

MAJOR BIBLE DOCTRINES

Part 44: The Church: missions

The church has an outward (missions), inward (edification), and upward (worship) focus. "The Lord who calls His church to worship and to nurture also sends it through the centuries and across the continents to witness for Him" (Clowney).¹

Missionary work is the gracious work of the Triune God...History then, is His story. And evangelism is the story of the grace of God in which the Bread of Life pursues the hungry, the Fountain seeks the thirsty, Rest overtakes the weary, the Highway finds the lost traveler, the Light overcomes the darkness, Peace dismisses fear, and the Giver of Law pronounces benediction upon the guilty law-breaker! The ground of all evangelism is God Himself. It was not that Adam sought God. It was God who came saying, 'Adam, where art thou?' So Paul quotes Him saying in Isaiah 65:1, 'I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me' (Rom.10:20)—Ian Tait [*Local Church Practice*, 137]

I. The Church

A. Five aspects of missions

1. *The meaning of missions.* The English word *mission* is taken from the Latin word *missum* meaning "to send forth with authority or purpose." *Missum* was used in the Vulgate to translate the Greek word *apostello* meaning "to send forth." A missionary is someone sent by a church, with divine authority, to start and establish churches.² [1] Foreign missions. Foreign missionaries are those sent from churches in one country, to start and establish churches in other countries. "A [foreign] missionary is one sent by the local church, in obedience to Christ's commission, generally crossing cultural and language barriers, to bring the gospel to the nations, for the purpose of gathering believers into local churches" (Hofmaier). [2] Domestic missions. Domestic missionaries are those sent from a church, within that country, for the purpose of starting and establishing local churches. These two, foreign and domestic missions, are fundamentally the same, with foreign missions necessitating additional steps such as cultural education (learning a new language) and translation of Scripture.

2. *The mandate for missions.* [1] Eternal purposes. From eternity past, the Father promised His Son a people, comprised of every nation, in reward for His humiliation. "Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession" (Ps.2:8). "Missionary work was born in the counsels of the Triune God where it was decreed that, by the preaching of the gospel to all people, there should be brought to eternal glory a great multitude which no man could number from every tribe, people, and language" (Tait). In fulfillment to His eternal purpose, the Father sent His Son into the world as the great Missionary. "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (Jn.20:21). "Mission expresses the purpose for which Christ came into the world, and the purpose for which He sends us into the world" (Clowney). [2] OT promises. The OT, beginning

¹ Reformed, experiential Christianity birthed the pioneer missionary efforts of men such as John Eliot (1604-1690), David Brainerd (1718-1747), William Carey (1761-1834), Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), and John G. Paton (1824-1907). This mission effort was small and struggling until it exploded into the modern missionary movement begun by William Carey at the end of the eighteenth century—Joel Beeke [*A Puritan Theology*, 761]

² Personal evangelism is closely related, but not necessarily identical to missions. Local churches collectively, and Christians individually, must share the truth with unbelievers. But strictly speaking, evangelism that does not have new churches as a goal is not missions. Missionary work, more narrowly defined, entails evangelism for the goal of gathering disciples for the purpose of church planting. "It is evangelism resulting in congregationalizing" (Payne). Simply speaking, missions is the multiplication of churches. Missionaries, establish and strengthen churches.

with the promise made to Abraham, foretold the salvation of the Gentile nations. "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa.49:6). [3] NT teaching. [a] The Savior's commission. The apostles were commanded, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk.16:15). "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt.24:14).³ [b] The church's description. "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt.16:18). The church is on the offensive. The kingdom of God is advancing deeper into Satan's terrain. [c] The gift of the Spirit. The Spirit was poured out on "all flesh," that is, all nations. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh" (Acts 2:17). Thus, gathered at Jerusalem were men from every nation and tribe. "There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). The Day of Pentecost was a foretaste of missional success. [d] The apostolic example. The apostles took the gospel to all the nations. "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). [e] The book of Revelation. The book of Revelation describes the church as comprised from every nation and tribe. "They sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation' (Rev.5:9; 14:6).

- (1) Gen.12:1-3; Ps.67:1-7; Ps.96:1-13; Ps.98:1-9; Isa.52:15 (Rom.15:20-21); Matt.28:16-20 (Mk.16:15-16; Lk.24:46-47; Acts 1:8); Rom.15:7-13

3. *The necessity of missions.* The necessity for missions is found in three truths: the depravity of man, the exclusivity of the gospel, and the sovereignty of God. [1] The depravity of man. Man's problem is not social or physical, but moral and spiritual. The entire world, "lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1Jn.5:19). Man by nature is a slave to sin and under the just wrath of God (Jn.3:36). "We need God, not because we need his help to solve our problems, but because God's holy justice is our problem! Only he can make us right in his sight, and to do so he must bear our judgment, provide our righteousness, and transform our natures" (Clowney). [2] The exclusivity of the gospel. As "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1Tim.3:15), the church has been entrusted with the gospel, the sole means of man's salvation. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). No person can or will be saved apart from hearing and believing the gospel. [3] The sovereignty of God.⁴ God's sovereign purposes fuel missionary endeavor. He has not only decreed a people to be saved, but also the means through which they will be saved. "He has foreordained *all* that comes to pass. The *all* embraces the means as well as the ends. The doctrine of election demands missionary outreach as surely as it guarantees that it will issue in true conversions" (Tait). "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2Tim.2:10). The church's missionary work, is the work of Christ pursuing His bride. "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice" (Jn.10:16). "Missions is the work of Jesus Christ who will gather to Himself, through our instrumentality, a congregation out of every nation" (Tait).

³ To this must be added Christ's parables, many of which describe His kingdom extending through the four corners of the world (Matt.13:24-32; 44-52; Lk.14:15-24).

⁴ Like John Calvin, the Puritans taught the doctrine of sovereign or unconditional election: that God has chosen certain individuals and ordained them to eternal life, to glorify His grace in their salvation (Eph.1:4-6). At the same time, they said that God brings His elect to faith and salvation through the preaching of the gospel (Eph.1:13). Therefore, the Puritans labored to spread the gospel. They trained and sent out gospel preachers and prayed for the propagation of the gospel in the lost world—Joel Beeke [*A Puritan Theology*, 763]

(1) Rom.10:14-15

4. *The responsibility for missions.* The local church is primarily responsible for missionary endeavor. "Gospel work that follows the Scriptural pattern will issue out of the church, be subservient to its discipline and will be supported by its prayers and blessing" (Maoz). [1] The local church must send missionaries. Missionaries are sent, they do not send themselves. "How shall they preach unless they are sent" (Rom.10:15). "The local church, the home church, is the sending body. The church, not a society! The relationship of the missionary with a society is administrative" (Trait). "The call may come to individuals but the commission remains with the Church, with every member of it, with the whole of it" (Tait). Thus local churches must train, set-aside, and send men qualified for the task (1Tim.3:1-7). They must be "experienced men called and separated by God for the work. Servants of Christ, qualified and recognized as a pastors and shepherds, separated from the existing ministry for a special task" (Nichols). "The missionaries must be men of great piety, prudence, courage, and forbearance; of undoubted orthodoxy in their sentiments, and must enter with all their hearts into the spirit of their mission; they must be willing to leave all the comforts of life behind them, and to encounter all the hardships of a torrid, or frigid climate, an uncomfortable manner of living, and every other inconvenience that can attend this undertaking" (Carey). [2] The local church must pray for missionaries.⁵ Christians must corporately, domestically, and individually pray "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven" (Matt.6:10). "Prayer is our primary provision for our missionaries, prayer in the worship, prayer in the prayer meetings, prayer in the homes, prayer in the 'secret place' of personal fellowship with God. We should be ever ready to borrow Samuel's words and say to our missionaries, 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you' (1Sam.12:23)" (Tait). [3] The local church must support missionaries. "NT giving, like that of the OT, is a corporate thing. It is an act of fellowship (Acts 4:37; 11:29-30; 2Cor.8:4-5; 9:13). In Malachi 3, after the question 'Will a man rob God?' has been asked and answered, the command is given, 'Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse'. In the NT the storehouse is the local church. Storehouse giving is not to causes, but to God. Storehouse tithing [i.e. to the local church] is the only tithing in Scripture" (Tait). [4] The local church must assist missionaries. The NT describes men and women, who helped the apostles without any title or formal office. "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cencrea...she has been a helper of many and of myself also" (Rom.16:1-2).

The local church, recognizing its responsibility as the sending body, identifies itself with the missionary by the laying-on of hands. In the person of the missionary, the church itself is going out after the lost; part of the family is moving out to establish – on the same Rock – another spiritual home '*after its own kind*'—Iain Tait [*The Local Church*, 145-146]

As in his incarnate life, Christ had to have a body to proclaim his Gospel and to do his work, so in his resurrection life in this age he still needs a body to be the instrument of his Gospel and of his work in the world. So the church represents Christ's interests in this world, and is to carry on His work of evangelizing its peoples. Indeed, this is the task of each instituted and organized local church—Malcolm Watts [*What is a Reformed Church*, 113]

(1) Matt.9:37-38; Acts 13:1-3; Phil.4:15-16

⁵ We must daily desire that God gather churches unto himself from all parts of the earth; that he spread and increase them in number; that he adorn them with gifts; that he establish a lawful order among them; on the other hand, that he cast down all enemies of pure teaching and religion; that he scatter their counsels and crush their efforts—John Calvin [*Institutes*, 3:20:42]

5. *The work of missionaries.* [1] Missionaries must preach and teach the gospel. Missionaries are sent to proclaim the gospel, not foremostly to address social needs. These needs (feeding, housing, healing, and clothing the poor), though consistent with Christianity, are not the essence of missions.⁶ "It is almost as an aside, by accident, that the church finds herself involved in these other matters. The church is commissioned to fulfill another work; a work that no one else is either interested in, or qualified to perform: the preaching of the gospel to needy sinners that they might be properly prepared for an everlasting state" (Webber). [2] Missionaries must gather their converts into local churches. Ideally, these local churches will eventually have a plurality of indigenous (native) elders. "Missionary work is the outreach of one spiritual home towards the establishing of others. It is as children growing up move out from one family to form others" (Tait). "As missionaries preach the gospel of redemption to others and gather those new believers into churches, those redeemed communities of faith in turn continue to spread the message of redemption and restoration across the world, carrying out the mission of God, until that final day of restoration occurs" (Payne). [3] Missionaries must report to their sending and overseeing churches. "Antioch was Paul's local church, his *'spiritual home.'* From it he was sent out, was *'recommended to the grace of God for the work.'* To it, to rehearse *'all that God had done,'* he returned. Returning again, he *'continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the Word of the Lord,'* and on leaving for another tour was *'recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God'*" (Tait).

(1) Acts 14:21-28

⁶ Perhaps part of the problem here rests with the term 'missionary' itself. Not being a biblical word, perhaps it is inevitable that it should now be put to use in a way that was not originally envisaged. Traditionally, at least in evangelical circles, it was a word normally associated with the activities of our Lord's early disciples as they attempted to begin the work of going 'into all the world to preach the gospel'. Today it is used to cover just about anything that is done by Christians in any country other than their own. This, we are persuaded, is at best regrettable; at worst it is mischievous. How so? Because the almost inevitable tendency of this outlook is for the preaching of the gospel to end up taking second place to humanitarian concern. It does so in terms of manpower; it does so in terms of funding; and it does so in terms of church interest and participation—Daniel Webber [*William Carey*, 46]