

Missions: What is the Goal?

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Melvin Hodges expresses well the concern behind this workshop:

It would be logical to suppose that all the different aspects of the outreach of the church in foreign lands would be united by a common goal. Yet, what a variety of answers would be evoked were we to ask missionaries of the Christian faith throughout the world to define their goal!¹

The purpose of this workshop is to focus on the target, or goal, of the Great Commission. Without a clear understanding of the God-assigned target, we will be tempted to substitute activity for accomplishment, to be satisfied that we are busy doing missions without really being sure that we are doing exactly what Jesus commissioned us to do. I believe Hodges is correct again to assert, “Our ultimate goal and the means which we employ to reach the goal are intricately related. If our goal is not clearly defined we may err in the choice of methods employed and fail to realize the true fruit of our labors.”²

I. Evidence that Church Planting is the Goal of Missions

In order to prove that the target of the Great Commission is churches planted, we will need to look first at the commission itself, but then move to consider this question within the larger context of the New Testament Scriptures. I believe we can find five powerful reasons for coming to the conclusion that the target of the Great Commission is the establishment of growing, reproducing local churches.

- A. The Content of the Great Commission, Matt 28:19-20
- B. The Backdrop of the Great Commission, Matt 16:18
- C. The Implementation of the Great Commission, Acts 11:19-26; 13:1-3; 14:21-23
- D. The Description of the Great Commission, 1 Cor 3:5ff
- E. The Fulfillment of the Great Commission, Rom 15:19ff

¹Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 9.

²Ibid., 9-10.

II. Implications of the Church Planting Goal for Missions

Although much more probably needs to be said about the place of church planting in missionary work, I want to offer a brief survey of what I believe are significant implications for our thinking about missions and missionaries.

A. Implications for Missions

In this case, the principle that the Great Commission cannot be fulfilled without the planting of churches essentially is the great implication! I believe this principle sets the standard of evaluation for all missions work, and that standard contains three important elements.

1. New Testament Missions Must Aim to Plant New Churches
2. New Testament Missions Must Aim to Plant New Indigenous Churches

Without, I hope, oversimplifying a complex debate, there are two basic issues that need to be addressed:

- a. The first is whether the churches planted are indigenous to the culture in which they are planted, or are they merely a transport of one culture into another?
- b. The second issue is whether a church is planted with the view that it is to assume responsibility for itself. In other words, should churches be planted with the goals of self-government, self-propagation, and self-support?

3. New Testament Missions Must Aim to Plant New Indigenous, Reproducing Churches

B. Implications Regarding Missionaries

Since this principle has significant implications for missions, it must also have implications for those who serve as missionaries. If the proper goal of missions is church planting that leads to a self-perpetuating church planting movement, then two mandates for missionaries seem to follow.

1. The Primary Mandate for Missionaries is to Plant Churches.
2. The Secondary Mandate for Missionaries Is to Play a Support Role in Church Planting.

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