

The Mission of the Church Pt.2

I. A survey of key passages

A. Matthew 28.19-20 (Lk 24.45-49; Acts 1.8)

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. 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.

B. Eph 4.12

Is it true that pastors are to teach all believers to do the work of the ministry due to Ephesians 4.11-16 where Paul says, **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?** Many people with different agendas believe the text informs us that it is the job of pastors to train believers for ministry. For some, that ministry is personal evangelism (pastors equip them to make new disciples). For others, that ministry is to promote social justice (pastors equip them to feed the poor, to promote shalom, etc). 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: **to** [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. The interpretation that this translation teaches (by this grammar) is that Jesus gave ministers a) 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, or b) to build up the body to be strong in the ministry of social justice.

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. 3) Verse 16 teaches that all have a part in building the church. The view is often driven by the desire to avoid clericalism.

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

Counter proposals: 1) the Greek prepositions are being over pressed; thus, there is no grammatical or linguistic ground for linking the first two phrases (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 253, stringing prepositional phrases that depend on a main verb and that coordinate with each is common in Ephesians, 4.13 & 14 are two examples). 2) Yes, 7 & 16 indicate a role for all believers in the church, but this does not require some special ministry. 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).

Q1: If I think that some ministry is *the* work of all believers (i.e. *the presupposition* to everything in the Christian life is either doing evangelism or doing social justice), then how might this affect my view of the purpose of the local church gathering, pastoral authority, preaching, and a host of other things in my outlook toward the church and world?

Discussion: We will neglect many things in God's order of things. For some churches, when the church goes out calling on a Thursday night, some stay back in support by prayer and making coffee because in the body not all function as eye, arm, or hand. This is better than the

view that insists that, yes, some make the coffee, but they also have the task with the rest to make the coffee and then deliver it because all have the task of witnessing. 2

The gathering of the church per this presupposition (a or b) means that the church is some kind of staging center for this program or that.

Then there is no place for expository preaching: why go through a year's study on a book of the Bible? Just need the gospel in outline to explain salvation. People bring others to church to hear the message of salvation; the ones bringing do not really need the sermon. The sermon is for the people they brought to hear of salvation.

By contrast, mission can be what is happening *in the church*. From Matthew 28, the mission of the church has to be understood within the mission of the apostles and pastors of discipling. Thus, the mission of the church is within the church and it is *being disciples*.

Where does the sovereignty of God come into this discussion? Without a sound view of sovereignty, we may think that *job one* of the church, of every Christian, is outreach because if we do not do our job, people will not be saved as if the harvest depends on us. We need to understand the sovereignty of God. A decline in sound teaching leads to decline in grasp of sovereignty. Perspective on going to Muslims in Dearborn, MI: it is a joy because God saved us and we want to share the news. It is not earning our way but kneeling at the feet of a sovereign Lord and looking to Him to open blind eyes.

Arminians in the Muslim ministries in Dearborn (Finney, the altar call practitioners) operate as if they can persuade people into the kingdom (just say it the right way and we get the job done: it is up to us folks trying real hard to get them to get it).

If on the job a person spends too much time witnessing and not working, then that is not a good witness.

We need to frame things properly to see where Christian witness bearing enters the picture in Scripture and define it biblically. A helpful model that we will explore further is the good works pie with many slices. Do you think that most of the pie is the work of witnessing or is witnessing a small slice of the good works pie that a huge number of other slices?

What is personal evangelism: "You have to have on your heart the intention to talk to someone today, every day, to explain the gospel and call them to repentance"? This view places an undue burden on believers because this goes beyond Scripture; it can be a manipulative tool that is legalistic because the conscience is bound to a commandment of men.

In all the other parts of the pie beyond the evangelism slice, there is a whole lot of stuff; there is much work to do.

Q2: What does the threefold work of pastors (equipping saints-bringing holy ones to maturity, doing the ministerial work-of the word, and building the body of saints-on the apostolic foundation; cf. *Novum Testamentum* XLVII, 1, 26-46, "Whose Ministry? A Re-Appraisal of Ephesians 4.12" by S. Page) imply for members?

The obverse of this work of pastors is the church growing to maturity by the word 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).

This deepens our grasp of making disciples and being disciples. The mission of the church is defined in a structural way here: *this is the mission: be disciples for holiness*. Thus, the gospel you learn as pastors fulfill their mission affects your life and every single thing you touch. Then if we do that, God will take care of the rest. We take up the means and God is bringing forth the fruit.

We confuse the history of redemption; we forget that history and misjudge things. We miss the elephant in the room of the mission texts like Matthew 28 and with it Eph 4.12.

De Jong (reformed thinker) and Stearns: both seem (I say this tentatively) to miss sovereignty and to miss the point of being disciples. Granted, De Jong fights the idea of social justice in a way that loses gospel proclamation. Yet De Jong seems to miss being disciples as a major plank on which to build our understanding of the church's mission.

But should we not have both discipling and being disciples in our view of mission?

Yes, discipling, making disciples, evangelizing is primarily the work of evangelists and missionaries 3

Being disciples is the work of the church by the work of pastors (who have within their work the slice of “do the work of an evangelist” (so the context of Timothy).

Then, in the doing of good works by growth in learning for holiness, people led by the Lord in their gifts and callings will engage in various good works that first begin in the home and work place and then spill out in life and speech acknowledgment of Christ. It is not a cookie cutter result however in which all do this or that.

The mission of the church is not to add to itself, but to perfect itself in maturity for holiness. Adding is the work of Christ the sower through His apostles and evangelists, missionaries, teachers and pastors.

Your mission, your work is being disciples in lifelong learning.

Husbands nourish the wife as Christ nourishes the church to holiness; so, pastors are to work to this end in discipling the church toward maturity in holiness.

Per Eph 4.20 (you learned Christ but not in certain ways that lack holiness). Thus, trusting the Lord in full fellowship is part of a cluster of growing in faith and joy (with no sacred secular) on the path of holiness.

Define holiness: the spirit and letter of the Ten Commandments; God as our model: be perfect; pursue all the virtues of the Christian life (1 Cor 13, love is..). There is a lot of work to do on all these matters. There may not be sufficient appreciation of a meditative life in the being of disciples.

Be holy as I am 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 in the Christian life and mission.