

Baptist Freedom, Fidelity, and the Great Commission

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[0 : 00] So, we've looked at English Baptist history through the 17th century, and we've looked at American Baptist history through the 18th century, and in both cases we reached the point in the timeline when Baptists finally had freedom.

In England, their freedom essentially came through the Act of Toleration in 1689, and in America, their freedom really trickled down to the various colonies and states following the Revolutionary War.

So, this leaves us with another 200 years of Baptist history, which may sound simple enough. We've covered the first 200 years, now let's cover the last 200 years. But would you care to guess what happens in the Baptist story after they're granted complete religious liberty?

Well, I'll give you a hint. If we count only the Baptist denominations worldwide that still exist, the total, and this is an estimate, comes to approximately 80 distinct groups.

And if we were to count all of the smaller national or regional denominations, along with all of the short-lived splinter groups that popped up over the last 200 years, the total would rise to possibly 500 different Baptist denominations or groups.

[1 : 25] In other words, the Baptist story over the last 200 years gets a bit complicated. I've mentioned this before, but once people, and that is fallible, sinful descendants of Adam, are given complete freedom, well, you might say the proponents of state-enforced religion are given the opportunity to say, I told you so.

Once you remove all of the guardrails, people are no longer prohibited from believing pretty much anything and everything. And they're right about that. Freedom has a cost, but without freedom, as we've seen, the cost of this lack of liberty could be the true worship of God.

Without freedom, the Baptists could not have maintained the biblical model of a regenerate church membership consisting of only genuine believers. So we're thankful for the freedom we have.

But this also means that attempting to cover the totality of Baptist history over the last 200 years is nearly impossible. So instead, I want to follow a particular stream of Baptist life.

I want to follow the particular Baptists, better known in America as the regular Baptists. These are the Baptists who held to a Reformed, Calvinist understanding of salvation.

[2 : 49] They held a high view of God's sovereignty. They were confessional. Namely, they held to the 1689 Second London Confession, or at least some version of it.

And I want to focus on this stream for a couple of reasons. First of all, both in England and America, they were, perhaps a few historians would argue with me, but only a few, they were what we might call the mainline Baptists.

They were the standard. They quickly became the very foundation of the Baptist movement in the 17th century. They were the first to recover baptism by immersion. Their confession, the 1689, became the most popular, most enduring confession of the Baptists.

Especially in early America, they were essentially the Baptists. There weren't very many others that would contradict them theologically. It took more than really 200 years before the general or Arminian Baptists really took root in America.

So it seems only appropriate to follow their story and see what happens. And the second reason I want to focus on the particular Baptists is that for us here at Grace Fellowship Church, their story is our story.

[4:10] We hold to the same convictions. We hold to the same confession. We are the theological and ecclesiological descendants of the particular Baptists.

So why not learn a little bit more about our family history? So the Baptists, they now have freedom. And you would think this would lead to great prosperity and growth.

But in England, by the middle of the 18th century, the particular Baptist churches are in severe decline. It's been estimated that by 1750, approximately one-third of their churches had disappeared.

Baptist leaders at the time described this period as a melancholy day. Andrew Fuller, whom we'll talk about in just a moment, would later say that if this trend had continued, the Baptists would have become a very dunghill in society.

So what happened? They grew during the decades of persecution. Why did they suddenly become stagnant once they had their freedom? Well, the short answer is hyper-Calvinism.

[5:26] Obviously, the particular Baptists had a high view of God's sovereignty. In the Second London Confession, they write, God hath decreed in himself from all eternity by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever comes to pass.

With the exception of sin, of course, as they articulate. And as it relates to our salvation, they write, So they believed in man's utter depravity, God's unconditional election for his people, for salvation, and that no one can be saved unless God does a gracious work in his or her heart.

As Ephesians 2 says, We're all born dead in trespasses and sins. Without God granting us the gift of faith, without him making us alive together with Christ, as Paul says, we will not turn to God on our own.

Romans 3, no one seeks for God. So that's all true. That's all biblical. However, it is possible to carry these doctrines of grace too far.

And this is what we call hyper-Calvinism. Now, hyper-Calvinism can be a little challenging to talk about because there are degrees of hyper-Calvinism.

[7:05] Some carry it further than others. Plus, some people, at least those who oppose the doctrines of grace, will often apply this term to all Calvinism. As far as they're concerned, every Calvinist is a hyper-Calvinist.

So for our purpose today, I'll focus on the primary argument used by the hyper-Calvinists of 18th century England. So what happened was that many of the particular Baptists began to reason that if an unregenerate sinner cannot believe on his own, then he must not have a duty or an obligation to believe.

They argued that duty implies ability. So if there's no ability, there must not be a duty or a command or a responsibility. And the practical outworking of this kind of thinking resulted in a near complete lack of evangelism.

In fact, pastors wouldn't even exhort the unconverted to repent and believe or turn to Christ when they preached on Sunday morning. They left it completely unaddressed at all.

It may sound strange to us now, but they developed this concept where a sinner would essentially have to examine himself for some evidence that God had saved him before a preacher could really rightfully call him to repent and believe for salvation.

[8 : 33] So you can't be called to believe for salvation until you're already saved. And there were lots of things that contributed to this.

Even the great Baptist theologian John Gill, who was massively influential, inadvertently contributed to this because he taught what's called eternal justification.

In other words, he believed that God declared his elect people righteous when he chose them before the foundation of the world. So even though they would still need to come to faith eventually and would come to faith eventually, as far as God is concerned, they were already justified long, long ago.

So this had a way of shifting the focus away from believing in the gospel for our justification. You know, think of a scale with God's sovereignty on one side and human responsibility on the other.

Now, biblically, we need to keep these things in balance. But the hyper-Calvinists were tipping the scales too much toward God's sovereignty and almost completely removing man's responsibility.

[9 : 44] Well, this was the environment among the particular Baptists in England until Andrew Fuller came along in the latter half of the century.

So Fuller had grown up in this hyper-Calvinist context and as a young man, he was tortured by it. He was often convicted of his sin and he wanted nothing more than to be saved, but he was afraid to pray to that end.

He was afraid to turn to God for salvation because he had been taught that a sinner is utterly helpless until God chooses to save him. So he's in this weird position where he wants to be saved, but he doesn't believe he should ask the Lord to save him because that might undermine God's sovereignty.

Well, he does eventually come to faith, but this hyper-Calvinism followed him into his ministry and for years, he was afraid to address the unconverted from the pulpit. He was afraid to perform any kind of evangelism.

He would not exhort them to repent or believe because again, this might undermine God's sovereignty. And yet this becomes really troubling to him because first of all, this is not what he sees in Scripture.

[11 : 00] He sees Christ and the apostles preaching the gospel indiscriminately to anyone and everyone. And not only that, they're telling people to repent and believe for salvation.

And then Fuller starts reading Jonathan Edwards primarily, but also John Bunyan, John Owens, and others. And he realizes that just maybe the particular Baptists in England have gotten a little off track.

So the hyper-Calvinists were saying, it doesn't make sense to command a person to do something that they're not even capable of doing. And Fuller responds, well, it's not that they can't, so much as they won't.

So for example, I shouldn't tell a person to flap their arms and fly because I know full well they lack the ability to fly.

And I certainly couldn't hold them responsible for not flying, could I? But the duty to believe in Christ is a little different than that. It's more like telling a man to love his neighbor even though he despises his neighbor.

[12 : 11] You see, he has a mouth. He's physically capable of saying kind words. He's physically capable of being kind to his neighbor.

In fact, if he were standing before a judge, he would have no excuse to give. It's not as though he could say, I'm sorry, Your Honor, but I really lack the ability to be kind because I just hate him too much.

No, the judge would hold him accountable because he does have the ability. He just doesn't have the will. He doesn't have the desire, and that's a different thing. In other words, a sinner's inability to repent and believe isn't an excuse, as the hyper-Calvinists suggested.

It's the crime itself for which God holds us accountable. So everyone has a duty to repent and believe, and ministers of the gospel should exhort the unconverted to repent and believe.

Now granted, many are called, but few are chosen. That is, many are called by preachers, and only a few are chosen by God, yet we call everyone nonetheless.

[13:23] So Fuller brings God's sovereignty and man's responsibility back into balance, especially when he writes his seminal work, *The Gospel, Worthy of All Acceptation*, which was published in 1785.

And this shift changed the way the particular Baptists were thinking about evangelism. I mean, they go from almost no evangelism to a very robust theology of evangelism because they now understand that God's sovereignty doesn't hinder the Great Commission.

It's the very thing that enables it to be successful, which is why Jesus reminded his disciples as he's sending them out to make more disciples, that he would be with them to the end of the age.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, he says. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. You will be successful because I have sovereign authority over the salvation of sinners, and I will be with you.

And this ultimately leads the Baptists to form the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792. Obviously, if sinners have a duty to believe the gospel, then the church has a duty to tell people about the gospel.

[14:44] And because of their renewed enthusiasm regarding evangelism, they form this missionary organization to better facilitate the work. remember that Baptists are not an organized denomination.

They're all independent churches. So they don't really have a great way to plan this work or to collect donations for potential missionaries. Basically, BMS can send out people to collect money from churches, similar to what the Apostle Paul was doing throughout his travels, and then ensure that the missionaries get the financial support they need.

Of course, not everyone was on board with this. There would continue to be pockets of hyper-Calvinism, really, to this day.

At one point, a Baptist preacher got so annoyed with Fuller that he stood up in a meeting and he says to him, Young man, sit down. When God pleases to save the heathen, he will do it without your aid or your mind.

But, in general, the tides had certainly turned and most of the particular Baptists were now embracing this renewed emphasis on evangelism.

[15:59] And this is where William Carey comes into the story. So, Andrew Fuller, he will stay at home in England handling all of the administrative tasks and collecting financial support while Carey will become their first missionary.

And Carey essentially says to Fuller, I will go to India and I will make disciples if you'll stay here and hold the ropes. In other words, I'm going down into the mine, into the mine, but I need your support.

I need you to hold the rope for me. And in the year 1800, Krishna Pale becomes the first Hindu convert under Carey's efforts.

By the way, Fuller and the Baptist Missionary Society would go on to translate the Bible into more than 40 different languages.

They would also have an instrumental role in abolishing child prostitution in parts of Asia. And that's on top of the many people saved under their missionary efforts. So, there was a tremendous amount of good done throughout the world which was made possible only by these churches having this cooperative effort together.

[17:14] Now, the Baptists were not the only ones committed to missionary work at this time. Jumping across the pond for just a moment, the American Congregationalists formed their own missionary organization.

And in 1812, they send missionaries to India as well, including Adoniram Judson and his wife, Anne, and Luther Rice. And you may be wondering why I'm talking about Congregationalist missionaries now, but you'll understand in just a moment.

Now, a trip to India from America was about a four-month boat ride. It's a long time, so there's no going home for Christmas during a mission trip like this. Well, both the Judsons and Rice, who are on separate ships, by the way, they already know about William Carey.

They know there's a Baptist missionary already there. He's become world famous, so they decide to spend these four months on the boat preparing themselves for any possible confrontation.

If a debate becomes necessary over the issue of baptism, they want to be ready. So the Judsons are on one boat, Rice is on another, and they're independently studying their copies of their Greek New Testament for the entirety of the four months.

[18:35] And guess what happens? As they prepare themselves to argue for infant baptism and against believers' baptism, they, I would say providentially, have become convinced that the Baptists are right.

Now, just put yourself in Judson's shoes for a moment. I didn't mention this, but his wife, Ann, is every bit as much of a devout congregationalist as he was.

In fact, you should read the letter he wrote to his future father-in-law asking if he could marry his daughter. He basically says, Sir, if you allow me to marry your daughter, I vow to go out into all of the world and make congregationalists of all nations.

Actually, it's a little darker than that. He basically says, if you'll permit me, I'm going to lead your wife into great suffering and death, but all for the cause of Christ. And by the way, he married Ann only two weeks before they got on this boat.

So, he has two really big problems now. First, he has to confess to his new wife that he's now a Baptist, which did not go very well at first, but she did eventually come to the same convictions.

[19:50] And second, he has to confess that they'll now be stranded in India without any means to support themselves. We've talked about the congregationalists and the Baptist relationship in America.

The congregationalists back home in New England are not going to financially support Baptist missionaries. But when they finally get off the boat, they find Luther Rice, who confesses, you know what, I think I'm a Baptist now.

So, he got converted on the ride over as well. So, they develop this plan. First, they find Kerry and his associates so they can be baptized. And then, they decide that the Jutsons will head to Burma while Rice gets back on the boat and returns to America to see whether he can get the Baptists to support them.

Now, that leads to another problem. At this time, there is no Baptist denomination in America. There's no central body that connects all of these independent Baptist churches together.

There's no missionary organization like there's now in England. So, how is Rice going to support, to raise support for them in a timely fashion if all of these independent churches are, in fact, independent and they're scattered throughout the country?

[21:11] Well, it helped that he had a compelling story to tell them. And it really doesn't take too long before word gets out and the churches rally together to form what would become known as the Triennial Convention.

And it was named that because they would meet every three years. So, Rice essentially says, by God's incredible providence, we already have Baptist missionaries in Burma.

They just need your help. And churches from the north, the south, the middle colonies, they all send delegates to be a part of this and the Jutsons get the support they need. Now, I'll come back to what's happening in America, but I've got to tell you a bit more about Jutson.

This man is truly remarkable. His time in Burma was anything but easy. The environment was very hostile to Christianity.

He was imprisoned at times, he was tortured. He said he would spend hours discussing the gospel with Buddhist scholars, who in the end would basically say to him, you know, that sounds perfectly reasonable and I don't have a single argument against it, but I still don't believe it.

[22:28] He lost children while he was there. Eventually, he lost his wife. And for the first six or seven years, he did not see one person come to Christ.

And you may wonder, what in the world would keep him going? Arguably, most men would have gotten on a ship and headed back home long before that. So why did he stay? God's sovereignty.

Calvinist theology has often been accused of destroying evangelism, and as we've seen, hyper-Calvinism has at times. But for Judson, understanding God's sovereignty and salvation was the very thing that kept him going.

You see, he had a very low view of himself. He had a very low of his own abilities. He did not think he was a great preacher or a great missionary, but he was convinced that God must have a people in this place.

Think of Paul when he was tempted to leave Corinth because of the strong opposition against him. What did the Lord tell him? Paul couldn't see it yet, and Judson couldn't see it yet, but he was confident that God was sovereign over the situation.

[24:01] It didn't matter that he wasn't an eloquent speaker. It didn't matter how hostile everyone seemed to be to the gospel. He was called to preach Christ and him crucified, and he trusted that God would give the increase according to his perfect timing if only he continued faithfully planting the seeds.

In other words, while most people would look at his experiences in Burma and think, this is a God-forsaken place, you'll never accomplish anything there, Judson said, just wait.

Watch and see what the Lord can do. And eventually, he did begin working in Burma. Well, the Baptists back in America have organized now for the sake of missions, both at home and abroad.

Remember, there's an entire western frontier with people that have not been converted, that know nothing of Christianity. But all of a sudden, there are these opposition movements that rise up and really complicate the situation.

Christians, this is during the first half of the 19th century. So, first of all, we have the revivalist preacher Charles Finney, who adamantly opposes Calvinism.

[25 : 20] Now, keep in mind that the vast majority of American Baptists at this point are still Calvinists. So, in a sense, he's not just attacking Calvinism, he's attacking the very identity of Baptists in America.

America. And in particular, he hates the doctrine of total depravity. He believes everyone is equally capable of coming to Christ by their own free will.

So, unlike Judson in Burma, he believes that if an evangelist is unsuccessful, he simply needs to change his methods. He needs to try something a little different. He's the one who introduces the anxious bench that would sit at the front of the church.

And when someone felt convicted of sin, they'd come to the bench. And from the testimonies I've read, Finney would apply as much pressure as he possibly could until they cracked and professed faith in Christ.

Now, the second group that grows in influence at this time is the free will Baptists. And while they share some similarities with Finney and his followers, they are an independent movement.

[26 : 27] Finney was saying that anyone can choose to come to Christ and the free will Baptists were saying that God wants everyone to come to Christ. And both of these groups have great success in evangelizing people.

They're growing very fast and this leaves the regular Baptists looking kind of passive, possibly even a little lazy, and they're feeling a certain amount of pressure from this.

confession. So, in 1833, they draft and publish a new confession called the New Hampshire Confession. And I don't have time to go into all of the details of it, but in short, this confession was designed to be somewhat of a compromise.

Many have called it mildly Calvinist. I don't know whether that's entirely accurate, but it retained God's sovereignty and the doctrines of grace, but it put this extra emphasis on man's responsibility.

For instance, it stressed that the church has a duty to preach the gospel to all people. So, the idea was to retain the theological foundation of the particular Baptists while putting more emphasis on evangelism, which is what the regular Baptists are now being accused of falling short of.

[27 : 41] Of course, this was their way of responding to Finney and the Free Will Baptists and anyone who felt that they just weren't serious about evangelism. Meanwhile, there's a third group making waves among the regular Baptists, and this group strongly opposes the triennial convention and really any kind of organized missionary work.

They're the group who would eventually become best known as the primitive Baptists. Christians. Now, it really confounds most people to think that there was ever an anti-missionary movement among any Christians.

But there are a couple of reasons why this group developed. Now, their formal stated reason for opposing missionary societies, such as the triennial convention, was that they did not see a warrant for them in Scripture.

So, in their minds, this was an entirely human innovation that didn't belong in the church. Is that true? Well, in Acts 13, the church in Antioch formally identified, set apart, and sent Paul and Barnabas for the work of missions.

In 2 Corinthians 8, we see Paul coordinating a multi-church effort to support gospel work. So, the principles are there, even if the form of it took a slightly different shape in 19th century America.

[29 : 13] But the primitive Baptists had two distinct motivations under the surface, if you will. And the first was a relatively extreme form of hyper-Calvinism.

Daniel Parker, for example, was one of the most outspoken critics of missionary societies, and he held a view that there are only two kinds of people in this world, children of God and children of the devil, and that these two groups have been unchangeable since the fall of Adam in the garden.

So, practically speaking, children of the devil aren't saved and then become children of God. A child of God was always a child of God, which means evangelism isn't really necessary.

Once God's sovereignty brings one of his children to spiritual life, they'll find the church. The church doesn't need to find them. Therefore, missionary work is pretty useless.

Now, to be clear, most primitive Baptists didn't go quite that far, but they all eventually embraced a form of hyper-Calvinism that certainly diminished the need in their minds for any missionary organizations.

[30 : 31] And the second underlying motivation was the perceived greed of the missionaries. So, imagine you're part of a relatively poor rural Baptist church, and this missionary from the big city shows up one Sunday morning asking for money.

It looks bad to them, and it leaves a bitter taste in their mouth. They're kind of resentful about that. So, now the regular Baptists are feeling pressure from the free will Baptist influence, which says, go and make disciples.

Their churches and associations are now splitting all over the country because the primitive Baptists on the other side are arguing, no, don't go. That's not biblical.

And yet, there's another group that pops up to further complicate matters, and that is the Campbellites. So, Alexander Campbell, he also disagrees with the current state of missionary work, but he doesn't want to merely separate from the regular Baptist.

He wants to tear it all down and start over. He wants to throw out the Second London Confession. He wants to scrap everything he perceives to be a modern innovation in the church.

[31 : 45] He objects to any theological term not found in the Bible, the Trinity, for instance, or effectual calling. He considers that the language of Ashdod, which is a reference to the book of Nehemiah when the Jewish people had mixed their language with that of the Philistines.

In short, he's throwing out centuries of theological refinement and articulation by the church. And what's the result of that? Well, I'll give you just two examples.

First, he comes to redefine faith as to mean nothing more than a mental ascent to the historical person of Jesus. Yes, Jesus was a man. Yes, he lived.

Yes, he died. And second, he teaches that baptism is when a person is regenerated and saved. So, if you want to be saved, you believe the facts about Jesus, you get baptized, you're saved.

Simple as that. Unfortunately, many people thought Campbell made perfect sense, especially when he espoused no creed but the Bible. So, many more Baptist churches became fractured and eventually those followers of Campbell were disfellowshipped by the Baptists and they became the so-called disciples of Christ as well as the church of Christ.

[33 : 05] But, all of these controversies actually had a positive effect on the remaining regular Baptists.

For any among them who were becoming complacent or maybe fatalistic regarding evangelism, Finney and the Free Will Baptist renewed their fervor.

And together with the Primitive Baptists, they were forced to essentially recommit themselves to the work of the Great Commission. And the Campbellites, they renewed their commitment to a robust, clearly defined theology, that is, confessionalism.

And these become recurring themes throughout the remainder of Baptist history. And I'll give you just a few examples.

First, we have John Dagg, who is a blind, lame man who can barely speak above a whisper.

[34 : 09] Not very impressive when you look at him. But in 1857, he writes the Manual of Theology wherein he rigorously defends the doctrines of grace and sound Orthodox theology.

And this has a tremendous impact on the newly established Southern Baptist denomination and would keep them grounded in the truth for at least a while. Second, we have Charles Spurgeon in London.

When he opens the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861, essentially a megachurch that completely defied the popular hyper-Calvinism, anti-evangelism of their day, Spurgeon's first sermon series is on the doctrines of grace.

And later, when the English Baptists began moving away from Orthodox Christianity and rejecting the authority of Scripture, this is what we call the downgrade controversy.

Spurgeon held the line. In fact, many say it's what killed him. His church was eventually, his church eventually left the Baptist Union.

[35 : 22] As Spurgeon said, you just can't make peace with Arab. Then throughout the 20th century, both English and American Baptists continue their drift toward modernism.

And by that, I'm referring to this idea that the church needs to embrace the world's criticism of the Bible. So when the world says, there's no way that God created everything in six days, the modernist or the liberal Christian basically says, okay, maybe you're right.

Maybe the Big Bang Theory is correct. Maybe everything evolved over millions of years. But the creation story still has some worthy principles to teach us, right? Or when the world says, Jesus did not rise from the dead, the liberal Christian says, no, but you know, he's alive in spirit.

And that's the point. In other words, it's a rejection of Christianity itself. It rejects the Bible. And it turns Christianity into nothing more than a movement for temporal social causes.

So from individual churches to entire denominations to seminaries, confessionalism is largely abandoned. And evangelism becomes more about social justice than the salvation of sinners.

[36 : 46] And yet within the Baptist, you still have a remnant of John Dagg and Charles Spurgeon-like figures who keep bringing us back to our particular Baptist roots.

So in the mid-20th century, guess what happens? There is what I'll call a Reformed Baptist resurgence. This is when Baptists, both independent Baptist churches and Baptist churches within established denominations like the Southern Baptists, not only take a stand against modernism, but firmly plant their feet on their particular Baptist heritage.

They bypass the New Hampshire Confession and all other attempts to maybe soften biblical theology to make it more palatable to more people. And they formally adopt the 1689 Second London Confession.

So they go straight back to when the Baptists were most carefully refined before religious freedom sent them in a million different directions. And yet, they had also learned their lessons from the years of hyper-Calvinism and those anti-missionary movements.

So they are careful to retain that evangelistic spirit and mission that Baptists had sometimes lacked. And with this modern resurgence of Reformed Baptists, we have a restoration of all of those important Baptist characteristics that we've talked about throughout this study.

[38 : 18] Orthodoxy, regenerate church membership, believers' baptism, the sovereignty of God and salvation, confession, confessionalism, the authority of Scripture, and a heart for evangelism.

So here's our challenge as Reformed Baptists in the 21st century. Obviously, we now enjoyed the hard-fought religious freedom secured by our Baptist forefathers, but will we succumb to the pressures of this world to abandon the faith once we're all delivered to the saints, or will we, like Dagg, like Charles Spurgeon, hold the line?

Will we remain dedicated to the robust theology of the 17th century particular Baptist? Will we remain committed to carrying out the Great Commission as much as Andrew Fuller and William Carey?

Better yet, will we let our understanding of God's sovereignty be the fuel for our evangelistic efforts as it was for Adoram Judson? I doubt, could be wrong, but I doubt that it will ever be fashionable to be a Reformed Baptist.

But as we've seen, faithfulness has never depended on popularity, only conviction to the truth. And I'll leave you with a quote from Charles Spurgeon who said, to be faithful to God in a world that is departing from Him is to be willing to stand alone if need be.

[40 : 03] Let's pray. O Lord, our God, we thank you for your faithfulness to your church through every generation. You have preserved your truth.

You've guarded your gospel. You've raised up men and women who were willing to stand fast for your word and speak it boldly to the world. I pray that we, in our own day, would hold firmly to the faith once delivered to the saints, neither softening your truth nor shrinking back from the Great Commission you've called us to.

Keep us humble under your sovereign grace. Keep us diligent in proclaiming Christ to those around us. And Lord, keep us dependent upon your Spirit for all our efforts.

And we ask these things for your glory and the advancement of your kingdom through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.