

The Mission of the Church Pt.3

I. Passages that shape our understanding of the mission of the church

A. Matthew 28.19-20 (Lk 24.45-49; Acts 1.8): 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: Jesus gave **shepherds and teachers** to bring the saints to maturity in holiness by ministry of the apostolic word; this defines the mission as being disciples for holiness of life.

C. 2 Timothy 4.5

As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim 4.5). Timothy is to perform his ministry fully, which includes proclaiming the gospel: **and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith (1 Thess 3.2).** Evangelistic gospel work includes establishing and exhorting in faith. As in Eph 4.11-12, evangelism is not precisely "outside" oriented. Thus, making disciples (of Mat 28) is not restricted to the call to become disciples, it also includes discipling those who are willing to hear and who, by repentance-baptism, enter the church, pledging to be disciples under pastors in a concrete way in local churches duly ordered.

The parallel phrases in 2 Tim 4.5 (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: **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. (2 Timothy 4.2-4).** This is pastoral discipling (teaching disciples) inside the church. Again, the mission of the church is the counterpart of these things.

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). Therefore, 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 go as far as they can with 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. 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 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, per the passages studied so far, is the work of ministers and the work of churches.

1) It is the work of ministers (of 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 (social justice) 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).

2) It is the work of churches (church members) who fulfill their part *within this 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. The goal is holiness as the Lord is holy, which serves the ultimate goal of glorifying God by sinners being restored in the image of God. *For the church scattered*, when the members are dispersed to their homes and marketplaces, their mission work is to live holy lives in reflection of 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 ways) and works of witness (spreading the gospel word in a host of ways).

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). They will love God by loving their neighbors according to the fundamental patterns of the Ten Words in their true spirit and intent. This is an emphasis not to be lost in looking to the Sermon on the Mount to fill holes in our grasp of the gospel. So, Christians will not lie but speak truth with wisdom. They will do what they can to promote peace, court truth and justice, authority structures, health, and safety.

Of course, speaking to people about their need of the true Bread of life promotes the greatest possible health and well being of the neighbor. Sharing the gospel with unbelievers for the good of all indiscriminately (the gospel offer is for all everywhere among all nations), but with wise discrimination (the gospel offer is not for the self-righteous, pigs and fools), extends love to people regarding their greatest need. If we miss this point, then the hole in our understanding of the gospel is that we are thinking that life consists in food, drink, and clothing for the body.

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 same mold to which all must conform. People who aim at a one size fits all approach (either all must do the works of personal evangelism, or all must do the works of social justice) not only fail to understand the Great Commission, but they also fail to appreciate liberty of conscience, and they tend toward legalism by bringing believers under the commandments of men. These failures show that we have forgotten that the mission of the church is first Christ's mission (He builds His church through the gift of various ministers and local churches). 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; a farmer by providing food, 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 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.