

A Great Commission Theology For Life 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Introduction: 1) In Matthew 28:16-20, the text we know as the Great Commission, the word “all” calls for our careful attention given its repetition:

- “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (v. 18).
- “Make disciples of all the nations” (v. 19).
- “Teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (v. 20).

2) It would appear that the apostle Paul was captured by the same passion as His Savior and he wanted to see the same ignited in the heart of his son in the faith Timothy.

- He wanted prayers to be made “first of all” and “for all men” (v. 1).
- He wanted prayers to be made for all in authority” (v. 2).
- He, like His God, desired all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (v.4).
- And, he was convinced that Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all (v.6).

3) Paul had what I would call “a Great Commission Theology for Life” because he worshipped, loved and served a Great Commission Lord! 1 Timothy 2:1-7 is about the basics of such a theology for life. There is nothing fancy or complicated in this text. It is clear and straightforward for anyone to see and understand. The issue is not that we don’t comprehend. The issue is one of obedience.

4) Paul lays before us 4 essential building blocks of a Great Commission Theology for Life.

I. God Calls Us To Pray For Everyone. 2:1-2

✳ Paul begins with a word of exhortation or encouragement (*parakalo*) to pray. He notes it is to be:

1. a priority: “first of all”

2. comprehensive: “supplications (petition or request), prayers (Olford, “idea of devotion), intercessions (intervention praying) and giving of thanks”
 3. inclusive: “all men”
 4. specific: “kings and all in authority”
 5. purposeful: “we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”
- * This is evangelistic praying. This is Great Commission praying. This is not prayer as usual in most of our churches! Paul is recruiting the prayers of believers for the salvation of the nations and those who lead those nations! Remember: the emperor was Nero! It does not matter who our leaders are. We are to pray for them.
 - * Prayer will be at the heart of a Great Commission Resurgence. E.M. Bounds said, “Prayer and missions are bosom companions.” It will take us beyond parochialism and nationalism, it will get us out of our forts and bomb shelters. We are to pray for our country and every country, our culture and every culture, our leaders and every leader. Spurgeon said, “We do not know what God may do for us if we would but pray” (*Revival Year Sermons*). I believe this is true of our nation. I believe it is true for our world.
 - * We will not reach the Muslim without prayer.
 - * We will not reach the Buddhist without prayer.
 - * We will not reach the Hindu without prayer.
 - * We will not reach the Jew without prayer.
 - * We will not reach the Secularist without prayer.
 - * We will not reach our Neighbor without prayer.

- ✳ We will not reach the “prostitution rows” that Charlotte and I were forced to see in South Asia in July 2009 without prayer.
- ✳ Let’s cry for our nation and all nations, let’s pray for the persecuted church, the unreached peoples, the dictators and despots. Let’s pray as Jesus taught us in Matthew 9:38, “Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” We fail to reach the nations because we fail to pray for the nations.
- ✳ Paul notes such praying has a goal in mind not only for the nations but for us as well: “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases it, “so we can be quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation.”
- ✳ I think John Piper captures the heart of what Paul is after in v. 2: “If you want your prayers to do the most good for the greatest number of people, be sure to include in your prayers those persons whose decisions create the conditions in which the purposes of the gospel prosper. It is important to pray for leaders because the conditions they create either advance or impede the gospel” (“Pray for Kings and All in High Positions”, 1-18-81).

II. God Desires For All To Be Saved. 2:3-4

- ✳ Our prayers should be as broad and extensive as God demands.
Our hearts should be as big and expansive as God desires.
- ✳ Verse 3 is a hinge verse that connects vs. 1-2 with v. 4. Praying for all men, especially world and national leaders, is 1) good (a word used by Paul at least 20 times in the pastorals) and 2) acceptable (*HCSB*; *ESV*, “*pleasing*”; *NIV*, “*pleases*”) in the sight (lit. “before”) of God our Savior (lit. “the Savior of us God” cf. 1:1; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10;

3:4). Why? Verse 4 thunders the answer: “God desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” Note that to “be saved” equals having “the knowledge of the truth”, the truth that will be clearly and carefully explained in vs. 5-6.

✳ The Savior God desires (Gr. “*telei*”; wishes, wants) all to be saved. The statement is profound in its simplicity. No qualifications. No exceptions. And yet there is much here for our theological reflection.

1) God desires all to be saved, He does not decree all will be saved. There is no soteriological universalism hiding in this verse. God truly and genuinely desires some things that sadly do not come to pass.

2) We are confronted here with the biblical reality of “the two wills doctrine of God.” To simplify this profound truth we might say it like this, “God is willing to save all though He does not will to save all, He desires the salvation of all but did not decree the salvation of all. God delights in the eternal perishing of no one, though He has designed a world where some do perish eternally. Thus we distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he has designed will happen. There is a great tension and mystery in all of this, but there is no mystery in the revealed basic, bedrock, biblical truth: God desires all men, all persons, to be saved. This is His heart and this must be our heart. The nations are on His heart. All humanity is on His heart. In Ezekiel 18:32 God tells us, “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone.” (*ESV*).

✳ Today there are according to the “Joshua Project,” as of 2-17-09, 6,649 unreached people groups. There are 2.72 billion who know little or nothing of Jesus. The top 100 unreached/least reached people groups alone total 1.7 billion people. Here you have the names of countries like India, Iraq, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Myanmar, China,

Nigeria, Japan, Pakistan, Indonesia, North Korea, Turkey, Afganistan, Yemen, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Uzbekistan. India alone has 46 of the largest unreached/least reached people groups in the world! China has 7. Pakistan has 7. Indonesia has 5.

- * Lest you think my heart is only for the nations let's take a look at home. The picture is not pretty. In fact it is heartbreaking. Christianity grew by only 5% from 1990-2000 in the United States. Now compare this statistic with the following growth rates: Nonreligious/Secular 110% increase, Islam 109% increase, Buddhism 170% increase, Hinduism 237 % increase, Unitarian/Universalist 25% increase, Native American 119% increase, Baha'i 200% increase, New Age 240% increase, Sikhism 338% increase, Scientology 22% increase, Taoism 74% increase, and Deism 717% increase. Do we believe God desires all to be saved? Then we must do more. The nations cry for more. Our nation cries for more. Our God deserves more. He loves us so much He allows us to share in His mission if only we will join Him.

III. God Has Designated Jesus As The Only Savior. 2:5-6

Michael Green, the wonderful historian on evangelism has put it well, "However expressed, whether as the Messiah of Old Testament expectation, as Lord over the demonic powers or whatever other category of interpretation was employed, the early preachers of the good news had one subject and one only, Jesus."

-Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970, 51).

- * Paul now moves to the heart of His Great Commission Theology. It echoes the words of Jesus and Peter. Southern Baptists dare not get this wrong even if the rest of the world does.

- John 14:6, “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” [Jesus]
- Acts 4:12, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” [Peter]

Here Paul focuses on 3 essential, non-negotiable truths of faithful gospel proclamation.

These 2 verses all but certainly reflect an early hymn or confessional statement of faith.

1) There is only on God (Sounds of the first two commandments of the Decalogue and the Shema thunder in the background).

2) There is only one Mediator between God and sinful humanity and His name is Jesus.

Here is the divine/human negotiator between God and man, heaven and hell. Slip in any other name at the end of verse 5 and you plunge yourself into the world of blasphemy and heresy, of Satan and demons, of hell and lostness. As Adrian Rogers puts it, “salvation is not a plan-it’s a Man!”

3) Our mediator gave Himself a ransom for all. Gave Himself – a vicarious offering; a voluntary offering; Ransom – a payment, Jesus said the same thing in Mark 10:45 where he weds “The Suffering Servant” of Isaiah 53 to the Son of Man in Daniel 7 and redefines for the disciples who and what the Messiah is!

For All – His death avails for any and all who place their faith in Him. Here is our Mediator (v. 5) and Redeemer (v. 6), providing an atonement, a way of salvation and reconciliation, sufficient for all. And yet we must not miss a vital truth made plain by God’s Word: “The way is open to all but there is only one way.” God sets the terms of our salvation not us. God establishes the parameters of redemption not us. In the year that I was born (1957) Basil Clutterbuck sets the record straight:

“[W]e must not commit the blasphemy of conceiving missionary strategy as something man-centered and man-controlled. It is Christ who builds His Church, not we; the strategy of all true evangelism is His, not ours.”

- * Bottomline: “Life is short, death is sure, sin is the cost and only Jesus is the cure.” Paul says this glorious truth is to be testified in due time, at the proper time. God has, in Christ, provided overwhelming evidence at a particular moment in history of his desire for the salvation of all men. He has done His part. Now, what is our part in this grand redemptive narrative?

IV. God Has Appointed Us To Proclaim The Message. 2:7

- * Robert Coleman in his classic *The Master Plan of Evangelism* writes, “The need of the hour is a return to the kind of evangelism which majors in people winning other people to Christ and building those they have won into disciples who can win and build others.”
- * I believe this was Paul’s strategy as well. Note in the text he identifies a 3-fold appointment from Jesus: 1) preacher (herald; *kerux*), apostle (*apostolos*); a sent one and a teacher (*didaskalos*) of the nations (*ethnon*).
- * Paul embeds this holy assignment with an oath, “I am speaking the truth [in Christ] and not lying.” This is who I am. This is what God has called me to be and called me to do. He notes the context in which he does what he does: “faith and truth.” With fidelity and veracity Paul conducted his ministry before all. Examine my motives and my message. See if they will not withstand your most careful scrutinizing and inspection. This is my ministry! This is my life! Why? Because Christ is my life!
- * Paul had a unique call from Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel. But then, does he not have the same for us all in some sense? The first great missions movement growing out

of the Reformation was among the Moravians. Their passion for the gospel and the nations is unparalleled in our day. Indeed the historian A. C. Thompson wrote of these early mission pioneers,” so fully was the duty of evangelizing the heathen lodged in their thought that the fact of anyone entering personally upon that work never creates surprise... It is not regarded as a thing that calls for widespread heralding, as if something marvelous or even unusual were in hand.”

-Colin A. Grant, “Europe’s Moravians-A Pioneer Missionary Church,” in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*

Going to the nations was the norm, it was simply who they were!

- * It is well known the influence that the Moravians had on the Great Awakening preacher John Wesley (1703-81). Perhaps what he caught from them was what inspired him to write this prayer to our God:

“I am no longer mine but Yours.
 Put me to what You will;
 Rank me with whom You will;
 Put me to doing, put me to suffering;
 Let me be employed for You or laid aside for You,
 Exalted for You or brought low for You;
 Let me be full, let me be empty,
 Let me have all things or let me have nothing;
 I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
 To Your pleasure and disposal. Amen.”

- * Can you say this? Can I? A Great Commission Christian can.

Conclusion: Our God is a Great Commission God. We must be a Great Commission people.

- * Spurgeon, “If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay.”