

## Commissioning of the Church

### Definition

The students should understand the mission of the church. The students should be able to evaluate structures and tactics designed to fulfill that mission.

### Key Passages

The New Testament states the church's mission in several different ways. By looking at various formulations, we can gain a sense of the purpose of the church in God's program.

- Jn. 20:21 "Jesus therefore said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'"

Jesus calls attention to the nature of his own mission as a way of understanding the mission of the church. To be specific, we could look at Jesus' description of his intent in various places where he declared his own purpose:

- Lk. 19:10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."
- Jn. 3:17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him."
- Mk. 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
- Mt. 28:18-20 "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, `All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"
- This passage contains Christ's so-called "great commission" to the church. We notice that reaching the lost millions in the human race again figures prominently. The church is to go, not to wait for others to come. International missionary outreach is explicitly mentioned.

Notice that baptism is included, as well as "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." In other words, part of the task of the church is to teach and disciple those we have reached with the gospel so that they have a healthy walk with God. This process is a natural part of a healthy evangelistic strategy, since those who have been discipled are in the best position to join in the task of reaching others.

- 2 Cor. 5:15-20 "And He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf. . . Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

In this passage, Paul once again draws the parallel between the mission of Christ and that of the church. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. . ." and "he has committed to us the word of reconciliation." The church is to take up the work of reaching those alienated from God

(which is the cornerstone of reconciliation). However, our work doesn't stop there. We are to press the work of reconciliation forward in the area of bringing members close to God through enhancing their walk with him, teaching them how to worship him and how to gain victory over their own personal problems. Seen this way, reconciliation is both an event and a process.

- Col. 2:19 "[Beware of those who come up with their own religion instead of] holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God."
- Here Jesus is the head of the body of Christ. Our mission is to hold fast to him, receiving our directions and nourishment from him, often through the agency of other members (the "joints and ligaments"). Likewise, we, as joints and ligaments in our own right, are responsible to take of Christ and give it to others. This is describing how Christians depend on each other for ministry within the church. However, he also points out that the whole body "grows with a growth which is from God." In other words, as a living spiritual organism, the church is to grow like other living things. Here the ever-present importance of reaching out to those who do not know Christ is again evident.
- Eph. 4:11 "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; 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. 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; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him, who is the head, even Christ, 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."
- In this passage, we again see Paul's vision of the properly functioning body of Christ. Under the headship of Christ, not only are there leaders who equip other members (the saints) but the saints themselves do the "work of service." This work of service is the responsibility and opportunity of "every joint" and of "each individual part." In other words, the vision here is of a community where everyone has a role in being built up spiritually and building up others. The result is growth. Qualitative growth, or spiritual maturity among the members (we are no longer to be children tossed here and there) as well as overall growth through reaching the lost (the growth of the body).
- 1 Pet. 2:9-10 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."
- In Peter's version of the commission of the church, the identity of the Christian community is stressed along with its mission. Its identity is that of the people of God. Its mission is to serve as a race of priest-kings who proclaim the excellencies of God. Some versions read "declare the praises of God" (NIV) which is not an accurate translation of the word *arete* ("virtues" or "excellencies").

**Question:**

What problematic implications arise from the NIV's translation here?

**Answer:**

The problem with this translation is that it implies that the church is merely commissioned to reflect the great things about God back to him. Instead, it is both to God and to our fellow people that we are to proclaim or publish the great things about God. This proclamation is in harmony with the other passages stressing the importance of outreach, as well as the context (vs. 12) in which Peter urges that because of our mission we should keep our "behavior excellent among the Gentiles" so they will glorify God.

**Discussion Questions:**

What are some of the unfortunate forms of fallout when local churches stray from this central mission of the church?

1. What are some ways a local church can stray from this central mission?
2. How does a local church stay on track with this central mission?
3. If your church strayed from this central mission, what would you do?