LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Liberty University
DigitalCommons@Liberty University

Themes of Theology that Impacts Missions

Center for Global Ministries

1-1-2009

The New Testament and Missions

Don Fanning
Liberty University, dfanning@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgm_theo

Fanning, Don, "The New Testament and Missions" (2009). *Themes of Theology that Impacts Missions.* Paper 2.
http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgm_theo/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Global Ministries at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Themes of Theology that Impacts Missions by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.

2

The NT followers of Jesus

The OT period had its last revelation through the prophet Malachi with the prophecy of the sending of "the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Mal 4:5). One of the results of the period of the Captivity was national repentance from idolatry. They never again doubted God's willingness to inflict terrible punishment for flagrant disobedience, especially in the area of idolatry. This consciousness drove them to go to the opposite extreme in the development of the Pharisees, who were the guardians of purity for the Jewish lifestyle, adding requirements that they thought would assure obedience to the law.

As soon as the Persians conquered Babylon (537 BC) thousands of Jews were allowed to return from Captivity in Babylon (exactly 70 years after the first captivity as Daniel and Jeremiah prophesied—Dan 9:2), gradually more and more migrated back to rebuild their homeland, the Second Temple (completed at 515 BC) and Jerusalem. The king of Persia, Cyrus the Great, did not allow them to restore the monarchy, which left the priests as the leading authorities. With the proliferation of synagogues the need for accurate copies of the OT manuscripts gave rise to the scribes who became the authorities in OT texts and were called *Rabbi*, "my teacher." These were men outside the tribe of Levi who developed many oral traditions

When the Greeks took over the known world (332 BC) the Jews lost their Persian protection and were subjugated, which provoked the Maccabean wars of independence. The influence of the Greek culture (Hellenism) included the *gymnasium*, the center of intellectual, athletic and social life. Many of the values and morals of the Jews were ignored and challenged by this culture, which provoked an anti-Hellenistic movement. When the Greek Seleucid king Antiochus IV invaded Judea in 167 BC he desecrated and stripped the Temple of its religious artifacts and instituted a forced hellenization, requiring Jews to abandon their traditions and laws. Judah Maacabee led a bloody rebellion against the Seleucids liberating Jerusalem in 165 BC, which resulted in a priestly monarchy called the Hasmonean dynasties in 152 BC.

Two political factions developed in this period: Pharisees and Sadducees (also the Essences, but they were more recluses who had little impact on the country). The Sadducees denied the immortality of the soul and the existence of angels or spirits. They would cease to exist after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. The Pharisees, however, insisted on the literal, if not exaggerated, interpretation of the law.

These two factions fought various civil wars obligating the Roman general Pompey to take over Jerusalem in 63 BC to begin the Roman control of Israel. Continued revolt and rebellion would eventually lead to the total destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD. The world at the time of Jesus' birth and the initiation of the Church was violent and complicated. The Pharisees grew to hate anything that was not Jewish.

In spite of all the political turmoil, persecution from foreign powers, and the Jewish understanding of God, there were multitudes of open hearts willing to learn more about the God Yahweh.

"...the great rabbi Hillel taught his disciples to seek to bring Gentiles to Yahweh. Hellel's pupil, Gamaliel, was the teacher of Saul of Tarsus, so Saul was already familiar with

missionary ideas before becoming a Christian. The results of all this activity were almost incredible. Edmund Soper points out the Harnack found adequate evidence to assert that more than seven percent of the Roman Empire at the beginning of the Christian era were adherents of the Jewish faith" (Terry, Smith and Anderson, 1998, p. 62)

End of the 400-years of silence

The "400-years of silence" (from Malachi to the angelic revelations of Jesus' birth) came to an end with the announcement of the incarnation (to Joseph, Matt 1:20; and to Mary, Luke 1:30). We can never comprehend how difficult it was for Jesus to become incarnated in human form in the epoc of the Roman Empire. The difficulties, deprivation, persecution and rejection were described in four records for our encouragement and example.

John "brackets" his description of the life of Jesus with John 1:14, affirming that the "Word was made flesh," and with John 20:21 (NKJV), requiring of his followers that "as the Father has sent Me, I am sending you." John's Gospel means for us to understand that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are only fully comprehended against the backdrop of the entire universe, and in keeping with God's great purpose to love and call all of humanity into a relationship with himself Terry, Smith and Anderson, 1998, p. 64).

Olson describes three elements that should have been obvious: "As we look at the gospel records, our task is threefold: 1) to observe the intimations in the preparation for His ministry that He was indeed "Savior of the world," 2) to seek to understand the universality of His earthly ministry as it relates to His own Jewish people, and 3) to examine the various forms of the 'Great Commission' to focus our thinking about them" (Olson, 2003, p. 37).

Simeon received the third revelation of the new era. God promised him that he would see the Messiah's coming: "[30]…For my eyes have seen Your salvation [31] Which You have prepared before the face **of all peoples**, [32] A light to bring **revelation to the Gentiles**, And the glory of Your people Israel" ([NKJ] Luke 2:30-32). Later John the Baptist announced Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the **sin of the world**" (John 1:29, 36). Though it is not clear what they understood by these statements, looking back we see that it should have been obvious, but culture and prejudice blind one to reality.

From Explicit to Implicit

Throughout the OT God revealed His desire for Israel to share His knowledge and Person with the entire world, but Israel grew to hate the pagan world instead of loving it. Now God Himself came to model His love and commitment to the world, and then commanded His followers to do likewise.

The whole nature of God's approach to drawing men to Himself changed with the advent of Jesus. It was no longer a "Come and see how God has blessed His people" to "Listen to the message from the ones who will go for Me." Jesus was emphatic that His disciples imitate His approach to ministry as being sent to preach to the lost. His whole approach was to the lost of Israel, then of the whole world: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save **that which was lost**." The call to "follow me" implies that the same thing will be said of His disciples, i.e. they too will seek out the lost.

From Israel to the World

The call went out to Israel to repent and accept Jesus as Messiah. He modeled the constant teaching and preaching ministry from cities to villages. From open air preaching and teaching to private encounters were His methodologies. He was always teaching, always seeking an open heart. No one was beyond His acceptance, which provoked the accusations of the Pharisees, "Why does he eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matt 9:11).

The focus on Israel was to call them to fulfill the purpose of God in choosing Abraham: that his seed [Jesus] would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. They were to be the announcers to the world of the salvation God would accomplish through Christ's death. At the last, a few understood His mission and their mission to go and tell.

In the Sermon on the Sermon on the Mount, He reminded Israel that they were to be the "Salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." He then proceeded to show the Rabbinical misinterpretations and distortions of the Law which kept them from being such (Olson, 2003, p. 40).

Follow me

Thirty times in the Gospels it is recorded that his disciples were to "follow" Him. His standards were high: they could not deviate to bury their father (Matt 8:22) and required a full dying to (Matt 10:38; 16:24). He told a rich ruler who wanted to follow Him to go and sell everything he had and then come and follow Him (Matt 19:21).

Eventually his popularity would gather large groups of followers, but followers or spectators are not disciples and He was only interested in disciples. "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.[24] But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men,:[25] …, for He knew what was in man" ([NKJ] John 2:23).

Olson says that toward the end of His ministry Jesus gave them the parable of the landowner who leased a vineyard to some vine growers who mistreated and killed the owner's son (Matt 21:33-46). Jesus' application of this story is seen in His conclusion: "Therefore I say to you, this kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (21:43). There is no doubt now what His intentions are: to make disciples of anyone who will take seriously the command to follow him to the ends of the earth.

The Purpose of the Church Age

More than 140 verses refer to the "kingdom of God" that was preached by the disciples, Apostles and Early Church. This kingdom would never fulfill its objective until it included every "nation" [*ethne*, "ethnic group"], or people group since Jesus declared that He would not return to earth until the gospel had been preached to every people group "then the end will come" (Matt 24:14). Robert Garrett writes, "Clearly in the apocalyptic vision of our Lord, the

history of humanity could never be brought to its proper conclusion until God's purpose to make known his divine love through Jesus Christ his Son to all "peoples" is accomplished. Perhaps the end has not come because all nations have yet to hear!" (Terry, Smith and Anderson, 1998, p.)

The Great Commission

Toward the end of Jesus' life the implication became specific commands or mandates for His followers to obey. Following the resurrection the biblical record indicates there were five reiterations of the Great Commission, one in each of the Gospels and the Book of Acts (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:8). It is called the "Great" Commission because of the final emphasis He gave it before the Ascension. This is what the disciples and the church was to be about.

There is little argument that these declarations are the guiding principle of the life of Jesus that He seeks to impart into the lives of His followers. The interpretation principle of repetition indicates that this command was of extreme importance to Jesus. Now that He was not going to be present as Jesus was during His life, what were the believers to do?

Matthew 28: 18-20

The classic and comprehensive commission is found in Matt 28:18-20. The commands in this passage are sandwiched between two phenomenal statements that were to be the primary confidence builders for persecuted believers throughout the ages.

Declaration and Promise

By now the believers knew the full picture of the incarnation, sacrificial death and resurrection of the living Sovereign of the universe, Jesus Christ, and that He was now holding His followers accountable for acting in His stead. They were to trust in His continued ability to appropriately intervene in real time, committing their lives for the salvation of others, just as He had done. Just as Jesus counted on the authority of His Father to control the circumstances and resources to enable Him to carry out His mission, He now expects us to count on His authority to accomplish His final commands. The declaration means that He will exercise His full "authority in heaven and earth" in order to accomplish His purpose in the world and in our lives. We can count on His powerful involvement in whatever we initiate for His purpose.

The final promise carries more impact than it is credited for. Throughout the OT, when people were assured that God was "with them" they were never afraid to take on impossible tasks. That was all they needed.

Gideon was not asking what the will of God was. He knew that. He was asking whether God would be with him in the battle or not. Once assured of God's presence he did not care how impossible or difficult the mission might be (Judges 6:13-16) (See also Num 14:9; 2 Chron 32:7-8; Psa 46:7, 11). This promise, when believed and relied upon, brings a confidence in the disciple necessary to face formidable odds and powerful opponents without fear or hesitation.

Caleb said it this way, "Assuming the LORD is with me, I will conquer them, as the LORD promised" ([NET]Josh 14:12), and he did. Jeremiah took his confidence from this same promise: "But the LORD is with me as a mighty, awesome One" ([NKJ] Jeremiah 20:11) (also "like a mighty warrior"[NIV]; "as a mighty, awesome One"[NJV]). With a Partner like this any task is accomplishable… even world evangelism.

The bottom line is: Jesus has promised to be an almighty, powerful partner to anyone willing to take the initiative with Him to finish the task of world evangelism. If we knew the full implications of this promise and believed it, there would be no hesitation in our spirit to go anywhere or take on any task for the Gospel. It is only our unbelief that hinders our confidence in His sufficient intervention.

Commands

Sandwiched between an immense declaration of being all powerful, i.e. sovereign, and an encouraging promise of always being with them in their endeavors, the Great Commission never has lost its application since it requires carrying the message to every people group and is to be in effect "until the end of the age," that is when Christ returns.

In Matt 28:19-20 there are four verb forms, but only one imperative verb. The other three verb forms are gerunds (in English, verbal participles in Greek), meaning that these three are dependent upon the force of the single main verb. The main verbal thrust therefore is "to make disciples," the only verb in the verse. All these listeners were disciples, so they knew what it took to bring them to discipleship from disbelief or indifference. The meaning of a "**disciple**" is to be "a learner, pupil…one who follows one's teaching" (Thayer's Greek Lexicon).

One cannot trust what one does not understand, nor follow what one does not believe to be true. Whatever this means it certainly is not a momentary decision that becomes meaningless, but rather a life-long trust and commitment to the teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures. This, ultimately, is the meaning of evangelism.

Notice where these disciples are to be made: from "**all nations**." The word "nations" translates the word *ethne*, from which we have the English word "ethnic." Thus, the focus does not refer to the geo-political boundaries of modern-day countries (i.e. Ghana, Iraq, or Colombia) but rather to the groupings of ethnic people groups who share the same language and culture, no matter where the geo-political boundaries of the modern day countries may be. In Colombia there were 52 ethnic people groups, most of whom lived in the jungles, but all of them spoke a unique and different language.

There are approximately 12,000 of these ethnic people groups in the world today. About half of them have little or absolutely no one in their language/culture that has ever heard the gospel even once. Many of these ethnic groups have been reached with the Gospel, some are projected to integrate with other groups losing their individual identity, leaving approximately 4,000 unreached groups. Several groups have initiated contact and linguistic works with over a thousand of these groups leaving just over 2,000 totally unreached groups at this date. These are the target groups for the Church. Many hide behind the excuse that we have not won our entire nation to Christ, so why go somewhere else?

It seems best to assume that our Lord intended that some disciples should be converted as representatives from every ethnic people group, rather than that all the Church's efforts should be spent to win entire nations collectively and unanimously be made disciples. This

> would be great, but it was not Jesus' vision! According to Jesus, the vision in Revelation 7:9 of a multitude of the redeemed around God's throne at the end of all time who are "out of" **every tribe, and tongue, and nation, and kindred" (**Terry, Smith and Anderson, 1998, p. 72).

The vision is representatives of every people, not all the people of a nation. The problem is: if one focuses on winning all the people in one nation, then representatives from all the nations are never reached.

The three participles (gerunds in English), "going," "baptizing," and "teaching" are the ***manner*** or ***means*** by which the main action of the verb (to "make disciples") is to be accomplished. Disciples are to be made by someone going to them, calling for a public commitment to the truth of God's promises by baptism and then teaching them how to be accountable to each other for their obedience to His commands, especially in a corporate structure call the "church."

The emphasized word in the command is "**going**" by the grammatical structure. George Martin discredits the common translation "as you are going" implying that followers of Jesus "must be sensitive to the presence of others around them who need to receive a witness." He states that "this twists the force of the Greek construction and ignores the power of the context to reduce the meaning to a weakened 'if you are going, then...'" (Terry, Smith and Anderson, 1998, p. 73).

Quite the contrary, the command is an intentional, interventional, inconvenient, interruptive and out-of-the-ordinary going to an unreached person/people with a specific objective in mind: to make believing followers of Jesus where none exist at the time, just because Jesus said this is what He wanted or commanded to be done. This is not an option, nor is it merely for a select few.

John remembered the comparative declaration of the Commission purpose in [NKJ] John 20:21, "So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Not only was there a command to go, but a declaration of Jesus sending His disciples just as His Father had sent Him. Mark saw the method of fulfilling the Commission when he wrote, "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" ([NKJ] Mark 16:15). Luke focused on the message that was to be delivered to the entire world, "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" ([NKJ] Luke 24:47).

The second word in the Matthew Commission is "**baptizing**" the followers as a first step of their obedience or public commitment to be a follower of Jesus and His teachings. In Spanish we called this step: *poner la camiseta de Jesús* ["put on the T-shirt of Jesus"]. There was to be no mistaking the new loyalty of the follower. He was to be a public and unashamed follower of Jesus, not just have a secret mental "faith" exercise. The tri-part focus of this baptism is the commitment to the doctrine of the Trinity as the only divine reality that exists.

These steps (going, making disciples of all ethnic people, and baptizing them) describe basic evangelism of declaring the amazing grace of God who is willing to forgive the repentant sinner of all his sins if they will trust Him completely, publicly and unashamedly. If the unbeliever who is "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12) is willing to turn "to God from idols (anything that is loved more than Jesus) to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9), then he is to be publicly baptized as a testimony before everyone concerning their new faith in Christ.

The final phrase "**teaching them to observe** [obey] **all that I have commanded**" refers to the on-going training in the teachings of the NT. The phrase, ***to observe***, means "to give heed to, watch narrowly, observe" (Liddell-Scott Lexicon). It refers to a life-style and moral integrity of practicing all the teachings of Jesus and the Holy Spirit throughout the NT. Due to the appalling lack of discipleship in the churches today, most Christians have no idea what these commands are that disciples are expected to be obeying and holding each other accountable for their obedience.

The vision of a chain of people being connected through the discipling process is to go on multiplying until every people group has been reached with the gospel message. Every disciple is commanded to reproduce other disciples or followers of Jesus and to communicate the teachings of the NT. Every generation is expected to continue this chain-reaction process until the last people group is reached with the gospel. The only reason that it has not yet been accomplished in the twenty-first century is that some have broken the chain. "If the Christians alive today were simply to commit themselves to multiplied disciple making, it would be mathematically possible to reach the world's population by the fourth or fifth generation of new disciples. It is possible to fulfill the Great Commission in our generation!" (Terry, Smith and Anderson, 1998, p. 74).

History of the NT Church

The early believers knew when they came to Christ that they were accepting a mission for life. It was not convenient for them to follow Jesus, in fact, it was only because they were convinced He was God, and His death was the only hope for all mankind, that they were willing to become believing followers. There was no such thing as a NT believer who was not a follower of Christ with a mission.

Once the Holy Spirit was given as a universal replacement for the localized presence of Jesus His power in every believer was sufficient to enable him to be His witnesses as he went from (going) **Jerusalem** (their familiar starting point), to **Judea** (surrounding province of people they did not now), **Samaria** (nearby ethnically different – and disliked – people), **to the ends of the earth** (the last remote people group with even stranger cultures and foreign languages anywhere on the globe). This was not an easy or convenient task, nor does the command go away until Jesus returns.

It would take a while before the Early Church would catch on to the vision. They were concerned about the establishment of the Jewish Kingdom of God on earth. Jesus basically told them not to worry about their desire for Jewish importance and power (Acts 1:6) until they completed His mission for them: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and to the farthest parts of the earth" ([NKJ] Acts 1:8). He had already given them this same commission just before the crucifixion, but they did not catch the meaning: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations [*ethne*], and then the end will come." ([NKJ] Matthew 24:14). Did they think He did not really mean what He said?

Jesus made this clear to them, repeating it five times before the ascension. Their cultural baggage prevented them from seeing the Gentile aspect of the "world" vision, but the Holy Spirit would make this clear to the disciples.

Phase One: Jerusalem

E-0: Evangelize the people religiously and culturally most like you

The term "Pentecost" refers to the Jewish celebration of the giving of the firstfruits of the harvest and the giving of the Law by Moses. The name defines when it occurs: fifty days after Passover. Jesus was crucified the day before Passover, arose on the third day (of the fifty days before Pentecost), appeared and taught the disciples for 40 days (Acts 1:3), then told His disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. They had to wait for 7 days (50 – 3 – 40 = 7). Jesus did not tell them His plan, but the Spirit came precisely when there was a huge crowd of Jews from all over the known world gathered at Jerusalem for the celebration of the Jewish Pentecost.

Once in each of the four Gospels there is a reference to the prophecy of John the Baptist that Jesus would baptize His followers "in the Holy Spirit" (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). The final reference to the baptism in or with the Spirit is in Acts 1:5 where they are told it would finally occur "not many days from now." They were told to wait in Jerusalem until the coming of the Spirit occurred which ended up being a seven-day wait. Accordingly, no baptism in the Spirit occurred until that Jewish Day of Pentecost in 33 A.D.

Once the Spirit came all believers would receive Him upon believing (with the single exception of Samaria to be explained later). Peter's sermon makes it clear that the promise of the Spirit is for all believers equally: "For the promise is for you and your children and for **all who are far away**, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself" ([NET] Acts 2:39). Sounds like Peter caught the vision for the Gentiles, but eight chapters later it became evident that he was still controlled by old Jewish prejudices. One of the characteristics of revelation is that occasionally the writer does not understand the significance of what has been revealed to him, but he records it accurately. This, again, reveals the heart of God, not the benevolence of man.

The partaking of the Spirit's presence in the body of every believer resulted in the formation of a multitude of human bodies sharing the same Spirit of God that indwells Jesus. Therefore, this Spirit baptism makes every believer a corporate part of Jesus ([NKJ] 1 Corinthians 12:13 "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body…"). This Jewish Feast Day at Pentecost AD 33 was an epic event, never to be repeated, which became the formation of the Church, which is His Body (Col 1:19).

This was all a "mystery" at first until the universal uniting into one body of all believers who share the Holy Spirit was revealed to Paul several years later (Eph 3:3-9). Thus their Jewish orientation kept them from seeing the real purpose of God in forming the Church. What they would not see, God would obligate them into fulfilling.

At the designated time the Spirit of God came to dwell in the bodies of all believers from the moment of their repentant-faith. The 120 disciples of Jesus in the Upper Room (Acts 1:15) were the first recipients of the Spirit in an inaugural three-fold signal of His coming.

First there was the loud and violent noise (Acts 2:2) that was so widely heard across Jerusalem that a great crowd gathered at the apparent source of the tornado-like sound (Acts 2:6).

Secondly, there were "tongues of fire" that rested over each of the original 120 disciples, certainly denoting something new had occurred to them. This must have brought to their minds the OT manifestations of God to Moses where God spoke out of the fire in the bush (Ex. 3:2;

4:15), then later referred to this unique method of how God specifically spoke to Israel "out of fire" (Deut 4:33). Neither of these first two signs ever occurred again. Some have made futile attempts to allegorize these events in order to claim their repetition, but that only distorts the meaning of the original occurrence.

Thirdly, the initial recipients of the Spirit miraculously and boldly spoke to the gathered crowd in sixteen distinct languages or dialects. Since the Jewish crowd was a mixture of Hellenists expatriates (Jews from around the Empire who spoke these different languages) and Hebrews (Jews from Israel who only spoke Hebrew, Aramaic and maybe Greek and Latin), only the Hellenists in the crowd understood perfectly what was spoken. They were amazed. This could not mean they had the gift of "interpretation" (1 Cor 12:10) since they were not saved yet. It can only mean that literal earthly languages were spoken when the genuine gift of tongues was manifested.

The Hebrew Jews from Jerusalem, the "others," who did not understand these languages, thought they were drunk (Acts 2:13). Later the gift of tongues would have a specific evangelistic purpose, again to the Hellenist Jews of the Dispersion as on the day of Pentecost ([NKJ] 1 Corinthians 14:22, "Therefore tongues are for a **sign**, not to those who believe but to unbelievers"). The unbelieving Gentiles who did not understand the sign significance would think they were weird or crazy (1 Cor 14:23). The special sign aspect of tongues is declared in [NLT] 1 Corinthians 14:21, "It is written in the Scriptures: "I will speak **to my own people** through strange languages and through the lips of foreigners." Notice that the prophecy of a **language sign** is directed primarily to "my own people," referring to Israel.

All of these signs made it evident that God was doing a new thing, or revealing a new truth to His people Israel. Again, their preconceived ideas precluded them from grasping their role as recipients and protagonists of a grace-driven salvation for all people. As the amazing offer of God's salvation was spread throughout the known world, which remained a small portion of the real world, the major recipients initially were the proselytes to Judaism and those influenced by the OT teaching in the synagogues, called "God-fearers" in the NT, such as Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 22) and synagogue attendees at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16, 26).

The early believers were notable in four aspects: 1) their study of the new doctrines that the apostles were teaching, 2) their sharing equally with all the believers ("fellowship"), 3) eating together as a family, 4) worshipping and praying together (Acts 2:42). The amazing things that the apostles could do in the name of the Lord kept even the skeptical fully aware that God was doing something new and special in Israel. No one could doubt the supernatural element of the message of Jesus and the apostles.

The resulting propaganda, making Jesus the issue of discussion on everyone's lips, brought many to the conclusion that the Apostles' message was correct and they were obligated to make a decision, one way or the other. The end result was that conversions were occurring daily, "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

Word of mouth would eventually spread the news of a new thing that God was doing throughout Jerusalem. Their boldness to share the gospel brought them under persecution and rejection: "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine" ([NKJ] Acts 5:28). This was phase one of the Great Commission: reach the people religiously and culturally like you.

From the initial additions to the church, the disciples began to multiply, that is, more people were causing the growth. "Then the word of God spread, and the **number of the**

disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith"([NKJ] Acts 6:7).

Later the growth would be on a church level, which moved it into an exponential growth dynamic: "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they [the **churches] were multiplied**" ([NKJ] Acts 9:31).

This is the three-fold model to be reproduced world-wide: (1) focus on individual conversion and disciple-making, (2) multiplying the evangelism of the disciples by saturating a city with Gospel teaching resulting in fellowships or new congregations, and (3) these new congregations take responsibility for continuing this process in other areas such that each church will birth new churches.

Phase Two: Judea

E-1: Evangelize the people culturally most like you, but more indifferent religiously – Acts 1-7

It would not be easy for the early Jewish disciples to break with their long-held traditions and beliefs about Gentiles. It apparently took several years before the gospel began to spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea, except by the word of the believers from the day of Pentecost and other foreigners who came to Jerusalem. The church was growing so rapidly throughout the region and so many needs forced the early leaders to shoulder more responsibility for unifying and maturing the new believers that thinking beyond their province was difficult to imagine.

At first the churches were "… enjoying the favor of all the people" ([NIV] Acts 2:47), but soon the implications of the gospel message would bring the first persecution in Acts 4, provoking Peter's exclusive declaration, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" ([NIV] Acts 4:12). Being Jewish was not enough to be saved; you had to be a follower of Jesus or you were lost! This exclusiveness would become so offensive that greater persecution was inevitable. This is the "offense of the cross" (Gal 5:11): Jesus is the only way to heaven and the Father (John 14:6). It is obvious today that this principle had global implication, but it was slow in becoming obvious to the early Jewish believers.

Phase Three: Samaria

E-2: Evangelize the people linguistically like you, but ethnically, culturally and religiously different– Acts 8

In Acts 8:1 when "a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." God forced the believers out of Jerusalem into the neighboring regions where they inevitably shared their new faith in the Messiah.

This stage was to reach out to people who were not part of the main Jerusalem religious culture and events. Many of these people had seen the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles. The coming of the Spirit on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost marked the beginning of a new era in God's dealings with mankind.

Philip's evangelism among the Samaritans was a major break through (Acts 8:5). These were not Jews. The Samaritans were a racial and religiously mixed group that dated back to the Assyrian Captivity in 722 BC when the surviving Jews of the ten northern tribes were mixed with thousands of other captured peoples. This was designed to destroy any ethnic origins so Assyria could govern them. Some of the Jewish tradition was mixed with the pagan practices the foreigners brought with them. The result was a people with a religious and racial mixture that was despised by the Jews of Judea.

The bold preaching of Stephen resulted in many conversions to Christ, but the Spirit was not yet poured out on these baptized Samaritan believers (Acts 8:16). Hearing of these conversions the apostles sent Peter and John who evidently knew that without the intervention of the apostles the Spirit would not be given. This is a transition period in the Early Church where some things occurred that were never again repeated. The initial Samaritan evangelism was one of those unique events.

When Peter and John prayed for them, these believers were given the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17). This is understood to be the second application of the "keys to the kingdom of heaven" passage (Matt 16:19). It should be noted that this is not the "keys to heaven," but rather the keys to the "kingdom of heaven" or the keys that open the door of opportunity for new believers to share in all aspects of the present "kingdom of heaven" where Christ is the Messiah or King of His followers. It is not coincidental that Peter was the "door-opener" for the Jews, Samaritans and the Gentiles.

Phase Four: To the End of the Gentile earth

E-3: Evangelize the people linguistically, culturally, religiously and geographically different than you – Acts 9-28

By far the most difficult concept for the early disciples was to accept the notion that pure Gentiles (not partial Gentiles like the Samaritans) could equally be the recipients of the Spirit and the grace of God just as the Jewish believers were all experiencing.

Acts 10 takes place about 10 years after the beginning of the Church yet when another wave of persecution broke out the disciples fled from of the region of Judah, Samaria and Galilee "preaching the word to **no one but the Jews only**" (Acts 11:19) all the way to Cyprus and Antioch of Syria, hundreds of miles to the north and west. They still did not catch the vision of Gentile evangelism.

God would have to move them "outside the box" or the established new leaders to wake up the churches to His purpose, a practice He would repeat throughout the history of the Church. Paul was a Jewish zealot, persecuting the Jewish Christians for abandoning Moses for Jesus. He "made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison" ([NJV] Acts 8:3).

God occasionally intervenes in the course of human history in a direct and evident manner to accomplish His purpose. Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus to persecute more Christians was one of those times. This again is a unique experience, that is, it is not the normal experience for entering the ministry. I have likened this to the calling of Abraham. No where again in the New Testament is there such an intervention to call men to Himself and to the ministry simultaneously. Paul becomes the Abraham or the Jonah of the New Testament, only he fulfills God's expectations.

God was going to "bless the nations" through Abraham's seed as the Messiah brought the full salvation by grace, complete forgiveness and an amazing inheritance in the kingdom of God. But as time went on in the early Church, there was little or no interest in the rest of the world, so God intervened in the special calling of Saul of Tarsus (Paul), who would develop the strategy for reaching the world.

> "So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. [16] But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. [17] I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, **<u>to whom I now send you</u>**, [18] to **open their eyes**, in order to turn them from **darkness to light**, and from **the power of Satan to God**, that they may receive **forgiveness** of sins and an **inheritance** among those who are sanctified by faith in Me' " ([NKJ] Acts 26:15).

Several principles are seen in this passage: firstly, Saul's persecution of the believers was directly perceived and felt by Jesus as though it were an attack on Him personally. This is the significance of the Holy Spirit in the bodies of believers and the resulting "body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16). Whatever is done to any believer is perceived as being done directly to Jesus Himself.

Secondly, Paul's unique calling to Christ in salvation was immediately declared as having the **mission purpose** of being directly sent by Christ specifically to the Gentiles in order to bring about their conversion by making them to understand the forgiveness and inheritance through faith in Christ. Once again this is **not the normal way** for entering into the ministry. This experience is **never again repeated** in the written record. Paul was **not given a choice** whether to enter into the ministry or not. He had to preach or face the inevitable chastisement of this majestic Sovereign God who had just appeared to him. This is the meaning of, "For if I preach the gospel, I have no reason for boasting, because I am compelled to do this. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ([NET] 1 Corinthians 9:16). This seems to be the only way God could get a Jewish believer to break out of his prejudicial mode of thinking to open the door to the Gentiles.

Thirdly, the transformation of the Gentiles is not described and a totally sovereign, no-human-involved kind of event, rather God told Saul (Paul) to "open their eyes," that is, to make the see the truth. Nowhere did Paul wait for God to do something before he presented the gospel. His tactic was to boldly confront the unbelievers in the synagogues, streets, market-places, courts of law, and in private conversations. He exhorted (Acts 13:15), preached (13:42; 14:7), persuaded (13:43; 18:4), spoke boldly (13:46; 14:3), reasoned out of the scriptures (17:3), explaining and giving evidence (17:4), disputed (17:17), provoked curiosity and answered questions (17:19), contextualized his message (17:22), etc, etc.

To make Paul's responsibility clearer, God reiterated His command to Paul in Acts 18:9-10, "Do not be afraid [any longer] but keep on speaking and do not be silent. [:10] because I am with you, and no one will assault you to harm you, because I have many people in this city."

Paul's confidence was derived from the assurance that when he proclaimed the gospel God was working through that proclamation in the hearts of the unbelievers enabling Paul's message to "open their eyes" to understand the truth, recognize their guilt, and believe what was declared from the Scriptures.

Without human involvement the gospel was ineffective. The power of the gospel is unleashed as it is proclaimed, not before. It seems obvious, but it is not unusually for man's created theology to interfere with the obvious statements of Scripture.

At the conclusion in Acts of Paul's stay in Rome he declared to the curious Jews, "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" ([NKJ] Acts 28:28). Though his conversion and commission to the ministry are not normative, his message and method for accomplishing the mission have become the models for reaching the Gentile world.

Acts tells how the gospel spread. "The choice 'vignettes' that Luke provides serve to demonstrate that here is a gospel which offers salvation to all people--regardless of background, race, language, ethnic heritage, or social class. Where this gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit guides the messengers and works with power, to call a lost humanity to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Through message and method, the Book of Acts lays the biblical basis of the world mission of Christianity" (Terry, Smith and Anderson, 1998, p. 82).

*The global mission of the epistles

The mandate and vision of planting the gospel and viable communities of believers in local churches throughout the Gentile world permeates the epistles. Is he saying that every ministry ultimately must be targeting the world? Early in Paul's writings he rejoiced that "the Lord's message rang out … in Macedonia and Achaia ... everywhere (1 Thess 1:8).

This global vision not only permeated his thoughts and writings, but directed his actions and strategies for his whole ministry to see that the gospel was preached throughout the world. Here are some excerpts from his writings: "The gospel that I preach among the Gentiles (Gal 2:2); "all those everywhere" (1 Cor 1:2); "both Jews and Greeks" (1 Cor 1:24); "through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Cor 2:14); "reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19); "so that we can preach the gospel in regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory" (2 Cor 10:16); "all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit" (Col 1:6).

In response to the passage where Paul describes his purpose was to preach "where Christ was not known" the goal of the missionary is to make Christ known and available everywhere to all people, not to win everyone to Christ. George Martin says:

> "Follow the unrelenting logic of this. Once the gospel is preached to a group of people, it can be said that among those people the gospel is now presented, even if all do not accept it. If the ambition of the preacher stays the same, he then finds himself looking toward others who have yet to hear. He goes to them and makes the gospel known, following up on these efforts by going to another group, and another, and another until in all places the gospel is known (Martin, 1998, p. 93).

The Book of Romans lays the groundwork for understanding that all men everywhere are equally in desperate need of the gospel and capable of responding to it if God's people were willing to

take it to them. Romans 1-3 puts all men, Jews and Gentiles, on equal footing: they all are found to be unrighteous before a holy God, with no hope in their own merits of ever being acceptable to God. In Romans 4 Paul shows that only by hearing the Word of God and trusting in its promises any man can be granted the "blessing" of Abraham, that is, God's righteousness, which is received without earning it, rather by personally putting one's faith in God's Word. God proclaimed it to Abraham and Jesus proclaimed it to Paul, but now we are expected to be the announcers of this "good news" to the rest of the world.

In contrast to Paul, many professing Christians seem never to lift their eyes to consider the harvest fields of the world. Their motto seems to be: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where it is already known." Consider the student who, in explaining why he had not considered international missions as a possibility, said, "Well, I believe that the Lord has called me to work with youth." The obvious response to this statement is, "Do you not realize that there are youth all over the world?" (Martin, 1998, p. 93)

After a thorough discussion on how the gospel changes any and all people who respond to its message he concludes his *Magna Carta* of the Church with the objective: "but now [the gospel has been] revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, **so that all nations might believe and obey him**—" ([NIV] Romans 16:26).

Seeing things as Paul saw them, we cannot remain unmoved in our slumber. Perhaps one of the greatest hindrances to world evangelization today is the practical universalism of professing Christians. Many seem to believe that in the end, all will work out well for everyone. After all, God is love, isn't He? [this will be dealt with thoroughly in another chapter]

The truth, however, is that people all over the world in every tongue and culture are without hope of eternal life unless by faith they hear and trust in Christ. "To be utterly convinced of this fact will mean that one cannot be placid and unmoved. People are dying, and the gospel must be taken to them! ... (Rom 10:13,14). Will you be that preacher?" .

The Global Mission of the New Testament Church

Is the church to be an end to itself, existing to exist, established to occupy space and make its participants feel good about God and themselves? What is the church called to accomplish? The development of the New Testament is the expansion of Jesus' statement, "I will build my church" (Matt 16:18). Multiple are the definitions of what this means, but as a working definition for this study we will use this description of what Jesus intended:

> "A New Testament church is a body of believers, baptized upon their profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who gather together regularly to worship God in Christ and pray for one another and for the world; to share in each other's lives [fellowship] both in an accountability relationship and assisting one another's needs; to learn the meaning of the Word of God and the implications of its commands, then to disperse throughout society and the world to share the blessings of God's grace to man" (Author's version).

Without getting lost in the divergent focus' of the church, the basic mission of the church is to win the lost to Christ, make disciples of all believers committed to community within the church and to evangelism outside the church, all for the ultimate purpose of God of "blessing" the nations of the earth through the granting of His righteousness by faith to all who hear and will believe the Gospel of Christ. Anything else becomes a secondary purpose or a means to accomplishing this primary task of the church. We are to major on the major purpose. The

church is a worship and training center for world evangelism, if it adheres to the New Testament mandate.

Ron Rogers states, "The missionary purpose of the church rests firmly on the foundation of the missionary nature of God. The missionary purpose of God's people springs ... directly from God. The clear affirmation of Scripture is that our God is a missionary God. Both the Old and New Testaments speak clearly to his missionary heart . This gets us back to the concepts of mission and missions; the *mission* stems from God's purpose in the world of revealing Himself to all mankind through His revelations in His Word being made know to every ethnic group (tongue, tribe, people and nation) by those who have come to know Him. This is what He has been about since the Garden of Eden.

The concept of missions refers all that the churches do to reach the people of the world with the good news of God's message of salvation and to form them into bodies of believers that learn to reflect His character and holiness. The more like Him they become, the more this cycle is reproduced.

Churches are called to be key players in God's plan to reconcile the broken creation to himself. Whatever else the church may have to do, it must fulfill its calling to evangelize a lost world-- to bring light and hope to people who walk in darkness without any glimmer of hope. ... "Sadly, however, the church through the ages has often found the temptation to heed the calls of lesser masters too intense and to wind its way down side streets, thereby allowing the clear call of Christ to missions to become muffled or conveniently distorted" .

The global blessing of the New Testament salvation

Every task requires a primary motivation. Though the mission of God rests on several motivational factors, none is stronger than the theological truths of God's astounding offer of salvation and acceptance to sinful man anywhere on the globe who hears and believes.

> Any effort to study theology without noticing strategic missiological implication is an incomplete study, as is any study of missions that does not mark critical theological foundations. Proper study will conclude that both theology and missiology are inextricably linked ... All who are grateful for their salvation will inevitably be motivated to join God in his missionary enterprise. To do less is nothing more than spiritual selfishness. To discuss mission strategy without seeing at the core of missions God's redemptive act through Jesus Christ is spiritual oversight. Salvation is not just at the heart of mission; salvation is the heart of mission. Salvation is explicit in the concept of mission just as missions is implicit in the truth of salvation (Simmons:1998, p. 129).

Many evangelical leaders fear that the majority of their church members are practicing closet universalists. Their daily lives reflect little belief that individuals without Christ are condemned and without hope in their future eternity. Their security of salvation is enjoyed selfishly and is so departamentalized in their lives that the implications of not believing in Christ's salvation for others are never considered.

At best, churches often limit their evangelism to the few that are willing and able to attend one of their church services, with little concern for those who will not attend. Many today believe that confrontational evangelism is out of mode, too offensive to others (does more harm than good) or too much to expect of contemporary Christians.

Gospel presentations even in the church services are often superficial, tacked on to a message of a Christian life theme, or merely wrapped into an invitation to join the church, or come forward to pray for any spiritual need. Confusion abounds in our pulpits concerning the clarity of the gospel, thus the members barely understand the salvation message and would be hard pressed to have to explain it to anyone. It is no wonder that there is little motivation or interest in seeking to evangelize friends and neighbors, much less any motivation to give up everything in life and go to a totally unreached part of the globe to evangelize people who are totally opposed to everything Christian.

> Orthodoxy is no assurance of missiological fervor, but it is a foundational influence. When a breakdown of missiological fervor within orthodoxy does occur, however, it is often reflected in a widening gap between theological belief and Christian practice. For instance, someone may give his or her enthusiastic assent to John 14:6 that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father. At the same time, one might admit doubts that God would condemn someone to hell who sincerely practices a religion other than Christianity. Winston Crawley prophetically called a "religious relativism" that is very similar to a form of Hindu doctrine (Simmons, 1998, p. 130).

The global imperative of sin and its consequences as revealed in the New Testament

> Great is the sin barrier between God and humanity (Isa 59:2). This division is absolute and unyielding apart from hope in God. No individual apart from God's power can cross this divide, even with the best of human effort, strength, and goodness (Titus 3:5,6). No combination of human intellect or wisdom can contrive, without God's direction, the means to overcome sin's barrier (1 Cor 1:17; 2:13). This barrier was built the moment Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Since that time, no person born into the human race as a descendent of Adam has realized a personal relationship with God without confronting the sin barrier (Simmons, 1998, p 131).

Simmons describes three implicit truths for missions that are derived out of the truth of sin:

(1) **Missions is a fraud and a waste if no sin barrier exists**. That is, if man is not separated from God, there is no purpose in missions or the sending of messengers of reconciliation to the world;

(2) **Sin erects a barrier because of the nature of sin**. Man does his best to minimize the impact, meaning and influence of sin in mankind. For fear of doing harm to man's self image, sin is excused as a moral weakness, an ethical mistake, a natural imperfection or a moral sickness which can be cured. When man creates an image of a low standard of holiness of God, with human feelings and thoughts, he sees God accommodating Himself to man's sinfulness overlooking it as a human weakness. This is idolatry. God's standard of holiness demands absolute perfection in all His commands without a single act of disobedience. It was only one act of disobedience that brought spiritual death and separation from God to Adam for all humanity. Since sin brings death, only an acceptable death penalty can be a just payment to justify sin's forgiveness. Rebellion to God's will is so horrible an act that God is not only just in condemning the sinner, but His holiness demands that no one marked by even a single sin could ever exist in His presence.

(3) **Those separated from God by the sin barrier are lost**. The word used to describe this state is *apollumi*, "to perish, to be destroyed." God declares that He does not want anyone to be lost or to "perish" (2 Pet 3:9). Those who do end up perishing, do so because they refuse "to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thess 2:10). This state of mankind is so grave that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). The seriousness of man's plight is evident by the extreme measure that God took by sending His Son to become sin's sacrifice to reconcile sinful man to the holy God Yahweh. Lostness is a state of hopelessness and isolation from God's acceptance and fellowship. This state will never change from birth to death to eternity except during this life experience a messenger of God intervenes in the sinner's life to share the only acceptable solution to man's sin, the death of Christ on the cross as God's salvation.

"This realization births an urgency of the heart that accepts sacrifice, toil, and rejection so that the missionary task can be realized. William Carey's heart burned with this knowledge. In a letter to his father, he wrote: 'The thought of a fellow creature perishing forever should rouse all our activity and engage all our powers'" (Simmons, 1998, p. 134).

The motivation behind the great ventures for the spreading of the Gospel message around the globe did not originate in a mystical experience, but rather a conviction derived from an understanding of God's character and His desire for mankind. It stems from the thought: if this is what God desires, then I'll pour my heart and life into my part for making it happen by His grace, providence and provision. Paul summed up the purpose of the Christian life when he said, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain"([NIV] **1 Corinthians 15:58).**

Conclusion

There is an expression that communicates loyalty, devotion, commitment, love, relationship, intimacy, passion, selflessness, sincerity, spontaneity, and faithfulness: "Your wish is my command." If you know the desire of the one you love, you do not have to be told to do it. You just want to do whatever it is because you want to show him/her how much you love him/her. The same principle applies to our relationship with God. His Word reveals what He wants more than anything in all the world as well as what He commands us to do. Any effort spent in that endeavor pleases Him more than anything we can imagine.

On the contrary, to spend all your efforts doing things that either one knows He does not like, or doing things that do not matter to His revealed purpose with mankind is to have wasted a life. However, no thrill in this life can compare to partnering with God in His revealed purpose in His creation.

> Although God's salvation begins and ends with His purposes, His sovereignty chose to include us in the process. We are called to stand, not at a distance admiring this work of God's salvation, but nearby, so that we might be available for his use. At the place of availability, we embrace his purposes as our own and seek his wisdom of ourselves, thereby seeing the world as he sees it. Then we say with William Carey that the lost and dying world moves us to 'live and act alone for God,' working to the point of 'indefatigable industry, till we can't find a soul that's destitute of Christ in all the world' ... God calls us to move from the place of observation to the place of availability, thereby joining him in this great work of missions. Whatever sacrifice is required to move the distance is, from and eternal perspective, worth it (Simmons, 1998, pp. 146-147).

References

Martin, G. (1998). "Missions in the Pauline Epistles." In J. M. Terry, Ebbie Smith & Justice Anderson (Eds.), *Introduction to Missiology* (pp. 83-96). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Olson, C. G. (2003). *What in the World is God Doing?*. Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers.

Rogers, R. (1998). "The Missionary Purpose of God's People." In J. M. Terry, Ebbie Smith & Justice Anderson (Eds.), *Introduction to Missiology* (pp. 114-128). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Simmons, J. S. (1998). "The Missionary Motivation of God's Salvation." In J. M. Terry, Ebbie Smith & Justice Anderson (Eds.), *Introduction to Missiology* (pp. 129-147). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.