

“The Mission of the Church as Missions”

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It is always difficult to know the intellectual starting point for anyone who reads an article of information. A common thought when speaking of missions is that missions is something that happens when geographical boundaries are crossed or cultural boundaries are crossed or when language boundaries are crossed. We also speak of missions as an activity involving the strengthening of existing local churches or the establishing of new local churches. All of these ideas are present when speaking of missions. Seldom, however, do we see what we are engaged in as a local church as being “missional.” This is where I would like to draw our attention.

As a local church we are always to be engaged in the mission of God in and through the local church. This is an unavoidable consequence of the cross. If the mission of God is the gathering of worshippers into communities of faith from every tongue, tribe, nation, and people, then each of us are missionaries in our circles of influence.

Unfortunately, missionaries are often defined by the manner in which they secure financial assistance. How you secure financial assistance has nothing to do with whether or not you are a missionary. What you do defines you as a missionary. *Missionaries are sent by God into their immediate or removed cultural context for the purpose of preaching Christ's love by their example and (if necessary) by their words.* It is for this reason the idea of being missional functions on two levels. First, every believer is to be a missionary to those they come in contact with on a daily basis. Parents are to be missionaries to their children. Children are to be missionaries to their extended family. Employees are to be missionaries to fellow employees and employers. You are a missionary where you purchase food, coffee, and fuel. We are missionaries anywhere and everywhere we find ourselves. There is, however, a second level of missions and this is what we typically emphasize. When an individual gives themselves completely to the task of strengthening and establishing local churches and can no longer support themselves financially, then the local church identifies such an individual for the task and sets them apart to be a “vocational” missionary.

I believe we have “muddied” the idea of missionary on two levels. First, we fail to see our own missional responsibility within our own immediate cultural context. The people who identify themselves as a local church are to be missionaries in their immediate community. All believers are to be missionaries in every relationship they have developed. Unfortunately, as Christians, we continue to surround ourselves by other Christians in our planning and local church ministry expressions. For example, I cannot be missional at my work since I work with other Christians. I can only be missional when I live my life outside the context of my vocation. As Christians we are to be calling the unbelieving to communion with God through the cross of Jesus Christ.

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We should be leading and directing those who believe to the community of faith in which they are a part of. It is in this manner that we become missionaries and missional. Second, we fail to see the need of supporting those who have given themselves to the strengthening and establishing of local churches. We must not acquiesce to any convoluted thinking in this area.

Recently (October 2007) it was noted how Republican Vice-President Dick Cheney and Presidential Democratic hopeful Barack Obama are 8th cousins. This relationship, although humorous, means little. This is how we often looked at those who are involved in Christian ministry that is called “missions” for the sake of financial support. It does not become local church focused until it is necessary or addressed. The work engaged in is necessary and profitable and Christian, but it has not completed *the circle of New Testament Missions* until it is directly tied into the strengthening and establishing of local churches.

As a local church we must direct our energies into two very distinct activities. First, we must see ourselves as a witness in our cultural context whether it is at home, at work, or in living. Second, we must define vocational missionaries as those who are directly tied into the strengthening and establishing of local churches. We cannot afford to divert our corporate energy toward ministry expressions that are not directly promoting the strengthening and establishing of local churches.

I trust this “seed” will move you to think through the idea and then “to be Christ” in your place of life.