



The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples

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Many churches in America today want to be powerful, relevant, and influential in personal and social transformation. But whose kingdom are we building? God's? Or our own? A plethora of programs for outreach, discipleship, and spiritual disciplines are available at any bookstore and on countless websites. Yet what we need most is a renewed understanding of and commitment to the Great Commission. We assume that we already know the nature of this commission and the appropriate methods of carrying it out.

But Michael Horton contends that it too often becomes our mission instead of God's. At a time when churches are zealously engaged in writing up mission statements and strategic plans, he argues that we must ask ourselves anew whether we are ambassadors, following the script we've been given, or building our own kingdoms with our own blueprint.

Pastors, church leaders, and readers of Horton's "Christless Christianity" and "The Gospel-Driven Life" will value this frank and hopeful exploration of the Great Commission as a call to understanding and good practice.

The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples Details

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Rocky Woolery says

Very interesting and intriguing view of what discipleship is supposed to be. Also very thought provoking understanding of what is supposed to motivate church growth. Very well with the time it takes to read and digest for anyone in ministry or a leadership position in a local church.

Brian Collins says

Michael Horton writes on a variety of levels. This book is pitched as a meaty popular level book. It seems to be the final book in an informal trilogy begun with Christless Christianity and The Gospel-Driven Life. Perhaps most helpful in this volume is the discussion of how the Reformation marks of the church (preaching, sacraments/ordinances, discipline) relate to discipleship. Also helpful were trenchant critiques of the emergent church, missional conception of the church, and the discipleship models of Richard Foster and Dallas Willard. Horton also addresses church and culture, Christianity and culture issues. He adopts the exegetically problematic Klinean two-kingdoms view, but his application of this view does not seem as radical as David VanDrunen's.

Rob Blake says

What is the mission of the church? This is a hot topic today with proponents offering any number of answers. Ultimately, the answer is mostly dependent upon how one defines the church.

Michael Horton's goal in writing "The Gospel Commission is to call us away from mission creep, centering our discipleship and our churches on the very specific sources, goals, strategies, and methods that Christ mandated for this time between his two comings" (8). He sets out to accomplish this goal by walking through the text of Matthew 28:18-20. The book is an attempt to bring the distortions of the Great Commission back into line biblically because all of the distortions make the great commission more about one's self than Jesus. Many of the distortions come from an improper view of the Kingdom of God.

Some of the issues addressed are the deeds vs. creeds mentality of many emergents. Horton contends that they mistake, or blend, the Great Commission with the Great Commandment. They see the Great Commission as bringing about social justice, liberation, or world peace. They tend to believe that the Great Commission is the bringing about the Kingdom of God here on earth. The problem with this view is that the gospel is not what we do or how we live, rather it is the message about what God has done through Christ's life. The Kingdom is what we receive and only Jesus can bring it.

Horton also addresses the heresies of Charles Finney and the influence they have had on American Christianity. Finney taught a moralistic gospel where the goal was to get people to conform to a certain moral standard rather than be transformed by the real gospel. Salvation became dependent upon how well a person kept God's laws.

A third issue Horton cites as a source of our problems today is teaching of the Anabaptists from the radical

reformation who viewed the gospel and the kingdom through the lens of Platonic dualism. In this view, the world is bad and the chief goal of the gospel is to get Christians to separate from the world and all of its evil influences. The Kingdom is future the present is evil. Their main focus became trying to determine when the Kingdom of God would come. In the mean time they were to withdraw from the world and focus on personal disciplines which is very similar to the Gnostic quest for the inner light or hidden knowledge that only some could possess.

Horton is a great writer and exegete. The book is a much needed eye opener to the issues in American evangelicalism. While he does a good job pointing out all of the errors prevalent in other systems he misses a glaring one in his own belief system. Throughout the book he creates a false dichotomy between the church as an institution and the church as the Lord's called out people. Biblically, the church is the people; not an institution that exists separately from the people in order to serve the people. This is evident when he writes, "Christians are called to do things that the church is not called to do" (209). The church's only responsibility is to make disciples through Word, Sacraments, and Discipline. Christians can do many other things in their daily lives. These statements, and others like them that Horton make, only make sense if Christians are not the church. In other words, if Christians are the church then anything that Christians do is what the church does. But then again, this is the heart of the mission debate- how one defines the church.

Overall, the book is a great defense of the great commission as the proclamation of the gospel. It is the message about what God has already done through Christ, not an invitation for what we can do. It is the historical account of Jesus' life to redeem mankind from sin, not a new way for us to live.

Rev. Linda says

A resource for a Mentoring project I am developing for my church -- From the Publisher: Many churches in America today want to be powerful, relevant, and influential in personal and social transformation. But whose kingdom are we building? God's? Or our own? A plethora of programs for outreach, discipleship, and spiritual disciplines are available at any bookstore and on countless websites. Yet what we need most is a renewed understanding of and commitment to the Great Commission. We assume that we already know the nature of this commission and the appropriate methods of carrying it out. But Michael Horton contends that it too often becomes our mission instead of God's. At a time when churches are zealously engaged in writing up mission statements and strategic plans, he argues that we must ask ourselves anew whether we are ambassadors, following the script we've been given, or building our own kingdoms with our own blueprint.

Chris says

Although Michael Horton shares some solid thinking about the Gospel and he rightfully warns against unbiblical trends and practices, his reductionist approach to the Kingdom of God keeps on cropping up repeatedly throughout the book.

Bart Box says

The Gospel Commission is an outstanding biblical and theological investigation of the Great Commission. Horton frequently corrects imbalance and misunderstanding in our methodology. The book isn't long on practical help, but that's not really the intention. Where Horton excels is providing theological underpinning

for the Great Commission.

Christopher Raffa says

Here is another excellent critique of American evangelicalism and the emergent church movement by Horton. Many good points are made. However, it would seem that Horton embraces his reformed tradition, especially when he speaks of Christ's ascension into heaven [pgs. 295-296]. Though he does confess, "We are baptized with real water and eat and drink a real meal, which as a Reformed Christian I confess nothing less than "the true and natural body and blood of Christ" (from the Belgic Confession, Article 35) [pg 289].

Kenneth says

Great book on the great commission. Read Christies Christianity and then The gospel driven faith and then this work last. The emphasis of the author and teaching of the book will be new to many who aren't familiar with reformed faith. The importance of the church is really put forth in this book and makes me excited for the Lords day. I give 4 stars mainly because I am a baptist and disagree with some of his views on the covenants and who should be baptized.

John says

Good book on the topic of the mission of the church with the perspective of two-kingdom theology. I'm doing a interview with Horton at The Gospel Coalition this week, so that will give a better summary of things.

Bob says

In "The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples" Michael Horton argues that we need to return to our central mission, the Great Commission. "I believe that in our passion for relevance, we are subordinating the strategies that Christ has promised to bless to our own action plans." Horton believes that the Great Commission provides the church with its message (the announcement of Christ's authority), its mission (to proclaim the gospel and make disciples), & its methods (baptism and Word ministry). We're not free to pick our mission & then choose our own methods. Christ has prescribed how we're to go about carrying out his mission.

The Great Commission contains an urgent & specific imperative: We are to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. "There is no mandate for the church to develop a political, social, economic, or cultural plan," he explains. The only mandate is "to get the Good News to everyone who lies in darkness, to baptize them, & to teach them everything in God's Word. . . . Everything that the church is called to do as a visible institution--not only in its ministry of preaching but its public service of prayers, singing, sacraments, fellowship, government, & discipline--is to be a means of delivering this gospel to the whole creation." (p. 88)

There is nothing in the Great Commission about transforming culture. However, the Great Commandment calls every person--believer & unbeliever alike--to works of love & service in our daily lives. If some

confuse these mandates, other separate them, as if our high calling in Christ had no connection w/responsible stewardship & citizenship in the world." (p. 226)

Confusing the two has had devastating effects, resulting in another try at Christendom, as "the Great Commission becomes the Great Society" (p. 227). We must be careful to not minimize either at the expense of the other, but likewise we absolutely must be clear in the distinction. Horton best articulates it: "The Great Commission reflects the holy (saving grace) & is where disciples are made. The Great Commandment reflects common grace & is where our discipleship goes" (p. 243).

Dennis Henn says

The material is solid, as is Horton's thinking. He points us to Christ and away for our overweening tendency to works, to law, to self. Solid though he may be, Horton is dry, and his writing is saturated with quotes, which distracted me. The last two chapters were my favorite. In fact, read the last two chapters first and then tackle the book. Drink caffeine first.

Aaron says

My full review can be read at [Blogging Theologically](#):

What is the mission of the Church? Depending on who you ask, you're likely to hear answers that address various aspects of social and personal transformation. Some will say that we as Christians are to care for the poor, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to be salt and light in the world.

And all of these are true. But what is the mission of the Church *specifically*?

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus provided the answer to this question when he said to His followers, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

The mission of the Church is to make disciples. But is it possible that we've gotten a bit off-track? Are we actually making disciples—or are we doing something else? In his new book, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples*, Michael Horton offers a careful biblical and pastoral examination of the Great Commission, offering many helpful insights into how the Church can move forward in its role...

Larissa Langsather says

Although I liked this book, I liked in the way you have to like a book because it fits with your beliefs, but it was long and much better suited for someone deep in theology and pastoral ministries. I should have read it with a dictionary close at hand because so many words I did not remember what they meant. Also much of the time I couldn't tell if the author was quoting someone he agreed with or not. I wasn't sure I was tracking much of the time. I still don't think I understand what he means by "mission creep" which might have been a

better title for the book.

I did like how it tended to focus on being with God's people rather than individualized faith. Being a part of a church with a variety of people from different backgrounds and nationalities is important- although it felt the author didn't come right out and say it. I tend to shy away from people even people in my own church. I loved the emphasis on communion and baptism. We don't talk about that nearly enough in my circle.

There were some gem quotes though and I loved the idea of the book. It was really trying to focus on the gospel as the main thing and renewing the world and not necessarily disowning it. Here are a couple things I enjoyed and understood from this book. It didn't really start picking up for me until a little more than half way through.

p 180 "...hospitality is crucial. Happy is the pastor with members who are eagerly engaged in sharing their faith with co-workers- even gathering friends and neighbors for informal discussions of the faith."

p 181 "...it is important for us to recognize that personal evangelism is not primarily concerned with testifying to ourselves but with testifying to Christ. There is nothing wrong with relating our Christian experience. In fact, it is often a good way into a conversation with an unbelieving friend or relative. However, it is a mere preamble to the gospel. The apostles and martyrs faced death not because they had a spiritual experience or because their marriages were stronger and they were better people now, but because of their testimony to Christ."

P 183 "The Lord's Day is not a day of fasting in solitude, but of feasting: eating and drinking in the presence of the Lord- and his people." Basically it is a weekly holiday!! I love that concept!

Need to look up catechism....

p 188 "...no one has ever abandoned the Christian faith because they thought too much or knew too much." I don't know if I agree with this quote or not. I have a friend who has recently become an atheist. She is a researcher and I feel like she did abandon the faith because she thought too much. Plus my husband often quotes... knowledge puffs up. And no matter what type of circle you are in that is true.

P 276 "...whereas fundamentalism is "world-denying," Reformed theology is "world-affirming." That makes all the difference in the world, quite literally."

In conclusion, I learned what the word wiki means and I almost feel he had a good case going for infant baptism (though I do not think that was the point). I am a simple reader and this was over my head most of the time. I did learn more about the emergent church movement and I have to say for a recluse person it sounds really appealing, but part of the point was we need to be out spreading the gospel- not just to non-Christians but to ourselves and those who claim Christ as Lord. At least that is what I got out of it. It was a very good way to end Lent and the Easter season- Last line of the book- "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!"

WH says

I really wanted to love this book (as in, give this book 5 stars), since I generally really like Michael Horton. I thought that this was a very good book with an important message: insightful, well-researched, and thorough. But I found it a bit repetitive at points and just too long. I would definitely recommend this book, but I would also recommend skimming the repetitive parts and savoring the many nuggets of wisdom in the book.

Aaron says

Definitely some high points in this book. I rated it a 3 because I found that most of the time I had to wade through a lot of criticism to get to the core of what I was reading it for. Perhaps could have been better organized.
