

Today our Lord is reigning over the universe and executing God's plan, or *economy*. But before He ascended to the heavens, He commissioned His disciples to go forth and disciple all the nations (Matt. 28:19-20). To disciple the nations requires our labor mainly in four areas. We labor in preaching the gospel, in feeding the newly saved, in perfecting the saints, and in bringing the perfected saints into prophesying for the building up of the church. This is the commission that God has charged us to carry out.

Preaching the Gospel

The first responsibility of our commission is to preach the gospel. We preach the gospel of Jesus Christ that sinners may be saved to become the members of Christ for the building up of His Body. The salvation that God has prepared is not a shallow one. God's salvation makes sinners into the members of Christ. Those who receive the gospel are baptized into the one Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13), becoming His very members. God saves men to this extent! As the members of Christ's Body, the saved sinners must be built up together (Eph. 4:16) to be His corporate expression.

While God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), none can be saved without the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:13-15). God has entrusted the believers in Christ with the gospel (1 Thes. 2:4), and through our preaching men are saved by Him. While God is always ready to save, we must be willing to preach. Preaching the gospel is not a light matter. To preach the gospel we must constantly contact people, not just for a few days or weeks but year round, and we must regularly visit them until they repent and receive God's salvation. We must labor on them in patience and with endurance. Our Lord Jesus Himself had

continual contact with people and visited many during the years of His public ministry on the earth (Matt. 9:35; Mark 6:6; Luke 13:22); He also sent His disciples out to visit people with the gospel (Luke 9:1-2; 10:1-9). After the Lord's ascension, the early believers followed His pattern and went out to visit people everywhere with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:1, 4; 26:19-20). Today we carry out the same commission by visiting our relatives, neighbors, friends, and colleagues and sharing with them the good news of God's salvation, and we bear this commission to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). Our hope is that all men would be saved to become the members of Christ and to be brought into the building up of His Body through our preaching of the gospel.

Feeding the New Believers

Those who have been newly saved, like all living things, require nourishment in order to grow in life. We have been commissioned to preach the gospel, but our commission also includes nourishing those who have been saved through us. The Lord Jesus charged Peter to feed His lambs (John 21:15-17), and Peter took the Lord's charge seriously, for years later he was still feeding the Lord's lambs through his letters. In one letter he wrote, "As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2), and he exhorted the leading ones of the churches to "shepherd the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5:2). Paul also cared for the believers in the way of nourishing them, as he writes in one of his letters: "But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children" (1 Thes. 2:7). We too bear this burden for nourishing the believers today. Every

new believer is a spiritual baby who requires the continual nourishing. Through this nourishing the new ones can be kept alive and can grow in life unto their full salvation.

The nourishing of the newly saved ones is to be done regularly and consistently. To accomplish this, we visit the new believers in their homes or meet with them in any place available, week after week. During these regular times of care, we lead the new believers to exercise their regenerated spirits, read the Bible, sing spiritual songs, and pray to the Lord. By these, they are fed with the riches of Christ and are supplied with the divine life that they may grow spiritually. Only through such regular and consistent nourishment can the new ones stay alive and be healthy in the Christian life.

Perfecting the Saints

The third item of our commission is the perfecting of the saints. The apostle Paul speaks of this in his letter to the Ephesians: "And He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ" (4:11-12). God desires that all the believers would be perfected for the work of the ministry, which is the building up of the Body of Christ. It is clear from Paul's words that the Lord has entrusted this perfecting work to His believers; thus, it is also a part of our commission.

The saints are perfected through mutual shepherding, mutual care, mutual intercession, and mutual teaching in small groups (Heb. 10:24-25). This is done mostly in the homes of the saints, in groups of about ten to fifteen, week after week.

During these small group meetings, the brothers and sisters ask questions of one another and answer each other in mutuality. There is no need for appointed speakers or teachers, for all the believers can perfect others to some extent. By being open to the good deposit in one another, all the saints can be perfected by all the members in these small groups. Paul speaks of this mutual perfecting in Ephesians 4:16: "All the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." As believers in Christ, we pursue this perfecting of the saints in all the churches.

Bringing the Perfected Saints into Prophesying

God desires the building up of the Body of Christ, and according to the Scriptures, the practicality of the building up of the Body of Christ is by the saints' prophesying in the meetings of the church. Paul says, "But he who prophesies speaks building up and encouragement and consolation to men...He who prophesies builds up the church" (1 Cor. 14:3-4). The prophesying that is spoken of here, the prophesying that builds the church, is not a kind of foretelling; rather, it is a kind of "forth-telling." This is also a meaning of the Ancient Greek word that Paul uses. To prophesy in this way is to speak *for* God and to speak *forth* Christ so that the saints can be edified and the churches can be built. This is a divine speaking that the believers alone are privileged to participate in. As the apostle Paul charges us, all believers should desire earnestly to prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1). Such prophesying consummates the building up of the Body of Christ.

In order to have the proper prophesying, there is the need for bigger meetings (1 Cor. 14:23-25). These can be either the meetings of an entire local church, if the church is small, or the district meetings of a larger church. In these gatherings of around fifty saints, all can prophesy one by one, and all can learn and be encouraged (1 Cor. 14:31). Ultimately, every believer should be brought into this function of speaking for God and speaking forth Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ.

These four matters are our commission from God. We desire to remain in this commission until Christ comes back, and we earnestly expect to see the consummation of the building up of the Body of Christ, which will usher in the Lord's triumphant return. What a privilege to labor with God in this great universal enterprise!

Our Commission

*To Preach the Gospel,
to Feed the New Believers,
to Perfect the Saints,
& to Bring the Saints
into Prophesying*

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P. O. Box 2121
Anaheim, CA 92814

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