

THE TASK OF THE GREAT COMMISSION: THE METHOD OF DISCIPLESHIP[†]

by
David M. Doran*

*And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech
or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to
know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*

(1 Cor 2:1–2)¹

Although Matthew 28:19–20 does not present to us a definitive process for making disciples, fulfilling its basic command demands answering the question, how are disciples made? Historically, that question has been answered in simple terms like evangelism or gospel proclamation. The church viewed the Great Commission as a mandate to take the gospel to the ends of the earth so that it could be proclaimed to the lost. The other commission texts make this explicit: “preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15), “that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations” (Luke 24:47), “you shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8, cf. Luke 24:48), and “you will testify also” (John 15:27).

Proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ was viewed as the key to making disciples and, therefore, as the key to fulfilling the Great Commission. So, it should not surprise us to find the book of Acts records the disciple-making mission of the church in terms of the ministry of the Word. Perhaps the clearest text which joins these ideas is Acts 6:7, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of

[†]This article is an excerpt from a forthcoming book written for the Student Global Impact National Conference. David M. Doran, Pearson L. Johnson, and Ben Eckman, *For the Sake of His Name: Challenging a New Generation with the Cause of World Missions* (Allen Park, MI: SGI, 2001). For more information on the conference and/or the book, visit the SGI web site (<http://www.studentglobalimpact.org>).

*Dr. Doran is President and Professor of Practical Theology at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, and Pastor of the Inter-City Baptist Church in Allen Park, MI.

¹All Scripture quotations are taken from the NASB, 1995 update, unless otherwise noted.

disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great number of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” This text makes clear the connection between the ministry of the Word (cf. 6:1–6) and the task of disciple making. This is confirmed by the repeated stress in Acts on the spread of the Word (e.g., 12:24, 13:49, 19:20) and on the priority of preaching (e.g., 6:4, 14:15, 15:35, 18:5, 28:31). Viewed from the perspective of Acts, the Great Commission’s fulfillment was through the proclamation of the Word.

This is not restricted to the book of Acts. The Epistles reinforce this understanding of the Great Commission as well. In Romans 10:13–17, Paul unambiguously argues for the absolute necessity of verbal proclamation of the gospel if the work of missions is to be accomplished. The logic of his argument is irrefutable: since salvation is obtained only by explicit faith in Jesus Christ, then only those who have heard about and called upon Jesus Christ can be saved. This argument crescendos with the words, “so faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” And, based on vv. 14–15, both the word and the hearing are inseparably tied to a preacher.

In 1 Corinthians 1:17–2:5, Paul makes an extended argument for the importance of preaching, and of preaching the clear, undiluted gospel of the cross. Apparently the sophisticated Corinthians desired something less offensive and moronic than this message and method. Yet Paul’s defense of gospel proclamation proves that it is not simply *one* of the methods God intends to use to accomplish the Great Commission—it is *the* God-ordained method. The message of the cross is the means by which the Great Commission is to be fulfilled.

The remarkable work of God in Thessalonica also confirms that the ministry of the Word is the key to fulfilling the Great Commission. Notice how Paul summarizes this work:

⁵For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what manner of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything (1 Thess 1:5–8).

The Word is central to all that happens here. The apostolic ministry is described in terms of the Word, and the conversion of the Thessalonians is viewed as receiving the Word. The powerful transformation that the Word produces *in* them makes them into a model group of believers because the Word sounds out *from* them. They became Christians through the Word and they live like Christians by giving out the

Word. No wonder Paul requested these same believers to “pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you” (2 Thess 3:1).

THE SHIFTING SHAPE OF EVANGELICAL MISSIONS

The evidence that the fulfillment of the Great Commission is the proclamation of the gospel through the ministry of the Word is overwhelming; yet there has been a considerable shift in missions thinking and literature away from this position. It is my contention that this shift is out of step with the Scriptures and seriously threatens the fulfillment of Christ’s Commission to His church. The reality of this threat cannot be denied and it should not be ignored.

Mission or Missions?

When considering the decline of the Student Volunteer Movement for Missions,² one major factor that must be recognized is the shift from proclamation evangelism to the so-called larger or holistic evangelism.³ Sadly, evangelicalism has retraced these downward steps in the years since the Congress for World Evangelization was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. Prior to the conference, there was considerable debate about the relationship between evangelism and social action. Some considered that debate to be the “unfinished business” of the last major evangelical conference on evangelism which met in Berlin during 1966.⁴ In the eight years between these conferences, there was considerable movement in the direction of social action among the evangelicals. Consider the positive assessment of Edward Dayton:

In the eight years between Berlin and Lausanne, there was tremendous movement in the evangelical part of Christ’s church.... Lausanne was intended to be a congress of those involved in trying to reach the world; but the Holy Spirit was also enlivening the minds of men and women to

²*For the Sake of His Name* begins by recounting the history of the Student Volunteer Movement for Missions, originally a powerful force for world missions that began in the 1800s and encouraged thousands of college students to go to the mission fields of the world. Cf. Timothy Wallstrom, *The Creation of a Student Movement to Evangelize the World* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International, 1980).

³Ben Eckman, “A Movement Torn Apart,” in *For the Sake of His Name*, chapter two. Cf. also Arthur Johnston, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1978).

⁴Johnston, *Battle for World Evangelism*, p. 221.

expand our understanding of what it meant to evangelize. The Lausanne Covenant greatly broadened our worldviews. We were called to see that the task of evangelization was not confined to the sharing of information about Jesus. There was a life to be lived. We saw the need for the broad redemption of the world in all its aspects.... The year of Lausanne—1974—might also be described as a watershed year in Western evangelicals' interest in social concerns.⁵

What Dayton considers to be progress, I contend was regress—a return to the flawed thinking of the ecumenical movement that had embraced a social agenda that displaced evangelism.

Perhaps the chief architect and proponent of this shift in thinking is John Stott, a prolific writer and leader of the Lausanne Movement. From his work on the publication of the Lausanne Covenant and its attending exposition and commentary to his own books on this issue, Stott has set the agenda for inclusion of a social action agenda among evangelicals. He has set out to do this to counter what he perceived to be the past failure of evangelicalism. In his words:

One of the most notable features of the worldwide evangelical movement during the last ten to fifteen years [c. 1970–1985] has been the recovery of our temporarily mislaid social conscience. For approximately fifty years (c. 1920–70) evangelical Christians were preoccupied with the task of defending the historic biblical faith against the attacks of theological liberalism, and reacting against its “social gospel.” But now we are convinced that God has given us social as well as evangelistic responsibilities in his world.⁶

Stott, confirming Dayton's assessment, pinpoints Lausanne as the “turning-point for the worldwide evangelical constituency” because it set forth the principle that both evangelism and socio-political involvement are part of the Christian duty.⁷

How did the “worldwide evangelical constituency” come to see that socio-political involvement was part of the Christian duty? The pivotal shift in thinking was demonstrated and advanced by the redefinition of the Christian mission. Historically, the terms mission and missionary focused our attention on the evangelistic/discipleship mandate given to us by the Lord. Stott, and others, called for a redefinition of that term so that mission summarized all “that Christ sends His

⁵Edward R. Dayton, “Social Transformation: The Mission of God,” in *The Church in Response to Human Need*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 53.

⁶John Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1990), p. xi.

⁷Ibid., pp. 9–10.

people into the world to do” and that this “cannot be limited to proclamation evangelism.”⁸ More directly, he argues:

Instead of seeking to evade our social responsibility, we need to open our ears and listen to the voice of him who calls his people in every age to go out into the lost and lonely world (as he did), in order to live and love, to witness and serve, like him and for him. For that is “mission.” Mission is our human response to the divine commission. It is the whole Christian lifestyle, including both evangelism and social responsibility, dominated by the conviction that Christ sends us out into the world as the Father sent him into the world, and that into the world we must therefore go—to live and work for him.⁹

For Stott, the Christian mission is dual: evangelism and social action. This subtle shift in terminology, missions to mission, represented an enormous shift in theology and philosophy.

Though Lausanne articulated a logical priority for evangelism, it clearly argued that *both* evangelism and social action are parts of the Christian mission. The Lausanne Covenant went so far as to “express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive.”¹⁰ The exposition and commentary on these words go even further:

We express penitence both for our neglect of our Christian social responsibility and for our naïve polarization in having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. This confession is mildly worded. A large group at Lausanne, concerned to develop a radical Christian discipleship, expressed themselves more strongly, “We must repudiate as demonic the attempt to drive a wedge between evangelism and social action.”¹¹

So, what actually surfaces is less two distinct parts of one mission, and more two activities that cannot be separated from each other, that is, as we do one, we must do the other. Further work by the Lausanne Movement fleshed out the details of the relationship between evangelism and social action. In 1982 *The Grand Rapids Report on Evangelism and Social Responsibility* elaborated a three-fold relationship:

First, social activity is a *consequence* of evangelism. That is, evangelism is the means by which God brings people to new birth, and their new

⁸John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 342.

⁹Stott, *Decisive Issues*, p. 15.

¹⁰John Stott, ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974–1989* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 24.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 24.

life manifests itself in service to others.... We can go further than this, however. Social responsibility is more than the consequence of evangelism; it is also one of its principal aims.

Secondly, social activity can be a *bridge* to evangelism. It can break down prejudice and suspicion, open closed doors, and gain a hearing for the Gospel. Jesus himself sometimes performed works of mercy before proclaiming the good news of the kingdom....

Thirdly, social activity not only follows evangelism as its consequence and aim, and precedes it as its bridge, but also accompanies it as its *partner*. They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird. This partnership is clearly seen in the public ministry of Jesus, who not only preached the Gospel but fed the hungry and healed the sick. In his ministry, *kerygma* (proclamation) and *diakonia* (service) went hand in hand. His words explained his works, and his works dramatized his words. Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be ours....

Thus, evangelism and social responsibility, while distinct from one another, are integrally related in our proclamation of and obedience to the Gospel. The partnership is, in reality, a marriage.¹²

Given this frame of reference, it is not surprising, then, to find one of the members of this consultation draw the following conclusion: "And what is social transformation for the Christian? Is it not the entire business that God is about, namely, the redemption of the world? And is not the mission of the church social transformation in every dimension?"¹³

Incarnation or Proclamation?

As you may have noticed in the previous section, much (if not all) of the basis for the transition from missions to mission is said to be based on the example of Jesus Christ. Particularly, John Stott has set forth the argument that two texts from John's Gospel form the proper basis for the Christian mission: "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" and "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me into the world, I also send you" (John 17:18 and 20:21 respectively). Commenting on the Lausanne Covenant, Stott writes:

The opening affirmation echoes the prayer and the commission of Jesus (John 17:18; 20:21): *we affirm that Christ sends his redeemed people into the world as the Father sent him*. It recognizes that Christ's mission in the world is to be the model of the church's (NB, the "as-so" in both texts),

¹²Ibid., pp. 181–182.

¹³Dayton, "Social Transformation," p. 54.

and that *this calls for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world*.¹⁴

The backbone of Stott's position is the "as-so" language in these two texts. He understands this language to establish a model for our mission, an Incarnational model.

For if the Christian mission is to be modeled on Christ's mission, it will surely involve for us, as it did for him, an entering into other people's worlds.... Incarnational mission, whether evangelistic or social or both, necessitates a costly identification with people in their actual situations.¹⁵

In another place he develops the argument further:

Nor do I feel able to withdraw the conviction that our mission is to be modeled on Christ's. Just as his love for us is like the Father's love for him, so his sending us into the world is like his Father's sending him into the world. If words and works went together in his ministry, they should also in ours.¹⁶

Stott does not hesitate to establish these texts as teaching *the* normative pattern for mission:

Now he sends us into the world, as the Father sent him into the world. In other words, our mission is to be modeled on his. Indeed, all authentic mission is incarnational mission. It demands identification without loss of identity. It means entering other people's worlds, as he entered ours, though without compromising our Christian convictions, values or standards.... That is the principle of incarnation. It is identification with people where they are.¹⁷

My contention is that by means of these two modifications the landscape of evangelical missions was dramatically altered. The shift from missions to mission opened the door to an aggressive social action agenda that was legitimized as an essential part of the Christian mission. The re-shaping of the Christian mission into an incarnational, versus proclamational, model solidified the view that our words *and* works have equal place in witness; in fact, without the works, according to this view, our words will lack credibility.

I have taken pains, and considerable space, to present this position carefully for two reasons. First, as a matter of procedure, we must know what is being said before we can evaluate it properly. I have no interest in destroying a straw man, so I wanted to allow you to see

¹⁴John Stott, *Making Christ Known*, p. 29.

¹⁵*Decisive Issues*, pp. 21–22.

¹⁶*Contemporary Christian*, p. 342.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 358.

what has been said so you can evaluate both it and my critique of it. Second, and perhaps more concerning to me, is the fact that I have heard many of these same arguments beginning to filter their way into fundamentalist preaching and teaching on missions and evangelism. In showing where this language and these concepts originated *and* where they have led, my hope is that it will cause us to think very carefully about the far-reaching ramifications of simple sounding shifts in terms and concepts.

EVALUATING HOLISTIC MISSION AND THE INCARNATIONAL MODEL

So what is wrong with Stott's definition of mission and articulation of the incarnational model for ministry? I believe we should begin by questioning the somewhat arbitrary choice to make John 17:18 and 20:21 the definitive texts regarding mission. In light of the unmistakable emphasis in all of the other commission texts on proclamation, it seems very strained to redefine mission on the basis of these two, somewhat obscure, texts. By obscure, I mean that they do not specify the nature of our commission, that is, they do not at all tell us *what* we are to do. In terms of biblical interpretation, the proper way to approach the issue of mission would be to correlate all of the commission texts by moving from the clear texts to the more obscure. For some reason, Stott actually works in the other direction. Matthew 28:19–20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, and Acts 1:8 are all to be made to fit inside of the incarnational model. But the focus in each of the other texts is clearly on proclamation, not incarnation. The proper method of study would be to determine how John 17:18 and 20:21 fit into what the other texts say.

But even if we accept Stott's argument that these two verses establish the biblical paradigm for missions, his claim that these texts are intended to teach an incarnational model for missions is mistaken. By choosing to focus on the two words "as-so" Stott misses the point of these texts. Viewed in the larger context of John's gospel, the focus is clearly on the words "sent" (17:18) and "sent/send" (20:21). In fact, by focusing on the "as-so" portion, Stott turns the entire discussion into how Jesus came, not how He was sent by the Father, and the "sending" is the point of the texts. Just as Jesus was sent by His Father to do the Father's will, the disciples are now commissioned by the Son to do His will and carry out His work. John 4:34 provides the backdrop for this language and concept, "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.'" The language

of sending (used 41 times in John's Gospel) communicates delegated authority and responsibility for obedience on the part of the one sent.¹⁸ In Jesus' case, He demonstrated His complete dependence upon and total obedience to the Father.¹⁹ If there is a model presented for the disciples here, this is it—we are to walk in dependence upon and obedience to Jesus Christ, since He is now the Sender and we are the sent ones.

Of particular interest is the connection in John's Gospel between the language of sending/going and the themes of harvest, fruitbearing, and witness.²⁰ For example:

- I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor (4:38).
- You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you (15:16).
- When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning (15:26–27).

The key to understanding what Jesus meant in 17:18 and 20:21 is the use of the “sent” idea in 4:34–38. There, Jesus, in an evangelistic context, says that “His food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” Growing out His own commitment to do His Father's will (that is, participate in the harvest, cf. vv. 35–37), He sends the disciples into the harvest (v. 38).

Even the immediate context of John 17:18 and 20:21 make it clear that Jesus is not commissioning His disciples to engage in social action. That idea is completely foreign to the context of these texts, and to import it from other passages in the Gospels is not legitimate. As Carson notes, “To appeal to several verses from Luke to establish what is central to John's understanding of mission is indefensible.”²¹ We should be asking, what do the immediate contexts of these verses tell us about the mission Jesus has in mind for the disciples? If we look in John 17 for the answer to that question, we don't have to look too far

¹⁸Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Mission of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 107.

¹⁹Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 648.

²⁰Köstenberger, *Mission of Jesus and the Disciples*, p. 141.

²¹Carson, *Gospel According to John*, p. 648.

to see that the mission of Jesus was to make the Father's name known to the disciples by giving them His word. Verses 4–6 make this clear:

I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

It is crucial to see the connections here: (1) Jesus did the “work” He was sent to do; (2) that work is described as manifesting the Father's name to the men given to Christ “out of the world”; and (3) the fact that they were given to Christ is evidenced by their having “kept” the Father's word. So, in context, the sending that Jesus has in mind, if it is patterned after His, is a sending that involves the manifestation of Christ's name through the Word. This is confirmed by the emphasis on the word in vv. 8, 14, 17, and especially 20, where Jesus says, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me *through their word*.” The focus of this passage is not on the incarnation; it is on the proclamation of God's Word.

The same may be said about the context of 20:21. While it is part of a very complicated passage, the text following the sending language immediately addresses the issue of forgiveness of sins, not works of mercy or service. The symbolic bestowal of the Spirit (v. 22) is tied to the commission in v. 21.²² The Spirit's ministry is presented throughout John's Gospel as clearly connected to the task of witnessing (cf. 3:34; 15:26–27; 16:7–11), not to mention that both Luke and Acts tie the reception of the Spirit to the task of witnessing (Luke 24:47–49; Acts 1:8).

There is simply nothing in the contexts of these verses to make an argument for social action. To the contrary, the context clearly establishes that the disciples were being sent by Jesus Christ to bear witness to Him and that others would believe on Jesus through their word. Köstenberger states the case against Stott's position quite forthrightly:

The notion of the disciples' mission as “service to humanity” founded on the model of Jesus' mission appears, contrary to Stott's assertions, to be inconsistent with the Fourth Gospel's teaching on mission. A focus on human service and on human need, though often characteristic of contemporary mission practice, is not presented in the Fourth Gospel as the primary purpose of either Jesus' or the disciples' mission.²³

²²As the words, “And when He had said this” indicate, cf. Carson, *Gospel According to John*, p. 649.

²³*Mission of Jesus and the Disciples*, p. 215.

Along side of these textually governed arguments for rejecting Stott's view, we must add two theological arguments. First, the connection that Stott draws between the works of Jesus Christ and social action is very weak. The Lord's works were miracles—He fed the hungry by turning a few loaves of bread and fish into enough to feed thousands as a display of supernatural power. The leap from that to opening a soup kitchen is woefully simplistic and stretches credibility. To move from miraculous healings to providing medical services is, from my perspective, equally suspect. His miracles were unique and served a sovereign purpose for authenticating His Messiahship (cf. Matt 11:4–5; John 2:11). There can be no doubt that Jesus was moved with compassion by the hurts and needs of people, but it is wrong to conclude that the miracles were primarily a matter of compassion. The Lord of Glory clearly possessed sufficient power to heal everyone, but did not.

Against the kind of argument that Stott (and others) makes are the very words of Jesus Himself when confronted with the pressing needs of people. Mark 1:36–38 establishes the proper place of Christ's miracles in His overall ministry:

Simon and his companions searched for Him; they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You." He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for."

Here the self-confessed purpose of Jesus is to preach—in His words, "that is what I came for." Those words fit perfectly with what we saw in John 4:34–38 and especially John 17:4–6. The words and works of Jesus were not on equal footing; the works served the words.

A second theological concern is centered on Stott's use of the language of incarnation to describe our mission and ministry. To state the concern bluntly, the incarnation is an unrepeatably and unique miracle that should not be trivialized by calling it a "cross cultural journey" or comparing it to the "Apollo mission to the moon."²⁴ Scripturally, the Son of God became incarnate (was made "flesh and blood") so that He could "make propitiation for the sins of the people" (cf. Heb 2:14–17). He had to become incarnate because He existed immaterially from all eternity; by definition, human beings are already incarnate! Stott's language sounds nice, but in reality the "incarnation" of which he speaks is reduced to identifying with those to whom you minister. This reduction seems to cheapen the incredible miracle of the incarnation that is presented to us in Scripture. Köstenberger, again, provides a profound critique of Stott:

²⁴Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, p. 357.

Stott, by focusing on Jesus' *incarnation* as a model for the church's mission, seems to be at odds with the Fourth Gospel's presentation of Jesus' incarnation as thoroughly unique, unprecedented, and unrepeatable (cf. especially the designation *monogenes* in 1:14, 18; 3:14, 18). The incarnation is linked with Jesus' eternal preexistence (cf. 1:1, 14) and his unique relationship with the Father (cf. 1:14, 18).²⁵

The bottom line is that the incarnation is distinctly and uniquely Christological. And, as others have properly noted, if Stott can call for the church to adopt an incarnational model based on John 17:18 and 20:21, why does he not call us to imitate Christ's atonement? On what basis does he choose between the two?²⁶ I believe his choices are controlled by his agenda, not the text. In his zeal to promote social action, he has forced a lot of excess baggage into two Bible verses and a theological concept. It is time for us to drop the baggage and return to the clear command of Jesus Christ to be His witnesses.

A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO THE GREAT COMMISSION

What I have been writing flows out of one very important, deep conviction: the mission that Jesus Christ has given to His church cannot be fulfilled apart from the proclamation of the Word. It has also been informed by a very deep concern: the contemporary church is losing sight of this truth and many are losing the resolve to stand against this terrible tide. I believe what we have set forth in this essay has some very important implications for the task of missions.

First, we cannot fall prey to the idea that the Great Commission means evangelism alone, especially if it is cut off from discipleship. Christ has commanded us to make disciples, not count up evangelistic decisions. If all we have is a choice between getting the gospel to a group of people in a one-time shot or doing nothing, obviously, we should take the one-time shot and trust God to do the rest. But it is not legitimate to turn that decision into a ministry goal or guideline. The Great Commission is not fulfilled until there are disciples who are abiding in the teachings of Jesus Christ and bearing fruit through Him. We must consistently make that our objective, strategizing and striving toward that end.

Second, the main, if not exclusive, thrust of any missions program must be on the establishment of long-term discipleship that results in

²⁵*Mission of Jesus and the Disciples*, p. 216.

²⁶Köstenberger, *Mission of Jesus and the Disciples*, p. 216; Johnston, *Battle for World Evangelism*, p. 406.

an indigenous and self-perpetuating church movement. The proper focus of all missionary activity must be upon the spread of the Word, for it, through the work of the Spirit, is the power that produces disciples.

This leads to important implications for missionaries. I believe it means that preaching must be in the forefront of all missionary endeavors. And it means that training pastors/preachers is essential work for missionaries since the spread of the gospel in any region is dependent from a human perspective on their ministry. And, I believe that this means that all missionaries should be evangelists in the truest sense of the term, preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ calling men and women to repentance and faith in Him.