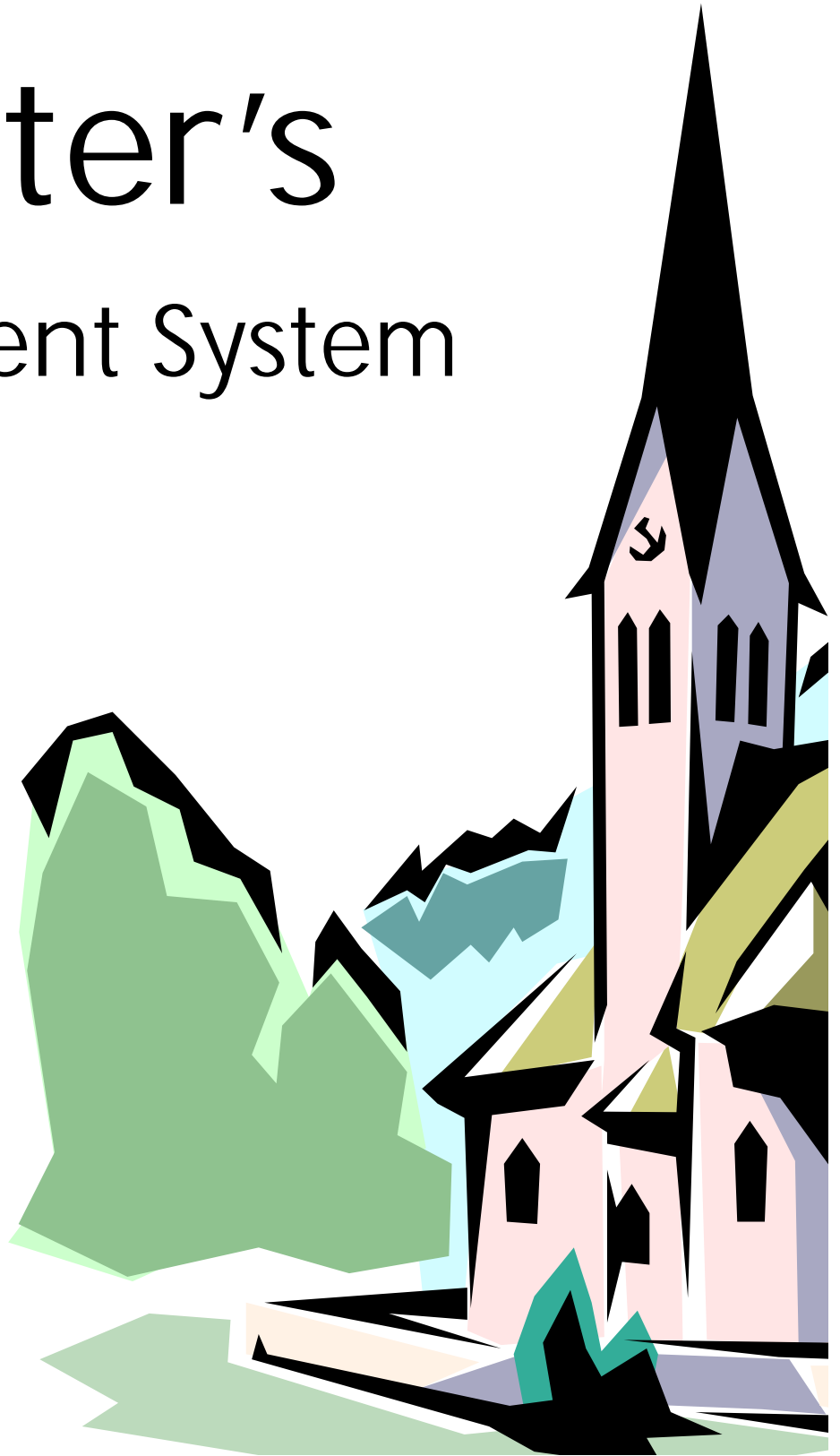


The  
Church  
Planter's  
Management System

Biblical  
Rationale  
for Church  
Planting



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This paper offers a biblical rationale to the efforts of the Church Planting Group of the North American Mission Board (NAMB). Specifically, it seems to give a biblical definition of church planting followed by specific, biblical, theological affirmations related to the church planting task. Following this, the paper will offer a biblical foundation beginning with the decrees of our Lord, and including other relevant passages. Then, the paper will propose brief theological foundations for church planting.

While written by one author, this document hopes to be a faithful summary of salient thoughts gathered from a series of meetings. Several meetings were held with church-planting leaders from across the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). I am grateful to the participants, Dr. Bob Reccord, president of the North American Mission Board, and Richard Harris, vice president, Church Planting Group, for their support in this project. In particular, I am grateful for the invitation and leadership of Dewey Hickey, director, Readiness Team, throughout the process.

## BIBLICAL DEFINITION

## OF CHURCH PLANTING

God's Word teaches that  
church planting is  
evangelizing the lost,  
discipling believers,  
and starting congregations.

## CHURCH PLANTING

## AFFIRMATIONS

1. Church planting is biblical.
2. Church planting must be based on fervent, ongoing prayer.
3. Church planting is essential to evangelizing the world.
4. Church planting must be guided by the Spirit.
5. Church planting is characterized by bold witnessing.
6. Church planting trusts the God who calls us to be faithful.
7. Church planting is about reaching all peoples, particularly in the cities, as well as rural areas.
8. Church planting must see all people as needing the gospel.
9. Church planting must follow the New Testament in honoring diversity.
10. Church planting must be sacrificial in nature, honoring God through our sacrifice.
11. Church planting must be indigenous to the local context.
12. Church planting is dependent far more on the call of God than on human factors, buildings, and finances.
13. Church planting demands hard work.
14. Church planting must include ministry to the whole person.

Significant Biblical Passages Related to Church Planting

A biblical rationale for church planting can be seen in examining three features: the Lord's reply to the Peter's confession in Matthew 16; the Great Commission passages; and the doctrine of the New Testament church. The convergence of these three forces produces a clear explanation of how the church can bring glory to God. Seeking to fulfill the Great Commission without local New Testament churches is like the birth of a baby without a family. In order for the Great Commission to be fulfilled, churches must be planted. Such churches must be biblical in makeup and give great emphasis to evangelism. These must be united to form a biblical focus.

The entirety of biblical revelation points to a God who is redemptive in nature. From the protoevangelion in chapter three of Genesis to the maranatha in Revelation 22, the Word of God is about God's desire to redeem people created in His image. Specifically, the New Testament spells out how we are redeemed by grace through repentance and faith based on the finished work of Christ.

## The Great Confession Passage

Matthew chapter 16 records one of the two instances in which Jesus specifically uses the word "church" (the other being in chapter 17 of Matthew). Jesus' statement, "Upon this rock, I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18, KJV) affirms the vital place of the church in the plan of God. The church was not a development of Jesus' followers after His ascension. The church was to the gathering of God's people. The Greek term, *ekklesia*, or assembly, built on the Aramaic *qahal*.

Blomberg adds further insight:

... the nature of Jesus' instruction to His community of followers certainly implied their continued existence in some form, even if there is little of an "institution yet in view." Moreover, the word *ekklesia* in Hellenistic Greek often simply met an assembly, as is also true of the underlying Aramaic *qahal*—a gathering of people for a particular purpose. In the Old Testament, these gatherings normally included the Israelites at worship, so that precisely such a community surrounding the Messiah had become a standard Jewish expectation.

Blomberg adds that in this passage, Jesus "implies nothing here of any particular church structure on government; he merely promises that he will establish a gathered community of his followers and help them to grow."

## The Great Commission Passages

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is but one of several recorded commands of our Lord to make disciples. In fact, every gospel ends, and the Acts begins, with a commission from our Lord. The propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is crucial to the disciples who follow Him. While expressed throughout the pages of Holy Writ, it is more clearly and succinctly stated in the passages that quote the Lord delivering the command than anywhere else. Notice the significant verses:

"Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matt. 28:18-20, NASB)

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature'" (Mark 16:15, NASB).

“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:47-48, NKJV).

“Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you, as the Father has sent Me, I also send you’” (John 20:21, NASB).

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NKJV).

## Matthew

These recorded words of our Lord offer a multifaceted look at the jewel of the gospel we share. In Matthew’s account, the main verb, *matheteusate*, means to “make disciples.” In the confidence of His power and presence, compelled to go forth, we are commanded not only to talk to people, but to make disciples. The force of this word was the attachment to a person, i.e., a follower of Jesus. Such followers are to be baptized (the entryway into the church) and taught the commands of our Lord. So, in this passage, there is a strong correlation between the winning of disciples and the church. Further, Matthew’s account emphasizes winning *ta ethne*, or all the “people groups” of the earth. Racial prejudices should be eliminated by the urgency of the gospel, and the unanimity of all people who are dead in sins (see Eph. 2).

Tasker quotes Levertoff who declares that Matthew 28:16-20 is “the greatest conclusion that any book could have.” Gundry describes the passage as a “compendium of important Matthean themes,” including Jesus as the greater Moses, one with authority, the Trinity, doubt among the disciples, teaching new disciples, the presence of Jesus, and the mission to the nations.

**Verse 18**—Jesus gives the charge to His disciples, beginning with His authority to render such a demand. Authority (*exousia*) is not “might” like that of a conquerer, but “something which is His by right, conferred upon Him by One who has the right to bestow it.” It is to be distinguished from the term *dunamis*. Foerster gives three foundations for the New Testament usage: “First, the power indicated is the power to decide. Second, this decision takes place in ordered relationships, all of which reflect God’s lordship. Third, as a divinely given authority to act, *exousia* implies freedom for the community.” It is significant that Jesus mentioned heaven and earth. His authority extended to heaven by virtue of His role as Priest with God, and throughout the earth due to His role as King of men. The terminology used expresses a total and unrequited authority.

**Verse 19**—Therefore, because of His divine authority, the disciples were to go and make disciples. Verses 19-20a are the heart of the Great Commission. The charge was made to the 500 present along with the 11, and continues in its full implications today. Broadus notes a new emphasis here by saying that whereas it was a practice of the Jews to let Gentiles come to worship with them, now Christians are given the assignment to go out, for “Christianity is essentially a missionary religion.” Broadus adds: “It must be spread, by a law of its nature; it must be active at the extremities, or it becomes chilled at the heart; must be enlarging at its circumference, or its very centre tends to be defaced.”

The participle *poruentes* is auxiliary to the main verb. The very nature of the gospel involves going. The term *matheteusate* is the main verb and is an imperative. There is the idea here of “having gone, disciple.” There is more involved in this term than simple instruction. In the New Testament, the term for disciple and its constructs occur about 250 times, only in the Gospels and Acts, and always implies an

attachment to a person. The scope of the commission is all the nations. Broadus says this was both a formidable challenge and a peculiar declaration. In Luke 24:47-49, we read of Jesus' instruction to wait for the Spirit's power for this awesome charge.

**Verse 20**—Two participants explain those elements involved in this process: baptizing and teaching (v. 20). Plummer notes correctly that verses 19 and 20 should not be separated as they are. He says the responsibilities to make disciples, baptize, and teach should be in verse 19 with the concomitant promise in verse 20. Concerning the teaching referred to in verse 20, Plummer comments: "It is evident from the threefold charge that the teaching which suffices for discipleship and admission is not all that is requisite. After baptism much additional instruction will be required." In other words, the commission given by Jesus does not allow a "dip them and drop them" approach to new converts that sometimes occurs.

Jesus' final statement is a reminder of His presence continually with disciples in all ages. Without this presence, the task would be unattainable. This presence would be manifested in the Holy Spirit who is mentioned in Luke's account.

## Mark

Due to Mark's uncertain textual status, only a brief view of its meaning will suffice. Robertson comments that "there is little in these verses not in Matthew 28." The important verses concerning the commission of Jesus are 14-18. Cole equates this appearance of Jesus to the disciples with John 20:19ff. Robertson says this is probably another account of the magna charta of Matthew 28:16-20. Unlike Cole, Robertson more aptly makes this the second time the commission was given, the first being John 20:21-23, while the third was Luke 24:44-49 and Acts 1:3-8.

Mark's account is succinct: Preach the gospel, or proclaim, as a herald, the specific, good message regarding Christ's work for us.

## Luke

Luke's commission builds on the Old Testament. After Jesus opened the understanding of His disciples, we are told He related their fulfillment came in His finished work. He then told them, "you are witnesses of these things." He had also said that repentance and the forgiveness of sins was to be preached. The message to be proclaimed was clear. The method, through the witness or testimony of each believer, was understood. No wonder Luke later recorded the unbelievable spread of the early Christians. They did what their Master told them.

**Verses 44-47**—With the attention of the disciples focused on Him, Jesus explained to them all that had occurred in accordance with Old Testament teaching. He refers to a tripartite division including the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (i.e., the law, prophets, and writings). This is the only reference in the New Testament giving a threefold division.

Jesus then opened their understanding. The verb is a present infinitive indicating a continuous and lasting comprehension. The Old Testament prophecies became clear. Three infinitives summarize the substance of Old Testament teaching about Jesus—to suffer, to rise, and to be proclaimed. Thus, the commission to the church is traced back beyond the time of Jesus' earthly ministry to Old Testament prophecy. Geldenhuys summarizes this fact: "The main theme taught by the (Old Testament) Scriptures is that the Messiah had to suffer, that He should rise again on the third day, and that the ultimate purpose of all this was that the glad tidings of repentance and forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in His name." The content of the message is repentance and the forgiveness of sins. This message was and is to be preached. The term employed is the common word for preaching, *kerusso*, and signifies a herald who

proclaims a message for someone. The herald's task is to announce the message without any alteration. Like Matthew the message is to be preached to all nations, and like Acts it is to begin being delivered in Jerusalem.

**Verses 48-49**—These verses along with verse 47 link the gospel closely to the book of Acts. Luke's use of the word "witness" is repeated in Acts 1:8. Here the fact is stated that the disciples were actual witnesses of those events that compose the gospel message: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In Acts there is an expansion of this with the charge that "you shall be witnesses," i.e., they were to testify consciously to others what they had experienced.

Likewise, verse 49 is closely linked to Acts 1. The promise of power was alluded to in Matthew 28:20b when Jesus promised His continuous presence. Here the promise of power is given clearly, and the source of this power is identified in Acts 1:8 as the Holy Spirit. The realization of that power came at Pentecost. The disciples were to wait in Jerusalem to receive the power.

In summary, the gospel record is in complete agreement as is the Acts. In other words, the history of the birth of the church clearly gives all Christians the mandate of proclaiming the Good News to those who have not responded.

## John

John's account is profound in its simplicity. "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21, NASB). Its profundity is seen in Jesus' charge that His followers are to go with the same urgency, the same resolve as our Lord Himself. Following the example of Jesus, His disciples are to go. But His followers are to go with the compulsion from the Lord having been sent. Even as it was necessary for our Lord to be incarnated, coming from heaven to earth (John 1), it is necessary for us to leave the sanctuary and go into the world to tell others of Christ.

Jesus sent His disciples even as He was sent. For what purpose was Jesus sent? The gospels are clear:

"For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, NASB).

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10, NASB).

Matthew noted a threefold ministry of the Lord: preaching, teaching, and healing (see Matt. 9:35). Jesus touched the hurts of people, proclaimed the good news, and instructed His disciples. Our efforts to reach the lost must never ignore the place of ministering to the needs of a hurting world.

## Acts

Jesus' last recorded words prior to the Ascension are in Acts 1:8. In control of the circumstances around His departure, the Lord made abundantly clear what He expected His disciples to be: witnesses to the Lord. Further, He gave a practical approach to carry out this charge—start where you are, and move out giving a witness to Christ. The Acts is a record of believers fulfilling the commission. And, everywhere they went, new believers were formed into churches.

The Acts' account mirrors Luke's Gospel. Jesus' final words to His followers includes a promise of power from the Holy Spirit; the personal (all believers); the proclamation (witnesses unto Me); and the plan (beginning at Jerusalem and moving forth). The Acts narrative is simply a record of the early church fulfilling the Lord's command. Our task has not changed.

Along with the Synoptic accounts the Gospel of John and Acts contain the Great Commission. The Acts' account equals the commission in Luke in its setting. Fitzmeyer says the synoptics display commissions that suit themes prevalent in each. He says Mark's use of "Preach the Gospel" is related to Mark 1:1,14,15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9. Similarly, Matthew's use of the terminology "make disciples" and "teach" can be seen in the five great teaching discourses of Jesus as well as Matthew's use of *mathetes* far more than in the other Synoptics. Likewise, Luke uses "testify" (*martureo*) which is an important theme in both Luke and Acts. John's account compels us to go forth for the Master.

It is significant that the last recorded words of Jesus before His Ascension contained the commission to reach the world with the gospel. Luke gives this account in both his Gospel and Acts (Luke 24:46-53; Acts 1:4-12). Certainly Jesus, who knew when and how His last moments would be spent with His disciples, left with them a final charge that was most important of anything He taught. Only if the message of salvation that He lived and died to bring were propagated could the lost world have hope. The responsibility placed on His followers is awesome indeed.

## The Great Commission and the Entire Bible

It would be wrong to say that the Great Commission to reach the world with the news that God desires a personal relationship with mankind is merely a single teaching in a few New Testament passages. In fact, evangelization is a theme throughout the Bible in a variety of degrees. Genesis 1-11 tells us why a savior is needed. In Genesis 12, Abraham is given the promise that all nations will be blessed through his family. In Exodus 19, God, who has called to Himself a people, charges them to be a "kingdom of priests." Space does not allow a thorough investigation of this subject; suffice it to say that the whole counsel of God reveals His redemptive nature, and His desire to bring apart a people to Himself.

The Old Testament is the starting place for understanding our Lord's charge (Luke 24:45ff). David Howard notes this when he warns about using only a passage like Matthew 28 to talk about missions and evangelism: "Mission was formerly based a little too one-sidedly. . . . But the fault lay not in the fact that mission was based on this (i.e., Matthew 28) declaration, but in the fact that Matthew 28:18-20 was isolated from the whole biblical witness." Howard also says that Genesis 1:1 is the necessary basis for the Great Commission, for God is concerned about all of creation. This does not take away from the manifold importance of the Great Commission given by Jesus; it merely shows that God's natural desire to relate to His creation has existed through eternity.

## The Nature of the Commission

In viewing the nature of the Great Commission as a whole several features can be seen. Three of these features are the individual, exclusive, and inclusive features inherent in it.

The Great Commission is individual in at least two ways. First, because each follower of Jesus is responsible to deliver the message. When William Carey set forth his views on foreign missions they were considered bizarre and new, not because of obedience or disobedience but because of identification—the people of Carey's day mostly thought the Commission applied only to the immediate apostles of Jesus. This faulty understanding is generally rejected today. Individual responsibility is clear: "The churches are composed of individuals, and there is no way to evade individual responsibility to the Great Commission." The second way in which it is individual is the fact that the gospel must be received individually. The message of Christianity considers mankind first of all as individuals. The biblical progression is to begin with the individual, bringing transformation, and to move to society (rather than changing society in order to reach individuals with the gospel).

The Great Commission is also exclusive. By exclusion, it is meant that the gospel is unique and is alone the only true means whereby man can be made right with his Creator (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The fundamental assertion of the faith of the Hebrews was monotheism and “there was something unaccommodating about monotheism.” Jesus is no less demanding. As the gospel has continued to spread this truth has remained unchanged; thus, our responsibility to witness only grows as world population increases.

Finally, the Great Commission is inclusive, inasmuch as it is for all people of all places. The gospel is universal, not universalist. All can be saved, all will be saved only by trusting Jesus. Jesus modeled the reality that the Gospel is available to all, spending time with Pharisees (Luke 7:36), sinners (Luke 7:36-50), publicans (Luke 5:27-32), the wealthy (Luke 19:1-10), Samaritans (John 4), and Gentiles (Luke 7:9). “There can be no doubt that in the mind of Jesus His message had a universal scope.” May this same attitude be exemplified in the lives of His followers today.

## The Nature of the Church

Neither the New Testament, in general, nor our Lord Jesus intended for Christians simply to reach people with the gospel. No, believers were to be formed into assemblies called by a common purpose. The word church, *ekklesia*, means the called out ones. Following the pattern of the synagogue, the early believers were quickly gathered into congregations, as is noted consistently in the Acts (Acts 2:41-47; 5:11; 13:1).

The Acts provides us the historical record of the birth of the earliest Christians. While the word “church” is not used until Acts 5:11, the gathering of baptized believers is seen as early as 2:42. As numbers of people continued to come to Christ, it was only natural that these new disciples be gathered into congregations, typically meeting in houses.

In Acts 9:31, Luke provides one of his typical summary statements in which he refers to the church in a general sense. The birth of churches as seen in the Acts offers several methodological paradigms or models to demonstrate how the disciples lived out the propositional truths they received. The paradigms, which will follow are not intended to be exhaustive, but illustrate the variety of approaches to plant churches.

Apparently, many churches were planted in a short span of time, for we read in Acts 14:23 that Paul and Barnabas appointed pastors in “every church.” Further, in Acts 15:41, Paul traveled “through Syria and Silicia, strengthening the churches.” Paul obviously formed new believers into congregations wherever he went. This was the natural result of evangelism. Roland Allen called this “the spontaneous expansion of the church.”

Heed the words of Talmadge Amberson:

We, today, need to recapture the note of spontaneity which existed in the New Testament and, therefore, produced churches as the believers witnessed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Church planting does involve specific and deliberate intent to start new churches, but the New Testament points to the fact that new churches and church planting are the direct and inevitable consequences of believers involvement in witnessing and proclamation.

## Theological Affirmations for Church Planting

That is to say, when believers are living in such a way as to bring glory to God, it is inevitable that lost people will be saved and churches will be planted. Beyond the obvious call to reach people given by our Lord, there are further theological affirmations to be deduced from the New Testament. The following are succinct statements only.

- The authority of Scripture (bibliology). The Bible is the written record of God's self-revelation to man. It, not contemporary issues, is the starting point for church planting. Truth is relevant to any culture, however, and must be presented in a manner understandable to a given culture.

- The initiative of a sovereign God (theology) from Genesis 1, where we see the initiative of God to create; to John 1 where the initiative of God to redeem is declared, and throughout Scripture, God is at work. Church planting is a response to the Divine initiative. As Chaney puts it, "Church planting is an integral part of the mission of the church, and the entire missionary task rides out of the ultimate intention of the Father."

- The empowering work of the Spirit (pneumatology).

The Acts could properly be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 1:8—the Spirit empowers witnesses.

Acts 2—the Spirit's presence in the community of believers.

Acts 4:8, 31—Believers filled with the Spirit gave a bold witness.

Acts 7—Deacons were filled with the Spirit and faith and, they too preached Christ and started churches. These men allowed the apostles to do the work to which God had called them. And, they were willing to die for the faith.

Acts 13:1f—The Spirit selected and commissioned the missionaries who would plant many churches.

- Jesus' life and work give the reason for the spread of the gospel (Christology). His death and resurrection are the gospel at its core.

- The message of the cross, i.e., the good news, is the means whereby men and women enter into a relationship with God (soteriology). The conditions for this response are repentance and faith.

- The church is the visible manifestation of the kingdom of God in this life (ecclesiology). A church is a group of baptized believers united to worship God, to nurture believers, and to reach the lost. The very nature of the church, including its personal nature, demands that churches be planted anywhere on earth where people live. The church is where the ordinances are conducted, where the Lord's day is honored, and where the saints assemble weekly for corporate worship. "The church," writes Charles Chaney, "is the present physical manifestation of Jesus Christ, the Lord in the world."

In the New Testament, local churches helped other churches. Paul took a collection to assist churches. Further, churches were involved in planting others. This is seen most clearly in Acts 13, where the church at Antioch sent out Paul and Barnabas on their journeys to evangelize and congregationalize.

Other teachings certainly relate to church planting. Biblical anthropology teaches that all are in God's image—yet fallen—and need the redemption offered through Christ and the nurture of churches.

Eschatology reminds believers there is heaven to be gained and hell to be escaped if churches are planted where all people across the earth can be reached.

## Theological Statements Related to Church Planting in the Twenty-First Century

- Church planting must focus on the empowerment and guidance of the Spirit of God.
- Church planting must realize prayer unlocks the spiritual resources of God. Intimacy with God is critical to the church-planting enterprise.

- Church planting must focus on divine resources over human resources.
- Church planting must recognize the essential place of sacrifice and hardship.
- Church planting must be built on the living Word of God incarnated in the changed lives of believers.
- Church planting must be founded on core biblical values—the essentials which lay a foundation for biblical church planting.

The dawn of a new millennium requires the passion, the conviction, and the courage of the apostles to reach the world. Church planting must, as it was then, be a central focus of evangelism and missions in our day. May God raise up a generation of apostle Paul's who will preach Christ and plant churches across the North American continent.

