

Why Modern Missionaries Can't Follow the Great Commission (And What They Should Do Instead)

Imagine this scenario: A dedicated missionary spends years learning a foreign language, needs medical care when sick, and can't heal everyone they meet through prayer alone. Is this a failure of faith? No - it's evidence that they're working in a completely different program than what we see in the book of Acts.

The Missing Powers Problem

Every time Matthew 28:19-20 is quoted as the "Great Commission" for today's missionaries, a crucial detail is being overlooked. These verses can't be separated from Mark's account of the same event, where Jesus promised specific supernatural powers would accompany those who believe:

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17-18)

This presents us with an unavoidable question: If we claim Matthew's commission, why don't we see Mark's signs?

Understanding the Original Context

When Jesus gave this commission, it was part of Israel's kingdom program:

The Message Was Kingdom-Focused:

"The gospel of the kingdom" (Matthew 4:23)

Water baptism for remission of sins (Acts 2:38)

Keep the law of Moses (Matthew 23:2-3)

The Audience Was Specific:

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles" (Matthew 10:5)

"Lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24)

Kingdom promised to Israel (Acts 1:6)

The Power Was Supernatural:

Instant language abilities

Complete healing power

Protection from deadly things

The Order Was Clear:

Jerusalem first (Acts 1:8)

Then Judaea and Samaria

Finally, the uttermost parts

Even years after receiving this commission, Peter needed a special vision just to visit one Gentile household (Acts 10). The apostles stayed in Jerusalem until persecution forced them out (Acts 8:1), and they "preached the word to none but unto the Jews only" (Acts 11:19). This proves that "all nations" in Matthew 28:19 wasn't an immediate commission to Gentiles - it was part of Israel's kingdom program where the nations would be blessed through a converted Israel.

A Completely New Program Revealed

When Israel rejected their risen Messiah through the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), their prophesied kingdom program was temporarily set aside. In this pivotal moment of Israel's final rejection, God revealed His secret purpose by saving their chief persecutor, Saul of Tarsus (later Paul), on the road to Damascus. This wasn't a mere coincidence - it was God demonstrating His new program of grace by saving the "chief of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15).

Through Paul, God began an entirely new work, creating the Body of Christ - a new entity that had never existed before. This Body began with Paul's conversion and the revelation of the mystery program to him. As the first member of the Body of Christ, Paul was saved as a pattern for all who would believe after him:

"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Timothy 1:16)

Paul was uniquely chosen as the only apostle commissioned directly by the ascended, glorified Christ in heaven:

"Last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8)

The Unique Gospel of Grace

Paul's gospel wasn't a modification or update of previous messages - it was an entirely new revelation from the glorified Christ:

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12)

This new message was so distinct that Paul calls it "my gospel" (Romans 2:16) and emphasizes that it had been "kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25).

Key Differences in Paul's Message:

Salvation by Grace Alone:

No works required (Ephesians 2:8-9)

No water baptism (1 Corinthians 1:17)

No law keeping (Romans 6:14)

A New Entity - The Body of Christ:

Began with Paul's conversion as the first member

A joint-body of believing Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 3:6)

No religious distinction (Galatians 3:28)

All members baptized by one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Seated in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6)

A mystery not revealed until Paul (Ephesians 3:1-9)

A Different Focus:

Grace not kingdom

Heavenly not earthly

Spirit not signs

Our True Commission Today

Through Paul, God gave us clear instructions for today:

"To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery" (Ephesians 3:9) "We are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20) "The ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18)

This grace commission perfectly fits what we see today:

No sign gifts required

No instant language abilities needed

No promise of physical healing

Pure grace message to all people

The Key to Understanding

God's instruction through Paul provides the solution:

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15)

When we rightly divide Scripture, recognizing God's different programs for different times, everything makes sense:

Why kingdom signs aren't happening

Why missionaries need language training

Why we need medical care

Why our message is different

What This Means for Modern Missions

Stop Trying to Fulfill the Wrong Commission:

Don't claim powers not promised to us

Don't confuse Israel's program with ours

Don't mix law and grace

Embrace Our Unique Role:

Share the pure grace message

Focus on the mystery program

Operate as ambassadors of grace

Minister with Confidence:

Know our clear commission

Understand our distinct message
Share God's grace freely
Practical Next Steps

If you're involved in missions or ministry today:

Study Paul's Epistles:

Romans through Philemon

Focus on the mystery

Learn our distinct message

Rightly Divide:

Recognize different programs

Understand our commission

Apply proper instructions

Share Grace:

Pure gospel message

No works required

Christ's finished work

Remember:

This isn't about having less power or importance - it's about rightly understanding and fulfilling God's perfect plan for today. When we grasp this truth, we can serve with clarity and confidence, knowing exactly what God has called us to do in this dispensation of grace.