**Hey Church! Is it the Great Commission or the Great Commandment?**

By

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Words are important. Even the order in which words are expressed is important. One place where not only the words used, but the order in which the words are expressed is important is in the ongoing debate between the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Which order works for you? For your congregation? For your denomination or network of congregations?

I have always been a Great Commission person. The way I state my commitment is to say, “I believe in the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment.

Over a lifetime of consulting with and coaching congregations and denominational organization, I have listened for the order in which people talk about the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Does it represent a position, perspective, or priority of ministry?

While I casually observed the use of these terms over several decades, I intentionally began to focus on what I was hearing when the issue was addressed to me in a certain way by a regional denomination leader. He said, “George, we appreciate what you are saying, but you have to remember we are a Great Commandment denomination rather than a Great Commission denomination.”

**What Was He Saying? Either/Or?**

Yes.

Just in case you need a refresher, the Great Commission is most classically recorded in Matthew 28:19-20. It is also expressed in Mark 16:15. The Great Commandment is stated in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I like the Mark 12:29-31 version which is substantially quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

A case can be made for making the Great Commandment first in priority. Loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves is certainly foundational. At our core we are to worship and praise our Triune God.

In practice, however, I have found that denominational families who focus most and state first the Great Commandment are diminishing in vitality and vibrancy. If church and denominational numerical growth is a key measurement, then they are not only failing to grow, but often experiencing significant decline. Of course, there are exceptions to this pattern.

Denominational families who focus most and state first the Great Commission are more likely to be increasing in vitality and vibrancy. Again, if numerical growth is a key measurement, these denominations may be growing. There are exceptions to this pattern. Southern Baptists as the largest Protestant denomination in North America are the exception when it comes to numerical growth during the past ten years.

**Good Works or Good News?**

While it is an oversimplification, a focus first on the Great Commandment can become a focus on Good Works in general. It can lack a personal concern for the full physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of the persons who are the focus of Good Works.

A focus on the Great Commission can become a focus on Good News almost exclusively, focus on the essential spiritual needs of persons, and only secondarily their physical, emotional, and social needs.

The reality is that we need an and/both approach. Therefore, I do not want to set up a false dichotomy of either/or. Perhaps what is needed is a continuum.

On one end is the Great Commission. On the other end is the Great Commandment. A few congregations may be all the way on one end or another. I suspect the majority are somewhere along the continuum with some focus on each. Not many will be perfectly balanced between a focus on the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

One quality of this Great Commission (Good News) and Great Commandment (Good Works) continuum is that100 percent of the time the people who are the focus of Good News and Good Works are without hesitation people you would be willing to have sitting next to you in worship every weekend. Without this unconditional love quality both Good News and Good Works efforts of bogus.

Where would you place your congregation along this continuum? Understanding you place, what are your next steps? Most important, where along this continuum is God asking your congregation to serve?

**Epilogue**

Great Commission vs. Great Commandment, or Good News vs. Good Works, are only two of the four factors in a balanced and synergistic approach to holistic congregational ministry. The other two are Good Faith and Good Community.

Ask me about the *Four Goods* at ***BullardJournal@gmail.com*** and I will share the model with you.