

OUTSOURCING THE GREAT COMMISSION

Since 1994 and the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), there has been much debate about the outsourcing of American jobs to other countries which offer a much cheaper labor force. The outsourcing debate today centers around the possibility of a large tax increase upon United States job producers.

Sadly, there has been a slow digression in the Lord's church towards outsourcing the responsibilities and obligations of the local congregation to another larger entity. Just recently, I read an invitation from the Gospel Broadcasting Network (GBN) wherein was stated, "the world is rapidly approaching seven billion souls; the United States alone has a population of 325 million souls. In order to address this challenging command [*the Great Commission*, B.G.], large events like this one...**simply must take place**" (emphasis B.G.). The logical implication then is that without "large events like this one," the command, "go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16) cannot be addressed. This is as unscriptural as it can possibly be. When the Great Commission was given in the 1st century, there were no television or radio stations, and Jesus gave no stipulation that "large events like this one...simply must take place" in order for this command to be obeyed. Just the opposite is taught in the New Testament. The apostle Paul told the Colossian brethren that the Gospel had already been "preached to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. 1:23). Also in the 1st century, many congregations which were small enough to meet in members' homes were commended for their faithfulness to God (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phm. 2). The apostle Paul called upon Titus to "ordain elders in every city" (Tit. 1:5), with the understanding that they could oversee and perform the work of the church in their respective local communities. The New Testament is very clear that the local congregation can very effectively and efficiently do the work of the Lord and fulfill the Great Commission. To say otherwise is shameful and unscriptural. God's design for the church is that each local congregation be autonomous and therefore able to obey God's commands irrespective of other local congregations. Scriptural authority exists for local congregations to work together in fulfilling the work of the church (Phi. 4:15-16; 2 Cor. 11:8), but it is sinful to imply that the local congregation cannot obey God's commands without the help of some larger entity. If each local congregation will follow God's pattern faithfully, the work of the church will be done. If local congregations choose to send the Lord's money to another organization to do the work of evangelizing for them, then the work of the church will not be done in their respective communities. This idea of outsourcing the Great Commission to others is dangerous and harmful to the success of the church of Christ. Evangelism, benevolence, and edification are works of the church for which each local congregation, individually, is responsible. Though congregations may work together, the work of the church cannot be outsourced. The GBN Newsletter (May, 2009) states, "our present annual budget is \$2,100,000; but, for the money, we know of absolutely no other way to reach as many people as effectively." Do you know how many new local congregations could be planted all across the United States with 2.1 million dollars? If the church of Christ had more faithful congregations in more areas of need, the work of the church would be done infinitely more effectively and efficiently than by spending the money on rent and people's salaries. Local congregations should never think that just sending money to a "large event" or cooperative work is enough to satisfy God's command to evangelize. Nor should anyone "guilt" local congregations into thinking that if the congregation does not

send money to support their event or cooperative work that the local congregation is not fulfilling God's Great Commission.

Another sad statement in the aforementioned invitation also caught my eye. The guest speakers at this large event were introduced as “**premier preachers in the Lord's church today**” (emphasis B.G.). In 2002-2003, I was first introduced to the wealth of Scriptural publications, which included commentaries and Lectureship books, and to the names of those who authored or edited said material. I remember the jubilant feeling of excitement and edification which followed and the great appreciation I had for the men who had dedicated their time and study to such good works. I held those men in high regard, but I never thought that they would begin introducing themselves as “premier preachers in the Lord's church” just 6-7 years later. The word, “premier,” means first in rank, chief, or leading. When the Lord's disciples disputed among themselves who would be the greatest in the Kingdom, Jesus responded, “if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Later, when James and John sought preeminence in the Kingdom, the Lord reminded them, “whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all” (Mark 10:44). The apostle Paul's humble attitude is seen in the fact that he referred to himself as the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), and “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8). To the Corinthian brethren, Paul stated, “we **preach not ourselves**, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake” (2 Cor. 4:5, emphasis B.G.). God does not desire nor want “premier preachers in the Lord's church today;” He wants humble servants who preach “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2), and not themselves. Though there is nothing wrong with having high regard and much respect for preachers, God does not desire an arbitrary preacher “ranking” system be employed, nor does He want His preachers to be considered chief among brethren. It is this dangerous “premier preacher” attitude that has led many to follow what the preacher says rather than what God says. Many individuals have used the excuse, “it can't be wrong, preacher so-and-so is involved.” This appeal to the wrong source of authority (preachers rather than God, cf. Acts 5:29) is cultivated by a mentality which gives ranks and titles such as “premier preachers in the Lord's church.”

Let us never choose to “outsource” the work that God has given each of us (you and I) to do. Let us gladly teach the soul-saving message of Christ, by word and example, to all we come in contact with – our friends, co-workers, neighbors, family, etc. Let us seek only to be humble servants of God and let God do the exalting (Mat. 23:12).

- *Brad Green*