant of Grace consists of two parts, the revelatory part known as the Old Covenant in the Old Testament period, and the fulfilment part known as the New Covenant in the New Testament period, which is the age of the gospel. The gospel age began with the coming of Christ to fulfil the promises made in the Old Covenant, and will end with the return of Christ to judge the world and to make all things new. The New Covenant involves the execution of the Great Commission, which is what constitutes the work of missions.

The end, or goal, of God's plan of salvation is the manifestation of His glory in the salvation of the elect. The redeemed and the angels in heaven worship and serve God in response to the glory manifested in the salvation of the chosen people. This is the end of missions. The redeemed on earth should similarly worship and serve God on earth. In other words, the *end* of missions should condition the process of

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achieving the objective of missions. The *objective* of missions is the planting and establishment of local churches – in preparation for life in heaven, which begins now and stretches to eternity. How should life in heaven, and the eternal state – i.e. the end of missions – affect the work of missions? The book of Revelation supplies us the answers. We consider three certainties in the work of missions as revealed by the Apocalypse.

### 11.1 The Certainty Of Progress

William Hendriksen (Hendriksen, 1980) convincingly argues for the conception of Progressive Parallelism in the book of Revelation. The seven sections of the Apocalypse are:

- Chs. 1-3, Christ in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.
- Chs. 4-7 The Lamb opening the seven seals of God's book one by one.
- Chs. 8-11, The seven trumpets of warning to the world.
- Chs. 12-14, The woman and the male Child persecuted by the dragon and his helpers.
- Chs. 15-16, The bowls of wrath upon the impenitent.
- Chs. 17-19, The fall of the Great Harlot and of the two Beasts.
- Chs. 20-22, The devil's doom followed by the new heaven and the new earth.

Each section describes the events, and the underlying spiritual principles, occurring between the first coming of Christ and His second coming. The first three sections reveal the church, indwelt by Christ, persecuted by the world. The church is avenged, protected, and victorious. The last four sections reveal the deeper spiritual background of this struggle. It is a conflict between the Christ and the dragon, in which the Christ (and His church) is victorious.

The book of Revelation is a book of prophecy. It contains visions and symbolism which must be carefully understood without falling into the extremes of literalism on the one hand, or allegorisation

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### 11.1. The Certainty Of Progress

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on the other. Each symbol should be interpreted as a whole, and its details should be understood in harmony with the whole. At the same time, the symbolism and details are rooted in historical reality that are rich in contemporary applications. For example, the symbolism of the seven golden lampstands, with Christ in their midst (Rev. 1:12-20), teaches us that local churches are meant to be independent and autonomous throughout the gospel age. The fact that they were churches in Asia, united spiritually by the presence of Christ in their midst, shows the propriety – some would say, the imperative – of like-minded regional groupings of churches working together in close fellowship. This has been explicated in some detail in an earlier work (Poh, 2000).

In the present book, we arrived at the imperative of reforming the local church so that the universal church is progressively sanctified (Eph. 5:26-27). Christ is sanctifying His church while each local church sanctifies itself. Christ works in the local church that takes on the responsibility of sanctifying itself (cf. Phil. 2:12-13; Col. 1:29). We have advocated that the church must be sanctifying itself according to the three offices of Christ, the threefold ministry of Christ, and the Three-Self Principle. This is consistent with the vision of Revelation 1 in which the lampstands are golden – speaking of the inherent purity of Christ's churches. It is also necessitated by the admonition given to each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 – which speaks of definite efforts put into reformation.

The role of the pastor, or minister, of the local church in the work of reformation needs to be noted. The seven stars in the right hand of the Lord are the angels of the seven churches in Asia. These are not real angels, i.e. spirit beings who serve God, neither are they the messengers of the churches sent to visit John. Furthermore, they are not a personification of the prevailing spirit of each church. Rather, they are the pastors of the churches. 1 Timothy 5:17 shows that there are two sorts of elders in the church – the 'ruling elders' and the 'teaching elders'. The teaching elders are identified as 'pastors and teachers' in Ephesians 4:11. The context of the Ephesian passage shows that the pastors are the full-time teachers of the church who have been called to the ministry of the word – just as the apostles, prophets, and evangelists were called to the ministry of the word. In the large church in Antioch, there were prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). In the large church in Jerusalem, the apostles functioned as

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its first teachers, until elders were appointed – with James appearing to be the pastor (Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19; 2:9).

We have argued out the case that a minimum of one pastor and one ruling elder constitutes the eldership of a church. From the first vision of the Apocalypse (Rev. 1-3), it would seem that each of the churches in Asia had only one pastor – *the* angel (Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). There would have been one or more elders helping in governing the church – some of whom helping in the teaching also, together with other men, as and when needed (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 4:14). In the vision, a letter was addressed to each pastor because he was the representative of the church. The pastors were the stars held in the Lord's right hand because they were Christ's representatives to the churches. (In today's jargon, we would speak of the 'right-hand man' of a person of authority.) Although each letter was addressed to the church, it would be expected that the pastor had to take the lead in heeding the admonition of the letter. The point we are making is that the pastor plays a key role in the reformation of the church – ye, not only in the reformation of the church but also in the whole work of missions. After all, the reformation of the church is part of the work of missions.

In the history of the church, God has always used pastors to initiate the work of missions and reformation. The Reformation of the 16th century stands as a watershed in church history. As the Reformers engaged in reforming the churches by teaching the word of God and implementing biblical practice, the Spirit of God worked mightily – resulting in a revival second only to Pentecost (Acts 2) in magnitude and long-term effects. The revivals of subsequent centuries pale in significance when compared with the Reformation. One obvious difference between them lie in the fact that the subsequent revivals focused on the winning of souls to Christ instead of the establishment of churches that were constantly being reformed. The momentum and gains of the revivals were short-lived as a consequence. The effects of the 16th century Reformation, however, continues to be seen and felt today (Mangalwady, 2012).

The book of Revelation assures us that God is at work throughout the gospel age. The 'thousand years' of missions will run its course and fulfil God's purpose of calling to Himself the elect (Rev. 20:3). The Lord will send forth the labourers as the church prays for labourers (Matt. 9:37-38). He will raise up 'angels' for His churches



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## 11.2. The Certainty Of Hindrances

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as the church engages in training preachers (2 Tim. 2:2). Under-shepherds will lead while the Lord's people willingly serve, so as to constitute an orderly grassroots movement (Psalm 110:1-3). As we plant churches that are constantly being sanctified, revivals will be sent by the Lord in His time (Mal. 3:10, 16-18).

## 11.2 The Certainty Of Hindrances

As certain as there will be progress in missions, so certain will there be hindrances to missions. The book of Revelation shows us that Satan has failed to destroy the male Child, resulting in him turning his wrath upon the children of the woman, i.e. the members of the church – those who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17). Satan's attempt to destroy the church will fail. The woman, i.e. the church, who gave birth to the male child is borne on eagle's wings "into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent" (Rev. 12:14). The period called "a time and times and half a time" corresponds to the 1,260 days of verse 6 – i.e. three years and a half. Symbolically, this represents the gospel age that extends from Christ's ascension almost until the judgement day. It is the period during which the two witnesses are given power by their preaching to overcome their enemies (Rev. 11:3-6). In the words of William Hendriksen (Hendriksen, 1980:155):

*These witnesses symbolize the church militant bearing testimony through its ministers and missionaries throughout the present dispensation. The fact that there are two witnesses emphasizes the missionary task of the church. Cf. Lk. 10:1: the Lord sends his missionaries two by two: what the one lacks the other supplies. (Emphasis original.)*

However, when the two witnesses finish their testimony, "the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them (Rev. 11:7)." "And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those

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who dwell on the earth (Rev. 11:10)." Throughout the gospel age, the church will be persecuted and Christians will die as martyrs.

The hindrances to missions come not only in the form of persecution by civil authorities – represented by the beast that arises from the sea (Rev. 13:10) – but also in the form of false teaching and philosophies – represented by the beast that arises from the earth (Rev. 13:11-18). The church will be troubled by subtle false teaching as much as by outright persecution (Acts 20:29-30; 2 John 7-8; Jude 3-4). One can think of the heresies that plagued the early church, the so-called Theory of Evolution of recent years, and the many cults and religions in the world which draw people away and prevent others from hearing the gospel. While persecution and false teaching are painfully experienced by God's people when they strike, a more pervasive hindrance to missions is worldly allurements that draws away many souls to destruction. This is represented by the Great Harlot, called Babylon the Great, who sits on the scarlet beast, on many waters. We are told, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (Rev. 17:15)." Worldly allurements, abetted by persecuting civil authorities, have hindered the progress of the gospel in various parts of the world at different times, and caused suffering and death to God's children. "I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Rev. 17:6)."

In plain language, the apostle Paul warns us (2 Tim. 3:1-5):

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

Missions must take into account the hindrances that arise from the instigation and empowerment of the devil – appearing in the forms of persecuting civil authorities, false teaching, and the allurements of the world.

## 11.3 The Certainty Of Success

Progress in missions will be accompanied by hindrances to missions. The one will not be neutralised by the other. Instead, there will be success in the work of missions. God's elect will be called into His kingdom by the gospel despite the hindrances of the devil. While the devil is a powerful foe, his power is limited by God in the gospel age – symbolised by "a time, and times, and half a time", "one thousand two hundred and sixty days", and "a thousand years". The limitation to Satan's power is described in Revelation 20:1-3,

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

During the gospel age, those who die for the faith, and those who die in the faith, reign with Christ in heaven. Those who die for the faith are described as "the souls of those who have been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God (Rev. 20:4)", while those who die in the faith are described as "he who has part in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6)". We are told, "Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev. 20:6)." The 'second death' is a reference to eternal punishment in hell for the unbeliever, after the soul is reunited with the body on the day of judgement.

Near to the return of Christ to judge the world, Satan will be allowed to do his worse – causing much suffering to the church while deceiving the nations all over the world. This will be the culmination of the progress of missions as well as of the hindrances to missions. The last of the elect will be called into God's kingdom by the gospel while Satan harnesses his agents to attack the church. The short period just before Christ's return will be marked by persecution, apostasy, and unbelief (Matt. 24:9-13, 24; Luke 18:8; 2

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Thess. 2:3-12). The Lord will suddenly return and swiftly execute judgement on His enemies. The devil and all his agents will be cast into "the lake of fire and brimstone" to be "tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). So will "anyone not found written in the Book of Life" (Rev. 20:15).

What become of the saints on the day of judgement and after? We are told in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 that the Lord will bring with Him those who died in faith. These words follow (1 Thess. 4:16-17):

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

The apostle Peter adds the following details ( 2 Pet. 3:10-13):

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

While the apostles Paul and Peter write in plain language, the apostle John continues in the prophetic language of Revelation 21:1-4,

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard

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a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

This is the description of the blessedness of life in heaven. The New Jerusalem is the church of Jesus Christ, the bride of the Lamb, which consists of the full number of God's elect (Rev. 21:9-21). None of God's people will be missing. Everyone of them is clothed in the righteousness of Christ (Rev. 19:8). The glory of the New Jerusalem is described in Revelation 21:22-27:

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The description of life in heaven follows (Rev. 22:1-5):

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

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There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

In symbolic language, the fulness of life is conveyed by the river of water, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. The collective noun is used of the tree, of the river, and of the street. The city is a beautiful garden lined with rivers, streets, and trees. The trees bear fruit regularly, every month – showing that there is abundance to feed "a great multitude of people which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" (Rev. 7:9). This number, however, is known to God (2 Tim. 2:19). While on earth, the full number of God's elect is referred to by the symbolism of the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel who are sealed – i.e. who are owned and protected by God (Rev. 7:4-8; 14:3). Here, in Revelation 22, the full number of the redeemed are now in heaven. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations, showing that the people live in harmony, with full acceptance of one another. No misunderstanding, suspicion, nor fear is there to spoil their fellowship. Together, they willingly serve their God. Yes, there will be work to do in heaven, just as in the garden of Eden. Service speaks of work other than worship. They shall reign, which also speaks of work (cf. Matt. 25:21, 28). Work, however, will not constitute toil, but pleasure. There will be no marriage in heaven, and no procreation, for the redeemed people will be like angels (Matt. 22:30). Marriage on earth has its joy, and its sorrow. In heaven, the fellowship of God's people will be raised to a level higher than experienced by Adam and Eve before the fall. The passage parallel to the last is Revelation 7:15-17,

Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

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#### 11.4. Three Implications

Comparing with Revelation 21:22, the temple is the presence of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. The people serve God 'night and day', i.e. continually, for there shall be no night there (Rev. 21:25). Night speaks of the need for rest, of fear, and of dangers. In heaven, there will be no night to trouble God's children. What Paul foretold in plain language in his epistle to the Ephesians would have been fulfilled (Eph. 2:4-7; 3:21):

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus...to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The end, or goal, of God's plan of salvation – which is the manifestation of the glory of God in the salvation of the elect – will have been accomplished.

#### 11.4 Three Implications

The three certainties of missions – viz. the certainty of progress, the certainty of hindrances, and the certainty of success – lead to many implications, three of which are considered here.

##### *Generosity without compromise*

Missions is not the work of any one church nor of any one constituency of churches. Truth, vision, and spirituality are not the monopoly of any single denomination. The Great Commission encompasses all the Lord's people, and all the Lord's churches. There are churches that have gone too far astray, to the extent of denying the fundamentals of the faith, with which we may have no fellowship. We are to endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" without compromising the fundamentals of the faith (Eph. 4:1-6). No doubt, all truths are important so that error in any one truth will affect the faith in some ways down the line. However, it

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must be honestly acknowledged that the Bible is not equally clear in all its parts, and not all Christians are equally clear on every point of doctrine. Having said that, it must be noted that there are essential points of doctrine which cannot be denied without harming "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)". It follows that on the one hand, we must be big-hearted towards those who differ from us in doctrine and practice, on the other hand, we must separate from those who are in error on the fundamentals of the faith. While the dividing line between the fundamentals and the non-essentials may be debated, each church must work out the extent of fellowship it chooses to have with those who differ from it. This is where the creeds of the early church and the historic Confessions of Faith from the Reformation come into their own.

On the practical level, all Evangelicals must be respected and loved as our brethren. We would define an Evangelical as one who holds to the sole authority of Scripture, the gospel of 'justification by faith', and the imperative of evangelism (Poh, TR, 2017). We would have difficulty co-operating in missions with Evangelicals who practise hard-core altar calls, or hold to Charismatic views on the sign gifts, or advocate contemporary worship. However, we would not compete with them in missions, nor undermine them in their work. We may express our disagreement with them, and correct them as the opportunity arises, which is different from intruding into their sphere of ministry and taking away their churches or missionaries. When their churches or missionaries voluntarily choose to join us because they have had a change in theology to conform with ours, the transfer of allegiance should be done with amicability and transparency as much as possible. Problems often arise from a lack of reciprocal spirit. "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise (Luke 6:31)."

For ourselves, we would plant only churches that hold to our distinctive theology. Life is short, resources are limited, and opportunities are many. We must be focused in what we want to achieve – i.e. the type of churches we want to plant and to establish. At the same time, we would open our church leaders' seminars and ministers' conferences to other Evangelicals with the understanding that we teach from our perspective of the truth, and that they come in peace and not with the intention of undermining our work or poaching our missionaries. Not only do we share teaching in this manner, we also



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contribute and collect funds for special needs such as in building projects, good works, and disaster relief involving other Evangelicals. In some situations where we are unable to be directly involved, we are happy to contribute – in finance and prayer – to those who are able to preach the gospel and carry out good works.

Being generous in this manner to Evangelical brethren without compromising our distinctive theology and denominational convictions has brought us no small measure of comfort and sweet fellowship with others. The old adage, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity", applies.

##### *Leadership without elitism*

We have emphasised that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 (and related passages) is a command to the local church to plant other local churches. The principle of 'the centrality and uniqueness of the local church in the purposes of God' is upheld. The Great Commission is not a command given to independent individuals or to para-church organisations. Furthermore, the work of missions involves the whole local church, and not just a few individuals in the church. This emphasis on the role of the local church should not be misunderstood, misapplied, or abused.

The Orthodox churches – including the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches – have always posited a clear and absolute distinction between the clergy and the laity. This led to the Protestant churches emphasising the principle of 'the priesthood and prophethood of all believers' instead. This means that every believer – not just the minister – has the right to draw near to God in prayer and to proclaim the word of God. In some circles, this has been taken to the extreme such that the role of the minister of the gospel in the church is minimised or denied. The Plymouth Brethren, for example, practise the equality of lay elders, with no recognition of the role of the full-time pastor. In some evangelical circles, the bi-vocational ministry is advocated in which the pastor – whether formally trained or not – holds a full-time job at the same time. Some Reformed Baptist churches hold to the parity of all elders in which the full-time elder and the other elders are regarded as pastors who share equal rights in all the ministries in the church. The doctrine of the call to the ministry of the word is either inconsistently upheld or denied by replacing it with something quite different from how it is

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traditionally understood (Waldron *et. al.*, 1997; Poh, 2006).

The Scripture places ministers of the word as the instrument of God to declare His will and to lead His people. In the Old Testament, the prophets, priests, and kings were equated with the shepherds of God's people – be they faithful (Jer. 23:4; Ezek. 34:11-12) or unfaithful ones (Jer. 6:13-14; 8:10-11; 50:6; Ezek. 34:1-10; Zech. 11:7, 8, 15-17). In the New Testament, the abiding office of the minister is that of the pastor, although he is also an elder who normally leads the eldership in ruling the church (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:17). The leadership of the church, therefore, is neither individualistic nor polycentric in an absolute sense. Instead, it consists of an eldership led by the pastor and, together, they oversee the church. Believing in the autonomy of the churches, the leadership of a network of churches is not centralised or decentralised in an absolute sense. The flagship church concept allows for clear leadership of one church while allowing for, recognising, and encouraging the contribution of other churches – much like a happy family. After all, the gifts of the ministers vary and opportunities of service are diverse. Church history reveals that God has used ministers of the word to win souls, to build up the church, and to lead His people. Genuine revivals of the past have always involved the leadership of ministers of the gospel. George Whitefield, John Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, and Asahel Nettleton are among the many that may be named. The well-known missionary, William Carey, was the pastor of a church before he went into the mission field. Jonathan Edwards and Charles Simeon were pastors who were deeply involved in missions. Although Hudson Taylor and Jim Elliot were connected with the Plymouth Brethren, they would have been considered ministers in other communions. The attempts to minimise the office and calling of the pastor that we have listed above fail to give credence to the obvious and natural understanding of the role of the angel in Revelation 1 to 3. Are these attempts an over-reaction to the clergy-laity distinction of the Orthodox churches? Or are they a result of pandering to the egalitarianism of Postmodernism? While not wanting to promote a new elitism, the biblical role of ministers of the gospel in the work of missions must be pressed.<sup>1</sup> The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 must be understood in this light. While it is a command to the local church to plant other local churches, the leadership and instrumentality of the ministers must not be denied or

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minimised. The related passages of Matthew 9:37-38 and Romans 10:14-15 make this clear.

Various Confessions of Faith that arose from the Reformation show a comfortable acceptance of the complementary roles of the ministers and the other members of the church. The 1689 Baptist Confession clearly recognises the office of the minister when it says (1689 Confession:26:10):

The work of pastors being constantly to attend the services of Christ, in His churches, in the ministry of the word, and prayer, (t) with watching for their souls, as they that must give an account to Him; it is incumbent on the churches to whom they minister, not only to give them their due respect, (u) but also to communicate to them of all their good things according to their ability, so as they may have a comfortable supply, without being themselves (x) entangled in secular affairs; and may also be capable of exercising (y) hospitality toward others; and this is required by the (z) law of nature, and the express order of our Lord Jesus, who hath ordained that they that preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.

(t) Acts 6:4; Heb. 13:17; (u) 1 Tim. 5:17, 18; Gal. 6:6, 7; (x) 2 Tim. 2:4; (y) 1 Tim. 3:2; (z) 1 Cor. 9:6-14.

The Confession further says that the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are to be administered, not by just any Christian, but by "those only, who are qualified and thereunto called according to the commission of Christ" (1689 Confession:28:2). The two Bible references for this, viz. Matthew 28:19 and 1 Corinthians 4:1 pertain to those who are called to be ministers of the gospel. While the position and role of the pastor are clearly recognised, the role of other members of the church in handling the word of God is not overlooked, as seen in these words (1689 Confession:26:11),

Although it be incumbent on the bishops or pastors of the churches to be instant in preaching the word, by way of

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<sup>1</sup>Here, elitism is the belief that the clergy or a select few know the Bible better than others and should lead the church; egalitarianism is the belief that all Christians are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities to serve in the church.

## 11. THE END OF MISSIONS

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office; yet the work of preaching the word, is not so peculiarly confined to them; but that others also (a) gifted, and fitted by the Holy Spirit for it, and approved, and called by the church, may and ought to perform it.

(a) Acts 11:19, 20, 21; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11.

Pastors must take the lead in missions, helped by the other elders. Churches must pray for preachers to be raised up, trained, and sent forth to preach the gospel. When God gives a revival, it will be one led by ministers of the gospel, as much as it will be a grassroots movement. The primacy of preaching and teaching God's word will be obvious. A leaderless grassroots movement will turn anarchic sooner or later. It will not fit into the pattern of what we expect of a genuine work of God (cf. 1 Cor. 14:40). In short, the leadership of ministers in missions must not be overlooked, denied, or minimised while encouraging the involvement of the whole church.

### *Biblicism without obscurantism*

In missiology, trends may be noted in the various eras. The Reformation of the 16th century saw the recovery of biblical doctrines and the reformation of worship. The attempt to recover biblical church order did not result in a consensus of opinion on the subject. The early stirrings in foreign missions during the Reformation were eclipsed by the colossal task of reforming the churches after the centuries of accumulated human traditions and spiritual declension (Haykin & Robinson, 2014). The 17th century saw a notable increase of interest in wider church planting among the non-Conformist Puritans on both sides of the Atlantic (Poh, 2013:199-206, 288-290). This culminated in the rise of the era of Modern Missions in the next century. The initiative of the Particular Baptists in the 18th century of sending William Carey (1761-1834) and others to India spurred the formation of various missions boards on both sides of the Atlantic (Haykin, 1995). The Moravians, despite their unorthodox beliefs on Scripture and on the death of Christ, were active in foreign missions from around 1730 (Dallimore, 1979: 171-174). However, it is William Carey who has been hailed as 'the Father of Modern Missions'.

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#### 11.4. Three Implications

The rise of social concerns and co-operation in missions in the 19th century resulted in a toning down of emphasis on distinctive ecclesiological and theological beliefs (Brown:1986:136-141). This was a time of exploration and the opening of new frontiers, accompanied by the advent of the so-called Theory of Evolution and Modernism (or Theological Liberalism). Church-based missions boards became independent of the churches which founded them while para-church organisations and independent missionary societies mushroomed. On the front of missions, it was a time of experimentation and reflection on the methodology of missions. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) and the China Inland Mission (later renamed Overseas Missionary Fellowship, then OMF International), and John Nevius (1829-1893) belong to this period. Hudson Taylor took to wearing Chinese attire, including sporting the Manchurian pigtail, while John Nevius formulated the Three-Self Principle of missions. The Three-Self Principle was the outcome more of empirical observation and experimentation than the fruit of theological reflection or biblical exegesis.

In the 20th century, revivals broke out in various parts of the world – including in Korea, north-east India, parts of Southeast Asian countries, and China. This was the era of Roland Allen (1868-1947) in China, when the idea of missions as a grassroots movement was fostered. In the West, the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy rocked churches. After the 1930's, the Modernists (or Liberals) were largely pushed to the confines of the theological faculties of universities, or dispersed as social workers in various non-governmental organisations. The original Fundamentalist camp was made up of various shades of Evangelicals who upheld biblicism, i.e. the belief in the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice. By the 1930's the Fundamentalist camp broke up into the Fundamentalists (the term now taking on a narrower meaning), the Reformed, and the Neo-Evangelicals. The Neo-Evangelicals place emphasis on social concerns and are incline to be ecumenical. The Pentecostals arose to form a fourth group (Poh, TR, 2017). Together, these groups are known as Evangelicals (the term now taking on a broader meaning). In other words, the Fundamentalists before 1930 were the old Evangelicals, while the new Evangelicals comprise the new Fundamentalists, the Reformed, the Neo-Evangelicals, and the Pentecostals.

## 11. THE END OF MISSIONS

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After the Second World War (1939-1945), a theological re-alignment began to take place which has continued to today. Some Fundamentalists have become Reformed, some Reformed men have become Neo-Evangelical, and some Pentecostal men have embraced Reformed theology. A resurgence of interest in Pentecostal theology and Reformed theology occurred from the 1960's. Pentecostal theology spilled into other denominations to become the Charismatic movement while Reformed soteriology has been embraced by sections of the Charismatics who constitute the New-Calvinist movement of today. This was the period when the Modern Church Growth movement arose – advocating the ideas of contextualisation, cross-cultural sensitivity, and the use of scientific analysis to assess the viability of outreach methods. From the earlier empirical approach (e.g. McGavran, 1955) to the later sociological approach (e.g. Hesselgrave, 1978) the ideas of the Modern Church Growth movement have been praised as well as criticised. Two divergent emphases emerged – 'holism' which emphasised good works and social ministries, and 'prioritism' which emphasised conversion and spiritual transformation. Those who opposed the ideas of the Modern Church Growth movement were frowned upon as non-progressive.

The early 21st century saw the rise of the Missional Church movement among the ecumenical-minded Evangelicals which has been embraced by conservative Evangelicals as well. When the expression 'a missional church' was first used, it appeared to carry the meaning 'a missions-minded church'. With time, the term took on a different nuance and has become a catchphrase of a new missions movement (Stetzer and Im, 2016; Roxburgh and Boren, 2009; Woodward, 2016). The Missional Church movement begins its narrative with the *missio Dei* (the mission of God), based on John 20:21, 'So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."' The life of Abraham is used as a model of missions when, in reality, it is a model of the personal life of faith (Rom. 4:18-22; Heb. 13:8-10, 13-16). The movement eschews 'extractionism', i.e. the practice of taking converts out of their cultural environment. It also repudiates the 'attractional church', which aims to attract people instead of going out to people. It advocates the planting of reproducing churches. It also embraces the seeker-sensitive approach to local outreach, the multi-site approach to church growth, contemporary worship, and the community-based 'incarnational' (some

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#### 11.4. Three Implications

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read as ‘worldly’) lifestyle for the church. While differences exist between conservative Evangelicals and ecumenical Evangelicals of the Missional Church movement, the pursuit of cultural relevance through an egalitarian church structure is a common trait. Furthermore, distinctive conviction in theology and ecclesiology is eschewed and indiscriminate ecumenism in missions and social concerns is encouraged. While not always stated explicitly, those who do not share their views of church growth would be considered obscurantist, stuck in the past, or ignoring modern needs.

On our part, we have opted to hold on to historic biblicism while resisting any tendency to obscurantism.<sup>2</sup> Modern technology, the findings of science, and the insights of sociology may be harnessed to missions as tools. The foundational principles and methods of missions, however, must flow from the word of God – not by a patchwork theology, but by a holistic approach that avoids majoring on minor issues. We see the Great Commission of Mathew 28:18-21 as the key passage on missions and John 20:21 as a subordinate passage, not *vice versa*. We see the apostle Paul, rather than Abraham, as setting the example for missions. We arrive at a view of church oversight from the Scripture and not from pragmatic considerations that are thinly veiled by irrelevant theological arguments. We see missions in the light of the eternal purpose of God, not in the limited view of transient cultural trends. We rejoice over the recovery of biblical insights on missions through the centuries – including the necessity of cross-cultural sensitivity, the proper place of contextualisation, the planting of reproducing churches, and the harnessing of the whole church to the work of missions. Instead of the patchwork theology and empirical approach of the various missions movements, our approach has yielded similar results and more, while avoiding aberrations from the Bible. In particular, we would single out three critical aspects of missions that have been overlooked or under-emphasised by others.

Firstly, missions must take into consideration *the certainty of spiritual decline and apostasy in the church*. This has been foretold in God’s word. Apostasy occurred among God’s people in the Old Testament. Towards the end of the New Testament period, the condi-

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<sup>2</sup>Here, we use the word ‘obscurantism’ to mean opposition to new ideas and knowledge from disciplines other than biblical theology.

## 11. THE END OF MISSIONS

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tion of 'the seven churches' in Asia was indicative of the spiritual decline all round. Decline occurred in the early church while the gospel spread. Departure from the truth and the accretion of human traditions led to the one thousand years of spiritual darkness of the Middle Ages (500 AD to 1500 AD). The Reformation of the 16th century restored important biblical doctrines while clearing away human traditions. The gains made began to be lost as the centuries passed by so that today we have the phenomenon of 'Christian nations' sliding into Modernism, then into Postmodernism, and now into post-Christendom. Should this departure from the faith surprise us? Have we not been warned of this in Scripture? What this means to us in practice is that the ground must be ploughed again and the seed of the gospel planted in so-called Christian nations and communities. We are reminded afresh of the spatial and temporal aspects of missions as taught in Acts 2:39, and the light shed by this truth on our understanding of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20.

Secondly, missions must take into consideration *the spiritual struggle that underlies the advance of God's kingdom on earth*. Satan is actively hindering the advance of the gospel by spreading false teaching, by persecuting the church, and by drawing souls away through worldly allurements. These are the works of the beast of the sea, the beast of the earth, and the Great Harlot called Babylon. They are the agents of the great fiery serpent who failed to destroy the male Child of the woman, and now turns his fury against her offspring. The battle is fierce on every front. In the West, worldly allurements have drawn away millions. In the Middle-East, the Indian sub-continent, and Southeast Asia, millions have been blinded by false religions. In parts of Africa, the Middle-East, and Asia, millions of the Lord's people are put under fear and stress because of the fires of persecution.<sup>3</sup> We know, however, that the Lord will preserve His people and the church will emerge victorious in this war. Practically, this means that missions must be carried out with much prayer and a prayerful spirit. It also means that new disciples of Christ must be taught to expect and to accept self-denial, suffering, and death for the faith (Matt. 10:16-20, 28; Luke 9:23-26; Rom. 8:16-17; 2 Tim. 3:12). This is a teaching neglected in many Christian circles. Instead, self-indulgence is promoted under the guise of the health-and-wealth gospel, incarnational ministry, New Covenant Theology



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(which denies the abiding relevance of the Ten Commandments to Christians), New Calvinism (also known as the Young, Restless, and Reformed movement), and the like. These are the symptoms, if not the contributory causes, of the worldliness and decline of churches in 'Christian nations'. It is ironic that such churches constitute the Missional Church movement. This might sound too harsh a judgement. Seen in the light of the agents of Satan hindering the spread of the gospel – and, in particular, the agent of the Great Harlot – one is obliged to give sober thought.

Thirdly, missions must take into consideration *the Christian hope* – *which includes the certainty of Christ's return to judge the world, the gathering together of all the redeemed of the Lord, and the eternal blessedness of life in heaven*. The Christian hope should condition not only the personal Christian life but also the quality and spirit of missions (Rom. 8:18-39). All the elect will be called into God's kingdom by the gospel. The Holy Spirit will bless human instrumentality and the God-appointed means of hearing the word. The devil might do his worst against the church through his agents, but God's plan of saving for Himself a people will not be frustrated. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, in which is the New Jerusalem. The Covenant of Redemption is immutable.

In the Christian life, we may take to heart the words of Romans 8:37-39:

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In missions, we may take to heart the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10 and 2 Timothy 2:10,

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me...Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the

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<sup>3</sup>It is estimated that in China alone there are more than 80 million believers.

## 11. THE END OF MISSIONS

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elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

### 11.5 Summary

The end of missions is the gathering together of the elect in heaven to worship and serve God, in response to the manifested glory of God in the salvation of His people. The objective of missions is the planting and establishment of local churches, in preparation for life in heaven. The end of missions should condition the accomplishing of the objective of missions. The book of Revelation reveals three certainties concerning missions, namely: the certainty of progress, the certainty of hindrances, and the certainty of success. This leads to three implications, namely: (i) there should be generosity towards others without compromising distinctive theology and denominational convictions; (ii) the leadership of ministers in missions must not be overlooked, denied, or minimised while encouraging the involvement of the whole church; and (iii) historic biblicism must be clung to without ignoring contemporary needs and issues. Missions must take into consideration three aspects that have been overlooked or under-emphasised, namely: (a) the certainty of spiritual decline and apostasy in the church; (b) the spiritual struggle that underlies the advance of God's kingdom on earth; and (c) the Christian hope.

The Lord who gave us the Great Commission had known the end from the beginning. He had foreseen the advance of science and technology, and the changes to the way we see and do things. He has given us the principles and methods of missions that are always relevant and applicable. We are convinced that it is possible to hold firmly to a biblicism that avoids obscurantism.

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### 11.5. Summary

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### **Recommended Reading**

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- 2 Mangalwady, Vishal, 2012. The Book That Made Your World. Thomas Nelson. 297 pp.

# Twelve

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## OVERVIEW

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Missionary statesmen are missionary strategists. Most of them are retired missionaries who have acquired experience on the mission field and possess the God-given ability to see the big picture of missions. They often end up being seminary professors whose vision and burden lay confined to the Department of Missiology of the seminary. Others die on the mission fields, after heroically trying to get the home churches to capture their vision while patiently tweaking to improve on their missions strategies on the ground. Is there a bridge between these two scenarios, which does not compromise on the truth and yet is able to get the message across effectively to the right people?

### 12.1 What We Have Accomplished

We have propounded a covenantal perspective of missions. Missions is rooted in the eternal purpose of God. We are doing God's work. His sovereign purpose is unfolding before our eyes. None can stop or alter His plan. His chosen people will be gathered unto Himself. From the beginning, salvation has been revealed to be attained either by works or by grace. God's plan of salvation is to draw the elect to Himself through faith in Jesus Christ, so that they are saved by grace alone.

We have propounded an evangelical perspective of missions. Missions is grounded in the atoning death of Christ. The gospel of "Jesus

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Christ and Him crucified" must be preached from a passage of Scripture, with the Bible opened. The passage may be long or short, but it will yield the gospel if it constitutes a passage. The open Bible lends authority to the message that is preached. The preacher aims to make true disciples by getting a hearing for the gospel, and trusting in the Holy Spirit to save. A good grasp of the doctrine of salvation, as summarised in the Five Points of Calvinism, and of the Order of Salvation, will help the preacher in gospel proclamation so that the consciences of the hearers are appealed to. Understanding the relationship of the three faculties of the human personality to conscience will make the preacher a sharper evangelist and counsellor of souls.

We have propounded an Amillennial perspective of missions. Missions is crowned by the Great Commission which is a mandate given to the local church, to plant other local churches. The objective of the Great Commission is the calling out of the elect to form them into local churches. The scope of the Great Commission covers all the peoples in the world, of all generations, till Christ comes again. The risen Lord has promised to be present with His people to carry out this task. There is a spatial and a temporal aspect to this task. The "one thousand years" of Christ's reign has begun at Pentecost. It will end with His return to judge the world. The mystery that was hidden in time past is now revealed to us. All Israel, consisting of the elect from all the nations, will be saved.

We have shown that the Great Commission is equipped with its own methodology, which consists of principles and methods. Principles are to be followed always, while the methods are to be followed as closely as possible, with adaptation when needed. From the three elements of the Great Commission have been drawn out principles and methods to fulfil each sub-objective – to make disciples of the nations, to establish local churches as required by the need to baptise the disciples, and to build up the faith of the disciples and train them to be labourers who contribute to the fulfilment of the Great Commission. We must have a four-generation view of service to the Lord.

We have put forward the necessity of striving to be an ideal church while allowing the prospect of eternal life in heaven to condition the work of missions. Each church should strive for the ideal of submitting to Christ in His three offices, engaging in His threefold ministry, and conforming to the Three-Self Principle. It is desirable

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## 12.2. A Biblical Perspective

for the founding church to act as the flagship church to the churches that it has planted directly or indirectly, in the work of missions. As missiology developed through the centuries, helpful principles and insights have been uncovered while questionable innovations and departure from the Bible were seen. In particular, some sections of the Missional Church movement of today are a concern. Three aspects of missions that have been overlooked or under-emphasised, include: (a) the certainty of spiritual decline and apostasy in the churches; (b) the spiritual struggle that underlies the advance of God's kingdom on earth; and (c) the Christian hope. Instead of knee-jerk reactions to changing trends in society, missions must be firmly based on the teaching of Scripture.

## 12.2 A Biblical Perspective

The biblical basis of missions consists of the three theological perspectives woven together to form a "threefold cord that is not quickly broken" (Eccl. 4:12). The practice of missions arises from the methodology inherent in the Great Commission, which is elaborated by the overall teaching of Scripture. We have exegeted the relevant scriptures as we proceeded in our study of missions. Believing in the Reformation principle of "sola scriptura", we have drawn out principles and methods from the Scripture, applied them to various situations, and compared them with the approaches and methods advocated by others. We do not claim to have covered all grounds nor have spoken the last word on each subject. Here, we conduct an overview of the missions situation and compare it with the biblical perspective that has been expounded, before ending with some final applications.

The American Presbyterian missionary John Nevius (1829-1893) and his wife Helen arrived in China in 1853, spending most of their time in Shandong Province. Nevius engaged in itinerant ministry, travelling by horse, to plant churches. Through his experience, he strongly advocated the importance of establishing self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches. In 1890 Nevius was invited to explain his methods to the new missionaries in Korea. His method was adopted and shaped the Protestant church in Korea to this day. His book on missions, entitled "The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches", was published posthumously in

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America in 1899 (Nevius, 1899). The Three-Self Principle of Nevius was applied to the churches in China but hijacked by the Chinese government to support the Three-Self Patriotic Movement consisting of churches that are registered with the government and largely under its control. As a reaction, this gave rise to the house churches that are not registered with the government, facing its wrath often – with harassment and persecution. From a background of the synodical Presbyterian system, Nevius struggled to arrive at the principle of the Three-Self for the churches. We are not being facetious to note that if this principle were consistently carried out, the outcome would have been the planting of autonomous and independent local churches of the Reformed Baptist kind, infant sprinkling excepted.

Another missionary, the Anglican Roland Allen (1868-1947), served in China from 1895-1903, mainly in Shandong Province. He returned to Britain due to ill-health. His book "Missionary Methods: St. Paul's Or Ours" was published in 1912. This was followed by his essay, "The Spontaneous Expansion of The Church And the Causes which Hinder It" of 1927. What Allen was advocating may be described today as a grassroots movement of local Christians spreading the gospel. He advocated a "hands-off" approach to evangelism and to the administration of the new churches, with minimal theology and structure, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide the native believers. His stricture against the missionary approach of his time would have had the effect of making many open to his propositions – a case of pitting one extreme against another. For ourselves, we would see the biblical position as lying somewhere between the two extremes.

We have noted that the period 1900 to 1930 was a tumultuous time in the world. While churches in the West were facing the challenge of Theological Liberalism, missions in the east was undergoing re-assessment of its approach. James Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission died in China in 1905. The fires of revival in Korea, from 1907 to 1910, was spreading across the seas to Shandong Province in China. Allen couldn't have been ignorant of the revival, nor remained uninfluenced by what was happening in the Far East. The fruit of Allen's grassroots-minimalist principle is the house-church movement and the Back-to-Jerusalem movement (Hathaway, 2003). The house churches are ill-equipped to handle the many cults that have arisen, including the devastating Eastern Lightning. The Back to Jerusalem movement has the huge ambition to preach the



## 12.2. A Biblical Perspective

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gospel to all the countries lying between the 10 degrees and 40 degrees latitude of the globe, until arriving at Jerusalem. Many of the missionaries of this movement are poorly trained, if at all, going forth armed only with "a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2). The 'human wave attack' might be a legitimate infantry tactic, but not one taught in the Bible. There is no virtue in practising *song si* – a known Chinese concept meaning "to recklessly throw away one's life". A lady missionary of the movement in Egypt ended in the psychiatric ward of a hospital. A couple of the movement were killed in Pakistan (BBC, 2017). The zeal and sincerity of Brother Yun are admirable, but the explanation of his experiences would probably be revised with the passing of years (Yun, 2002).

We have considered the Welsh Baptist missionary Timothy Richard (Hattaway, 2018:28-33). He was among those who struggled over the self-support of the local churches as compared with foreign support. Related to this was the amount of control the foreign mission had over the local churches. Then, there was the struggle over the place of schools, hospitals, and orphanages in the work of missions. Richard was particularly successful in reaching to the intellectual class who then became influential over many. Richard faced criticism from home that he was veering to the social gospel. William Carey had faced similar charges from his missions board, leading to the severance of ties for a time (Appleby, 2007). Another area of struggle was for the newly planted churches to take on indigenous characteristics instead of being influenced by western churches. It was argued that the church buildings need not have steeples, and the church bell was unnecessary. This argument was then carried to the extreme of rejecting traditional forms of church government and worship styles such as the liturgy and the singing of hymns, which were replaced by pragmatic and even unbiblical styles of governance and worship. All these happened at a time when Pentecostalism was spreading rapidly, morphing into the Charismatic movement from the 1960's. At the front door was shouted, "We want to plant indigenous churches!" while through the back door came Pentecostalism which influenced the teaching, practice, and worship of the churches. Today, the house churches in China, the churches in north India, Indonesia, and north Borneo show strong Pentecostal influence. We are not suggesting that this was done mendaciously, but the outcome is there for everyone to see. A case in point was an

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incident that happened in north Borneo when a missionary "succumbed to phenomenon" and gave his imprimatur to what was obviously Charismatic influence (Lees, 1987:114-121). The floodgate to Charismatic practice was opened.

In the middle of the 20th century the Modern Church Growth movement came into prominence. The emphasis is on the presentation of the gospel in a culturally relevant way. There is heavy reliance on sociology and the scientific approach. Statistical studies are conducted to determine the relevance and effectiveness of any approach. Results measured in numbers are the indicators of the effectiveness of a method. This has led to the use of the seeker-sensitive methods of attracting people to church, the creation of cell groups, and the attempt to grow megachurches. Rick Warren's book "The Purpose-Driven Church" is a product of the Modern Church Growth movement (Warren, 1995). Don Richardson's approach of finding "redemptive analogies" reflects influence by this movement (Richardson, 1974). Another product of the Modern Church Growth movement is Phil Parshall who advocates heavy contextualisation in the evangelisation of Muslims – including the circumcision of male children, the use of the Muslim form of worship with Christian content, calling Christians the followers of Isa, etc. (Parshall, 1980). Combined with the influence of Pentecostalism, we have missionaries praying for dreams of Jesus Christ to be given to those they are reaching out to. The teaching of Romans 10:17 is overlooked – "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The Modern Church Growth movement does not seem to have patience with the Reformation principle of 'sola scriptura'.

The Missional Church movement which started around the beginning of the 21st century rides on the back of the Modern Church Growth movement. It is largely an urban phenomenon that builds congregations by attracting youths from other churches, to meetings that resemble karaoke lounges or pop-music festivals. The pop-band, electric guitars, slide projectors, and special lighting are used freely, with a good dose of showmanship. The congregation is encouraged to clap hands, or sway raised hands, in unison while singing. Many such congregations have left behind the embarrassingly wild antics of the Charismatic movement of the late 20th century – including mooing like cows and writhing on the ground like snakes, falling to the ground at a touch (being 'slain by the Spirit'), and the faith heal-

## 12.2. A Biblical Perspective

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ing fiasco of the Vineyard movement – but continue to cling on to tongue-speaking, healing, and prophecy. Those in the New Calvinist movement have embraced Calvinistic soteriology while holding on to Charismatic continuation of the sign gifts and to contemporary worship. They mislead many by calling themselves Reformed when they are hardly so. They are very much on the forefront of the Missional Church movement. The indications are that the pursuit of cultural relevance and the ‘incarnational lifestyle’ of the Missional Church movement are only thinly veiled worldliness. It will not be surprising if many professing believers in such churches drop like flies – or, are blown away like chaff (to use a biblical expression) – when outright persecution against the Christian faith occurs. These words are not written in malice. We are big-hearted enough to embrace in fellowship brethren who differ from us. We feel constrained to sound the alarm when there are departures from the truth, and when there is looming, and ongoing, persecution in many parts of the world.

The theories of missions put forth by writers from the 1900’s have mostly been based on personal observation and experience on the mission field. There are allusions made to the methods used by Paul, but without exegesis and careful exposition of the Great Commission itself, so that the cases they put forward are unconvincing and plagued with ambiguities. Theirs is the approach of pragmatism, bolstered by their reputation and experience as missionaries. We emphasise again that our disagreement with these men does not imply a questioning of their integrity or faith. Neither are we saying that no good has come out of their effort. Some of their conclusions, in fact, are what we believe to be biblical. An example is the Three-Self Principle. We arrive at the same conclusions – and more – by a different route, prompted initially by what they were saying. Furthermore, the stories of their lives are an inspiration to those who would care to read them. If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of these giants – with the Bible opened and a heart prostrated before the Lord.

We consider again the approach we have taken, which is to exegete the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, with reference to other relevant passages. We trust our readers have derived great satisfaction in seeing the Great Commission expounded holistically. We reproduce here the diagram showing our approach (Fig. 1.1).

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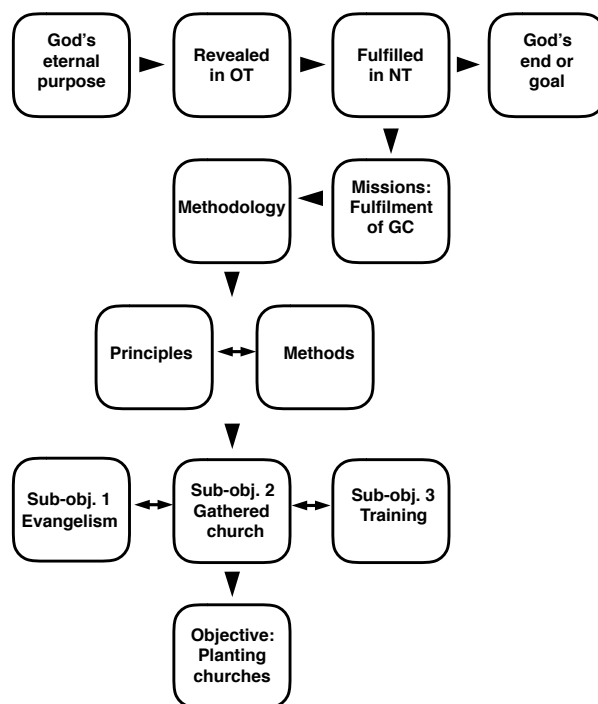


Fig. 1.1: Approach Towards Studying Missions

### 12.3 The Way Ahead

*For the Reformed Baptists*

While confining ourselves to the precincts of Scripture, and taking

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into consideration God's dealings with His people in history, we are tacitly advocating a Reformed Baptist perspective to missions. Reformed Baptists believe in the autonomy (self-rule) of the local church, the independency (freedom from external control) of the local congregation, and the communion (spiritual union) of like-minded churches. This places us in the best possible position to fulfil the Great Commission in the biblical way, compared to other denominations and missions organisations. Reformed Baptist churches have order, but are not hampered by denominational structures. Being independent and autonomous churches, there is great freedom for quick action. When one church goes astray, it is less likely to lead the whole denomination astray, for there is no denomination of the synodical type. Believing in the communion of churches means that the danger of anarchy is minimised. Having a regenerate membership means that our members have been made willing by the Lord to obey His word. Hebrews 8:11 says, "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Psalm 110 is messianic and concerns the gospel age. It says in verses 1-3,

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth.

What holds in theory may not be so in practice. A first step is to work towards being the churches that we ought to be, and to plant churches that would not go astray in the next generation. The apostle Paul first arrived in Ephesus in AD 52 (Acts 18:18-21). He stayed for three years to establish the church. The churches in Asia were planted. The apostle John wrote the book of Revelation in AD 96, in which the seven churches in Asia were warned of errors in doctrine, practice, and attitude, and exhorted to repent (Rev. 2-3). In less than fifty years, the churches planted and established by the apostles were showing serious departure from the truth. The lessons to us are clear. How should we be reforming ourselves and what sort of churches do we want to plant? We do not want to

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be nominally Reformed Baptist – claiming ourselves to be Reformed Baptist without knowing what that means or worse still, when we are not one. There are churches that are Calvinistic in soteriology and baptistic in ordinance, but are not necessarily Reformed Baptist.

We have mentioned that a church that is submitted to Jesus Christ as Head must submit to Him in all His three offices. Under the prophethood of Christ, the doctrine of the church must be right, preaching and teaching must have the primacy in the church's life, and a Confession of Faith will be adopted. Under priesthood, the worship must be right, the prayer meeting is indispensable, and proper pastoral care will be practised. Worship will include the correct administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and guided by the the Regulative Principle. Under the kingship of Christ, the government of the church must be right, corrective discipline will be upheld, and there will be involvement in missions. Furthermore, the ministry of the church is to be patterned after that of Christ (Matt. 4:23; 9:35), in which teaching is given in the church, outreach is made to win souls, and good works are quietly carried out in conjunction with teaching and outreach. Teaching the members of the church is obviously an outworking of the prophethood of Christ, while outreach is an outworking of the kingship of Christ. We have noted that in the Old Testament, kings led their armies into battle in the spring seasons (1 Chron. 20:1). Good works may be regarded as an outworking of the priesthood of Christ, who healed because of His high-priestly compassion (Matt. 14:14; Heb. 4:15). These are discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Poh, TR, 2017), but it suffices here to sketch the outlines. We represent the model of the church and its ministry as in Figure 12.1.

What should constitute the core characteristics of a Reformed Baptist church? In my book "What Is A Reformed Baptist Church?" I listed down seven characteristics of what it means to be "Reformed" and seven for what it means to be "Baptist" (Poh, RBC, 2017). They constitute what I would regard as the ideal situation, to which all Reformed Baptist churches should strive to achieve. They are as summarised in the table of Figure 12.2.

For our purpose here, we must be more generous and relax the core values. The churches we want to found must be committed to the following core characteristics<sup>1</sup> to qualify as a Reformed Baptist

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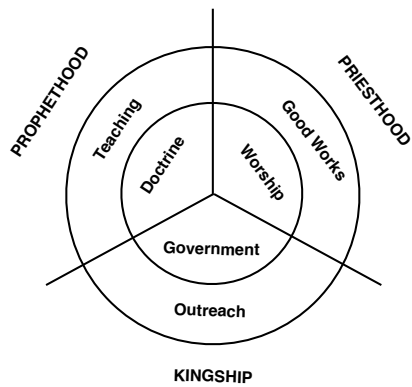


Fig. 12.1: Model of the Church and Ministry

Fig. 12.2: Characteristics of “Reformed” and “Baptist”

	REFORMED	BAPTIST
1	Thankfulness for the Reformation	The supremacy of Scripture
2	Commitment to the ‘Five Sola’s’	The Gathered Church
3	Commitment to the “Five Points of Calvinism”	The voluntary nature of discipleship
4	Commitment to a Confession of Faith	The baptism of believers by immersion
5	Commitment to the primacy of preaching	The headship of Christ
6	Commitment to the Regulative Principle of Worship	The priesthood and prophethood of all believers
7	Commitment to a covenantal view of salvation	The abiding relevance of the Great Commission

Church:

<sup>1</sup>Revised to six, instead of five, every pair of characteristics corresponding to

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- 1 The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith or its equivalent.
- 2 Systematic, expository, applied, preaching.
- 3 The Gathered Church, i.e. baptised believers who are covenanted together.
- 4 The Regulative Principle of Worship.
- 5 Rule by elders, and decisions made with congregational consent.
- 6 Fulfilment of the Great Commission.

No doubt, it is possible to have the trappings of a Reformed Baptist church but be devoid of spiritual life. It is important that we maintain spiritual vitality by constant self-examination, self-reformation, and fellowship with like-minded churches.

### *For all Evangelicals*

It is fashionable nowadays for various organisations – be they businesses, schools, foundations, hospitals, etc. – to have a "Statement of Mission" and a "Statement of Vision". By mission is meant what the organisation wants to do now. By vision is meant what the organisation hopes to be in the future. For our churches, the Statement of Mission would be to fulfil the Great Commission in all its fulness, by planting local churches. This is because the planting of local churches is the objective of the Great Commission. These local churches are to be sanctified in their membership in preparation for the return of the Lord. This may be regarded as the *grand objective* of the Great Commission, which is to build up the church of Jesus Christ by the sanctification of the local churches. Our Statement of Vision, therefore, is to be churches that are being sanctified as we fulfil the Great Commission, in preparation for the Lord's return. The sanctification of the church deserves some attention.

The sanctification of the individuals begins from their conversion, as can be seen in passages like 1 Peter 1:22-23,

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been

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one of the three offices of Christ.



### 12.3. The Way Ahead

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born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever..

and Romans 15:16; 16:25-26,

...that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

...to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—

The sanctification of local churches is by the ministry of the word, as seen in Ephesians 4:13-16,

...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

The sanctification of the local churches will lead to the sanctification of the universal church, as seen in Ephesians 5:26-27,

...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

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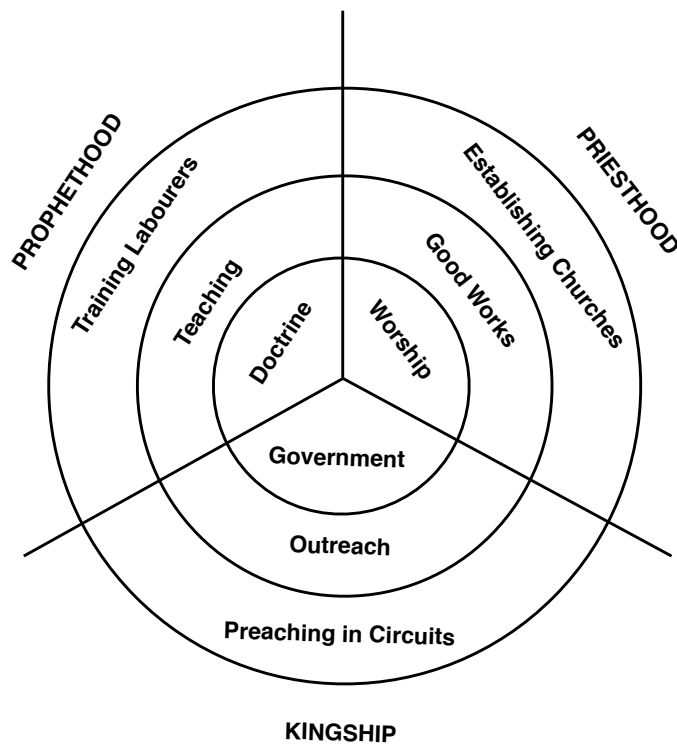
As the Great Commission is carried out, the elect are increasingly added into God's kingdom and sanctified in the local churches. The sanctification of the local churches in turn contributes to the sanctification of the universal church. The sanctification of the church is the work of Christ as High Priest (Eph. 5:2; Heb. 10:11-14). The Great Commission, therefore, is an extension of the ministry of the local church to the universal church, in preparation for the gathering of all God's people at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9-10). We shall then worship and serve the triune God for all eternity (Rev. 21:1-4)!

We have traversed the full cycle, seeing the Covenant of Grace revealed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New testament – with missions crowned by the Great Commission. The link between God's eternal purpose in eternity past and eternity future has been made (cf. Eph. 1:3-14). A four-generation view of ministry requires the training of labourers, the establishing of the churches that have been planted, and preaching in circuits to plant more churches while consolidating the existing works. These fall under the prophethood, the priesthood, and the kingship of Jesus Christ, respectively. We may, therefore, add another layer to the diagram of the church's ministry. The complete diagram is as in Figure 12.3.

At this point, a question may arise. Do we start from within the concentric circles, and work our way outward, or do we start from the outer circle, and work our way inward? In other words, do we slowly and steadily plant quality churches or do we plant many churches quickly and then slowly reform them? Adopting any extreme approach is inadvisable. Reformed Baptist churches in the West seem to have taken the first approach, while our brethren in Nepal and Sri Lanka seem to have taken the second. One approach is slow in planting new churches while focusing on reforming the existing church. The other approach is fast in planting churches which progress no further than "the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ" (Heb. 6:1). Often, it is not a case of consciously adopting an approach but unwittingly falling into that approach. After all, a comprehensive view of missions has not been put forward among Reformed Baptists – indeed, among other constituencies – up to this point. We would advocate focussing on quality rather than quantity, without being held back in the work of missions. Having one biblically sound church is better than having ten unsound churches that

### 12.3. The Way Ahead

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**Fig. 12.3: A Complete Ministry of the Church**

soon go astray to become veritable "synagogues of Satan" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). We keep in mind the principle that local church growth must go hand-in-hand with wider church planting (2 Cor. 10:15-16). We

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note at the same time that the churches in Asia, in the book of Revelation, are not only a warning to us of the possibility of going astray but also a norm of church ministry. The apostle Paul was thorough in building up a model church in Ephesus – preaching the gospel to win souls (Acts 20:20-21), establishing the church by declaring the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and quietly doing good works in conjunction with preaching and teaching the word of God (Acts 20:35). This church spawned the other churches in Asia. In this church Timothy was placed – to establish it (1 Tim.), and eventually to start a training school for preachers (2 Tim. 2:2).

### *Of statesmen and missionaries*

Missionary statesmen of the stature of William Carey and Hudson Taylor are hard to come by. God seems to raise up such fathers of Israel only sporadically. Such men have a few things in common – an intense love for their God, a passion for souls, dogged perseverance on the mission fields, and the ability to see the big picture spatially and temporally. The vast majority of missionaries are not missionary statesmen. They are content to fulfil their calling faithfully with no desire to be seen or known as leaders. Our understanding of missions links local outreach and wider church planting with the local church. Pastors have a duty to travel in circuit to initiate new works, teach the believers, and advise the local leaders in the mission fields without neglecting the welfare of the local church. The missionaries on the mission fields are held accountable to the home church, although they should be given the authority to make practical decisions on the ground. Policy decisions and major undertakings such as opening schools or moving to another mission field should be done only in consultation with the home/sending church which, ideally, co-operates with like-minded (supporting) churches within its sphere of ministry.

Our perspective of missions is all-encompassing and holistic. Tribal missions is only one aspect of missions which does not negate the validity and importance of inner city missions. A local church would have a particular area of focus in missions, as no one church can accomplish everything everywhere. The link between the mission field and the home church is clearly established, with the eldership of the home church having the general oversight while giving the missionaries the liberty to act as the situation demands on the ground. The

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pastor of the home church, in conjunction with those of the supporting churches, should visit the mission fields regularly, say, once a year. With modern transportation and communications, missionaries have the privilege of returning home on furlough on a regular basis, which was not possible for the earlier generations of missionaries. We see such furloughs, or sabbaticals, as a biblical practice. It was practised by the apostle Paul in his missionary journeys, and is consistent with the principle of preaching in circuit. We are told in Acts 14:26-28,

From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

In this regard, it should be noted that missionaries who are back on furlough should not be spending their time going around the churches doing so-called deputation visits – to canvass for financial and prayer support, to give reports, etc. After all, reports have been sent out to the churches on a regular basis. The profile of the missionaries should not be raised to such an extent that they are seen as occupying a separate and unique office in the church, much like that of the modern Christian counsellor in some churches. While loved and esteemed as servants of God, they are answerable to the sending church and are members of that church. In missions conferences, they may be invited to speak and give their perspectives and experiences but they should not be the main, or only, speakers. We have noted that many missionaries, although godly and zealous, are not as well-taught and well-trained as they could be. Many of them went into the mission fields at a young age. They might have had some theological training but they have not sat under systematic teaching in church for long. Their time on the mission fields involve teaching others on quite fundamental levels, with not much solid input of teaching to themselves. Unless mentored by an experienced missions-minded pastor – just as Timothy and Titus were mentored by Paul – it is more difficult for them to attain to the maturity of

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Timothy or Titus. Their time home on furlough and at missions conferences would be better spent in feeding upon biblical teaching given by pastors and other teachers, and in fellowship with other believers, rather than teaching others as *guru's* on missions. Pastors and churches, after all, are as much involved in missions as the missionaries.

### 12.4 Until He Comes!

At any moment, the number of people born into the world is more than the number of people born into the kingdom of God. As the Lord tarries in His return, the need for labourers in the mission field grows exponentially. How our hearts are burdened for souls to be saved, and for labourers to be sent! Yet, it is not God's will that any one church accomplishes everything. We are expected to do our utmost, and no more. Revivals occasionally come, in which the elect are swept into God's kingdom in big numbers. Revivals are the sovereign work of God, in response to preaching, prayer, and the confession of sins in God's people. After Pentecost, the Reformation of the 16th century was a watershed and may be considered the mother of all subsequent revivals. The Holy Spirit sovereignly worked in the hearts of many, turning them to the Lord for salvation. The people engaged in reformation of the churches and the preaching of the gospel. Lasting good came out of the revival which was the Reformation. For the gains of revivals to be sustained, there must be the accompanying reformation of the churches. The sovereignty of God encompasses human responsibility. While waiting for revivals to come, we must patiently and faithfully carry out the Great Commission. Here is a song to comfort and strengthen us as we carry out the Great Commission.

God did plan from eternity  
To save all of His elect;  
In the fulness of time Christ came,  
Freedom from sin to effect;  
Risen from death, in heav'n seated,  
His Spirit makes us perfect.

Make us willing, faithful servants,

#### 12.4. Until He Comes!

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O Lord our God, Yours to be;  
Our sins subdue, our gifts refine,  
Make us useful and holy;  
Through our High Priest we bring our plea,  
Cleanse and strengthen us daily.

The Lord has all authority  
In heav'n above or on earth;  
He subdues all opposition,  
Bringing many sons to birth;  
In triumph our King will come to judge,  
And turn dark days into mirth.

*Refrain:*

*Arise! Arise! Fill up the ranks!  
Respond to the clarion call!  
His word proclaim, His might unveil,  
Hard hearts will melt, strongholds fall!  
Carry your cross, whate'er the loss,  
By heav'n's glory they are small!*

(To the tune of *Bryn Calfaria* or *True Pearl of the Orient*. The music score of the latter tune is given in Figure 12.4. The tune can be heard at the link shown in (Poh, 2004). The song is sung to a slightly different arrangement at (Poh, 2019).)

Soon, everyone will face his or her end. One's life on earth is so limited. One can do only that much in a lifetime. A generation seems to pass at the blink of the eye. Having done all, by God's power, we await the return of the Lord who will renew all things. With great longing we wait for the marriage supper of the Lamb. With great longing we await the dawn of the new age. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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Fig. 12.4 True Pearl Of The Orient



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