

# **FUNDING GREAT COMMISSION FAITHFULNESS: A RESPONSE TO MORRIS CHAPMAN**

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## **Introduction**

On May 7, Southern Baptist Executive Committee President Morris Chapman released a white paper titled “What’s In a Name? The Cooperative Program and Great Commission Giving.” The paper is available online at the Executive Committee’s Baptist2Baptist website and through Baptist Press.<sup>1</sup> The latter includes an interview with Dr. Chapman conducted by Baptist Press executive editor Will Hall. This white paper is written in response to Dr. Chapman’s document.<sup>2</sup> We appreciate Dr. Chapman sharing his concerns. Some were unique in that we had not heard these concerns expressed by anyone else. Others have been raised by different people and Dr. Chapman provides a service in bringing them together in one place.

However, we believe his analysis is an inaccurate assessment of Great Commission Giving and the impact it will have on the Cooperative Program. We believe that Dr. Chapman is right when he argues that “Southern Baptists are moved more by principle than by public relations.” However, the public relations organ of the SBC, which is under Dr. Chapman’s oversight, is clearly and decidedly slanted against the Great Commission Resurgence (GCR), thus we have chosen to respond with this paper so that our principles can be heard by Southern Baptists. We encourage our brothers and sisters to read all perspectives on the issues, and then make wise and informed decisions. Far too many are making their decisions based on irresponsible rhetoric and speculation and not the actual substance of the GCRTF report. We should all be more responsible than this.

Dr. Chapman’s white paper was written in response to the document titled “Penetrating the Lostness,” which is the final report of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force (GCRTF).<sup>3</sup> Component three of “Penetrating the Lostness” calls for Southern Baptists to celebrate “the total of all monies channeled through the causes of the Southern Baptist Convention, the state conventions, and associations” under the proposed name “Great Commission Giving.” The GCRTF does not argue for Great Commission Giving (GCG) as an alternative to the Cooperation Program (CP). Rather, the Task Force simply recognizes that our churches support SBC-related causes through funding strategies in addition to the Cooperative Program and urges Southern Baptists to rejoice over all financial support of Southern Baptists’ Great Commission ministries. Celebration rather than chastisement is a far more effective means of motivating sacrificial giving through all avenues.

In his white paper, Dr. Chapman raises nine “grave concerns” about Great Commission Giving. In these posts, we hope to respond to his arguments and, Lord willing, lay to rest his concerns. It is our prayerful hope that this paper will make a helpful contribution to the ongoing discussion about Great Commission Giving in particular, as well as the wider Great Commission Resurgence movement.

## **Concern 1: A Devaluation of the Cooperative Program**

Dr. Chapman’s first concern is that the adoption of GCG will result in a devaluing of the Cooperative Program. He uses a couple of different diagrams to hypothesize the possible ways

that Great Commission Giving would undermine the priority of the CP. His chief complaint is that the Cooperative Program will simply become one component of the new GCG paradigm, thus forfeiting its role as “THE cooperative means by which Southern Baptist churches support the whole program of Southern Baptist work.”

The GCRTF does call for Great Commission Giving to be the new overarching term that is used for all funds given to support SBC ministries. But “Penetrating the Lostness” also clearly “call[s] upon Southern Baptists to honor and affirm the Cooperative Program as the most effective means of mobilizing our churches and extending our reach.” Furthermore, the GCRTF calls upon all Southern Baptist churches to increase the percentage they give to the CP and calls upon all state conventions to increase the percentage of CP funds they forward to the SBC. Every member of the GCRTF is clearly and strongly supportive of the Cooperative Program. We believe the GCRTF’s recommendation will actually strengthen support for the CP.

We believe Great Commission Giving is not a competitor with the Cooperative Program. Rather, it simply is the recognition that Southern Baptist churches have always given to SBC causes through a variety of means, including special missions offerings, direct giving, and yes, primarily the Cooperative Program. Great Commission Giving is a better term and method to identify and rejoice in the level to which a local church supports SBC ministries because it includes every means a given church may use to help fund the Great Commission work of Southern Baptists. The CP stands at the center of those means for the vast majority of our churches, and we believe it will be supported to an even greater degree in the years to come.

### **Concern 2: A Devaluation of the Cooperative Program Name**

Dr. Chapman’s second concern is that Great Commission Giving represents a devaluing of the Cooperative Program name. He correctly and rightly argues that Southern Baptists are not Independent Baptists because of our commitment to cooperative missions and ministries. But he then seems to strictly equate cooperation with the Cooperative Program, going so far as to claim that “the Cooperative Program IS our Great Commission Giving!” This paints a picture that is both incomplete and historically inaccurate. It is incomplete because, as noted above, while the CP is the primary strategy through which Southern Baptist financially cooperate, it has never been the only means of such cooperation. It is historically inaccurate because Southern Baptists were committed to cooperative missions for 80 years before the advent of the Cooperative Program in 1925. The CP simply became our principle means of pursuing cooperative missions. Let us again say, we believe it still is and should continue to be the principle means.

Contrary to Dr. Chapman’s allegation, the recommendation that Southern Baptists adopt the Great Commission Giving language is not a “bait and switch.” The Cooperative Program “brand,” which is embraced and championed by the GCRTF, remains intact. We believe Southern Baptists will continue to rally around the CP, and even increase their support of the CP, if a case can be made that the Cooperative Program is the best strategy Southern Baptists have for extending the gospel to all nations. The Cooperative Program brand will remain as strong as Southern Baptists’ confidence in the stewardship of CP monies by the ministries they fund. This is as it should be!

### **Concern 3: A New Metric for “Cooperation”**

Dr. Chapman’s third concern is that Great Commission Giving will become a new metric for “cooperation” among Southern Baptists. He repeats the mistaken contention that the Cooperative Program is the only standard through which a church’s support of the SBC is measured. He also claims the CP “provides a sense of a church’s sacrifice for the sake of all the ministries in which a state convention and the SBC are engaged,” which is incorrect. Further, he argues that “well-known pastors of larger churches that give small percentages through the Cooperative Program” will further undermine the CP by arguing that Great Commission Giving should become the new benchmark through which financial cooperation is measured. Not only does Dr. Chapman impugn the alleged intentions of large church pastors, he also neglects the fact that several prominent large churches, including the First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia and the First Baptist Church of Springdale, Arkansas have significantly increased their CP percentages in recent years.

Dr. Chapman fears that Great Commission Giving will motivate pastors who give low percentages to the Cooperative Program to further decrease their support of the CP. We disagree, and believe just the opposite will occur. We believe that celebrating all moneys given to SBC ministries, coupled with a renewed Great Commission emphasis across the SBC, will motivate pastors of churches of every shape and size to lead their churches to increase their Cooperative Program support. Most churches that give low percentages to the CP are not unsupportive of the SBC. Rather, many are unconvinced that the CP is the best stewardship of their missions money or should be the only strategy they use to fund SBC ministries. We believe the burden of proof rests upon CP-funded ministries to prove they are worth the investment of Southern Baptist churches who desire to spread the gospel to the underserved and unreached places in America and the uttermost parts of the earth. If the burden of proof is met, we are convinced our people will rise to the occasion and give even more.

### **Concern 4: Motivation for Cooperation**

Dr. Chapman’s fourth concern is that GCG will result in a diminished motivation for Southern Baptists to cooperate. He states that he cannot understand why a pastor would not lead a church to support all that Southern Baptists do through the Cooperative Program. Dr. Chapman seems to imply that differing levels of support among autonomous churches is inappropriate and that some unmentioned benchmark must be met before a church is considered supportive. He also ignores the concerns that numerous churches have raised about stewardship of CP funds by some of our state conventions and denominational ministries. He then repeats, yet again, a version of his incorrect argument that SBC churches have only funded their ministries through the CP.

The claim that Southern Baptists were “societal” prior to the adoption of the CP in 1925 is historically inaccurate. Southern Baptists have embraced the convention method since 1845 because the SBC provides oversight and raises funds from a common pool of likeminded churches. The Cooperative Program is not the equivalent of the convention method; it is rather a specific strategy within the convention paradigm. Concerns that Southern Baptists will become “societal” are unfounded, unless one is concerned that all of our denominational ministries will become independent of SBC oversight. Ironically, it is Dr. Chapman who led the charge for the Executive Committee to retain sole membership of all SBC ministries in recent years, a change which effectively prevents the SBC from becoming truly societal.

Dr. Chapman also criticizes an unnamed GCRTF member for desiring “greater recognition for designated gifts to SBC entities,” quoting several biblical texts to demonstrate how unspiritual he believes this individual is. This is a rather weak argument, particularly in light of his own contention that the SBC currently recognizes a church’s degree of cooperation based upon its percentage of CP support. In other words, what he alleges Great Commission Giving will do could just as easily be applied to the CP and the recognition it now receives. It seems as though Dr. Chapman has latched onto the word “recognition” and interpreted it in the worst possible light to make a point he cannot otherwise sustain. The goal of the GCRTF is to recognize both CP giving and Great Commission Giving. It is not an either/or. It is a blessed both/and!

### **Concern 5: Mere Reallocation Creates No New Money**

Dr. Chapman’s fifth concern is that the mere reallocation of funds creates no new money. He notes that no proposals for greater missions funding will be successful without increased giving by the members of local churches. We agree completely, as does the GCRTF, which directly addressed this very issue by challenging all Southern Baptist to give at least 10% of their income to their local church and to consider estate planning and planned giving as further ways of supporting Great Commission ministries.

We believe Dr. Chapman inappropriately assumes that churches that do not meet his preferred level of CP support evidence some sort of selfishness or lack of faithful stewardship. Candidly, it is this very type of rhetoric, which assumes the CP is the only way to fund missions, that leads many churches to choose other means of supporting denominational ministries. Dr. Chapman has elevated Cooperative Program support to a level bordering biblical mandate, even if inadvertently. This attitude is far too pervasive among some denominational servants, and we believe it is a hindrance to our Great Commission faithfulness because it makes our strategies sacred rather than focusing attention on the lostness against which our strategies are supposed to be pushing back through gospel proclamation. We would do well to remember the words of Adrian Rogers, as repeated in Baptist Press on May 14, 1982: “Southern Baptists have made a golden calf of the [Cooperative] Program. . . . It’s almost easier to be against the Virgin Birth than the Program.” The context of these remarks was different, to be sure. The warning, however, is still valid today!

Dr. Chapman also expresses concern that the GCRTF calls for individuals, state conventions, and the SBC to commit to specific giving percentages, but fails to call upon churches to do the same. We believe there is a valid reason for this. In our understanding, the call for individuals to give at least 10% of their income to their local churches is biblical. As for the call for the state conventions and the SBC to adjust their budgets, this represents the desire of the GCRTF and countless other Southern Baptists that our entire denomination commit greater resources to reaching the underserved and unreached peoples of the world. But it is not the place of a denominational task force, or any other denominational representative, to recommend the level of giving expected of autonomous local churches. It is, however, the place of local churches to instruct denominational ministries how they should use the money those churches give.

The primacy of the local church cannot and must not be undermined in an effort to preserve the Cooperative Program status quo. The GCRTF unequivocally called for a greater commitment to CP giving among local churches. Though Dr. Chapman apparently desires a certain level of CP support from local churches if they are to meet his personal standards of

cooperation, we believe this is not his prerogative (or ours) as a denominational servant. Local churches must be in the driver's seat for missions giving. Dr. Chapman's statistics about what higher CP percentages could accomplish are informative; we would indeed get more money to the mission boards if churches gave more to the CP. But we are curious why this is the only statistic Dr. Chapman chose to highlight. Why not show how much money would go to the mission boards if state conventions in non-pioneer regions adjusted their CP budget to a 50-50 split between the state and the SBC? Why not show how much money would go to the mission boards if one or more national entities were defunded? Why the selective use of statistics? Calls for increased CP giving without addressing concerns about CP stewardship seem myopic and short-sighted.

### **Concern 6: A Devaluation of Cooperative Efforts**

Dr. Chapman's sixth concern is what he calls "a devaluation of cooperative efforts." He argues that he is in favor of "direct giving and going" as a way to encourage churches in "doing missions." By "direct giving," we assume he means direct giving to local church ministry initiatives and not direct giving to state convention or SBC ministries. He also contends that the SBC "exists to promote cooperative ministries." We disagree. The SBC exists as a network of connected cooperative ministries embraced and funded by autonomous Baptist churches. We think he is misguided when he implies that a church is only supporting the work of the SBC by what it gives through the Cooperative Program, since only the CP funds the 'whole' program." A church is supporting the work of the SBC anytime it gives to any SBC ministry. This is the very reality that Great Commission Giving seeks to recognize. The Cooperative Program is not of the *esse* ("being") of the SBC, but rather is of the *bene esse* ("well being"). We are thankful that the CP is in place to fund our ministries, but it is not intrinsic to the SBC since it did not exist for the first half of our history thus far. Dr. Chapman seems to consistently miss this point.

### **Concern 7: The Law of Unintended Consequences**

Dr. Chapman's seventh concern with Great Commission Giving is what he calls "the law of unintended consequences." His concern is that CP budget shortfalls will result if GCG is embraced. SBC ministries would then be forced to raise their own funds like they did in the days before the CP. We have to confess that this is indeed a possibility. But Dr. Chapman makes two key assumptions that we would contest. The first assumption is that Southern Baptists ought to continue doing everything we are currently doing. The GCRTF has suggested that every ministry needs to be examined and some ministries may need to be altered or perhaps even dropped. It is not a question of whether or not all our ministries are good; undoubtedly they are. It is rather a question of whether or not we are investing our resources in the most important things: ministries which aid churches in penetrating lostness.

The second assumption we would challenge is the assumption that CP giving will either remain stable or decrease if Great Commission Giving is adopted. As we have argued, we believe the Cooperative Program will substantially increase if local churches are convinced the CP is the most effective means for them to fund our denominational ministries. We believe this is true regardless of what happens to the GCG proposal. We are firmly convinced that no denominational ministry that is effectively assisting our churches in fulfilling the Great Commission will face any financial shortfalls. Frankly, if a ministry is not doing its part to help

us be a Great Commission people, it does not deserve our money. Southern Baptists will rally around the Cooperative Program and every ministry it funds if they are convinced we are more effectively rescuing the perishing among all the peoples of the earth. It is this very concern that leads so many churches at the present time to designate giving directly to individual denominational ministries instead of giving more through the CP.

Dr. Chapman also rehashes the tired argument that our problems are spiritual rather than structural. We strongly disagree with this false dichotomy which has so often been introduced into the debate over the Great Commission Resurgence. The spiritual and the structural are intimately related. Our structural problems reflect our spiritual problems, and our spiritual woes are only exacerbated by our structural shortcomings. Both need to be addressed and both need to be corrected. The GCRTF addresses both in “Penetrating the Lostness.”

### **Concern 8: Maintaining Funding Projections**

Dr. Chapman’s eighth concern is that adequate budget planning will be hindered if the SBC adopts Great Commission Giving. He reasons that since the budgets of the denomination’s ministry are based in large part upon CP allocation, GCG introduces greater uncertainty into the equation. He recounts how the CP allowed Southern Baptists to give generously to New Orleans Seminary, NAMB, and three state conventions in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. He argues this could not have been done without the budgetary stability provided by the Cooperative Program.

We have already expressed our disagreement with Dr. Chapman’s contention that Great Commission Giving undermines the CP. We believe the CP will become even stronger if the SBC embraces a Great Commission Resurgence. We believe that, for whatever reasons, Dr. Chapman has embraced a doomsday scenario for the CP which colors a number of his concerns, including this one. We prefer to trust our people and the churches to do what they believe is best with their missions money. The fact is the CP will continue to play a central role in budget planning, and some churches will continue to give directly to individual SBC ministries. In other words, what is happening right now will continue to happen. But if the GCRTF recommendations are adopted (and this is a crucial point many seem to be missing), we will recognize only gifts to Southern Baptist ministries, call it Great Commission Giving, and stop criticizing churches who exercise their freedom to determine how their missions money is used.

### **Concern 9: A Fractured Spirit**

Dr. Chapman’s final concern is that GCG will lead to a fractured spirit in the SBC because the Cooperative Program will die and Southern Baptists will no longer know how to cooperate. Some entities will go bankrupt and agency heads of financially viable ministries will be tempted to pander to churches that designate high dollars to those ministries. Again, we disagree. Dr. Chapman continues to assume that Great Commission Giving will kill the CP, even though the practice is basically going on right now, albeit by a different name (e.g. “Total Mission Giving”). We continue to believe that the key to a healthy future for the CP is not to bemoan designated giving, but for the CP to make a compelling case that it is the best means of funding our Great Commission priorities. Agency heads already receive contributions from some churches, some of which are substantial. Would Dr. Chapman argue that present agency heads are sycophants who lead their agencies in such a way as to please these churches? We trust he would not.

Dr. Chapman also argues that there will be tensions between pastors who support the CP, state conventions, and associations, and those pastors who do not. We have several questions about this claim. Does Dr. Chapman believe that there are many SBC churches that do not support any of the ministries he mentions, or does he mean they do not support them at the level he thinks is necessary to qualify for authentic cooperation? At what level of CP giving is a church considered unsupportive of the denomination? Does Dr. Chapman believe that every association and state convention is deserving of equal and unquestioned support? For example, does Dr. Chapman believe that churches who cooperate with the Baptist General Convention of Texas should give at the same level to the CP as churches that cooperate with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, even though the former only forwards about 22% to the SBC while the latter passes on over 57%? Does Dr. Chapman believe that churches should give generously to a local association that is unwilling to disfellowship affiliated churches that embrace the homosexual lifestyle or ordain women to pastoral ministry?

This gets to the heart of our disagreement with Dr. Chapman. He seems to imply that the way forward for the SBC is to simply give more money to the Cooperative Program. We want the CP to flourish, but we argue that this will not happen without asking some hard questions about Great Commission stewardship of CP dollars. His position amounts to a tacit endorsement of the status quo. We believe the status quo is unacceptable and will neither sustain the SBC long term nor effectively plant Baptist churches among all the peoples of the earth. He implies the CP is the sine qua non of the SBC. We believe the CP is a fantastic strategy that is almost on life support because of stewardship concerns that many denominational servants are unwilling to address. He suggests more is better. We believe that better is better, and that will lead to more.

### **Conclusion**

As we conclude our paper, we wish to make crystal clear our wholehearted support of the Cooperative Program. We were both converted and nurtured through the ministries of CP-supporting local churches. We were educated in various CP-funded institutions. We presently serve at a CP-funded theological seminary and have served at other CP-funded ministries in the past. We believe that the Cooperative Program remains the best strategy for Southern Baptists to fund Great Commission ministries. So does the GCRTF. But we also believe the Cooperative Program is not the only strategy for pursuing these ends. We further believe the CP faces an uncertain future, and that the movement known as the Great Commission Resurgence could bring needed renewal to the Cooperative Program and extend its effectiveness for at least another generation. We hope Southern Baptists will not be misled by the bombardment of biased reporting and the misinformation campaign being perpetuated by some denominational servants. It is unfortunate this is happening. It is unfortunate we needed to respond.

We remain convinced that the proposals of the GCRTF, including the recommendation that we adopt the Great Commission Giving strategy, offer a way forward for Southern Baptists who wish to be more effective in doing our part to fulfill the Great Commission. It is our prayer that the proposals will be overwhelmingly embraced by the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting in Orlando on June 15-16, 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> See Morris H. Chapman, “What’s In a Name? The Cooperative Program and Great Commission Giving” (May 7, 2010), available online at <http://baptist2baptist.net/gcr/articles/MHC-05-07-10.asp>, and Will Hall, “SBC EC's Chapman states ‘grave concerns’ about harm to SBC's Cooperative Program,” Baptist Press (May 7, 2010), available online at <http://www.sbc Baptist press.net/BPnews.asp?ID=32895>.

<sup>2</sup> This material was originally published in three parts at Between the Times, the faculty blog of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, on May 19, 20, and 21, 2010. See <http://betweenthe times.com>. This white paper has been adapted and lightly edited from those original articles.

<sup>3</sup> Available online at <http://www.pray4gcr.com/reports/penetrating-the-lostness/>.