

Exploring the Wealth of New Testament Teachings about Mission

Edinburgh 2010

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- Both in plenary and track sessions we heard about different models for mission for our different situations in 2010
- It is important to recognize how complementary these are; and how these diverse models for mission are equally biblical
- There is a wealth of NT teachings about Mission ... in each text about mission Thus we have a choice... and constantly making choices.
- as I will try to illustrate ... in 5 minutes ... rather than 5 hours as I do with my students
- Thus I have to limit myself to one text: Romans 15 that you know, I trust. (see the handout on the tables; you can also read about Matthew 25, that I originally planned to present in 5 minutes)...

Example # 1a: Teaching about mission in Romans 15: 1) Paul as a model

- Paul's mission is a model for our own missionary activity.
- Mission = preaching the gospel message to people who do not know it so that they might believe and be saved
 - from eternal condemnation, 6:22) by being justified by faith (e.g. 5:9-10 and 10:1-17). It involves calling people to the “obedience of faith” (1:5), i.e., conversion. and subordination to the sovereign authority of Jesus, which is the result of preaching the gospel” (Stuhlmacher).
- Like Paul (1:1), the Romans (“saints,” 1:7) are, through their conversion, set apart to preach the word of the gospel.
- And so are we.

Example # 1b: Teaching about mission in Romans

15 2) Paul's Churches as models

- Paul brought the gospel where Christ had not yet been named (Rom 15:20), planted small communities “from Jerusalem to Albania [Illyricum]” (15:19), and hopefully to Spain (15:23-28).
- **But propagating the gospel is not finished** in all these regions! Mission needs to be **contextualized** in each place.
- **These small communities (the body of Christ, 12:4-5) are missionary centers** called by God to carry out a twofold mission **in their own context** (a twofold priestly service):
 - glorifying God in worship services and liturgy (15:6); and
 - bringing others to glorify God, through our way of life (as living sacrifice, 12:2) and “words” of hope (15:18-19)

Example # 1c: Teaching about mission in Romans 15 3) **Discerning God's Work**

- Mission is not Paul 's (our) work, but God 's or Christ's work
- So Paul's disclaimers: Yes, I have planted churches all over, BUT this is **not** my doing: it is "what Christ has accomplished through me" (15:18).
- Yes Gentiles have been won to the obedience of faith, "by word" (yes, he preached) and also by deeds (to bring people to glorify God), but Gentiles have primarily been won "by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (15:19).
- Mission is carried out – performed – by God, the risen Christ, and the Spirit. The missionaries' role changes: it is first discerning God's work to day and then witnessing to it.

Example # 1c: Teaching about mission in Romans 15 3) **Discerning God's Work (2)**

- Mission is carried out – performed – by God, the risen Christ, and the Spirit. All what Paul claims is that throughout these regions he witnessed that the gospel of Christ has been “*fulfilled (peplêrôkenai)*” (15:19b)
 - (not merely “fully proclaimed [or preached] the gospel of Christ” (NRSV, NIV, NAB, presupposing the first view of mission),
- The gospel is fulfilled as the prophecy are fulfilled “by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.”
- Mission is proclaiming that the promises of the gospel are and have been fulfilled **by the Triune God** ... even before the missionaries have done anything.

Example # 1c: Teaching about mission in Romans 15 3) **Discerning God's Work (2)**

- Mission is then threefold (as Father George, Bishop of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church in Indian said):
- A) Mission is first the Triune God's mission in the world before the missionaries do anything; this is **the Triune God's mission BEFORE the liturgy.**
- B) This requires prayerfully discerning how these promises of the gospel are fulfilled = this is **mission DURING the liturgy.**
- C) Then one can proclaim: Look what God, the risen Christ, and the Spirit are doing among you! Being missionary is being a witness not only about what God has done in the past in Christ, but also and primarily about what God is doing in the present, fulfilling the promises of the gospel. = This is **mission AFTER the liturgy.**

We always make a choice. **Is it the best choice in our particular 2010 context?**

- Each time we think “mission,” because of our human limitations we end up emphasizing one or another of these understandings of mission found in the wealth of New Testament teachings.
 - We cannot avoid emphasizing one as our primary way of practicing mission, because it defines the way we act.
- But, despite our limitations, we can ask:
- What are the implications of each view and practice of mission?
- Did I/we make the right choice? Which is “the best” choice in our particular contexts in 2010 and beyond?
- This is such a prayerful quest in which we are engaged here together.