

Is the Great Commission a Mission Mandate for Us Today?

Posted by Bob Young

Note: Periodically the Barna Group shares a *Barna Highlight* to help inform Christians about the state of the U.S. churches. Barna describes these as “bite-sized findings you can use to become a more informed leader.” Detailed information is available in *The Great Disconnect*, a research project in partnership with Mission India, a resource for “helping today’s churches and church leaders to a better understanding of the misconceptions and inconsistencies that are hindering the church in fulfilling the Great Commission.”

The graphic to the right summarizes information presented in a recent *Barna Highlight*.

- 85% of “pastors” believe missions is a mandate for all Christians.
- Among “practicing Christians,” only 42% affirm missions as a mandate for every Christian.
- Among “all Christians,” only 25% believe every Christian must be involved in missions.¹

The research results do not surprise me. I remember a conversation and Bible study with a Bible professor at one of our Christian universities. He affirmed that the Great Commission was given only to the Eleven and that it should not be understood as a command for Christians today. I have been involved with church leaders for over 50 years. I can tell you that few church leaders are actively, intentionally involved in the mission of seeking and saving the lost! Our practices reflect our understanding of Scripture!



We have a world mission problem! While a very large percentage of ministers, preachers, missionaries, and evangelists see the Great Commission – missions and evangelism – as a mandate for all disciples of Jesus, that belief is shared by a minority of Christians. Even among the most active, involved Christians, between one-third and one-half see the Great Commission as a mandate for all Christians (42% is halfway between 1/3 and 1/2). The survey found that among all Christians, only one in four see mission as a personal mandate to every Christian.

Welcome to mission work that largely depends on professionals.

Welcome to mission work where the primary purpose and result is not making disciples and saving souls.

Welcome to mission work focused on meeting physical needs.

We have a local mission problem. Since the mission field begins at the doorsteps of the church building and our homes, the survey results speak to local churches where mission activity among the members is often minimal. Welcome to churches where evangelism mostly depends on the ministers. Welcome to churches where the defined role of some ministers does not include mission outreach. Welcome to churches where leaders are minimally involved in local mission outreach. Welcome to plateaued and “crawl growth” churches.

We have a problem in the mission field because the U.S. results reported by Barna are being passed on to churches in the mission field, where increasingly, outreach is the work of the missionary, the minister, or the preacher, but not of every Christian! I close with a reminder. When the early church was scattered in Acts 8, the text says that the Christians went everywhere preaching the word. May we return to the New Testament model!

¹ In the context of the local church, “pastor” would refer to those with formal preaching or ministry roles. The second group would be the members who are most active and involved; the third group would represent the entire membership.