

GOD'S WILL FOR THE CHURCH IN REGARD TO MISSIONS

The day was hot and muggy, like most days in the tropics. The road was dusty and full of giant potholes and ruts that sometimes threatened to swallow the Toyota four-wheel drive truck. It was a normal day in the life of the missionary. However, that "normalcy" was interrupted as he and his wife were called to make a house visit to a mother in the pains of childbirth. Many aspects of this experience were in sharp contrast to the missionary's own cultural upbringing. The place of birth was unsanitary and there were many friends and family there "helping." There were no doctors or nurses and the equipment consisted of towels and water. There were no epidurals or pain medicine. However, in spite of all these "disadvantages," the miracle of birth took place in this poverty stricken, remote, mountainous village. Indeed, this birth was a miracle, but it was also very natural, for it is the will of God for man to multiply (Gen 1:28).

The day was again hot and muggy and the road dusty and bouncy. It was another normal day in the life of this missionary and again there was a call for help. However, this call was similar to that of the Apostle Paul's where the man in Macedonia said, "come over and help us" (Acts 16:9). The village was remote and the people were uneducated and illiterate. There were no church buildings, or choirs or invitation hymns. There were only the bare necessities present that day: the gospel message and the Holy Spirit. However, in spite of all of these "disadvantages", the miracle of birth took place in that village. Indeed, this birth also was a miracle, but it too was very natural. Jesus' church had been birthed again. It is the will of God that his church goes into all the world and multiply.

It is God's will for the church to be on mission with God to bring his gospel to the ends of the earth. John R. Mott said, "The primary work of the church is to make Jesus Christ known, and obeyed, and loved throughout the world."¹ Robert Glover said, "the church's supreme aim and task is world evangelism."² Henry Blackaby, in his study *Experiencing God* has helped the church realize again this reality of God's mission in the world. He teaches that God is always at work around us and that God is the initiator of involving his people to be on mission with Him. As His people respond through obedience, God's kingdom is advanced and God's mission is fulfilled; hence, His church is established and His people experience Him in new and wonderful ways.

Missions is the will of God for the church. This paper will highlight briefly five different areas to demonstrate God's plan for the church. First, the word "church" will be defined and placed in its proper context. Second, the past will be explored, showing the link of God's chosen people in the Old Testament with his chosen people in the New Testament. Third, various scriptural texts will be cited, which if properly interpreted, leave the church with a clear understanding of its mission in the world. Fourth, different metaphors will be explained in an attempt to understand the churches multifaceted function with in the mandate of "being on mission." Last, a quick survey of the book of Acts will be conducted in order to observe the church in action. Did the apostles really understand what Christ wanted them to do? If so, did they fulfill their mission?

The Word "Church" is Defined

¹Robert H. Glover, *The Bible Basis of Missions*, (Los Angeles: CA, Bible House of Los Angeles, 1946), 43.

²Ibid., 31.

In today's western culture, the word "church" can be interpreted many different ways. To some, church is the building; to others, church is something that is done. For example, some might say, "let's go have church." To the Roman Catholic, the word "church" might conjure up thoughts of ritual, formality or the smell of incense. To the member of the Iglesia Ni Cristo, which is a cult in the Philippines, "church" is the building, which will be raptured on the last day.

The early church had none of this baggage or confusion. The New Testament, through the Holy Spirit, chose the exact words in order to teach and guide the early disciples. The word used in the Greek New Testament is "ekklesia." This word is taken from two different Greek words: "ek," which means "out of," and "klesis," or "kaleo", meaning "a calling" or "to call." These words were used among the Greeks to describe a body of citizens gathered to discuss the affairs of the state, as depicted in Acts 19:39. In this passage, the city clerk admonished the people to settle the matter lawfully in a legal "ekklesia." Writers began to use this word during the intertestament times to, "designate the gathering of Israel, summoned for any definite purpose, or a gathering regarded as representative of the whole nation."³ Ekklesia is used in the sense of "The whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era, as in Matthew 16:18."⁴

Ephesians 1:22 is cited also as an example of this usage of the word as the whole company of the redeemed; Ekklesia is used in the singular, indicating a congregation. The plural is also used many times in the New Testament in reference to churches in a district (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Tim 3:5). George Peters in *A Biblical Theology of Missions* summarizes the following basic qualities of the word ekklesia:

³W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Lynchburg, VA: The Old Time Gospel Hour, 1952), 76.

⁴Ibid., 76.

1. It was a called out and a called into people.
2. It was a people of a special kind.
3. It was a people called together for a special purpose.
4. It was a people conducting their affairs on principles of equality and brotherhood.
5. It was a people uniquely related to God. This new concept was introduced by the Septuagint and the New Testament, particularly in Acts 7:38 and Hebrews 2:12.⁵

The New Testament writers used the word *ekklesia* three different ways: assembly, organized body of believers, and the church universal.⁶ Therefore, the first Century believers understood automatically that they were a part of a body that was to be different and to make a difference. They were the called out ones, not to isolate themselves in a monastery, but to be the redeemed on mission.

God's Chosen People

The concept of the "called out ones" is not something revolutionary with the advent of New Testament times. In fact, this idea of election has its roots in the choosing of Abraham.⁷ Roger Hedlund says, "The purpose of election is functional. Election is for service. Election involves both calling and sending."⁸ God said to Abraham, "go to the land I will show you and I will bless you and you will be a blessing to all nations" (Gen 12:1-3). This same call was repeated to Isaac and Jacob. Joseph also understood that his life, as one chosen, had a divine purpose that went beyond himself (Gen 45:7). God chose Israel from all of the nations not

⁵George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 200.

⁶*Ibid.*, 201.

⁷Roger E. Hedlund, *The Mission of the Church in the World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 36.

⁸*Ibid.*, 36-37.

because of her merit, but because of His plan for them in relation to the world. There was a blessing to be received in order to be a blessing to the world (Gen 12:1-3). Israel, in the Old Covenant, never fully realized her potential or fulfilled her mission of reaching out to the nations, however, the concept of election or being called out was thoroughly ingrained into the life fabric of the nation; thus, becoming a bridge of understanding for the New Testament believers.

Peter pulls the past and the present together in his first epistle where he applies Exodus 19:3-6 to the ekklesia of his day (1 Pet 2:9). The former passage is God's first Covenant with his people before the giving of the law. They were chosen out of all the nations to be a, "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). They were to be a kingdom of mediators between God and all of the nations; they were to be holy and make known the will of God to all people groups.

Peter, understood that the believers were being built up "into a spiritual house" (1 Pet 2:5). He, no doubt, thinking of the first covenant, says to the ekklesia scattered throughout the then known world, "You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Pet 2:9). Peter then gives the purpose of their calling: "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9).

Scriptural Support for a Missions Theme

Not only is the will of God made plain to the church regarding missions in the meaning of ekklesia and in the concept of election, but there is also clear scriptural support. The first of these scriptures is Ephesians 3:1-10. The context of this great passage begins with Ephesians 2:11-22, where Paul speaks of the Gentiles being "brought near through the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:13). He then states that, "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the

cross" (Eph 2:15-16). He further adds that this new community is not only a body, but it is a "household," "holy temple," "built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:19-22).

Because of this incredible news that the enemies of Israel, the Gentiles, can be saved and reconciled, and placed into the body, Paul say, "I have become a servant of this message" (Eph 3:7). However, he then shifts gears and reveals to the ekklesia of Ephesus and to the ekklesia of today what God's purpose is to be in light of this wonderful news of forgiveness and inclusion of the Gentiles; this message must be made known "through the church" (Eph 3:10). Paul further adds that this message and mission is nothing new; this mission was, "the eternal purpose of God" (Eph 3:11), finally understood.

John 5:17-20 has been a central text in the teaching of Henry Blackaby. He emphasizes one's personal relationship with God as the basis for understanding God's will. Jesus said, "the son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his father doing, for the Father loves the son and shows him all he does" (John 5:19, 20). If Jesus could do nothing by himself, how much more impotent is the church when she works in her own strength, confidence and plans? With these verses in mind, the church should be doing as follows:

1. The church needs to recognize the ways of the Father.
2. The church needs to recognize the voice of the Spirit.
3. The church needs to understand what is the will of the Lord.
4. The church, as a body, needs to seek the Lord, draw near to him, and rekindle a "first-love" type fervor.

Rick Warren has expounded clearly and simply two often quoted texts in any discussion concerning the church and its mission. Based on Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 12:30-31, Warren has said that a great church is one that obeys the great commission and the great

commandment. These great scriptures were not only given to the apostles, but are also binding to the church today. Warren teaches that God's will concerning the church in regard to missions is as follows:

1. Evangelism- The lost must be reached. The gospel must be proclaimed to all.
2. Worship- Those who come together must "love the lord with all their heart." Missions still exist today, because every people group in the world is not yet worshipping Christ.
3. Fellowship- People must not only be brought into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, but they must be brought into a local body of believers through baptism and membership. It is God's will that churches be planting churches among all people groups.
4. Discipleship- The church must train those she wins to Christ.
5. Service- People are chosen by the Lord, assimilated into the fellowship of the church, trained to maturity, and then sent out into the world.

Everything the church is and does points to the truth that she is made for mission.

Biblical Metaphors Used for the Church

Next, God's will for the church in regard to missions can be seen by briefly explaining Biblical metaphors used for the church. The first of these metaphors is the "body of Christ" (Eph 1:22-23; 5:30; 1 Cor 12:27). These verses all refer to "his body." Jesus was the "word become flesh" (John 1:14). He was the incarnate God who walked among men. God loved mankind so much that he sent his one and only son. God did not wait for man to come to him, but Christ emptied himself and took on flesh. This mystery of the incarnation escapes the realm of natural logic, however, because of the incarnation, God was able to physically touch, hug, teach, listen, and heal mankind. This incarnation of Christ was a one-time event that can never be repeated. Nevertheless, in his church, the incarnation continues. His body is still here. The ekklesia can still walk where people need the gospel. Christ's hands can still touch the hurting. Jesus' mouth can still teach the multitudes and his arms can hold those needing comfort. Through the church,

Jesus continues to show his love to the world. What a powerful, life-transforming truth this could be if it were only grasped and applied by the modern church. This called out assembly is actually the body of Christ.

There is another metaphor that has great implications for the cause of missions as it relates to the church. Ephesians 2: 21-22; 1 Corinthians 3:9,16; 1 Timothy 3:5; and 1 Peter 2:5 all speak of the ekklesia as being the temple or household of God. After God's awesome display of power on Mount Sinai, the people were afraid. Therefore, Yahweh meticulously instructed the Israelites how they could enter into his holy presence. They could never approach God without the shedding of a substitute sacrifice; these sacrifices were first done in the wilderness Tabernacle and later in the Temple built by Solomon. The glory, power, presence and instruction of God Almighty was there in the Temple; thus, when the assembly of the called out is referred to as the temple of God, this revelation is awesome indeed! When the world observes the church, what does it see? When the lost come in contact with some of these "temples", what do they experience?

The church as the light of the world is another poignant metaphor. Light, unless covered is always penetrating the darkness. Darkness must always flee when light is revealed and the result of retreating darkness is that deeds of darkness are exposed and deception is discovered. Paul admonished the church in Ephesus to "live as children of light" (Eph 5:8). Jesus said, "let your light so shine" (Matt 5:16). The church as the light of the world is always encroaching on the kingdom of darkness so that those held captive can be "called into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9).

Some concluding metaphors used in the Scriptures are: the salt of the earth (Matt 5:14), the bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2), ambassadors for the Kingdom (2 Cor 5:20), soldiers (1 Tim 2:4), farmers (2 Tim 2:6), and athletes (2 Tim 2:5).

The church in action. Finally, God's will for the church, in regard to missions can be understood by observing the first-century believers. The book of Acts is a record of the church on mission. In cooperation with the Holy Spirit, they testified first in Jerusalem. The work continued there until Stephen's death (Acts 7). After this, the church was scattered into the surrounding villages of Judea and Samaria; everywhere they traveled, they preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. Acts 13-28 gives testimony to the power of the gospel as it spread to the ends of the earth. Luke's account of the church on mission concludes with these words, "he preached the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ boldly and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31).

The assembly of that day endured hardships, persecution, beatings, imprisonment, and even death. Nevertheless, the gospel could not be stopped. As they obeyed in their role as the called out ones, they became the church victorious and the church triumphant. John R. Mott commented about the early church in this way: "They did more to accomplish the world's evangelism than any succeeding generation."⁹ Glover asked the questions, "How did they do it?" "Did they use methods which cannot be employed today?" He continues, "The fact is that the early believers were beset by not a few decided limitations and disadvantages as compared with

⁹Glover, *The Bible Basis of Missions*, 38.

today. In numbers, they were a paltry few. Financially, they were poor. Their means of travel were meager and crude."¹⁰ There were no telephones, fax machines, and computers. What is the answer to their missionary effectiveness and achievement?

In summary, they understood that they were the called out ones for a specific purpose. Second, they were firmly established in the Old Testament teachings concerning missions. Third, they were a group of people who obeyed fully the Great Commission as well as the Great Commandment. Fourth, they understood who they were as the church; finally, they were a church built on "mission" and radically obedient to the Holy Spirit.

¹⁰Ibid., 38.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Glover, Robert Hall. *The Bible Basis of Missions*. Los Angeles: Bible House of Los Angeles, 1946.

Hedlund, Roger E. *The Mission of the Church in the World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985.

Love, Julian Price. *The Missionary Message of the Bible*. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1941.

Peters, George W. *A Biblical Theology of Missions*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.

Vine, W.E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Lynchburg, VA: The Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1952.

Willis, Avery T. *The Biblical Basis of Missions*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1979.