

What is the Mission of the Church in the World?

Clarifying the Disjunction of Making Disciples versus Doing Good Works

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**Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.
Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:16)**

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that though it may seem that there is hard disjunction between making disciples and doing good works, in reality, it does not exist. To the contrary, both are important duties that belong to the church, but, for clarification, neither give us *the* mission of the church in the world; they do not give us the mission of the church either separately or together, with one or the other taking priority. What I aim to demonstrate is that the mission of the church (why it exists in the world) is to be a family of disciples for the glory of God.¹ Thus, on one hand, the church does not exist for the making of disciples; that is not its identity.² Instead, the good and necessary work of evangelism is for the establishment of a church of disciples.³ On the other hand, discipleship is not an end in itself separable from good works. Instead, learning as disciples, too often the elephant in the room in this discussion, is for holiness that comes to manifestation in good works that glorify God.⁴ Partial but essential support for this claim derives from the mission of the apostles, pastors, and pastor Timothy.

I. The mission of the apostles

Without question, the Great Commission of Matthew 28.16-20 is the *locus classicus* regarding the mission of the church.⁵ However, the major hurdle for using this classic text is the fact that this mandate was given to the apostles (**the eleven disciples went to Galilee...And Jesus came and said to them, 28.16**). Similarly, the promise of a mission to the ends of the earth in Acts 1.8 was given to the apostles and the Book of Acts records the *fulfillment* of what Jesus promised to them. Fundamentally, therefore, discovery of “the mission of the church” must begin with this historical-redemptive fact, namely, that the mission of the church is a derivative of the mission of the apostles. Their work is foundational for the church not only in the giving of the canon *to* the church but also in the very formation *of* the church itself. Thus, the mission of the apostles is a

¹This should be a given in this discussion, namely, that the mission of the church, the supreme end for which it exists is to glorify God (cf. DeYoung and Gilbert: “We want the crystal-clear and utterly unique task of the church-making disciples of Jesus Christ *to the glory of God*—put front and center, not lost in a flurry of commendable concerns,” p. 23, Italics mine). Therefore, to avoid reductionism, we need to remind ourselves of this comprehensive fact and align all of our thinking accordingly. For example, Wolterstorff thinks the Westminster divines went astray and missed shalom because they lost sight of the neighbor in their account of the chief end of man (*Reason within the Bounds of Religion Alone*, 112). Contrary to Wolterstorff, a Christian philosophy of history has to be rooted in the ultimate goal of history, to glorify God, which affects every part, every stage of the unfolding historical process.

²Harvey Conn overstates this point when he says, “The church must recapture its identity as the only organization in the world that exists for the sake of its nonmembers,” *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 23. Instead, it exists in the world to be a school of lifelong learning for believers under pastors.

³It might be better to say that the necessary work of making disciples is for establishment of churches, as the Book of Acts shows. What the risen Lord Jesus continues to do and teach takes place through the apostles in churches duly ordered under elder-pastors. The mission of the church, therefore, is the mission of local churches made up of disciples in covenant with Christ for life.

⁴Thus, the mission of the church is the obverse of the mission of Christ who came to call sinners to be His bride that He sanctifies and nourishes through history until the wedding feast in glory (Jn 17.1-2, 17-19; Eph 5.25-29; Rev 20.9).

⁵Matthew 28.16-20: **Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

controlling and structural fact that must be put in place to properly understand all the questions that pertain to this topic.⁶

What then is the mission of the apostles? One verb of the four in verses 19-20 states the hallmark of the great commission. It is the main verb, make disciples, on which the other verbs depend: **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...** The apostles are to “make disciples” by going, baptizing, and teaching. Therefore, causing and maintaining a process of discipleship, or discipling, is the commission’s distinguishing feature. It is truly the great teaching commission. The apostles make disciples by *going* to the nations *with gospel proclamation*⁷ that includes, at the least and initially, *teaching about baptism, the trinity, and commandment keeping*.

In this connection, it is important to avoid the evangelize then teach mistake. To make a point: Jesus is not saying, “Make disciples then follow up with teaching my commands” (first evangelize then get them into the church for instruction). Teaching about baptism, gospel washing, commitment, authority, the trinity, and the commandments is how the apostles make disciples. There is no restriction of teaching to some state of affairs that comes after evangelism and conversion. The apostles make disciples from all nations by initiating and continuing a process of gospel preaching and teaching.

To be sure, their work is unique. However, the historical-redemptive uniqueness of the apostolate does not mean that there is no continuation of their mission beyond their foundation-laying time. Matthew 28.20 and 10.23 point beyond the time of the apostles because their work extends to the return of Christ (Mat 10.23, **When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes**) and **to the end of the age** (Mat 20.20).⁸

We come now to the critical question. From the great teaching commission, what is the main task, work, or mission of the church (i.e. of churches and their members)? Notably, from the classic text on mission for the time between the comings of Christ, the work of the church is the obverse of the work of the apostle-teachers: the mission of the church is to be a body of disciples learning the gospel.⁹ In this connection, consider how the book of Romans, the entire book, is the gospel Paul preached by teaching, and taught by preaching, at Rome. Gospel proclamation is a single fabric that includes going out to nations (to all men everywhere) finding

⁶My claim is that truths about the nature of their mission are presuppositional, so they ought to control our interpretation of texts that speak of witnessing and good deeds. This is worth noting here because those who think of making disciples in a presuppositional way may, unconsciously, think that any view that even begins to question the ultimacy of evangelism cannot possibly be true, and those who walk on this path cannot be genuine Christians. Similarly, those who think of doing good works in a presuppositional way, may, unconsciously, think that any view that subordinates matters of social justice to gospel proclamation cannot possibly be true, people on this path have yet to become fully surrendered and truly spiritual Christians. Presuppositions are not bad, but holding them uncritically is not good, and they need to be tested, carefully put in place, and wisely applied.

⁷Adding “going to the nations with gospel preaching” to the notion of “going” derives from the parallel Great Commission texts: Mk 13.10; Lk 24.45-49 and Acts 1.8.

⁸Matthew 10 gives part one of the Great Commission and therefore, with Luke 10, fills out the meaning of the commission by redemptive-historical anticipation. Cf. “Matthew 10.23, Taking the gospel through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes: Prophetic Perspective and the Land of Israel as Metaphor,” ETS Midwest, Warsaw, Indiana, March 16, 2007, Richard A. Ostella.

⁹This accords with DeYoung and Gilbert, but with qualification: “The mission of the church [is] ...proclamation, witness, and disciple making (which includes teaching everything that Jesus commanded),” *What is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 233. The qualification, which harmonizes with the overall thrust of these authors, is simply that we need to accent *being disciples* as the mission of the church per the Great Commission. From the introduction to Christ and throughout the Christian life, Christ is “learned” (Eph 4.20); saved sinners come, learn and submit to His authority (Mat 11.28-30).

those who will hear, calling them to discipleship, baptizing them, and teaching them in local settings under Christ in His church, in a school of lifetime learning.¹⁰

Therefore, to understand the mission of the church, we must begin with the Great Commission and recognize that *it is the commission of the apostles for the establishment of the church*. What then is the apostolic mission? It is making disciples by calling people to repentance-baptism-discipleship. This mission continues to the end of the age through preachers whose work is likewise making disciples.¹¹ What then is the mission of the church? It is the counterpart *in the mission* of making disciples; it is *being disciples* in a school of lifelong learning under pastors.¹²

II. The mission of pastors

Is it true per Ephesians 4.11-16 that pastors are to teach all believers to do the work of ministry?¹³ For some, that ministry is personal evangelism (pastors equip them to make new disciples¹⁴). For others, that ministry is to promote social justice (pastors equip them to feed the poor and to promote shalom¹⁵). Correct interpretation of the text depends on the relationship of the three prepositional phrases in 4.12 that explain why Jesus gave pastors to the churches: **το [πρὸς] equip the saints for [εἰς] the work of ministry, for [εἰς] building up the body of Christ (ESV).**

1. The view that this text teaches that all believers do the work of ministry

Note the position of the single comma after the second phrase and joining the first two. Three reasons support this interpretation: 1) the change of prepositions from the first phrase to the second, which is said to indicate that the two phrases are not coordinate but a unit, 2) verse 7 teaches that all have grace for ministry, and 3) verse 16 teaches that all have a part in building the church.

2. The view that this text teaches that ministers do the work of ministry

¹⁰So, how might we rename the commission? It is the Great Commission, that is, the Great Teaching Commission, and in turn, the Great Teaching-Learning Commission. In a word, it is the discipling commission by which a church of disciples is formed and maintained. It is all evangelism. Fittingly, therefore, Paul exhorted Timothy to minister with careful persistence for the salvation of himself and his hearers: **Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers** (1 Tim 4.16).

¹¹The work goes on from generation to generation through preachers like Timothy, the faithful he teaches, and, in turn, the others they teaches (2 Tim 2.2, **what you have heard from me...entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also**).

¹²If you love me, Jesus says to Peter with repeated emphasis, feed my sheep. There is no comparable emphasis in the commission of the apostles to feed the hungry of the world. Instead, priority is given to the church: do good to all but especially to the household of faith (Gal 6.10). Of course, the commandments boil down to loving God and the neighbor, but we must keep the new commandment before us, which is "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13.34). This is a reminder of the *priority* of being members of the church who build up one another in such a way that the body builds up itself to maturity in holiness and love (Eph 4.11-16) toward the presentation in heaven of a bride, by the mission of Christ, that is pure, holy, and without blemish (Eph 5.25-27). *Perhaps, the most important question regarding good works is "how do we prioritize given our limited resources?"* We need much wisdom as when to speak to a fool and when to remain silent, how to sell all and give all away and not go on welfare, how to give priority to poor and afflicted *saints* around the world and *not all the poor*, how to give to Christ and not the poor knowing that the poor are always with us, how to grasp Mary's sitting and listening as commendable while Martha is busy serving alone, how to avoid throwing pearls before swine, how to understand the kingdom both now and not yet, and so forth. I would like think that, in the years of being radiated by twelve hundred sermons experienced by the Stearns family, they were not sub-Christian "sleeper cells" with the wrong priorities and thus mere "preresurrection" Christians, where they remained (maybe successful but without significance) until they joined the social revolution envisioned by Jesus by becoming radioactive, postresurrection, Christians in full surrender to God (Stearns, *Hole*, 245-247).

¹³Ephesians 4.11-16: **And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.**

¹⁴Thus, pastors are to equip the saints for their mission to complete a building, which is the body of Christ, to add more stones to the building, to win souls, toward the completion of the body of Christ, His bride, in consummation glory.

¹⁵Pastor are to build up the body to be strong in the ministry of social justice (Cf. Stearns, *Hole*, 264: Christ gave gifts to equip His people to do kingdom work).

Counter proposals: 1) the Greek prepositions are being over pressed; thus, there is no grammatical or linguistic ground for linking the first two phrases,¹⁶ 2) yes, verses 7 and 16 indicate a role for all believers in the church, but this does not require some special ministry, and 3) completion of the body is not adding more stones (evangelism), but building up the body (v. 16); nor is it building up for social justice ministry. Instead, it is building up in faith, knowledge, doctrine, and love. All believers have a role in the building up of the body, but the focus of 4.12 is on the distinctive role of ministers in bringing all believers to maturity in truth and mutual love (4.11; 3.5; 2.20; 4.20).

Therefore, the three prepositional phrases state the mission of pastors (in concert with the other ministers mentioned). Their work is threefold: to bring the saints to maturity as holy ones, to do the ministerial work of the word, and to build up the body.¹⁷ This deepens our grasp of making disciples and being disciples. The mission of the church is defined in a structural way here: *be disciples under pastoral ministry of the apostolic word for maturity in holiness*.¹⁸

III. The mission of Pastor Timothy

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim 4.5). The parallel phrases (doing the work of an evangelist, and fully performing the work of ministry) both relate to the same thing of the preceding context, namely, preaching the word by rebuking, reproof, exhorting with complete patience and sound teaching.¹⁹ This is pastoral discipling “inside” the church. Again, the mission of the church is the counterpart of these things. Evangelistic gospel work includes establishing and exhorting in faith. As in Eph 4.11-12, evangelism is not precisely or exclusively “outside” oriented. Thus, making disciples (of the great commission) is not restricted to the call to people in the world of nations to become disciples, it also includes discipling those who are willing to hear the gospel, and who by repentance-baptism enter the church pledging to be disciples under pastors in a concrete way in local churches duly ordered.

How do we conclude that pastors have “outside” work along with their inside and primary work? Pastors are aligned with the apostles in the ministry of the apostolic word. They continue the apostolic proclamation to the nations to the end of the age, so, though their work is primarily focused on discipling the church in the truths of the gospel, the gospel they teach is for the nations; it is to be spread about to all people, everywhere (so, 2 Tim 2.24, they teach everyone, including opponents, waiting on God to sovereignly give repentance).²⁰ Notably, discipling work is always present in mission as God moves people from outside to inside the church. There is discipling by *calling people to become* disciples (by much teaching as the

¹⁶Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 253, notes that stringing prepositional phrases that depend on a main verb and that *coordinate* with each is common in Ephesians. The selective placement of the comma by the editors of the Greek NT and by translators is unnecessary.

¹⁷Cf. *Novum Testamentum* XLVII, 1, 26-46, “Whose Ministry? A Re-Appraisal of Ephesians 4.12” by S. Page. The obverse of this work of pastors is the work of the church receiving pastoral care rooted in the work that was given by the apostles in their testimony and witness to Christ that He promised, commissioned, and empowered by the gift of the Spirit.

¹⁸Be holy as God is holy. Perfection is the goal. The number one tennis player in the world goes on an interview and says, “My goal is to improve my game.” He seems to be flawless and that does not reduce the goal. Striving for perfection (even though we fail and cannot attain it) continues. How much more should this be the case of being disciples for holiness. A huge part of doing involves choosing the better place, like Mary at the feet of Christ listening to His teaching (Lk 10.38-42).

¹⁹2 Tim 4.2-4: **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.**

²⁰Therefore, pastors must always have neighbors (that are to be loved in loving God) within the scope of those to whom they proclaim the good news, even if the outsider is in peripheral vision with the church in center vision (pastors teach as much as they can to both unwilling and willing hearers). Accordingly, some proclaimers of the gospel may teach the gospel as missionaries in church planting, which will involve them in doing pastoral work in a secondary way for a time. That is, for a season, the work they do may demand that most of their time be spent with unbelievers calling them to become disciples by repentance-baptism by which they pledge to be disciples under church ministry of pastors.

examples in Acts show us) and discipling by *teaching those who have become* disciples (to save yourself and those that hear you, 1 Tim 4.16).

How then, in summary, might we outline the mission of the church?

The mission of the church is the work of ministers and the work of churches.

1) It is the work of post apostolic ministers (missionaries, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers) who fulfill the mission by discipling, which includes calling people everywhere to become disciples under the authority of the triune God (therefore, it involves teaching), and discipling includes the teaching of those who have become disciples by the repentance-baptism pledge of discipleship. Good works of mercy have an important, but subordinate place in this mission because of the command to love our neighbors by doing good to all, but especially to those of the household of faith (Gal 6.10).²¹

2) Second, the mission of the church is the work of churches (church members) who fulfill their part *within the discipling mission* in two contexts: as the church gathered and scattered. *For the gathered church*, the role is that of being disciples in the context of worship by diligent attention to prayer, reading of Scripture, singing, giving, preaching, and observing the sacraments. These acts of worship are good works. The goal is holiness as the Lord is holy, which serves the ultimate goal of glorifying God through the restoration of sinners in the image of God. *For the church scattered*, when the members are dispersed to their homes and workplaces, their mission work is to live holy lives that reflect pastoral instruction in holiness (Eph 4.12). This means that they are to go about doing good as Jesus did to glorify God by their good works (Mat 5.16). The good works pie of holiness is a big pie with many slices. Among the slices are works of mercy (doing social justice in a myriad of ways²²) and works of witness (spreading the gospel word in a host of ways²³).

Specifically how church members fulfill their mission must include hard work at work (to have a good reputation to those outside) and speech among outsiders that is godly (Col 4.6).²⁴ They will love God by loving their neighbors according to the fundamental patterns of the Ten Words in their true spirit and intent. So, Christians will not lie but speak truth with wisdom.²⁵ They will do what they can to promote peace, court truth and justice, the authority structures of the fifth commandment, health and safety of the sixth, business ethics of the eighth, and so forth.

All of these good works are good and all of them take work, time, and energy. One may do this, and another may do that, in Christian liberty. We cannot expect believers to fit into the

²¹They are important in the display of growth in holiness by both ministers and church members in all areas of their lives from changing diapers to doing cancer research, in the home and in the workplace, in relationships to all people, for the glory of God through good, good works that have the right standard (the law of God), the right motive (love for God), and the right goal (the glory of God).

²²Sharing the gospel with unbelievers for the good of all indiscriminately (the gospel offer is for all everywhere among all nations, but with discrimination (with wisdom and restraint not to throw pearls before swine) extends love to people regarding their greatest need. If we miss this point, then the hole in our understanding of the gospel may be that we are thinking that life consists in food, drink, and clothing for the body.

²³Both as a local church and as individuals, by life and by lip, you are a light in the darkness. In this connection, your most important witness is the witness of a holy life displayed in good works guided by your learning of Scripture. Consider how spouses may be won by the silent testimony of a godly life (1 Pet 3.1), how wisdom toward outsiders manifests itself in gracious speech (Col 4.5-6), how your Christ honoring conduct and good deeds may lead Gentiles to receive the gospel offer in the day of God's visitation (1 Pet 2.12), and how your partnership in the gospel with your pastor has the important context of abounding love, spiritual discernment, and knowledge for a fruitful life of righteousness by Christ Jesus to the praise and glory of God (Phil 1.5-11).

²⁴Just think of going off to work in the marketplace. Are you going there to make disciples or to make a living by the pursuit of excellence in your work? The answer should be obvious, but just because many miss it, *your work at work is to work*, to do your work unto the Lord, heartily, and in the pursuit of excellence.

²⁵Of course, speaking to people about their need of the true Bread of life promotes the greatest possible health and well being of the neighbor. Having the poor always with us is a reminder that Christ and His mission of saving the whole man, body and soul, has priority and primacy.

same mold to which all must conform.²⁶ People who aim at a one size fits all approach (either all must do the works of personal evangelism to be genuine, or all must do the works of social justice to be radioactively, truly, spiritual) not only fail to understand the Great Commission, but they also fail to appreciate liberty of conscience, and they tend toward legalism by bringing (shall we say manipulating?) believers under the commandments of men. These failures show that we have forgotten that the mission of the church is first Christ's mission of building His church in local expressions through the gift of various ministers. Under the risen Lord, church members are to do a variety of good works as they are able and according to their circumstances, interests, opportunities, gifts, and callings (a doctor promotes health in the spirit of the sixth command by his very vocation in life, even if he remains in Dearborn, Michigan instead of moving to an impoverished country; a farmer provides food for everyone including the poor, a missionary calls unbelievers to discipleship by repentance-baptism, the gifted at showing mercy may become nurses or volunteers at a local hospital, a cancer patient Christian may explain the gospel and acknowledge Christ before men when asked about her hope in suffering).²⁷ In all these ways, Christians who are epistles read by their neighbors are lights in the darkness and their very conduct is part of the process by which God spreads the word, brings unbelievers to saving faith, and gathers in the plentiful and sure harvest of His elect at the end of the age.²⁸

Applications to each disjunct

Pointedly, on one hand, instead of concluding that the mission of the church is making disciples, it seems more accurate to state that the mission of the church is that of being disciples for holiness manifested in good works for the glory of God. On the other hand, doing good works *must be rooted in being disciples* for the works to be good, good works instead of filthy rags. They must, of course, take place on this earth, now, in public before men, but the cultivation of the Christian graces for righteousness in thought, word, and deed is a huge task. Learning is itself a good and necessary work, an important good deed that at times may trump serving, as the case of Mary versus Martha shows.²⁹ Study under pastors aims at the good fruits that flow from abiding in Christ by abiding in His word (Jn 15). Thus, mission involves holiness of life at home and in the marketplace, day by day in the pursuit of loving families under Christ's love, and in the pursuit of excellence at work in a six and one pattern with no sacred-secular

²⁶Such is implied in appeals to have an impact on your world, move from success to significance, and leave a legacy by which you will be remembered, Cf. Stearns, Hole, 36, 236, 264.

²⁷Stearns gives a helpful delineation of gifts, talents, and circumstances, Hole, 263-264.

²⁸The Lord's harvest is sure and plentiful. He causes His word of salvation to spread and to grow like a seed growing of itself (Mk 4.26-27). That is the clear teaching of Acts and the letters to the Thessalonians (Acts 6.7; 12.24; 19.20: So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily). Precisely how this happens and the degree of fruitfulness among outsiders is determined by the Lord in His providence. Each local church has its God-ordained place in the process of planting, watering, and reaping. The same applies to individual Christians; your place in the process is God-given. Consequently, whatever fruit you may see from your life in the conversion of outsiders, as a church and as individuals, you have a testimony of the gospel that radiates in this world as light in darkness: you are light in the Lord (Eph 5.8) that exposes evil conduct (Eph 5.11-14) and as light, your good works do lead outsiders to glorify God (1 Pet 2.9-12). The degree to which your witness as a church spreads, increases, and prevails mightily depends on the sovereignty of God because the mission of the church is Christ's mission that He is accomplishing now from heaven as the risen Lord of a sure and plentiful harvest.

²⁹Listening for seasons instead of serving is necessary and good (Lk 10.39-42). Doing is essential, being is critical, and *learning is doing* that shapes being. Within the right emphasis we make on doing the word, not just saying it or hearing it, we must remember the importance Scripture places on being a person of good character, of being holy as God is holy. Our identity is not found in what we do but in who we are as children of the King and disciples of the Prophet of prophets. By the Spirit's working with the word, learning shapes who we are from the inside out. Both being and doing are matters of growth in holiness that comes by pastoral instruction and that aims at the supreme end: the glory of God. We must not forget that an important action of a Christian is that of learning for which much work is required.

compartmentalization of life.³⁰ The ministry of prayer is for fruits of abounding love that are by Christ Jesus for the praise and glory of God (Phil 1.9-11). Charity and its fruits per the love chapter of the Bible (1 Cor 13.1-13) show that giving my possessions to feed the poor and even giving my body to be burned in self-sacrifice are nothing and mean nothing without love. The love in view is first the saving love of God in Christ; then it is the love of the redeemed who have been loved by God and who therefore strive for the holiness of love described in the love chapter.³¹ They have much work to do according to this text that centers on Christian graces.³² In turn, this emphasis dovetails with the work of the body building itself up in love (which is the obverse of pastoral ministry in Eph 4.11-16).

Accordingly, what Jesus indicated in John 3.16, rightly read with verse 17, is that His love for the world is a *saving love by which He will certainly save the world*, not by saving every person ever born, but by effectually saving a remnant from the fallen sinful human race. Therefore, the changed world envisioned in the New Testament in the coming of the kingdom both now and not yet is the church, God's elect from all nations for whom Paul endured all things: **Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory** (2 Tim 2.10). The new world order of the kingdom now is the church in local expressions, the bride of Christ being made holy for the glory of God. In the consummation of the kingdom, in the glories of the kingdom not yet, the church will make up the new world of the redeemed. Accordingly, Jesus gives this marvelous promise: "today you are a little flock, but tomorrow you will be the world, because with all authority given to me as risen Sabbath King, I will build my church, my family of disciples, over the centuries, across the globe, and to the very end of the age through the discipling work of my appointed ministers."

³⁰A great deal of discipling work is required to break down false notions of a sacred-secular mindset. For example, whether acknowledged or not, the one who takes up the game of tennis takes up a sacred task. Playing tennis is not secular in contrast to something sacred like reading Scripture. All the facts that a tennis player learns are indirect words of a message from God to His image bearer. These words share God's thoughts with man so that man can think God's thoughts after Him. This sharing is an invitation to fellowship with God (Ps 19). The world in which man plays is the kingdom of God (the field is the world where sons of the kingdom and sons of the evil one live, Mat 13.38) whether we are thinking of a country, city, or stadium. The principles of gravity, inertia, friction, and geometry that govern the activity of all participants are nuances of God's wisdom. We grapple with God's wisdom when we study the relationship of string tension to weather, court surface, and ball speed. How then can someone have wise-wisdom or true knowledge of tennis if they do not acknowledge God's kingdom and speech? How can they know the game if they do not know (acknowledge what they know but suppress) that tennis is an expression of divine speech that calls to fellowship with God and obedience to Him? All the principles, details, and nuances of factuality that make up the game of tennis are words in a message from the Creator to His creatures. They are components of communication that are there for our understanding. If we do not receive the communication for what it is and use it in obedience to the Speaker, then we do not understand it; we lack true knowledge. In that case, we do not understand the game of tennis even if we have mastered it. The number one tennis player does remarkable things in the dark. This happens because though fallen he is still the image of God. Therefore, if there is true knowledge of tennis, then there will be enjoyment, and every bit of enjoyment will lead to thanksgiving to the triune God. Every marvel and every challenge will lead to a sense of awe at the wisdom of God and it will encourage praise to the God of such wisdom. Experiencing tennis (or biology, mechanical engineering, diaper changing, mashed potato mixing, cement finishing, and so forth) will mean experiencing an invitation from the Lord to fellowship with Him. The tennis player will acknowledge God's voice and submit to His will while playing the game. He will seek to please the Lord in the attitude with which he plays and in the use to which he puts all his earnings. Controversially perhaps, he will not do his tennis work on Sunday unless he is assured by His risen Sabbath King that such work is fitting on His Sunday-Sabbath. Cf. "Epistemic Circularity, Christian Virtue, and Truth," ETS, San Antonio, 2004, Richard A. Ostella, p. 4.

³¹ **We love because he first loved us** (1 John 4:19).

³²In this connection, it is not helpful to suggest that even if one has success they still need to go on to significance (Stearns, *The Hole in our Gospel*, 38, 315). It is somewhat misleading to imply that serving God on His terms in total self-surrender could not mean that someone stays at their current job. First, in whatever vocation they may find themselves, even without "success" as some define it, they have significance as disciples and children of the King. Greatness in a current job means working with excellence for the glory of God while walking humbly with the Lord. "Going on to significance" could be a code for self-exaltation, the opposite of humble love. Are the good works really good if we perform them to "make my mark on the world," leave a legacy so that when we die, we hope what we did will be remembered (Stearns, *Hole*, 238)? Granted, Stearns says that one does not have to be in full-time ministry to be in God's game, but it denigrates being a CEO for years to say that I am now, for the first time, in the real game, in God's game (*Hole*, 209). We need perspective on the idea of ordinary people doing extraordinary things: they do the extraordinary in the little things that go unnoticed; they do great things in daily faithfulness to the mundane tasks of family and vocation. As Dan King put it, "Dare to be ordinary, that keeps me busy." God works out His eternal purposes in day by day stages in all the little details of life. So, we are to be like Him knowing that even the little nail on the little toe of the left foot has significance in the body of Christ.