

GOD AND A GODWARD WORLDVIEW FOR THE IMB: CONCERNS ABOUT CPM THEORY

by Kenneth Hayward

Kenneth Hayward has been with the IMB for approximately a decade, lives in Asia, and can be contacted at: [backtoAsahelNettleton \(at\) gmail \(dot\) com](mailto:backtoAsahelNettleton@gmail.com).

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GOD AT THE CORE

What non-believers need most is God. Southern Baptist Convention members would likely agree. But what believers need above all else is also God. Further, what missionaries need most is, again, God. This point may not be obvious to all. Unfortunately our doctrine of God tends to get lost in the details of strategy. We assume everyone is focused on God, and we move onto our plans and goals. And yet, God is not a strategy and refuses to be summed up or domesticated in any simple sentence or plan. (This is not to imply that summaries are sinful just that they're in some way always inadequate.) In fact the Bible takes 66 books to unfold God's greatness. And after reading all of them we are still left scratching our heads in wonder and then provoked to lift our hands in awe. Worthy is God of all praise and worship!

Let's briefly consider a few verses that give us a small sampling of the Bible's emphasis on God himself. These verses are examples of God emphasizing *himself*. He makes much of himself because he knows we are prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love. He does this because he is our ultimate good.

Because it's natural to focus more on man and less on our Creator, we've highlighted words about God's centrality. Of course, it would be best to take the time to look up these verses in their proper context.

- Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning, **God created the heavens and the earth.**"
- Psalm 115:1–4 "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but **to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!** Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?' Our God is in the heavens; **he does all that he pleases.** Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands."
- Isaiah 45:22–23 "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For **I am God, and there is no other.** By myself **I have sworn;** from **my mouth** has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: '**To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.**'"
- Ezekiel 36:26–27 "And **I will give** you a new heart, and a new spirit **I will put** within you. **And I will remove** the heart of stone from your flesh and **give** you a heart of flesh. And **I will put** my Spirit within you, and **cause you to walk** in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."
- Matthew 28:16–20 "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they **worshiped him**, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, '**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father and of the**

Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe **all that I have commanded you**. And behold, **I am with you always, to the end of the age.**”

- John 3:16 “For **God so loved the world, that he gave** his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”
- Acts 2:47 “**praising God** and having favor with all the people. And **the Lord added** to their number day by day those who were being saved.”
- 1 Corinthians 3:7 “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, **but only God who gives the growth.**”
- Philippians 2:12–13 “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for **it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**”
- 1 Peter 4:10–11 “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves **by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him** belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”
- Revelation 17:17 “for **God has put** it into their hearts to carry out **his purpose** by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the **words of God are fulfilled.**”

These verses should whet our appetites for all that God is for us in Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord. When God is our core we’re not using him to get to our real wants, but our wants point us to our real need—God himself. We’re not merely using him to get to a big church or even a people movement. He’s what we want. He’s who we need. We’re not merely using him to see more souls saved; he’s the end goal.

The teachings of those who support Church Planting Movements indicate a different underlying perspective about God and the world. At one level many of them will affirm the need to glorify God in all things, and they will insist that their methods do just that, but yet some of their missionary colleagues still sense a disconnect with Scripture regarding CPM methods and theology. (Many of us love church planting but have problems with the *Movements* part of their system.)

What is the problem? The difference can be illustrated through something I witnessed when a CPM theorist trained a group of Asians preparing to evangelize. He read from 2 Timothy 2:24–26, which says, “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” So far, no problem. He pointed out v 24 and v 25a--“The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness,” encouraging the people before him to be gentle and loving to those they would encounter that day. Again, nothing necessarily wrong with that exhortation. But what disappointed me and showed me how we differ was this--that truth about being kind to lost folks really was the trainer’s point from this passage. He never touched on the rest of v 25, one of the most

sovereignly oriented verses in all of the New Testament, that “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth...” Given the message of that part of the letter to Timothy, it would have been so encouraging to us, and honoring to our Lord, had this gentleman emphasized that *God is the one who grants repentance*. God is so in charge of the universe that no one can repent without God getting credit for it. That sort of truth dripping with God’s power is what prepares my heart to share with pagans. God is in control, and today, this very day, the Lord may grant repentance and faith to an idolater whom I will witness to. And yet, this presenter did what seems to be typical of CPM advocates; he missed a chance to make much of God. He spoke to men merely about how they should treat men. And worse, when he mentioned repentance, it was minimal and not God oriented like the text is. This is where many of us feel the rub with our pro-CPM colleagues and their theology. Their system feels merely like it’s strategy based--looking at the mechanics of a disciples life (need to obey, share their faith, disciple someone, etc.)--while missing the larger framework of God’s majesty and gospel. Notice this quote, presumably by David Garrison, where he says, “Behind every CPM are intentional methods and strategies gleaned from Scripture. These strategies fall into 5 primary categories: Entry, Gospel, Discipleship, Church Formation, and Leadership Development. How these strategies interact and work together to further Church Planting is *The Big Picture*” (Garrison, “Online”). While Garrison may wish to point out that CPMs come from Scriptural methods, the take away really seems to be strategies. And this is what leaves many of us feeling empty about CPM theology.

This is no minor difference. We’re not all merely wanting the same thing while using different words, or simply leaning slightly in a different theological direction. Rather the difference seems to be that God’s glory is not the theological priority of CPM proponents. We are worlds apart, and this is what I hope to demonstrate in this paper.

To contrast with CPM theology, throughout this paper I’d like to use a couple of phrases or ideas for what I’m advocating--*gospel-centered theology* or *Christian hedonism*.

THE DESIRE FOR THE LOST TO BE SAVED

A decade and a half ago, I first read *Church Planting Movements* by David Garrison. I was excited and loved the vision for reaching people with the gospel. I especially liked the idea of all believers using their gifts--everyone a servant, which includes all believers sharing the gospel faithfully. I did my best to practice these principles. I even wrote Mr. Garrison a letter asking him questions. And he was kind enough to respond. But then, as time passed and I studied Scripture more, I began to be less intrigued with the overall package, with the general theology of CPM. I didn’t start out against it, but slowly began to feel that it lacked something. Over time it appeared that Garrison had written a phenomenological work (what he and others have seen happen) and then tried to make it a how-to manual for getting to movement with Scripture pressed back into where it seemed appropriate.

In terms of a passion for soul winning, however, Garrison’s book was a great inspiration. And for this I am thankful. Jesus died to honor the Father and to bring sinners to himself (1 Tim 1:15). That CPM devotees keep the reality of lost sinners before us is a good thing. We are grateful that they’re so passionate about the lost being saved and mentored. That people are constantly dying and going to an

eternal hell is a reality we don't ever want to weaken in our churches. Every believing generation must continually contend for the faith to keep these key doctrines before their membership. Hopefully we can give the trainers, writers, and speakers who love various CPM methods the benefit of the doubt that they genuinely care for souls and desire healthy disciples and want people to live in heaven. This is no small detail. Most people in the SBC and the IMB can agree on this point. For any type of biblical unity we find among God's people, we rejoice.

CPM proponents also want to help the church live practically. They don't just want knowledge passed around but want disciples of Christ to actually obey. We give thanks for their desire to be practical and emphasize obedience.

We're also glad to frequently come across the idea of God-prepared soils in CPM literature and trainings. This is a right way to see God's sovereignty in salvation. In fact, we wish IMB missionaries spent as much time trying to understand 2 Tim 1:9 "who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began," as they do grappling with the tucked-away verse of 2 Tim 2:2.

IMB & CPM: IS GOD CENTRAL?

One key issue in popular CPM theology that disturbs me is a peripheral God. We believe that CPM devotees love the Lord and that, from their perspective, he's a major part of their theology. We also acknowledge that his name is there within their systems and books, and that CPM folks genuinely think he's at the core in their theology; but our contention is that their approach makes it such that he is not, even though they mean well and think otherwise. The doctrine of God, it seems, is not the primary motivation in CPM theology. Desiring and enjoying God, worshipping him and his holiness and majesty is not what gets believers, and especially missionaries, out of their beds in the mornings in the CPM system, but rather it is a particular task or method or movement that spurs them on. It would help them to note that God is not the Great Commission. Yes God cares about the Great Commission for it is his. But God is more glorious than the Great Commission. He is worthy of all praise and is a person separate from a task. While many friends who accept CPM theology and their methods would likely acknowledge that God should be the core, and they might seek to show how he is central in their methods, he is not. The following quote ought to help clarify one man's concern with this problem within modern evangelicalism, and it will also clarify our concern with this same issue within the SBC and IMB:

"Preachers [and missionaries] can say dozens of true and wonderful things about the gospel and not lead people to where the gospel is leading. People can hear the gospel preached, or read it in their Bibles, and not see the final aim of the gospel that makes the good news good.

[For example,] "This King was Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. He fulfilled the Old Testament expectations of the Son of David, died for our sins, was buried, and rose again triumphant over Satan, death, and hell. He promised his own Spirit to be with us and help us. On the basis of his death and resurrection, the gospel promises a great salvation--eventual healing from disease and liberation from oppression, peace with God and others who believe,

justification by faith apart from works of the law, forgiveness of sins, transformation into the image of Christ, eternal life, and the global inclusion of all people from all nations in this salvation.

“But the point was made [earlier in this book] that the final and greatest good of the gospel is not included in that array of gospel gifts. My burden in this book is to make as clear as I can that preachers [and missionaries] can preach on these great aspects of the gospel and yet never take people to the goal of the gospel.

*“What makes all the events of Good Friday and Easter and all the promises they secure good news is that they lead us to God. ‘Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God’ (1 Pet. 3:18). And when we get there, it is God himself who will satisfy our souls forever.” (John Piper, *God is the Gospel*, pp. 41-42, slightly rearranged and italicized by me.)*

The gospel will always *lead us to God*. The good news--not some system, name list of lost friends, chart, method, goal sheet, or vision statement--will lead us *to God*. At the center of the gospel is the triune God himself (Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 2:12-18; Tit 3:4-8). What does it mean for God to be central in our lives and motivations? Psalm 115:1-4 says it well, *“Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’ Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.”*

God himself ought to be the main motivation for what we do, not even the desire for people movements or something as serious as human lostness. We will delight in the good news that *God does* something for us that we can't do for ourselves or for him--he dwells in us; Christ in us is our hope of glory. The prophet Ezekiel says it best,

“...Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (36:22-27)

That God cleanses his people from the inside out is still good news and lays the focus on God's accomplishments. Those teaching wrong methods can repent. There's always hope in Jesus for such

turning back to him. Once God is truly at the core, then this doctrine will protect evangelism, missions, and disciple making so they have their proper place in our theology. But placing evangelism, missions, and disciple making, church planting, and methods for movements at the center will not, nor can it ever, prioritize God in his proper place in our worship or our theology.

THE GOSPEL AND OBEDIENCE BASED DISCIPLESHIP

The best of discipleship plans help the disciple *commune with the triune God*. In fact that theme will continue to resound throughout the plan, throughout the disciple's life. Of course no manual or plan does a better job enlightening our hearts like the Bible. Any discipleship plan will properly interpret the inerrant and infallible Scripture so the follower of Christ will know how to obey God's Word. Another aspect that seems foundational to any great discipleship tool is how it understands the gospel in the ongoing life of the believer. The gospel of God's grace should never be reduced to something like a brief outline we share with lost people. Rather the gospel is what brought us to Christ and what sustains us in the Christian walk (Eph 1:18). It is what motivates us as we daily share with others from the riches of his grace the hope that is within us.

What is Obedience Based Discipleship (OBD)? There are some problems with definition here. Some equate OBD with a three-thirds system that structures times of discipleship into thirds, ultimately ending each session with people saying what they'll do or obey before the next meeting, which will also require accountability during the next gathering. Others use OBD synonymously with the idea of training trainers, or else directly link OBD to the book entitled *T4T [Training For Trainers]* by Steve Smith, while others equate T4T (the concept or the book) with Four Fields, a process of understanding evangelizing the first convert all the way to a planted church planting another church and sending out missionaries. Others would say that OBD is the more general term, with the T4T concept being a specific application of the larger OBD principle. Challenges aside, OBD is an approach (philosophy) or theology that aims primarily at the disciple's doing or obeying what is learned. For example, today he learns about evangelism, and then goes out in the next few days to share. OBD is often contrasted with an informational or knowledge based system that supposedly merely fills the disciple's head with facts, leaving no obedience required.

What concerns some of us about the OBD philosophy is not that it centers on evangelism and discipleship. These things are essential. The weakness isn't that it wants followers to reproduce. Reproducing can be healthy. Having accountability in the local body isn't by itself troubling. What concerns us with this system, and others like it, is that evangelism and discipleship seem to be the climax of the Christian life. Added to that slight but significant misstep, evangelism and discipleship must transpire rapidly and follow a particular process of accountability not found in Scripture. In contrast to OBD, front and center in Scripture is God and his glory (Gen 1:1). He will trample down his enemy and vindicate his great name (Is 45:20-25). He triumphs for his name's sake (Ps 106:8). Oh yes, his victory results in good for his elect. Indeed! But is there nothing more to our Christianity than inviting people to Christ, which has come to mean *sharing our faith and discipling others*? Witnessing and forming disciples are essential in the Christian life but not the essence. In biblical disciple-living and disciple-making, are

we not ultimately *experiencing the good news* of the triune God? We are communing with him. We're not just talking to others about a fountain that gives life, we're drinking from it.

If communion with God through Jesus isn't the heart of what we're inviting people to, then what we're replacing him with, great though it is, will fail to fulfill what every soul needs--the Creator God, YHWH. God is the great I AM and can't merely be known by the Christian through evangelism and making disciples. These activities will bring much joy to our souls only as we savor the God of evangelism and disciple making. Sharing our faith and making disciples are so essential that these take priority over, say, social justice issues. But witnessing and discipling don't sum up our relationship with God. As baptism and the Lord's Supper show, God is the goal and means of the Christian life. Knowing him and being known by him in the context of his body the church, his covenant community, is where we come to experience, touch, and taste his glory.

So with a heart constantly feeding on the triune God, Christian hedonists go out purposefully taking risks to share faithfully about our risen Lord. We, after all, have good news to share. *All humans have dishonored the name of the great covenant King and are thus sinners who must repent and believe in the crucified Christ or bear God's wrath in an eternal hell. Jesus is our only hope to erase our fear, shame, and guilt before a perfect King and Father. Through his gifts of repentance and faith, only Jesus can make right our relationship with the Creator by grace through faith.* While only the Holy Spirit can quicken a dead heart, we share freely with all sinners the message of Christ.

The gospel isn't merely a tool for the lost in evangelism, as I fear OBD proponents assume, but our treasure for each step we take as believers continuing the Christian life. Thus, the gospel is essential for regeneration, justification, and sanctification. We need the gospel to be justified and to get and stay sanctified (Tit 2:11-12). Daily we cling to the perfection of Christ in fulfilling the law and defeating death and the devil. No matter our gifting we will eventually fail at evangelism and discipleship because we can't always do them perfectly. Therefore, we'll consistently need to rely on Christ not even something so great and essential as evangelism and discipleship.

The gospel isn't a set of rules but the good news of what Christ has done on the cross and in his resurrection. Believers need it as much as the lost. Why? Christians need the gospel because we live on the reality of our relationship with Christ and his covenant people not on what we do for him.

But what of obedience? Of course a life feeding on God will result in obedience. If not, then that person isn't feeding on God. Yet we want to remind OBD advocates that religious works are possible without the Holy Spirit inside--"Depart from me you workers of iniquity; I never knew you" (Mt 7:21-23). So we can gladly say that communing with God and savoring his gospel go together with obedience. Savoring God--through Jesus--is obedience, and yet mere outward action which we'd call obedience, like witnessing, doesn't guarantee real communion with God. Worse, it doesn't even guarantee we're talking about a true believer. (That being said, what does blatant disregard for commands to witness show in a passive "believer's" life?)

People confessing Christ but not showing it with their lives is an old problem that OBD theorists are right to care about. The book of James addressed it in the first century but this sin problem has been around since Adam. The human heart is desperately wicked. Self-justification is our default mode. That's why we need Jesus' gospel. As the Spirit opens our eyes and brings us to repentance, the Father declares us righteous based on Jesus' obedience and thus makes us right with God. We no longer put on airs but are genuinely transformed. We will never stop stressing obedience but we'll put it in its proper context-- Jesus obeyed perfectly, died, and rose. He is our only hope, and that hope is on-going (Eph 3:16-18; 1 Tim 1:1). Our lives will be diligent and fruitful but that's not our hope. We can't trust ourselves. We work night and day because we're accepted already by God, not because we're trying to be accepted. Any good works flowing from our lives must be because of the fountain of life that God is working in us. If we're to see fruit, which may not necessarily mean converts, (although we pray there are many), we must abide in him (Jn 8:1-8). Obedience is a part of that outflow. But let's look more closely into God's Word to see the gospel working out grace in our lives.

As 2 Peter 1 says, fruitful and effective lives consist of faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, which--by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ--his divine power has granted to us (vv 1, 3, 5-8). In other words, by the righteousness of God, his divine power has granted to us these qualities (faith...love) which will make us fruitful and effective in the knowledge of Christ. Possibly a reason evangelism and discipleship aren't listed here, or in Gal 5:22-23 as fruit of the Spirit, is that God's grace working in a Christian's life can't be reduced to evangelism and discipleship. When we're communing with God then evangelism and discipleship flow from our lives but not necessarily the other way around.

We all believe that the Christian life requires obedience. A hardy "Amen" is appropriate here. No one wants a disobedience plan; we have that built in already. But not all forms of obedience are observable and measurable to humans. For instance, Psalm 34:8 says, "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" How well can we measure our own delight in the Lord? How well can we examine it in others? How will we report to others about how well we've enjoyed God? The problems here show a key weakness in the OBD system.

Perhaps OBD's biggest weakness is that it fails to go far enough, doesn't plunge down deep into the soul, for it tends to wind up merely critiquing what a person does because that's measurable. And as the theology or theory stands, it can't ever do more than that. It can't get to the attitude, the interior; therefore it can never ultimately help the disciple because Christianity can't be boiled down to outward activities, even though there are definitely outward activities required.

If by our strategies we only get our disciples to "obey" and by such outward actions we think we've really changed their Christian DNA, we, and they, will one day be disappointed. Again, if by getting them to be more active outwardly we assume all is then right and presume that we've added the one ingredient the modern church has been missing--because after all, "Aren't they reproducing? And isn't that what the Gospels and Acts are all about?"--then something less than God's glory has been our aim.

All along while we're celebrating having, supposedly, re-engineered the church's character (*ethos*), we will have really accomplished little if our disciples' hearts remain unchanged and they're motivated for the wrong reason--*God wants me to serve him. People are going to hell and no one cares.* (These reasons aren't completely wrong; they're just not complete.) People with a misperception of their own worth and value, rather than eyes focused on God's glory will consistently lead with words like, *serve, serve, serve,* and *duty, duty, duty* and *evangelism, evangelism, evangelism* but they'll be missing the one element which is of utmost importance--the gospel. Or simply put, God himself. It is the good news of grace which the faithful covenant-keeping YHWH works in our lives to make us, his covenant people, more like him. These misguided ones will be missing God at the center of their thinking.

Proponents of OBD surely want their disciples properly motivated but we fear their skewed theology will often result in believers who aren't primarily seeking *God*, but seeking *man-centered results that merely involve God*. Unless our disciples have the gospel and know how it sets them free--unleashed to exuberantly live the gospel, preach it, take risks for it, and one day die for it--they'll never know how to joyfully worship Christ and serve his church and evangelize with purer motives despite some conversions in their ministries. (In other words, winning people to Christ, while beautiful to see in the lives of Christians, doesn't prove all is well in that disciple's life.) We should be careful not to primarily motivate Christians with evangelism and discipleship or other forms of obedience, which amounts to *duty*. If we want them to possess a *joyful duty*, a *delightful duty*, we must motivate them with the triune God himself (Jn 17:21-23; 1 Pet 1:2-3). Yes, God has a passion for the harvest, but that passion doesn't make sense if divorced from his desire to glorify his name. Isn't that what Jesus was doing in Mt 28, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...I am with you always, to the end of the age"? Jesus is whetting the disciples' appetite for him, and as he's doing that, he'll empower them to minister the gospel to the lost and saved. And daily they'll worship--drink from that same life-giving fountain--not merely talk to others about it (Jn 4:14; 7:37-39; Rev 22:17). This will result in the kind of gospel-centered discipleship that perhaps all of us will delight to see.

ABIDE

The idea of abiding in Jesus comes from the Apostle John's writings and has become a popular theme within CPM literature. *Abide* gets at the theme of knowing God, and that's a great step in the right direction towards integrating a Godward priority into CPM theology.

One element, however, that's often missed among CPM folks is that Jesus says, "Abide *in me*." Jesus is our refuge. The aim of our abiding and hoping is *in Jesus*. In John's writings the idea of abiding in Jesus seems often tied to Jesus' abiding in us. As we abide in him, he abides in us. It goes along with John's continual emphasis on belief or faith in Jesus. While we don't want to do away with the place John and Jesus give to the idea of abiding in him, it's the *Jesus abiding in us* side that's the real motivator for what we do daily as missionaries. The problem comes when during trainings and writings when CPM people leave out that important dimension of Jesus abiding in us. We so desperately need it, so desperately need him. It takes the weight off of us to merely perform (abide, abide, abide) and places our trust in the One who is abiding. Jesus abiding in his believers places the emphasis back on the objective work

Christ did on the cross and helps us boast in Jesus and not ourselves. It's *Christ in you the hope of glory*, as Col 1:27 says it. That's good news indeed.

What we want to avoid is a theme that gives an unduly wrong emphasis resulting in a mentality like this, *the Christian life is all up to you--try harder, abide, abide, abide*. Although *abiding in Christ* is a great NT theme it doesn't get us smoothly from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:20. The rock, Peter himself, didn't perfectly abide in Jesus when he denied Christ (Jn 18:15-27); but the merciful Lord, in his grace, restored the wavering Apostle (Jn 21:15-19). After Pentecost, Peter also failed in such a way that warranted Paul's rebuke (Gal 2:11-21). Abide is not really good news unless we get to the part that God does for us what we can't do for ourselves--"You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit...." and "...He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" says Paul (Rom 8:9 & Phil 1:6). We need a theme or doctrine, like God's glory, to take us steadily through the whole Bible. (Both the Upper Room Discourse of Jn 13-17 and the "greater works" teachings of Jn 14:12, as some CPM practitioners promote, are too narrow through which to interpret all of the Christian life.) Great Christians in the past, like the Puritans, rightly stressed communing with God, union with Christ, enjoying, delighting, marveling, worshiping to get at a similar idea which is a bit more broad and accurate than abide. Of course none of these concepts alone captures all of the Bible or else we wouldn't have 66 books. But some themes get us closer than others. (For many reasons, we highly recommend all missionaries read J. I. Packer's book on the Puritans, *Quest for Godliness*.)

SERIOUS THEOLOGICAL WEAKNESSES

All of us, pro-CPM theology and Christian hedonists, have weaknesses and errors in our doctrine. This will be the case until we see our Lord. Let's be as humble as possible when approaching this topic, because we are all misunderstanding something in the Bible, even now. But when glaring weaknesses are discovered, we hopefully will all repent immediately. With a sense of our own fallenness here, there are still some issues to be pointed out among our CPM-promoting friends.

Sinfulness of man

We desire for our CPM co-workers to strengthen their doctrine of depravity in their theology, writings, and trainings. Despite originally being created in God's image, man isn't waiting to believe in Jesus. No man seeks after God no not one (Ps 14:1-3; Rom 3:10-11). In fact, he is in open rebellion against God and is actively lost and deserves hell. If we find a Cornelius type person, it's because God has gone after him, not the reserve. We surely want to have compassion for the lost, but man deserves God's wrath. The more we highlight that salvation is undeserved, that hell is what man really should get, that no man seeks after God, that God must will him and woo him into the kingdom, then the more we marvel that God chose, before time began, to save anyone. (For those wanting to be "all in on Acts" we've got to accept, rejoice in, and preach the view of God's sovereignty that we're given in that book: 2:23; 2:39; 2:41; 2:47; 3:16; 3:18; 4:27-28; 5:14; 5:31; 11:18; 11:24; 13:48; 15:8-9; 16:14; 18:27.) The more we overlook or downplay man's sinfulness, his will being bound so tightly to sin that he will never choose God, then the more we move away from our Protestant heritage. While we as Baptists still cherish many great doctrinal truths from the Reformation--priesthood of the believer, soul competency--we have frequently forgotten the foundational truth of the Reformation which was that man is imprisoned to his

sin; he is dead and hopeless without God's grace. Even justification by faith can't properly be understood apart from the groundwork of man's bound will and God's sovereign grace. Thus, mere methods even if *seemingly* derived from the Bible aren't the key to awakenings, revivals, or movements.

Mis-interpretation (*Eisegesis*)

In addition to strengthening their doctrine with a higher view of God and a lower view of man, we urge CPM advocates to cultivate a stronger method of healthy interpretation (*exegesis*.) Others have obviously seen this flaw too. Jackson Wu is right to emphasize this problem (see bibliography below). This misinformed tendency to read meaning into the Bible is a huge weakness among our workers, and, therefore, found in the way nationals use Scripture--with more of a topical approach rather than sensitivity to the context. In trainings and writings, rarely do promoters of CPM theology slow down to work carefully through a passage considering its fuller context. They rarely if ever help their audience see the big picture of the given book under study. It's too often fast paced proof texting with questions forced on the text like, "How does this parable change your church planting plans?" For instance, why do we so often rush to the end of Matthew, to the Great Commission, without discussing how Matthew got there in his thought? How did the book begin? How do Jesus' speeches and actions get us there? These aren't just scholarly questions with no relevance for those of us at these trainings. If we proof text, so will our national disciples.

A case in point of proof texting is that some CPM advocates might use the idea of churches planting churches by citing Jn 15:8 to prove that Jesus taught about churches planting churches. Or to cite Mark 6, Matthew 10, and Luke 10 as evidence for church planting when Jesus sent out his disciples, when no churches were started during those witnessing times. Another case might be the quoting of Hebrews 10:24 to justify the whole CPM enterprise ("And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works..."). If we actually read that verse in its context, we hardly have justification for all that supporters of CPM claim for their system.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."

How we get from Hebrews 10 to vision statements, smart goals, objectives, Four Fields, and accountability assignments is hard for some of us to see. The same could be said for the phrase of Mt 28:20 "teaching them to observe all" as some CPM theorists use it. Perhaps a different passage would better support some of their methods.

Since the authority of God's Word is supposed to be a key element that is found in all church planting movements, I wonder why their trainers and writers don't take more care to delve into Scripture and rightly interpret it? Why is moving slowly together through a passage a waste of time at a training?

With all of the encouraging elements I'm reading from our new president David Platt, I trust that some of these old problems will be corrected. But such improvements can't come soon enough.

A WORLDVIEW FROM ANOTHER WORLD

A worldview is the way we perceive reality, the way we think things work and should work. We are not always aware of our worldview either.

As much as redeemed humans can, with sin still indwelling, we want God's worldview to become ours. In Ps 79:9, the psalmist cried out, "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!" He wanted God to be compassionate to them, his people, and show himself strong against Israel's enemies, the nations. While Christian hedonists are sometimes off the mark, we want our theological priority to be for the glory of YHWH's name.

Those in full support of CPM methods and theology seem to perceive humanity's world and God's role differently than do those in a gospel-centered paradigm. CPM practitioners seem to think their methods will bring about movements. Curtis Sergeant says, in an article underneath a category on self-feeding and a smaller section about persecution, "If a believer understands and can apply these basic opportunities for growth along with the pattern of dual accountability we implement, then they can initiate an entire movement of new churches if for some reason they are separated from their spiritual community. They have the power of the Holy Spirit and access to Scripture along with these basic skills to move them toward maturity and equip them to bring others along. There is no way to stop such a movement" ("Planting Rapidly Reproducing Churches"). For CPM theorists so much of their core beliefs and actions seems to funnel down into getting believers doing the Great Commission. But the Great Commission is about more than a task--it involves God's triunity, his sovereignty, promise, covenant faithfulness, presence, and glory. There is something better than CPM. It's God and he is a someone.

While hopefully both sides of this debate want to honor the Lord by fulfilling the Great Commission, is God primarily *about* the Great Commission or is the Great Commission primarily *about* God? While I think the two aren't in conflict, there is a biblical priority to follow: God's supremacy and his glory first, then come evangelism and discipleship, along with other essential Christian disciplines. But it doesn't work in the reverse. (Notice how, in a popular CPM training method about Mt 28:18-20, "1 Command; 2 Assurances; 3 Tasks" while easy to remember buries the God-centered priority on both sides of the Great Commission command.) Evangelism and disciple making don't always get us to communion with God and delighting in all that he is for us in Jesus. While many in the IMB think Christianity works that way, it doesn't. Instead of stopping occasionally in the depot of grace, we want to ride on grace's rails continually throughout our lives. And we want that for our disciples too. The gospel (the good news that we have through Jesus) continues to be good news to us as Christians and missionaries. It's not merely a plan with steps but a relationship and an undergirding theological truth. So in the Bible it seems that church planting shouldn't be our primary motivation, although we certainly can enjoy it. Rather the triune God himself is our primary motivation (Dt 6:4-5; Ps 27:4; Mt 6:9, 33; Col 1:3-8; Col 3:1-4). With

that theological priority in order, we as a mission community can, by the Lord's grace, continue with church planting.

Again, the difference appears to be that in the CPM system God's glory is not their theological priority. The tone, flavor, ethos, ambiance is about what man *can do*, and what missionaries and their disciples *should do* to start a movement. Their theological priority seems to be expressed best by these words, in no particular order, *Great Commission, man, lostness, goals, church, movement, strategy, obedience*. This difference in worldview may account for Garrison missing Wu's point and not dealing seriously with Wu's criticism against CPM theology (Garrison, "Church Planting Movements are Consistent with the Teachings and Practices of the New Testament," and Wu, "The Influence...", and "There are No...").

While we want to be careful not to judge the motives of all CPM folks, we can judge their trainings, teachings, and materials. They seem to be highly motivated by souls and people movements and new churches. There's some good in those things. But anything can slide off course easily for any of us, CPM proponents or not. Heaven can be pursued with wrong motives, merely focusing on the pretty scenery and ease of pain without a focus on God. Missions work can be pursued for the travel, and in some cases, the great insurance package without a clear view of God and his glory and his desire for sinners to repent and believe. Something as compassionate as an adoption movement can generate positive effects on society and help those adopted but still be man centered in a way that is less than desired. Some doctrines at points sound biblical but are in their overall scheme not necessarily true to Scripture. Take for instance the doctrine of entire sanctification ("Christian perfection") taught by Wesleyans. At times it sounds biblical especially when they're quoting 1 Jn 3. But certain points are off base enough to call the whole teaching into question. We would say the same is true with popular CPM theology.

The proponents of CPM theory have sprinklings of good points, of moments when they highlight God's glory, but there are other key aspects of the Christian life that's left out to the point that their theology itself misses the heart of the gospel.

This critique does not imply that CPM supporters do everything wrong or that those of us dedicated to gospel-centered missions do theology and church perfectly. Certainly not. But we want our emphasis to be on fidelity to the Bible. We can be faithful to the missionary task if we reject most of the techniques and underlying theologies of the CPM method. And we should. While no one has perfect motives, thus we always need Jesus, some approaches are more biblical than others. We want to follow the path that is purer and more God centered.

The problem is not that CPM folks have a strategy. We all use methods. The problem is not with church planting, but with the approach to movements. How we get to churches that reproduce is a major issue. Their theology seems to insist that their strategy will usually get to movement, and thus is the best way to go.

We long for our CPM brothers to stop chasing movements and pursue God, enjoy him and keep sharing abundantly. Some people may counter that movements and pursuit of God aren't exclusive. We,

however, would have our CPM friends make the aim of their life to pursue him over all things, even movements. Then maybe God will grant revival and awakenings, which may or may not be the same as movements. As their theological priorities are corrected, hopefully so will their strategies realign. We don't want CPM enthusiasts to slow down proclaiming the gospel but wish to encourage them to make sure their message is Christ centered and includes repentance. We certainly long for them to slow down in their exegesis and be more careful interpreting the Bible. Is the point of the Wheat and the Tears parable really that we must accept that lost and saved will be in our churches as is commonly taught by a well-known CPM theorist, or might it be something closer to *God's kingdom and plan for salvation will not entirely wipe out lostness in the world in the short term, but eventually the Messiah King with complete authority will conquer all of his enemies?*

As to rapidly, that God has sometimes moved in mass and quickly is to his credit. It's no more formulaic than Samson's hair. We can't even raise our kids rapidly, but only faithfully lead them. And so it is with a plan for planting churches rapidly. But we can faithfully preach the gospel in abundance. Let God work fast or slow--to him alone be all glory. For all of the talk of setting our sails and letting God do the rest, we know of no modern theological movement that contradicts itself with their goal sheets and formulas and name lists more than do CPM advocates. Popular CPM techniques are attempts to make the wind blow into those sails. In the Christian hedonist approach, church planting will not be minimized, neglected, or discarded, but it will be prioritized behind God's glory.

An option opposite CPM philosophy is one that savors God, a gospel-centered way of life. This isn't a package but a way of thinking, and attitude, a theology, a worshipful mindset, a worldview. It is decidedly God- and Christ-focused rather than centered merely on the disciple and the mechanics of the disciple's life. In other words, this delighting in God way of life seeks to help the disciple grow by focusing on the main topic or person we find in Scripture, God himself. The radical good news of the Bible is something miraculous that God does for us that we cannot do for ourselves (Jer 31:33; Rom 8:1-5). Therefore, gospel-centeredness is a lifestyle that is geared to help the disciple see God's glory, hunger for him, worship him, and enjoy him forever in all of life. There's nothing wrong with getting into the details of discipleship, like CPM advocates do, but we've got to make sure that we're caught up at every level in exalting God above our methods. We open up the Bible, embrace all 66 books, and never stop delighting in all that God is for us in Jesus. The triune God must be our theological priority. "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor 3:7). In this context Paul is talking to infants in Christ divided into factions, some claiming Apollos and Cephas, etc. Paul's point is if they're in the faith, they all labor for the same Lord. They are Christ's field and building. They are, in fact, God's temple. He warns them in verse 12, "So let no one boast in men...." Now let's see it in the fuller context: "...and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.' So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (3:20-23). Notice how Paul takes their divisive attitudes and slays them on the altar of God and his glory. God is the point (v 7) and they are working for him (v 9) and they are Christ's and Christ is God's (v 23).

There is a difference between merely using the gospel to, say, point a lost person to Christ, which is what the CPM theorists do, and then actually living from a gospel-centered, delighting-in-God worldview so that this underlying theology touches everything done for the lost and saved. While the difference is subtle it is not small. In fact, we should see the dangers of CPM methods in the same alarming light that Asahel Nettleton so long ago saw, and warned, of the new measures running rampant through New England: "Fire is an excellent thing in its place, and I am not afraid to see it blaze among briars and thorns; but when I see it kindling where it will ruin fences, and gardens, and houses, and burn up my friends, I cannot be silent" (*Letters of the Rev. Dr. Beecher and Rev. Mr. Nettleton*). The good news for those doing it wrong is, they can repent immediately. We've all made mistakes in our methods and there's room at the cross for all of us.

Let's not try to shore up CPM theology by patching it with mere words about God's glory. Let's throw off whatever isn't worthy of our Lord, and make him our priority as we seek to spread his name among the nations. Then the lost whom the Lord brings into his family, according to his eternal plan as we faithfully proclaim the gospel, will be empowered to do the same. And despite persecution, they'll fulfill their duty with joy.

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