Funding the Great Commission

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**What is the Great Commission?**
The Great Commission is the traditional name for the mission Jesus gave to His disciples following His resurrection: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). The Great Commission is where the Christian church finds its call to world evangelization, and it is also where we learn that the goal of Christian mission is obedience to Jesus in every area of our lives.

**What is our role in fulfilling the Great Commission?**
The church's role with respect to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is to do whatever is necessary for its fulfillment, trusting the Lord to work through our efforts. This involves first of all being obedient disciples of Jesus. We cannot ask others to do what we ourselves are not doing. We continue to fulfill the Great Commission by working to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them obedience to Jesus in all areas of life, including matters of generosity and stewardship. Finally, fulfilling the Great Commission involves praying and giving our money to help other Christians do this important and strategic work, especially in frontier missions settings (Philippians 4:15; 3 John 6-8).

**Why do I have trouble caring about the fate of unbelievers (or the plight of the poor)?**
If we have trouble caring for the poor or reaching out to the lost, our first order of business is repentance for failing to obey God's command (Jonah; Matthew 28:16-20). Part of our trouble may stem from failing to study the priorities in God's Word. Meditating on the Scripture's message of mission and concern for the poor and the lost, memorizing relevant Scripture verses and reading relevant books can stimulate our concern for such vital matters. Supporting missionaries or organizations that are directly engaged in such ministries can be a great assistance to cold hearts. As Scripture indicates, our hearts follow our money (Matthew 6:19-21). When we invest in Coca-Cola, we care about Coca-Cola; when we invest in God's Kingdom, our hearts and minds inevitably will be much more in tune with His agenda. Above all, we simply may be growing cold in our appreciation for God's grace for us. God sacrificed His Son Jesus to save us from our sins, at great cost to Himself. A period of concentrated prayer, Bible study and fasting might strengthen our sense of gratitude and compel us to witness to the lost and care for the poor.

**What is strategic giving?**
Strategic giving is giving that shows sensitivity to deep needs in God's Kingdom and in our communities. Such giving has the potential not simply to make a small difference but to wholly transform a community or extend Jesus' gospel in radical, lasting ways. Examples abound, but include the following: (1) New York urban pastor Tim Keller argues that church planting should be part of every Christian's giving since it is an investment which often will produce great returns as the new church begins to contribute to the Lord's work on their own. (2) Instead of simply distributing handouts to the needy, some ministries focus (where appropriate) on providing small business or micro-enterprise loans to help the poor begin to work for themselves. (3) In many parts of the world—including the United States—racial and cultural tensions run extremely high, creating great division even among fellow believers and hindering the work of the church. Ministries and churches that emphasize racial reconciliation and healing are strategic sources of blessing as they help heal God's church so that it can function as God intended: as one unified family. As the church is healed, such efforts also can be sources of blessing for whole cities or entire nations. (4) Many areas of the globe and poorer parts of the United States are in dire need of trained Christian leaders. Giving to such strategic opportunities enables one's financial giving to multiply as the impact is felt through returns on investment and through the strengthening and extension of God's church in important ways. (5) Finally, we should note that giving that is not strategic includes giving to causes that work against the Kingdom of God—such as schools, colleges, hospitals, societies, seminaries and even denominations that were at one time faithful to Jesus and His Word but have departed from that commitment by embracing anti-Christian beliefs, values and practices. Many "respected" institutions (like alma maters) fall into this category, and we must be careful not to blindly support their work. Strategic giving can have eternal significance, not only for those to whom we give, but also for us.

**Should I give only to Christian causes?**
Not necessarily. Generally speaking, there is nothing wrong with a Christian giving money to a worthy non-Christian organization, e.g., a zoo, symphony, or university. (Of course, there are some non-Christian groups that are downright hostile to God and His Kingdom; Christians should not give money to these groups.) In fact, Christian giving to worthy non-Christian causes is a good thing, for a couple of reasons. First, God approves of cultural achievements like good music, good art and good education, even if they happen in non-Christian contexts (Genesis 1:28). Second, Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). We are supposed to be involved in constructive ways in the non-Christian world, which includes giving money. But having said so, there is a very important question of priorities that the Christian must ask. Where does my fundamental allegiance lie? What is my highest priority? For a Christian, the only proper answer is: with God and His Kingdom (Matthew 6:33). Giving to non-Christian causes is not wrong in itself, but if those causes come to supercede the place of God in a Christian's life, then they are idols, and the Christian should get rid of them (1 John 5:21). For example: Do we give more money to our college alma maters than to the church? If so, why? What does that tell us about our priorities? These are the kinds of questions we should ask ourselves. In short, we should give primarily to Christian causes, but it is good to give to some worthy non-Christian causes as well.