

THE CHURCH - CROSS-CULTURAL MINISTRY

“make disciples of all nations”

Key question

What is the church’s role in cross-cultural ministry?

Key text

Matthew 28:19-20

“19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Introduction

What issues need to be addressed in a discussion of missions?

1. Is cross cultural evangelism the **primary calling** of the church of Jesus Christ today or is it one step in a much bigger calling? Is the great commission, as a call to evangelism, the real purpose statement of the church? What does Matt.28:19-20 mean?
2. Who is **responsible** and for what in the evangelistic process? Will people go to hell because we have been negligent in doing everything we can to evangelize the world?
3. What is the role of **logical strategy** in world evangelism? Should we use or expect God to honor the best marketing tools and techniques in reaching the world? Should we conclude that because Americans have money and people resources that they should bear the major responsibility to minister to parts of the world that are in need?
4. Is **every Christian** a missionary or a mission field? Should every believer feel responsible to be involved in reaching the world for Christ? If so, in what ways?
5. The test of our real belief is our readiness to share it with all peoples.
6. How would you respond to this statement? “What really needs to be said is that where the Church is faithful to its Lord, there the powers of the kingdom are present and people begin to ask the question to which the gospel is the answer. And that, I suppose, is why the letters of St. Paul contain so many exhortations to faithfulness and no exhortations to be active in mission.” Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p.119

A. **Why is evangelism (especially cross-cultural evangelism) difficult in our day?**

1. The triumph of individualism, pluralism, and autonomy has made evangelism **politically incorrect if not cruel**.

2. The emergence of secular materialism has made evangelism **irrelevant**. Evangelism is seen as being concerned with the needs of the soul while it puts the needs of the physical body and political structure secondary.
3. The spiritual rebellion of people and nations has made evangelism **insignificant**. The gospel too often falls on ears that are not willing to hear.
4. The imperialistic impulse in evangelical Christianity has often made evangelism **manipulative**. Many people feel as though their private space is threatened by the aggressive overtures of zealous evangelists.
5. The **western missionary experience** of the early 20th century has often been insensitive to nonwestern cultures. Those who do not separate American nationalism from evangelical Christianity create an image that is resisted by thoughtful pagans and Christians.
6. The impulse on the part of some Christians to take full responsibility for the fate of the world has made much of evangelism **worldly**. The gospel message is sometimes marketed like any other commodity in a consumer oriented culture.

B. **What is the basis of evangelism?**

1. God has a passion for harmony (reconciliation) with His creation.
2. God has a love for those who are lost. John 3:16
3. The logical link between God's nature and personal evangelism is as follows:
 - a. God has made all mankind in His image for the purpose of enjoying and participating in His glory through fellowship with Him.
 - b. Because all have sinned and gone their own way God, out of love, sent His Son that whoever would believe in Him would be reconciled back to God.
 - c. People believe as they are confronted with the message of the Gospel through individuals in the church.
 - d. All believers share in the responsibility to spread the Gospel.

C. **Was Israel called to be an aggressively evangelistic community?**

1. Israel was to be a light on a hill bearing witness to the power and glory of YAHWEH.
2. Proselytes to Judaism were not uncommon especially during the time of Jesus.
3. The primary emphasis in the OT is on Israel's separation from the Gentile world.
4. Texts that deal with Israel's "evangelistic" relationship with the Gentile world illustrate Israel's reserved posture.
 - a. **Gen.12:1-3; 18:18;22:17-18; 26:4-5; 28:14** speak of God's promise to bless the whole world through the seed of Abraham (Christ). The point is that not only Jews but also Gentiles would be recipients of the Kingdom's blessings. This was fulfilled in the NT as the gospel was preached to the Gentiles.
 - b. **Ex.19:4-6** speak of Israel as royal priests. Some commentators read this to mean that Israel was to intercede for the other nations before God. This interpretation is not supported in Israel's history or literature.
 - c. **I Kings 8:41-43; II Chron.6:32-33** offer instructions to Jews in showing hospitality toward foreigners so that God's name would be respected by all people.

- d. **Psalm 67; 96; 105** are a call to give testimony to all the nations of what God has done in saving Israel.
- e. **Isa.49:6; 51:4** are prophecies that Israel would be a light to the Gentiles concerning the power of God to save Israel.
- f. **Isa.56:6-8** instructs Israel in the inclusion of proselytes from among the Gentiles.
- g. **Zech.2:11; Mal.1:11** speak of the coming Kingdom where both Jew and Gentile will worship Him.

D. What did Jesus teach us about evangelism?

1. The “great commission”

Matt.28:19-20 “¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

NOTE: This text makes the following critical points:

- a. The principle imperative is “make disciples” which involves converting people to the faith and bringing them to maturity in the faith.
- b. The radically new aspect to this command is its focus on the Gentile (nations).

Lk.24:46-49 “⁴⁶ - - - Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ you are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

NOTE: This text makes the following critical points:

- a. Repentance for forgiveness of sins based upon the death and resurrection of Christ is at the heart of the gospel message that is to be proclaimed.
- b. The eye witnesses (apostles) are the objects of the great commission.
- c. It can be assumed that those who would receive the Spirit after them would also proclaim this message.

Jn.20:21-23 “²¹ - - - Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ ²³ ‘If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.’”

NOTE: This text makes the following critical points:

- a. The apostles were sent just as Jesus was sent. He was the model. Apostles (missionaries) in the church should adopt the calling of Jesus as a model.
- b. The apostolic power to bind and loose from sins condemnation was given to the apostles who would become the foundation of the church and would by their teaching declare the nature and limits of forgiveness and freedom in Christ.

Mk.16:15-18 “¹⁵ - - - Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ He who has believed and has been baptized will be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

NOTE: This text makes the following critical points:

- a. Believing the message is critical to participating in its promises.

- b. Water baptism is to mark new converts as is the presence of power signs. These signs were present among the apostles but not among all the converts.
- c. The gospel of this passage was probably the same gospel that Jesus and John the Baptist preached to the Jews. It is now to be taken to the Gentiles as well. It is unclear as to how this gospel is related to the gospel that Paul preached.

2. Other teachings

John 10:16 “And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall bear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd.”

Luke 15 parables

- vs. 3-7 — The lost sheep
- vs. 8-10 — The lost coin
- vs. 11-32 — The lost son

NOTE: These texts make a number of points.

- a. God in Christ is assertively reaching out to people who are outside the covenant fold or who are not in good standing with the covenant.
- b. In the case of the prodigal son (Lk.15:11-32) it is suggested that the person in question is not outside the covenant family but not in good standing with the covenant family.
- c. Evangelism of the Gentiles may be too narrow an application for these texts. They may rather refer to any and all who are not in right standing with God.

3. His example

- a. Jesus’ ministry was largely restricted to the covenant people of Israel (not the world outside Israel). Matt.10:5-7; 15:24
- b. The few examples of ministry to Gentiles are striking because of their uniqueness.
 - Matt.8:5-13 a Roman centurion
 - Matt.15:21-28 a Canaanite woman
 - Jn.4 a Samaritan woman and her village
 - Lk.9:51-55 another Samaritan village
 - Jn.12:20-32 Greeks at Jerusalem

E. **What can we learn from the book of Acts about the evangelistic work of Peter and Paul?**

- 1. **Acts 1:8** “but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
- 2. **Acts 2** gives us an indication of how the early church experienced the gospel.
 - a. The signs and wonders of the Apostles draw people’s attention. vs.1-13
 - b. The Apostles witness to the resurrection is expressed in Peter’s sermon. vs.14-36
 - c. The people are convicted, believe, and are baptized. vs.37-41
 - d. The church functions as a new community. vs.42-47
 - 1. Teaching of the Apostles
 - 2. Fellowship
 - 3. Worship
 - 4. Social service

5. Remembrance (Lord's table)
6. Evangelism
- e. The life style of the church draws others to faith. vs.47
3. The example of the apostles
 - a. They bore witness to four things:
 1. The resurrection of Christ
 2. Their positional freedom (from the Law) in Christ.
 3. The moral change in their lives.
 4. The power of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the presence of the kingdom of God.
 - b. Their emphasis seemed to be on the eternal rather than the temporal benefits of being a Christian as they tried to win others to Christ.
4. Household evangelism (through the father's conversion) was common. Acts 17:5; 18:7; 21:8; 16:15,32-34
5. **Acts 10:1-48** describes the turning point in Peter's mind with respect to the inclusion of Gentiles in the Kingdom. Up until this point Peter and the other disciples did not see the Gentile world as capable of direct access to the promises of God's covenant.
6. **Acts 13:1-3** describes the commissioning of Paul's first missionary journey.

"¹ Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was {there}, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."
7. **Acts 17:16-34** gives us an example of how Paul was sensitive to the culture of his audience.
 - a. Paul met his audience on their turf. He spoke as one of them.
 - b. Paul commends the positive aspects of his audience's heart.
 - c. Paul uses the questions of his audience as a doorway to introduce Christ.
 - d. Paul appeals to the historic resurrection and the coming judgment in his message.

F. **How is evangelism emphasized in the Epistles?**

1. **The prescription for the church is to be "in and not of" the world much as the nation Israel was.**

I Pet.2:11-17 "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the things in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."

2. **The apostles recognize the need and goodness of evangelistic work.**

Rom.10:14-15 "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear

without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!'"

3. **The spread of the Gospel was a natural expression of the love and joy of those who possessed Christ's Spirit.**

I Thess.1:8 "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."

4. **The command given to the early church was to BE a witness.**

I Pet.3:15-16 "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the things in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

5. **The gifts of the church included evangelists.**

Eph.4:11-12 "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of "Christ;"

In **ACTS 21:8** Philip is identified as an evangelist.

6. **Timothy is exhorted to fulfill his calling as an evangelist.**

I Tim.4:5 "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

7. **The great commission of the apostles** is found in Eph.4:10-16 where evangelism is one part of the greater task of building the body of Christ.

Eph.4:10-16 "10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. 11 And He gave some {as} apostles, and some {as} prophets, and some {as} evangelists, and some {as} pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

NOTE: This text is perhaps the clearest statement of the true meaning of the "great commission" of the gospels.

8. **The absence of any clear exhortation to the church to do evangelistic work is significant** and suggests that its main calling is to witness from a posture of salt and light in the world through the individual lives of its members. The following passages are the closest references to evangelism as a responsibility to individual believers. They are not exhortations so much as descriptions.

- **Phil.1:12-18** "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, you and I will rejoice."

- **Eph.6:15** “and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace;”
- **I Cor.4:16** “I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me.” The context is one of not expecting remuneration for ministry and thus becoming a stumbling block or weaker believers.
- **I Cor.11:1** “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” Again the context is one of not giving an offense to others.
- **I Cor.7:12-16** This passage reminds believing partners in a mixed marriage that they can, by their conduct, win their non believing mates to Christ.
- **I Cor.14:23-25** “²³ If therefore the whole church should assemble together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.”

G. **What is the meaning of “missions”?**

1. In the broadest sense it means **the whole purpose of God and His Kingdom**. I would argue that if this is the working definition, then we can say that missions is central to the purpose of the church.
2. In the narrow sense it means **the spreading of the gospel message so as to win converts to the Christian faith**. If this narrower sense of “mission” is used then we would say that missions is but one part of what God is calling the church to do in this age.

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. Which texts speak of the “great commission?”
- b. Where does Paul speak of the “great commission?”

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. What are the unique challenges of cross cultural evangelism in our day?
- b. What is the Biblical basis of world evangelism?
- c. How is evangelism emphasized in the epistles?
- d. Was Israel evangelistic?

3. Questions you should wrestle with.

- a. Why is there not a greater exhortation to personal evangelism in the epistles?
- b. What is our personal calling with respect to evangelism?