

What is the Mission of the Church in the World?
Clarifying the Disjunction of Making Disciples versus Doing Good Works

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Richard A. Ostella, westminsterreformedchurch.org
rostella@comcast.net

**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 disciples for the glory of God.¹ Thus, on one hand, the church does not exist for the making of disciples.² Instead, the good and necessary work of making disciples is for the establishment of a church of disciples. On the other hand, discipleship is not an end in itself separable from good works. Instead, learning as disciples, the elephant in the room, it seems to me, in the debates over the mission of the church, is for holiness that comes to manifestation in good works that glorify God.³ Partial 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 28.19-20 is the *locus classicus* regarding the mission of the church. **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."** 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**). 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. One thing that we need to learn from this is that our pursuit of "the mission of the church" by use of the classic text must begin with this historical-redemptive fact, namely, that the mission of the church is a derivative of the mission of the apostles, which is a controlling and structural truth that must be put in place to properly understand all the questions that pertain to this topic. The work of the apostles 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.

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 divines went astray and missed shalom. 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.

³Thus, 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).

Outline of ETS paper

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II. The mission of pastors

III. The mission of Pastor Timothy

Summary

Closing 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 them 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. Study under pastors aims at the good of fruits that flow from abiding in Christ by abiding in His word (Jn 15). The 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 excellence at work in a six and one pattern where work is worship with no sacred-secular compartmentalization of life. 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) 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 love of God in Christ; this is the love of the redeemed who have been loved by God and who strive for the holiness of love described in the love chapter. They have much work to do according to this text that centers on Christian graces. In turn, this emphasis dovetails with the work of the body of building itself up in love (the obverse of pastoral ministry in Eph 4).

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 world. Therefore, the changed world envisioned in the New Testament in the coming of the kingdom both now and not yet is the world of God's elect for whom Paul sacrificed all (**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 Timothy 2:10**). The new world order of the kingdom now is the church, the bride of Christ being made holy. In the consummation of the kingdom, in the glories of the kingdom not yet, the church will be the world of the redeemed.