

# *The Baptist Faith and Message:*

## **XI. Evangelism and Missions**

**It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.**

All of the versions of the BF&M have included a chapter entitled “Evangelism and Missions.” Although the verbiage was tweaked some in 1963 and again in 2000, the content of the statement has generally remained the same. Historically, the Southern Baptist Convention was born out of missionary cooperation, which was for decades called the Cooperative Program. A defining characteristic of Southern Baptists is missions both at home and abroad. One of the promptings for the writing of the BF&M back in 1925 was to reconnect with post WWI England and Europe in efforts to cooperate in spreading the gospel. Dr. Edgar Young Mullins, second president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, journeyed across the Atlantic carrying with him the Southern Baptist statement of beliefs through which he hoped to engender a spirit of missionary cooperation with like-minded brothers and sisters in Christ across the ocean.

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Matthew's gospel ends with Jesus' “Great Commission” to go make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that he has commanded. All commandments of God carry with them a duty and responsibility. In some cases, the hearer does not have the ability to fulfill his responsibility. For example, God has commanded universal repentance; nevertheless, people cannot repent unless it has been granted to them by God. In the case of the great commission command, all who are responsible are also able and should be willing. So, if we are not making disciples, it is not for the lack of ability. The new covenant promise is that God will create obedient hearts upon which He will write His laws and they will perform them. Some translations say “make disciples of all nations,” other translations say “teaching all nations.” To be a disciple of Christ, one must first be a believer. Because it is not in our power to regenerate a person's heart, it is not really in our power to make disciples. God “makes” disciples. However, we do have the power to teach all of the nations the gospel which God uses to make disciples from every nation.

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Christians are new creatures indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who dissolves bitterness, anger, malice and prejudice and replaces them with kindness, goodness, mercy, patience and love. We who have received grace want to share it with others. We have the best news that another human being can hear. The BF&M makes clear that evangelical zeal is an outgrowth of the new birth. Given this emphasis in the BF&M, it is interesting how missions have devolved over the years to the “mission trip,” which often includes sending unbelievers with the believers as means of evangelizing them as well as the unbelievers at the mission site. All one has to do is to compare the missionary activities of the apostles and evangelists to the current missionary activities typical of Southern Baptist churches to see a striking difference: preaching versus projects. No doubt construction projects to build, to bring health care, to bring any number of necessities of life (e.g., clean water) can be true mission work. However, for it to qualify as Christian mission work, it must be done by believers in the name of Christ with the primary goal to preach and share the gospel while accomplishing the other.

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Evangelism is not just for evangelists and missions are not just for missionaries. Obviously, God calls some people specifically to these areas of service and provides them with the Spiritual gifts and natural talents to make it their life's work. The BF&M here makes the point that all believers should be evangelical and on mission wherever we go. We should constantly be looking for opportunities to witness for Christ. We also should be living our lives in ways that honor the Lord and reflect well on Him. By our deeds shall we be known. To encourage us along these lines, the BF&M uses the phrase "seek constantly to win the lost." However, our contemporary idea of winning is too often couched in terms of winning or losing, competition, and statistics, which plays into decisional based evangelism and the numbers game. When the Bible speaks of winning souls (e.g., Proverbs 11:30 KJV), it is never in terms of personal accomplishment or personal glory, it is more in the vein of taking a hill in battle or storming a castle to free the prisoners. To win souls is to take them from Satan's stronghold by the power of the gospel. You may ask: Does not the Christian apologist convince the gainsayers? Do they not win people to Christ? No, never! No man should ever take any credit for a soul coming to Christ. The only soul winner is JESUS CHRIST. It is not the Christian messengers that save, it is their message. This demonstrates how critical it is for us all to have a firm grasp on the gospel Truth and rightly motivated so that we are witnessing the Truth to unbelievers for God's glory.

Finally, the language of final phrase, "and by all other methods sanctioned by the gospel of Christ," was changed in 1963 to the less restrictive, "and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ." "Sanctioned" means employing only those methods used in the New Testament for the spreading of the gospel, all of which involved preaching and teaching. This is not to say that there were not other activities of daily living that were not concurrently undertaken by disciples with the citizens of the communities in which the disciples spread the gospel. By saying "methods in harmony with," the BF&M opened the door to a more pragmatic approach to "win souls." More and more, churches are using entertainment of various types to attract unbelievers to church or an "event" as means to present the gospel. It is much easier to make an argument that some activity can be harmonized with gospel than it is to say that it is sanctioned by the gospel. A spectacular church is not based in spectacle, but on the consistent preaching of Truth and true gospel witness of its members. Gideons' International would be an excellent example of a non-church organization with which Christians can cooperate to spread the Word, literally.