**Part 1: Our Great Commission**

by Pastor Cornelius R. Stam

(The following is the first of a series of articles drawn from Pastor Stam’s book, *Our Great Commission, What Is It?* Since this book never appeared as a series in the *Searchlight*, many of even our long-time readers may not be familiar with these selections.)

**INTRODUCTION**

At a panel discussion on *Dispensationalism* held at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, in 1947, the author made reference to “the *so-called* great commission.”

One of the other panel members challenged this terminology, stating that the commission to the eleven *was* “*the* great commission,” *not* “the *so-called* great commission.”

In our response we insisted that this commission *was* the *so-called* “great commission,” reminding our hearers that the Word of God does not call it “the great commission”; *men* do.

This obvious and important fact should be borne in mind by those who earnestly desire to “rightly divide the Word of truth” and carry out intelligently God’s program *for us today*. Such a recognition would be the first step in the discovery of the root cause of the doctrinal divisions that have separated true believers in Christ and have gripped the Church in deep confusion which it does not seem possible, otherwise, to dispel.

The commission which our Lord gave to the eleven (later twelve) has so long been called “the great commission” that multitudes of sincere believers have a hazy notion that the Bible designates it thus. The fact is, however, that this designation merely reflects traditional views and, as in our Lord’s day, “the traditions of men” all too often “make void the Word of God.”

Granted, our Lord’s commission to the eleven was indeed a great commission, but it should never be called “*the* great commission,” for the ascended Lord later committed a greater, a far greater, message and ministry to the Apostle Paul.

Unless we recognize a change in dispensation with the raising up of Paul, that *other* apostle, the commission to the eleven must stand as an irreconcilable contradiction to the great doctrines of the Pauline epistles—and *vice versa*.

It should be noted throughout this study that the Scriptural term “the eleven” is used only with regard to the period between Judas’ defection and death and the appointment of Matthias to take his place. Here, however, a note in the *Scofield Reference Bible* rightly defines the identification as “a collective term, equivalent to `The Sanhedrin,’ `The Commons,’ not necessarily implying that eleven persons were present. See Luke 24:33, I Corinthians 15:5; and cf. Matthew 28:16, where `eleven *disciples*‘ implies a definite number of persons.”

We know, however, that in Acts 1 the number of the apostles is again brought up to twelve. Thus when we refer to the *giving* of the commission, in this volume, we will designate this group as “the eleven,” but when we refer to the *carrying out* of the commission in early Acts we will refer to the same company as “the *twelve*.”

Finally, it should be noted that throughout this volume we designate Bible-believing Christians as *fundamentalists* rather than *evangelicals*. The rise of the new evangelicalism has caused many sincere believers to refer to themselves as *evangelicals*, but we feel that this term is vague and indefinite, while the term *fundamentalist* historically refers to those who stand for the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

**OUR LORD’S PARTING COMMISSION TO HIS ELEVEN APOSTLES**

**A Thorough Examination**

Before going into any consideration of the so-called “great commission,” we respectfully request the reader to examine, thoughtfully and prayerfully, all five segments of it, as quoted below from the *King James Version* of the Bible. Yes, you have read all of these passages before, but *read them again*. This time you may see things you’ve never seen before.

**Matthew 28:18-20**

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

**Mark 16:15-18**

“And He said unto them, 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.

“And these things shall follow them that believe: In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

“They shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

**Luke 24:45-48**

“Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures,

“And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved 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 among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

“And ye are witnesses of these things.”

**John 20:21-23**

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.

“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

“Whose so ever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose so ever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

**Acts 1:8,9**

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

“And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”

Since the subject of our God-given commission is so profoundly important, and since one or more of the passages quoted above are generally considered to be *our* great commission, we suggest that it would not be a waste of time for the reader to turn back and read these five passages again, this time noting carefully just what they say and what they do not say.

Does the passage being read refer to prophecy and the law? What are the terms of salvation? What were to be the evidences of salvation? Does it teach “no difference” between Jew and Gentile? Does it mention salvation by grace, through faith, on the basis of the shed blood of Christ? Does it mention the “one baptism” by which we are baptized into “one body,” and made one with Christ? Does it proclaim a heavenly position and prospect for those who believe? Does it mention “the mystery” so often referred to in Paul’s epistles?

Yours in Christ