

COOPERATIVE PROGRAM
together
We are

RESOURCE SAMPLER

“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you’.”
 John 20:21 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

Take a moment to list the places you went during the past week. : work, school, grocery store, mall, doctor, church, gas station, golf course, and so on. . In which of these locations did you most likely cross paths with an unbeliever? My list may look similar to yours in a general way but when you look at specific locations our paths took us to different places. You were sent out to represent Jesus wherever you went this week, just as all followers of Jesus were commissioned to be Jesus where they were sent during the past week. You could not represent Him in places that you did not go. Another brother or sister in Christ was being Jesus in other locations. Together, we represented Him in locations across the world.

Not only are we sent as a physical witness in our daily lives but we are also sent as we give of our financial blessings and through our prayers. Your prayers may be directed to specific requests and praises that are not a part of my prayer time today. Your financial gifts may go to needs that I do not give to. Yet as we cooperate together, as Southern Baptists, we are all in many places that could not be covered by one person.

Being sent may require that we give and go beyond what is comfortable and convenient. It may challenge us to walk by faith more than ever before. As we respond with a heart of generous love, we will experience a deep fullness of joy. Our lives and our churches and the world will be transformed. Together, we are here, there, and everywhere making a difference for His Kingdom.

How is Jesus sending you to share His love during the upcoming week? May you find great joy in serving Him by going in whatever way He calls you to go!

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The Cooperative Program: Understanding Its Biblical, Theological, and Historical Foundations

GETTING STARTED

To the Teacher: This lesson is designed primarily to demonstrate the biblical and theological foundations for the Cooperative Program (CP) and also to show its historical and practical foundations. The aim is to get learners to value the CP as, first, a tool for obedience to biblical mandates regarding Christian unity and interchurch cooperation for missions and ministry; and second, as Southern Baptists' primary historical and continuing strategy for practical, efficient stewardship in the financial support of cooperative missions and ministry. Additionally, this lesson is intended to show that from both biblical and historical perspectives, doctrinal unity is imperative for interchurch cooperative missions and ministry.

Key terms:

Interchurch—between or among two or more churches

Cooperative missions and ministry—the activities having to do with proclaiming and living out the Gospel and its implications in which more than one church participates

Learning Objectives:

- The learner will comprehend Christian unity as described in John 17:11, 17, 21–23 (also Ephesians 4:1–6) as the theological starting point for interchurch cooperative missions and ministry.
- The learner will comprehend the CP as an expression of the biblical examples of interchurch cooperation, such as that found in 2 Corinthians 8:16–24 (Jerusalem famine relief offering), and the biblical mandate to aid those who carry the Gospel in 3 John 5–8.
- The learner will comprehend the doctrinal unity necessary in cooperative missions and ministry as expressed in the biblical passages on Christian unity and interchurch cooperation in missions and ministry.
- The learner will comprehend the CP as an expression of the characteristic role of interchurch cooperation in Baptist history since the 17th century—beginning of the denomination as it now exists.
- The learner will comprehend the practical value of the CP and cooperative missions and ministry as reflected in the history of SBC missions/ministry funding through CP.

What Is the Cooperative Program?

The Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention has been the primary funding mechanism for Southern Baptist missions and ministry since its beginning in 1925. This tool allows Southern Baptists everywhere to help support the work of SBC and Baptist state convention entities engaged in the cause of Christ, primarily in missions and ministry. While there is obvious practical value in the CP—we can do more together—there are also foundational theological and biblical principles that demonstrate God is pleased when churches work together. To find the specific funding breakdown of Cooperative Program dollars, go to the Web site for your Baptist state convention or to the Cooperative Program Web site at www.cpmissions.net. The breakdown between state convention funding and SBC funding varies from state to state. The 2010–2011 CP Budget is \$199,822,090.

This money represents CP giving beyond that retained by the various state conventions and is allocated as listed below:

- International Mission Board \$99,911,045 (50.00% of total)
- North American Mission Board \$45,539,454 (22.79% of total)
- Theological/Educational Ministries *(including six SBC seminaries)* \$44,280,576 (22.16% of total)
- Christian Ethics and Religious Liberty Min. \$3,297,064 (1.65% of total)
- Facilitating Ministries (SBC Operating) \$6,793,951 (3.40% of total)¹

Note: The biblical quotations listed here are from the English Standard Version. Now, the teacher's guide for the lesson . . .

The Theological/Spiritual Foundation of Cooperative Missions and Ministry: The Reality of Christian Unity (John 17:11, 17, 21–23)

The Cooperative Program is an expression of interchurch cooperation for missions and ministry, which is itself a function of Christian unity. Every individual who has been reconciled to God in Christ is also reconciled to one another (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11–22). The unity that exists among individuals is best expressed within local churches. Individual believers display their membership in the Body of Christ in a tangible way through membership in local churches. Likewise, churches can display their unity in Christ by having fellowship and cooperating with other churches in missions and ministry, all of this governed by doctrinal purity and unity. John 17 exhibits the significance of Christian unity. Understanding the connection between the CP and its biblical foundation starts with understanding Christian unity.

Despite the tendency to refer to our Lord Jesus' model prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:2–4 as the Lord's Prayer, the prayer found in John 17 is truly the Lord's prayer. We find here the heart of the Lord Jesus expressed in His prayer to the Father. This prayer occurred in the Upper Room where Jesus observed the Passover Meal with His disciples immediately preceding His arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. What a blessing to find the Lord, at this most important moment, praying for His people, both His disciples present at that time and all who would ever believe (John 17:20)! During this crucial hour, our Lord prayed repeatedly for the unity of His people.

“Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:11b).

¹ See the CP Allocation Budget Proposal for 2010–11 at www.cpmiissions.net/2003/pdf/10-11ProposedBudgetAnnualpage60.pdf (accessed 30 April 2011).

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you love me” (John 17:20–23).

This passage displays the prayer, people, pattern, purity, and purpose of Christian unity. The prayer, of course, is that of the Lord. The people of Christian unity are those who have been born again, who are repeatedly referred to by the Lord Jesus in this prayer as “the people whom you gave me out of the world” (John 17:6, and also 17:2, 9, 11, 12, 24). Jesus contrasted this group with the world, for whom He was not praying (John 17:9). Clearly, the people of Christian unity are . . . Christians.

The pattern of this unity is that of the unity that exists between God the Father and God the Son (John 17:11b, 22b). This is a unity of essence, a spiritual unity that does not include outward uniformity. The people of true Christian unity are very diverse, and this is good and acceptable to God!

The purity of Christian unity is reflected in Jesus’ prayer for His people to be sanctified, or set apart, in the Truth, which is the Word of God (John 17:17). This indicates that there are doctrinal standards that govern and define our unity. The Christian faith is based on an objective message about events that took place in real time and space and the application of the benefits of those events. Many passages in Scripture reflect this historicity of the Gospel (Eph. 4:1–6; Jude 3). No real, spiritual unity is possible with those who reject the truth of the Gospel (Rev. 21:8, see the fate of the unbelieving).

The purpose of Christian unity is the proclamation of Jesus as the One sent from the Father (John 17:21, 23). Our unity is important as a witness to the world that sinners may believe and know that Jesus was Who He said He was. When we are divided over petty and selfish issues, we are hindering the cause of Christ in the world. When people reject God’s truth, division is unavoidable, as Jesus taught (Matt. 10:34–39).

For further investigation of the reality of Christian unity, have the learners read Ephesians 4:1–6 and Jude 3 and discuss the meaning of the phrases “one faith” (Eph. 4:5) and “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). In the discussion, help to lead them to the commitment that biblical truth is absolute and unchanging and is the only worthy, or even possible, foundation for Christian unity and, therefore, for interchurch missions and ministry.

Summary Statement:

In John 17 the Lord Jesus prayed for the spiritual unity of His people according to the sanctifying truth of the Word of God, so that the world might know and believe that He is the one sent into the world by God the Father.

Our Most For His Mission

Luke 9:46-50

How important is mission work to you? Many of us think of missions only during special emphases—and of course, we can't think about missions 24/7. But all things considered, how important is it to you that the mission of Jesus Christ— “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19, Holman Christian Standard Bible)—is accomplished?

I mean to put us all on the spot together. For one thing is certain: for Jesus Christ, His mission is His priority.

So let's put it another way: How much am I, how much are you, giving for the highest concern of our Lord Jesus?

My Utmost for His Highest is a book of devotional thoughts by Oswald Chambers, written about a century ago. If we can tune that title slightly to our purpose today, let's consider it *Our Most for His Mission*. My goal is to convince you from the Bible that Jesus' mission is His highest goal and that each of us, no matter how unimportant we may think ourselves to be, should be giving our best and our most for His highest: *our most for His mission*.

In Luke 9:46–50, Luke recorded some sayings of Jesus that have an interesting theme. Matthew and Mark record these teachings in some different contexts, but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke used these teachings to make a vital point about our part in the mission of Christ:

Luke 9

- 46** Then an argument started among them about who would be the greatest of them.
47 But Jesus, knowing the thoughts of their hearts, took a little child and had him stand next to Him.
48 He told them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in My name welcomes Me. And whoever welcomes Me welcomes Him who sent Me. For whoever is least among you—this one is great.”
49 John responded, “Master, we saw someone driving out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him because he does not follow us.”
50 “Don't stop him,” Jesus told him, “because whoever is not against you is for you.”

In these few verses, Jesus taught the disciples that the greatest in the Kingdom were the humblest of all, that receiving the message or messenger is receiving the message sender, and that one may participate in Jesus' mission remotely, through His name. Do you see the connection between these thoughts? Here it is: *The most humble Christian can have the most effective impact in the most important mission through the most obscure support, if that is all he can do.* Each of us, no matter what his means, can have a vital impact on the mission of Jesus Christ to reach the world with His message. What's required is simply the most and the best you can. And when you work together to give, go, and serve, your impact is felt everywhere we have mission work, to the ends of the earth.

My goal today is this: That each of us would commit to mission support in the greatest way possible.

Our Most for His Mission starts with the humble Christian.

The Humble Christian

Jesus first dealt with a discussion His disciples were having about who would be greatest in His Kingdom. He took a nearby child and focused their attention on him. Here was His lesson: *“For whoever is least among you—this one is great.”*

The key to Jesus’ lesson was what the image of the child said to His disciples. Children were commonly disregarded by society—as if, somehow, the adults of today weren’t the children of yesterday; people thought little of children (except in their own families, we suppose). But children were also thought of as innocent, trusting, and easily led. Probably Jesus had in mind this entire image as His lesson: When you are small and insignificant, but pure and trusting, you are just right for God to use for His important work.

Before we talk about a Christian’s impact on the world for Christ, we have to make sure we understand the importance of the humble Christian. I mean “humble” as in “humble circumstances.” That’s most of us. We think sometimes that to do anything for God we have to be the missionary, the minister, or the rich donor. How wrong we are. If that’s our calling, wonderful; but great work for God takes place in obscure places by obscure people whose names will never be known outside their own obscure neighborhoods.

End of the Spear was a 2005 movie about missionaries killed during their efforts to introduce Ecuadoran peoples to Jesus Christ. These were Christians who went where Christianity met the unreached world. We are inspired by such stories—and of course by stories of missionaries who serve for a lifetime—but we are convinced that we could never have that kind of impact ourselves. We think of the missionary as the tip of the spear, the lone servant of Christ who penetrates the world with the Gospel. But how did the missionary—the tip of the spear—get there? How does the spear tip get to its mark? *It is propelled by the long, strong shaft of humble wood thrown by the arm of the ultimate missionary, the One who has the purpose to reach the world with the message of His Son, Jesus Christ.* And we—you and I—are that spear shaft. The tip of the spear never flies by itself. Neither does the missionary. He penetrates with the Gospel because we send him to his mark.

That involvement of the humble Christian in the work of missions leads to the second lesson in this passage from Jesus’ lips.

The Obscure Gift

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes this little child in My name welcomes Me. And whoever welcomes Me welcomes Him who sent Me.” I want you to notice the distance between the beginning point and the ending point: The Father sends the Son; the Son identifies some needy child as one who needs acceptance or ministry; and down the line, someone else, accepting the challenge, receives the little child. Jesus was saying that when we respond to the needs of people whom He values, we are responding to the message of the Gospel, which is responding to Jesus Himself, which is responding to God the Father. In other words, the way we can demonstrate our love and obedience to God—the ultimate aim—is to show our love in an obscure way

to the one who is right before us. Or as Jesus said it elsewhere, “*Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.*” (Matt. 25:40, HCSB).

God wants obscure gifts. What do I mean by an obscure gift? Remember that Jesus said we are to do our almsgiving in secret rather than in front of everybody. His point was that we are not to call attention to our service. At the same time, however, Jesus called attention to the widow who put a single mite into the treasury. He was trying to inspire others to give selflessly.

Like the widow at the temple, the Christian in the humblest position in the church, the community, or the world, can and should serve God with his best, whatever that may be. The poorest Christians in terms of the world’s goods can give something, and in fact, they usually are among the best givers. The International Mission Board recently published a Web article about Calvary Baptist Church in War, West Virginia, that has a little more than forty people in worship on Sundays. But this congregation increased its Lottie Moon giving from about \$150 (in 2005) \$8,000 (in 2010). This town named War is in a very poor region of West Virginia, but these Christians are clearly rich in spirit. Their pastor says, “God’s been good to us,” which tells us that they give because God has given to them. He also says, “I don’t ever want us to be content,” which tells us that he and his church mean to keep doing their best, whatever their means.

That’s what Jesus was telling us about the humblest Christian, the little child who hasn’t yet become selfish, who has an open and generous heart and will reflect the love of his heavenly Father. He will give in obscurity because the only one he seeks to please is God—Father, Son, and Spirit. The mission is that of Jesus Christ; the missionary is the tip of the spear; and the obscure Christian gift—and thousands of others along with it—send the missionary on his way.

The beauty of the Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists is that together, all those obscure gifts, all that obscure work, all those obscure prayers, come together by the power of God in a force that sends thousands of missionaries from places in this county to states all around the country to countries all around the world, fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ. You are not in Copenhagen, Thailand, Brazil, or on the other side of our own country, but together, *we are* there. We only responded to the need at hand—the child in need, the offering challenge, the time of prayer for people we’ve never met—but with all the other *obscure* gifts, by God’s power we join the missionary and touch the world.

It’s that touching of the world that we must keep in focus. For the mission is not primarily that of the missionary, but of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “*I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance*” (John 10:10, HCSB). It’s *His* mission. He invites, even commands, us to join Him in it.

The Exalted Mission

The humble Christian makes an obscure gift, but it’s all about the exalted mission of Christ. Remember the theme of these verses in Luke: *The most humble Christian can have the most effective impact in the most important mission through the most obscure support, if that is all he can do.* This important mission, this *exalted* mission, is what we must keep in focus.

Notice the last teaching in verses 49–50. The disciples spotted some fellow they didn’t know, casting out demons in the name of Jesus, and they told him to stop because he wasn’t part of the Twelve. The disciples were being a little exclusive, weren’t they! *They* were the verified, bona fide followers of Christ! Jesus

had news for them: “ ‘Don’t stop him,’ Jesus told him, ‘because whoever is not against you is for you.’ ” One of the lessons here is to resist the temptation to believe that your own group of Christians is the only group that’s really serving God. But the other lesson lies at the root of the story: This group or that group is not the thing to be exalted: the mission is. Exalt the mission, not yourselves or one another. Exalt Christ, the Eternal Word made flesh. Exalt His Gospel, not your own message or the distinctions of the messenger.

It’s because the mission of Christ—to seek and save those who are lost—is exalted that we are always to confess that we are nothing and He is everything. I said that some of us think we have to be *somebody* to do *something* for Christ, but in fact, none of us is really a *somebody*, not compared with Jesus. And our mission, whatever it is, is nothing compared to His. Never lose sight of this, that Christ’s mission is exalted, not ours.

But once you’ve settled this in your heart, then realize that in order to exalt the mission of Christ, you and I *are* called to give our best, our all, all the time, for this exalted mission. And your best probably will grow as your means and ability grow. But whatever your best is right now, that’s what Christ wants from you.

Daniel March is known best for a hymn we sing: “Hark the voice of Jesus calling, Who will go and work today?” and the verse ends with, “Here am I, send me, send me.” But what if you can’t physically go? March continued by offering us ever more humble and obscure alternatives: “If you cannot cross the ocean . . . You can help them at your door.” Then, “If you cannot give your thousands, you can give the widow’s mite.” Finally, March added, “Let none hear you idly saying, ‘There is nothing I can do,’ while the souls of men are dying, and the Master calls for you.”

Why is it so important that even the most obscure Christian with the least resources respond to the call? It is because the mission of Christ is exalted and is to be exalted in every Christian’s life. It is why we remain in the world. And *the most humble Christian can have the most effective impact in the most important mission through the most obscure support, if that is all he can do.*

As I began, I told you that my goal was that each of us would commit to mission support in the greatest way possible. That makes the invitation today different for each of you here. It comes down to asking yourself:

What does God want me to do for the exalted mission of Jesus Christ, so that along with all these other relatively obscure Christians, we may be there *with* the missionaries piercing the world with the Gospel? Is it a specific gift God wants during this season? Is it an increase in my Cooperative Program giving every week? Is it a commitment to prayer? Is it participation in some mission venture?

Hark the voice of Jesus calling. Answer quickly when He calleth: Here am I; send me, send me!