

Fox River Congregational Church

Basis of Our Mission: The Five New Testament Purposes of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission

In no uncertain terms, Christ established the fundamental mission of His church. When asked what is the Greatest Commandment, Christ responded that all the Law and all the Prophets are condensed in two tasks: (1) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30) and (2) "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31). "There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31).

Later, in His last words before He ascended, Christ commands His disciples, in what is referred to as *The Great Commission*,

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.... (Matthew 28:19-20)

Here, Jesus commanded the making of disciples through three more tasks: (3) go into the world and share the good news, (4) teach them to obey everything He had taught, and (5) baptize them. The Great Commandment and the Great Commission provide the five primary tasks or mission for Christ's church.

Purpose #1: Love the Lord with All Your Heart (Worship) -- Christ's First Great Commandment is to love God. Throughout scripture we're commanded to celebrate God's presence by magnifying the Lord and exalting His name. (Psalm 34:3) In worship we exalt God with lofty praise, honor, thanksgiving, prayer and expressions of love and joy. How do we love God with all our heart? By worshiping Him! The word describing this mission purpose of loving God is *worship*.

Purpose #2: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself (Service) -- Christ's Second Great Commandment is to "Love your neighbor as yourself." By reaching out to and serving the emotional, physical, relational and/or spiritual needs of others, we demonstrate our love for them. The words describing this mission purpose is *service*.

Our Congregational forebears took this responsibility of service very seriously. They understood that God's Kingdom is a present reality. The Kingdom consists of believers in Christ who desire to do Christ's work in the world by ministering to the sick, the hungry and others in need of compassion. They did these things with joy, not because they hoped to earn God's salvation but because they experienced God's grace freely in their own lives and felt compelled to share it with others. Through serving others we express our love for them, thereby effectuating Christ's Second Great Commandment.

Purpose #3: Go and Make Disciples by Bringing People to Christ (Evangelism) -- The mission purpose of making disciples first requires bringing people to Christ. This is commonly referred to as *evangelism*. We are ambassadors for Christ. It is our responsibility as Christians to share the Good News wherever we go. The church exists to communicate God's Word leading to acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior (i. e., conversion). The task of evangelism is so important that Christ's Great Commission was reported not only in each of the gospels, but also in the book of Acts. Jesus commissions us to go and tell the world the Good News.

Evangelism is not only our responsibility; it is our great privilege and joy. We are invited to be a part of bringing people into God's eternal family. What better cause to give one's life to? If one knew the cure for cancer, he or she would do everything he or she could to get the news out. It would save millions of lives. However, we already know something better. We've been given the gospel of salvation and eternal life to share. This is the greatest news of all!

Purpose #4: Go and Make Disciples by Teaching Them to Observe What Christ Taught (Discipleship) -- After a person becomes a believer and accepts Christ as Lord and Savior (conversion), he or she must then be taught and mentored. Discipleship embraces mentoring people in the foundations of the Christian faith, teaching them, encouraging them, and praying for them so that they may follow Christ more fully. It is the church's responsibility to educate and develop people to spiritual maturity (i. e., grow toward a Christ-like life). Discipleship is the process of helping people become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This process begins when a person makes a decision for Christ and continues throughout the rest of his or her life. The objective is for people to become Fully Devoted Followers of Christ.

Purpose #5: Baptizing Them (Fellowship) -- The Great Commission includes three verbs: go, teach and baptize. Each is a part of the command to "make disciples." However, one might wonder why Jesus gives the same prominence to the simple act of baptism as he does to the great tasks of evangelism and edification. The answer lies in what baptism symbolizes, that is, identification with the body of Christ. Christians are called to *belong*, not just to *believe*. We are not meant to live alone or in relative isolation from others. Instead, we are to belong to Christ's family and be members of His body. Baptism says to the world, "This person is now one of us!" In other words, baptism symbolizes not only acceptance of Christ, but also *fellowship* in the church.

The term "fellowship" can be defined as participation with others in a community of interests. For Christians, fellowship is founded on the common confession that Christ is Lord. It relates to believers participating in a loving relationship with Christ and with each other. God seeks fellowship with His people and for His people to fellowship with each other. Christian fellowship is building relationships of trust and vulnerability with one another. It involves creating an environment in which prayer, worship and communion are meaningful and in which people edify, nurture and share with one another. The church, among other reasons, exists to provide fellowship.