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*Essays on the
Centrality of Christ in
the Church in Honor of
Joseph M. Stowell*

Proclaiming Jesus

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PROCLAIMING JESUS IN GLOBAL MISSION

**A Pauline
Perspective**

by Trevor J. Burke

Where in the world are Christian missions headed today? For sure, the mission enterprise is moving, but perhaps not in ways we had expected or anticipated. Within the last fifty years a seismic shift has occurred—no longer is the Northern Hemisphere the Jerusalem or sending church. Rather, the Southern Hemisphere and cities such as Jos in Nigeria or Seoul in South Korea are now sending out the majority of missionaries. Recent mission statistics show that Nigeria, for example, easily the most populous country in Africa, has sent 3,300 missionaries to serve with 110 different agencies, while South Korea has sent a staggering 12,000 missionaries with 116 agencies, 10,000 of whom are serving in 156 countries.¹

This is surely a cause for giving thanks to God, but it is not a new phenomenon. For several decades now, power, leadership, and influence have been shifting away from Europe and North America to the burgeoning churches in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Pacific.

Today, the church in the Northern Hemisphere is slowly awakening to this fact. As Andrew Walls, emeritus professor at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh, points out: "The missionary movement from the West is only an *episode* in African, Asian, and Pacific Christian history—a vital episode, but for many churches an episode long closed."²

Nonetheless, my opening question is deliberately ambiguous, for global mission has not only to do with "geography"—it has also to do (as I shall show in the next section) with theology. Moreover, in light of the changing face of mission, the church in the Northern Hemisphere would do well to ask, What ought we to do to rise to the challenge of how to do mission in the twenty-first century?

RESPONDING TO THE CHANGING FACE OF GLOBAL MISSION

The Method and the Focus of Missions

How should we respond? Should we panic,³ throw up our hands in despair, or recognize this as a part of God's sovereign plan in redemptive history? One recent response by some evangelical missiologists has been to lay the blame for the decline in mission in the Northern Hemisphere at the door of a faulty *methodology*. In *Changing the Mind of Missions*, James Engel and William Dyrness call for a new "revolution" in our understanding of mission. The greatest need of mission today, they maintain, is *not* to seek to win people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, "the mission of Jesus" is much wider and more "holistic," as evidenced in Jesus' inaugural sermon in the synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me . . . he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners . . . to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18 NIV) "If this defines the agenda of Jesus," declare the authors, "it also must define ours"⁴

Now do not get me wrong. I can empathize with the issues that

Engel and Dyrness raise and the need to have Christ's compassion and love in our hearts as we respond to the plethora of needs in our world. Mission should be holistic. It does involve the need to relieve poverty through education, medical aid, etc. Yet in all this, the preaching of the gospel to change lives should not be sidelined. After all, the opening words of Jesus' sermon above are: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me . . . to *preach good news*."

Over the years there has been a steady shift in emphasis, going right back to the early 1970s and the influence of ecumenism. As a result, the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20) has not only been redefined but has also taken on an ominous ring of liberation theology. Today, it seems, mission has more to do with justice for the poor and caring for the environment and less to do with making disciples and obeying the command of Jesus Christ to proclaim the good news and to proclaim Him who calls men, women, boys, and girls to turn from their sin and trust in Him alone for salvation.

But the changing face of global mission has brought another response from the church in the Northern Hemisphere, namely, a renewed awareness that it is not always necessary to send missionaries to Africa, Asia, South America, or the Pacific. Richard Mouw rightly observes, "The North American Christian community today is in a missionary location." Certainly this is a challenge as the church wrestles with a whole raft of missiological issues, including religious pluralism (e.g., the fantastic growth of mosques in North America), as well as increased experimentation with the occult, the practice of pre-Christian goddess religions, and consultation of astrological stars.

In light of this syncretistic melting pot, the great need of the hour, Mouw points out, is for the church to develop "missionary sensitivities while operating with a missionary vision in North America."⁵ His observations are good, but he too blames the decline of mission in the Northern Hemisphere on a faulty *methodology*.⁶ Moreover, his insights are not new, as recognized by Joseph Stowell who prophetically commented more

than a decade ago: "In America today, the world is moving to our cities and to our neighborhoods. The mission fields are coming from all over the world to us." Stowell then added the following penetrating remark: "That sounds exciting . . . unless you live in a nice suburb, and four weeks later a big truck pulls up. As you look through the blinds, you notice that the people moving in aren't like you. They don't have the same color of skin."⁷

Stowell brings mission down to the personal level and puts his finger on the pulse of the issue: today in twenty-first-century North America (and the United Kingdom, I hasten to add). We do not have to cross the seas to be involved in mission. All we have to do, if we have the concern (or is it obedience?), is to cross the street. When mission presents itself in one's own backyard, then we need all the sensitivity and courage to share the good news of Jesus Christ. But then those involved in mission have always been known for daring to risk their necks for the sake of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God, have they not?

The Ongoing Need to Proclaim the Gospel in Other Cultures

Don't misunderstand; I still think there is a need for those whom God has gifted and called to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to other parts of the world. The so-called "10/40 Window" where fifty-seven countries comprising 3.6 billion people, or 60 percent of the world's population, is evidence of this need. Right across the world's middle belt, from North Africa into the Middle East and right through Asia, the needs are greatest. Statistics "show that the vast bulk of people who have yet to hear a clearly communicated invitation to repent, turn to Christ, and worship God are those deeply embedded in cultures that largely, if not exclusively, follow a religion other than Christianity."⁸ Clearly some serious evangelization is required if the Great Commission is to be fulfilled. The need is for sensitive cross-cultural missionaries who will learn the culture and language in order to meaningfully communicate the message of the gospel.

But perhaps the most compelling reason that I am persuaded of the need for missionaries to serve overseas is, as mentioned earlier, the phenomenal growth of the church in the Southern Hemisphere. New wine in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Pacific is flowing in abundance. In addition, our brothers and sisters in Christ need the continued support of the church in the Northern Hemisphere.⁹

Those needs were brought home forcibly to me when I was teaching New Testament in a theological seminary in West Africa a few years ago. Just prior to going for our annual two-week vacation and as the rainy season was about to begin, we planted a shrub at the side of the house. On our return as we drove into the campus we were amazed that this young shrub had grown almost to the height of the door. Astonished at this spurt, I got out of the car and went across to inspect this tender shrub only to discover when I tugged at the base of the plant the whole thing uprooted in my hand!

Symbolic? I think so. The spread of the church in the Southern Hemisphere has been rapid but the roots do not always go very deep.¹⁰ Perhaps the greatest need for all those called to work in cross-cultural contexts is for "well-trained biblical scholars and adept, sensitive theologians . . . to establish a foundation—not *for* but *with* the Third World—grounded in the bedrock of God's unchanging Word."¹¹

If the decline in mission from the Northern Hemisphere does not lie with a defective methodology, where then does it lie? According to David Hesselgrave and others,¹² the roots lie much deeper:

Unfortunately, evangelicals in mission still tend to proceed as though their major problems were methodological. They are not. They are *theological*. It would be to their everlasting credit if evangelicals would devote themselves, their organizations, and their conferences to frequent and thorough studies on the Christian mission as set forth in the biblical text. By its very nature, biblical mission entails clear biblical priorities.¹³

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

So where can we turn in God's Word for guidance? Who better than the apostle Paul! Why not Jesus, you may ask? For a start, "the Pauline Great Commission"¹⁴ stands in line with the Great Commission given by Jesus (cf. Matt. 28:19–20; Rom. 15:20–22) who commissioned the apostle to take the gospel to all nations. Thus, "Paul's mission is nothing less than the outworking of *Christ's* own mission."

Second, Paul is helpful because the shift in the epicenter of missionary activity from the Northern to the Southern Hemisphere in the twenty-first-century world is akin to what Paul himself experienced. Remember, Paul was the vehicle for the changing complexion of the church in the first-century as it moved from being essentially Jewish in nature at its inception to one mostly Gentile in composition. Paul, therefore, serves as an excellent guide to the changing complexion of global mission today.¹⁵

Third, Paul was first and foremost a pioneer missionary¹⁶ who had a burning passion to make Christ known: "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel *where Christ was not known*, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" (Rom. 15:20 NIV). Paul was never complacent or reliant upon what had already been accomplished but always set himself new challenges, determined to break fresh territory and push across new frontiers with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, Paul was not only a missionary. He is more accurately described as a *cross-cultural* missionary—faced with the challenge and entrusted with the responsibility of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ across cultural barriers. Paul was the cross-cultural missionary *par excellence*. He was a Jew, "of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews . . . a Pharisee" (Phil. 3:5); he also wrote in Greek and could converse in Aramaic (cf. Acts 22:2); and he was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:29). Thus, Paul's multicultural background uniquely qualified him for the task of cross-cultural mission. Although a Jew,

Paul was called to be a missionary to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:14–16; cf. Acts 9:15), a point that "lies at the heart of Paul's work as missionary and pastor."¹⁷

But finally and most important, Paul was a theologian, as well as being a missionary. Paul's theology was beaten out on the anvil of his missionary travels and work and activity and is best described as "missionary theology."¹⁸ "We cannot understand Paul's theology without integrating his perspective on mission into the larger interpretation of his theology."¹⁹ Further, Paul's missionary message was christologically grounded, evident in the succinct summary of his missionary message: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except *Jesus Christ and him crucified*" (1 Cor. 2:2 NIV). The person and the work of Jesus Christ pervaded the apostle Paul's message.

These are all good reasons for considering Paul's writings for his *own* thinking on mission. Paul's role as missionary is one that needs to be reclaimed. But before we look at the content of Paul's missionary message, it is important to turn to the events that directly influenced what he was to preach: his conversion and call.

THE GROUND OF PAUL'S CONVERSION AND CALL AS MISSIONARY:
THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

The basis of all Paul's missionary activity finds its origin in *the* epoch-making events in his own life: his conversion and call.²⁰ It is highly significant that at the outset of his missionary activity Paul describes his conversion and call on the road to Damascus in christological terms.²¹ Paul makes this clear in Galatians 1:12, 15–16: "I received it [the gospel] through a revelation of Jesus Christ. . . . God . . . was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles." Here Paul provides a twofold description of the nature of the revelation. First, he designated Christ as the agent through whom he receives the gospel: "I received the gospel through a revelation of Jesus

Christ.”²² As far as his conversion and call are concerned, Paul owed nothing to human intervention and everything to the living, risen, and exalted Christ whom he had encountered.

Second, Paul goes on to stress how through his conversion and call “God . . . was pleased to reveal His Son in me” (1:16). Paul’s use of the term *Son* here (cf. Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 2:20) is a central christological ascription for Jesus the Messiah. Paul’s use of the verb *to reveal* in Galatians 1:16 together with the prepositional phrase *in me* underscores the objective (external) and subjective (internal) aspects of the revelation given to him. Regarding the former, this revelation was objective, having come from God and outside of himself. What happened to Paul was no mere fantasy nor premonition or even wishful thinking on his part; still less was it a mystical experience. Rather, the outward, visible aspect of the risen Lord who appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus was dynamic and real and life changing for the apostle. In respect of the latter, the revelation was subjective as the phrase *in me* denotes, having taken place within Paul, and not those who were travelling with him. This phrase underscores “the inwardness already implied by the verb ‘reveal,’ which connotes a disclosure involving perception and understanding on the part of the recipient.”²³

What is the purpose of this christologically defined revelation? Paul states that it is “that I might preach *Him* [i.e., Christ] among the Gentiles” (1:16b). It is instructive to note here the vital connection between revelation and proclamation: the risen and exalted Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who appeared to Paul was to be the sum and substance of his missionary message. Note that Paul’s proclamation of Jesus as Son here in Galatians 1:16b finds corroboration in Acts 9:20, where Luke relates how Paul after his conversion on the road to Damascus “immediately . . . began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’” In Galatians 1:16b the verb *preach*, in the present tense, contrasts with the previous verbs in the aorist tense (*called, set apart*), there-

by emphasizing the ongoing proclamation of a message that was not subject to alteration or change.²⁴

THE CONTENT OF PAUL’S MISSIONARY MESSAGE: - THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

We often overlook the fact that Paul’s letters are missionary letters, written by an itinerant missionary preacher whose goal was not only to bring people to Christ but also to establish churches in which those nascent converts could mature in the Lord. When Paul wrote his letter to the church at Rome, he had many reasons for doing so.²⁵ One of his reasons was his upcoming missionary plan to visit Spain and the need to have the support of the church at Rome. Moreover, Romans can be read as a “missionary document”²⁶ in which Paul presents his missionary theology.

At the outset of the letter, the apostle states his missiological purpose for coming is that he “might have a harvest among” (Rom. 1:13 NIV) the Roman Christians. The central element of Paul’s missionary preaching is, of course, the gospel (e.g., 1:1, 9, 15, 16, 17; 2:16; 15:16, 19), and the content of that good news is succinctly summarized in a highly compressed christological statement in Romans 1:3–4²⁷: Jesus Christ, Son of David, risen Son of God and Lord. In Romans 1:3–4 Paul underscores Jesus’ messianic credentials as one born of the seed of David (v. 3b) in fulfillment of the prophetic hopes of the people of Israel (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:12–16; cf. Isa. 11; Jer. 23:5–6). Romans 1:3–4 concurs with Galatians 1:16 concerning the content of Paul’s gospel, where repetition of the noun *Son* (vv. 3, 4) emphasizes that Paul is delineating nothing less than “Son-christology.”²⁸

Some commentators see Paul as contrasting the two natures of Jesus Christ in Romans 1:3–4—Jesus’ full humanity (“descendant of David”) versus His divinity as evidenced in His resurrection from the dead.²⁹ It is more likely, however, that Paul is contrasting two eras or

the two phases in Jesus' historical career where Christ's resurrection is the turning point. Prior to His resurrection Jesus was truly the Son of God, but after He was raised from the dead He entered a new phase of sonship by being appointed the Son-of-God-in-power. Crucially, for Paul, it is the vindicated and resurrected Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who not only ushers in a new era but who is also given power to save all who trust in Him.

This same christological note appears later in the letter when Paul states how God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as *an offering for sin*" (Rom. 8:3, italics added). The purpose of the Son of God coming into the world was not only incarnational but also sacrificial: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born with the supreme purpose that He might die for our sins. Moreover, it is significant how Paul "explicitly connects . . . the sending of the Son of God in Romans 8:3 with . . . the . . . consequences of divine adoption" (Rom. 8:15, 23).³⁰ That is to say, the Son of God who stepped out of eternity into history, and who subsequently died on the cross, is the one through whom others are enfranchised to become the adopted sons of God.³¹

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians also provides some of the earliest and vital evidence of his missionary preaching. In verse 1:9–10 (ESV), Paul reminds the Thessalonians how they had turned from polytheism to monotheism: "to God from idols to serve the living and true God."³² Conversion stands at the heart of all of Paul's missionary preaching. In this text the monotheistic emphasis is clearly evident, but we should not overlook how Paul sounds an important christological note by recounting the life and ministry of Jesus, especially His death, resurrection, and glorious return. Paul states that the result of the Thessalonians' conversion was "to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come" (1:10). Once again a "crucified and risen Jesus Christ is the content of Paul's missionary preaching."³³ It is particularly instructive to note how Paul uses the name *Jesus* in verse 10 without the accompa-

nying noun *Lord*. That is not only unusual but also emphasizes Jesus as a historical figure with respect to His humanity, i.e., life, death, and resurrection.

Interestingly, Paul's initial mentioning of the deliverance from the coming wrath (1:9–10) is repeated at the end of the letter (5:9–10) and functions as an *inclusio*, thereby underscoring that "Paul's Christology remains uniform throughout."³⁴ In 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 (NIV), Paul writes: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that . . . we may live together with him." At the beginning of the letter Paul had declared that the church is "in . . . Christ" (1:1), a clear reference that only those who have been united with God's Son in His death, burial, and resurrection belong to Him. Paul sounds the same note later in the epistle when he discusses Jesus' vicarious death *for* (Gk. *huper*, 5:10) its members, which delivers them from eschatological wrath *through* (*dia*, 5:9) Him. Viewing 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 and 5:9–10 as bookends to this letter reminds us that the alpha and omega of Paul's earliest missionary message to the Thessalonians are rooted christologically in the death and resurrection of Christ.

THE GOAL OF PAUL AS MISSIONARY-PASTOR: PRESENT EVERYONE MATURE IN JESUS CHRIST

Paul preached the gospel of Christ so that people might be converted. Conversion, however, was only part of Paul's larger missionary objective—the founding of Christian communities. But an even higher objective is in view because establishing churches was not Paul's final goal. According to Paul, the supreme end of the founding of communities was to present everyone mature in Jesus Christ on the last day. He writes to the church at Colossae: "Him we proclaim [i.e., Christ], warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may *present everyone mature in Christ* (Col. 1:28 ESV, italics added).

Paul was no fly-by-night missionary or charlatan. There were plenty of those around in the first-century world who could spin a good sermon, charge an exorbitant fee, and disappear without trace. Rather, as W. P. Bowers points out, the “defining dimension of the Pauline mission [was] Paul’s missionary commitment to . . . nurturing Christian communities as the central goal of his missionary endeavours in any particular region. . . . Paul’s missionary commitment includes nurturing such communities toward mature stability.”³⁵

But just how did the apostle Paul go about bringing people to maturity in Jesus Christ? Let’s consider this intriguing subject in a little more depth.

PAUL’S NURTURING OF HIS CONGREGATIONS

Paul used various means of pastoral care as a missionary to ensure that his churches grew in the Lord. One method was corresponding with them (and they with him, cf. 1 Cor. 7:1) by letter. Paul also regularly visited those communities he had founded to see how they were progressing and to resolve difficulties, divisions, and doctrinal problems. Further, he dispatched emissaries (e.g., Timothy, cf. 1 Thess. 3:6) to report on his converts’ progress.

Another fascinating piece of evidence of Paul’s continued pastoral care for the fledgling communities he had founded was in the personal and relational family language he used in his writings. The nurturing and caring for the communities he founded was as much part and parcel of Paul’s missionary responsibility as his activity of establishing them in the first place. Paul demonstrated his responsibility toward his congregations, for example, by his use of paternal metaphors:

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father [literally “I

fathered you”] in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (1 Cor. 4:14–15, ESV; cf. Philem. 10)

Many of Paul’s letters contain much family terminology, but 1 Thessalonians contains the heaviest preponderance of such language where he describes his relationship to the Thessalonians as a father to his children (1 Thess. 2:10–12). Paul also uses maternal metaphors to underscore his desire to nurture the fledgling community for whom he felt responsible: “as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. But we proved to be gentle³⁶ among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children” (1 Thess. 2:6–7). And he portrays the Thessalonians’ relations to one another as “brothers” no fewer than nineteen times (eg., 1 Thess. 1:4; 2:1, 14, 17; 3:2; 4:1, 6, 13; 5:1, 4), proportionately more often than any other letter.

Why does Paul use this family language? One suggestion is that it was only natural for Paul to use such terms—given the fact that not long after the founding of the Christian “family” the apostle was abruptly forced from his fledgling church, leaving him concerned and anxious to return (1 Thess. 2:17–3:6). But another reason for this familial emphasis in Paul’s letters is that he is drawing from a whole raft of assumptions in the ancient world to regulate relationships between himself as father and his converts as children. That is to say, Paul as father expected obedience, love, honour, etc., from his spiritual offspring, and they also expected discipline, love, etc., from him. The relationship was a reciprocal one.³⁷

Two points about this imagery are worthy of note. First, Paul is contextualizing his pastoral care: He is drawing from a common understanding of “family” in the ancient world, which he uses to instruct, guide, and care for this young community.³⁸ Second, Paul undergirds his pastoral care as missionary by his desire to see Christ glorified in his converts’ lives. One example from the ancient world of Paul will suffice. One way in which children in the ancient world were expected

to obey their fathers was through imitation. For example, Plutarch, the prolific Greek writer and contemporary of Paul writes: “Fathers . . . above all should make themselves a manifest example to their children, so that the latter, by looking at their fathers’ lives as at a mirror, may be deterred from disgraceful deeds and words” (*De Lib.* 20/14B). Similarly, Jewish fathers expected no different. Josephus, the first-century historian, states, “The Law . . . enjoins sobriety in the upbringing from the very first. It orders that they [i.e., children] be taught to read and shall learn the laws and deeds from their forefathers, in order that they may imitate [*mimōntai*] the latter” (*Ap.* 1. 204; cf. 1 Macc. 2.51).

Paul’s Personal Example

Paul is also not afraid to hold himself up as a personal example for his converts to follow. We see this in 1 Thessalonians 1:6, where Paul commends the Thessalonians for the manner in which they “became imitators of us and *of the Lord*,” where Paul means that “he imitated Christ and the Thessalonians imitated him,”³⁹ and in imitating him they were following the example of Christ. Paul makes a similar point in his letter to the church at Corinth, one which he had also founded, and where he writes “I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me” (1 Cor. 4:15–16).

Here again while Paul is keen for his converts to follow him, later in the letter he writes: “Follow my example, as I follow the *example of Christ*” (11:1 NIV, italics added). As a faithful missionary and pastor, Paul sets before the Corinthians Jesus Christ as the primary model for imitation, not only for himself and but for all believers to follow. Why? Simply because Paul was not only in the business of making converts but also in the business of ensuring they grew and matured in the Lord. Indeed, for the apostle the Corinthians’ growing up into Jesus Christ is not a take-it-or-leave-it matter but a Pauline priority, clearly evident in his use of the imperative mood in verse 16.

THE CHALLENGE OF GLOBAL MISSION FOR THE CHURCH

In light of Paul’s missionary message, what lessons can the twenty-first-century church glean in order to effectively communicate the gospel?

The Decisive Factor: the Message, *Not* the Messenger

A cursory reading of Paul’s letters reveals that his overriding concern was not with his missionary work or even his theology but with the gospel as centered on God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah, who in the last days had made God known by providing salvation through His death and resurrection. Christian mission for Paul was always Christ-centered. Paul had no desire to preach himself or his own message, because his message was the message of Jesus his Savior.

This matter of whether Paul’s message was the message of Christ has been much debated in scholarly circles, because some have tried to drive a wedge between the two. The debate is well summarized in the title of David Wenham’s (the British scholar’s) monograph *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* in which he concludes: “Paul would have been horrified at the suggestion that he was the founder of Christianity . . . Paul saw himself as the slave of Jesus Christ.”

We have seen that Paul as missionary was the founder of churches, not of Christianity, and we have observed how he did this by preaching a message centered on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Paul did not wish to start a new religion, nor did he wish to have a personal following. The latter was a particular problem in the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:1–5), where Paul sought to combat the cult of personality in which the *church members* were putting priority on man over the message. While different groups within the church were seeking to elevate Paul, Peter, and Apollos (cf. 1:10–13 and 3:3–9), the apostle responds, “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants *through* whom [not “*in* whom”] you believed” (3:5, emphasis added). To be

sure, Paul was God's agent through whom the church was brought into being, but he always deflected attention from himself by seeking to elevate and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2:2).

It is a simple but important point, and missionaries and pastors would do well to follow Paul's example and words when he states, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5).

The Prepared Missionary: Grounded in Scripture and Theology

We have observed that Paul was both missionary *and* theologian. These two do not contradict but rather complement each other. It is instructive to note how the church in Antioch sent two of its members, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1–3), who had been involved in the ministry of the church, overseas to engage in mission. What is particularly important here is that Paul and Barnabas were especially gifted teachers. Luke records in Acts 11:26 how after a great number had turned to the Lord (11:21), Barnabas sent for Paul and brought him to Antioch and "for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people" (11:26 NIV).

Note that the church at Antioch did not send novices overseas to engage in mission but dispatched two of its most spiritually gifted and involved members. Likewise, the church today should send people who are already serving in the church, the arena where gifts and calling have been identified, tested, fostered, and developed. This means that pastors-elders, along with the church body, have a vital role to play in looking for gifted people in their congregations who believe God may be calling them to go overseas. The church then tests this calling by providing opportunities for them to preach, teach, or engage in short overseas missions trips.

In light of the importance of theology in Paul's understanding of mission, missionaries should be as well qualified and trained theologically as pastors.⁴⁰ We sometimes think that theological training is required only for the latter and that the former are somehow exempt.

This is erroneous thinking. Think of it this way: If it is foolhardy to let loose into an operating theatre a surgeon with only a little training, how much more dangerous is it to allow a missionary to go overseas with only a little theological training when the eternal destiny of people are at stake? "Of all the people who are engaged in the Lord's work, the missionary is probably in greatest need of sound, thorough, theological training."⁴¹

This raises a related issue, namely, that those training for the pastoral ministry should be given exposure to the church overseas. The fruits of this initiative will pay off in the long run because if a pastor has a healthy interest in mission, you can rest assured his church will also. Working and living in another culture will not only change the way a person looks at the world (and how one is perceived *outside* one's own country); more important, the experience will change values and widen one's understanding of what God is doing in other parts of the world. It is worth remembering that those training for pastoral ministry will probably one day be sending others overseas to engage in mission. If they have some exposure to a cross-cultural context they will have some idea of the joys and struggles of serving in another country and be able to help their churches pray more intelligently.

Clear Communication: Presenting the Gospel *in the Cultural Context*

As we have seen, Paul was the consummate communicator, contextualizing his message by taking his readers from what they knew to what they didn't know. Of course, in doing so, Paul was only following Jesus' example of teaching His disciples by parable (e.g., seed, goats). Paul was a master of metaphor and used the image of the ancient family to communicate Christ to his congregations.

Contextualization and biblical mission are as much the agenda of the local pastor as of the cross-cultural missionary. We can all too easily employ clichés and slip into using "the language of Zion" without

thinking about whether our preaching is really resonating with our hearers. People may hear, but do they understand what is being preached?

There has never been a more appropriate time in the life of the Christian church than today for an innovative proclamation and contextualization⁴² of a biblically based message to meet the needs of a lost world. “Connect and relate” should be the church’s battle cry. Yet do not become irrelevant!

“But the gospel *is* relevant,” you reply. It most certainly is, but missionaries, pastors, and church workers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit need to articulate that message clearly so that others will understand how Jesus can meet their deepest need—their salvation. The gospel message is always the same, but the context in which we serve will determine how we present it.

Byang Kato, the late visionary Nigerian leader, described contextualization simply as “making concepts or ideas relevant in a given situation.” It is, he continued, “an effort to express the never-changing Word of God in ever-changing modes of relevance. Since the gospel is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary.”⁴³

For the cross-cultural missionary to connect meaningfully is a particular challenge—a lesson brought home to me early in my teaching career. While in Nigeria, teaching an exegesis class to seminary students on 1 Timothy, we had reached chapter 4:11–16 where Paul provides instructions for young Timothy as pastor. On three occasions in this chapter the apostle underscores Timothy’s responsibility not only to preach but also to teach (vv. 6, 11, 13) the Word. In short, Timothy was to offer instruction to those under his care.

This resonated with me in the context in which I was working. Many new converts were in the churches in Nigeria, and I was especially keen that my students learn not only to preach but also to teach. As I thought about this, I remembered the hens and chicks (preach-

ing fees!) we kept at the back of our house and recalled the many lessons I had learned from observing animal behavior during my undergraduate days of studying psychology. After the lecture I decided to invite my seminary students over to the back of our house where I had watched these birds.

Then I threw down a large hunk of bread for the hens. They quickly started to do what they always did, namely, break off small pieces and drop them on the ground for their young offspring to eat. A smile began to break over the students’ faces as my contextualized message hit home: “Here is what you are to do as pastors in your teaching,” I concluded. “Break the Word of God into easily digestible pieces so that the believers under your care can grow up into the Lord Jesus Christ. By your so doing, Christ will truly be glorified in His church.”

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NOTES

1. These statistics are taken from Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World, 21st Century Edition* (Carlisle, Pa.: Paternoster Press, 2001).
2. Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 45 (italics added).
3. Some hold the view that there is a crisis in global missions evident by the title of an excellent collection of essays edited by Russell L. Penney: *Overcoming the Missions Crisis: Thinking Strategically to Reach the World* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001).
4. James F. Engel and William Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 23.
5. Richard J. Mouw, “The Missionary Location of the North American Churches,” ed. Craig Van Gelder, *Confident Witnesses—Changing the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 3–15.
6. *Ibid.*, 3, 7.

7. Joseph Stowell, *The Dawn's Early Light* (Chicago: Moody, 1990), 173.
8. A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 295.
9. Even as I write, an article has been posted on the Web site of the Society of Biblical Literature in which a Chinese professor who introduced a course on Scripture into the curriculum was inundated with students wanting to take the course. Later in his letter he goes on to make a plea to the West, asking "for help from all of international biblical studies scholars who will keep an eye on the development . . . The following difficulties are . . . lack of books in this field, lack of multimedia materials, rarity of national and international conferences in this field held in China." See www.sbl.org.
10. See David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 195, who questions whether the roots are any deeper in some of the churches in North America today. He states, for example, that students coming to Bible colleges and seminaries in North America are not as biblically literate as their counterparts thirty years ago.
11. J. Ronald Blue, "The Necessity of Missionary Training for the Missionary," *Overcoming the Missions Crisis*, ed. Russell L. Penney (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 183.
12. David Hesselgrave "Evangelical Mission in 2001 and Beyond," *Trinity World Forum*, Spring 2001: 1–3; cf. Samuel Escobar, "The Global Scenario at the Turn of the Century," *Global Missiology for the 21st Century*, ed. William D. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) asserts that what we need to do is to get back to basics because "it has become evident that the new century will require a *return to biblical patterns of mission* . . . it is time for a paradigm change that will come from a salutary *return to the Word of God*."
13. Hesselgrave, "Evangelical Mission in 2001 and Beyond," 3.
14. This phrase is the title of chapter 5 of T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).
15. Andrew F. Walls, *Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books), 30, writes: "The first change in the center of gravity of the Christian world, entirely representative of what was to follow, took place within the first century of the Christian era, and its pathway is marked within the New Testament itself. Within a remarkably short time, Christianity ceased to be a demographically Jewish phenomenon centered in Jewish Palestine and expressed in terms of the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. It moved toward a new expression as a demographically and culturally Hellenistic one, dispersed across the Eastern Mediterranean and then beyond it . . . That Christianity was itself not swept away was due to the cross-cultural diffusion that had already begun, and the consequent emergence of a new Hellenistic model of Christian expression."
16. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 6, rightly laments the fact that "the body of literature on the early Christian mission is not large. This is true even for Paul's missionary work." The reason is that while Paul is important today as a theologian, during the early church he was primarily viewed as a missionary. Schnabel concludes that the apostle's missionary enterprise has been downplayed to the extent that "Paul's missionary work is almost completely ignored in . . . descriptions of Paul's life."

17. Stephen C. Barton, "Paul as Missionary and Pastor," *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 35.
18. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 164.
19. *Ibid.*, 164.
20. In recent times Paul's experience on the Damascus road has been understood as a call and not a conversion. Yet it is not a case of one or the other but both/and; see the most recent defense for both by Peter O'Brien, "Was Paul Converted?" *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 361–91.
21. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson, 1990), 31–32.
22. The phrase "Jesus Christ" can be understood as an objective (Jesus as the content) or subjective genitive (Jesus as the agent).
23. Murray J. Harris, "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," ed. C. Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 1191.
24. Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Neuen Testament (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr, 1981) has argued that Paul received all of his theology, i.e., soteriology, Christology etc., at his conversion on the road to Damascus.
25. See A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988).
26. Eckhardt J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Paul and the Early Church*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1472.
27. For one of the most cogent defenses for Pauline authorship of these verses see James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiotnesia in the Pauline Corpus* WUNT 2.48 (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr, 1992), 229–36.
28. Kim, *Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 111
29. There is a host of exegetical issues here. For guidance see Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 44–51.
30. L. W. Hurtado, "Son of God," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph Martin & Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 905.
31. See further Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: A Study of a Neglected Pauline Metaphor*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2006).
32. Charles A. Wanamaker, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 84–89, for a defense of this text as the authentic missionary preaching of Paul in Thessalonica.
33. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 2, 981.
34. Paul W. Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity: The First Twenty Years*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 44.

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35. W. P. Bowers, "Mission" in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), 608–19 (610).
36. This verse has an important textual problem that centers on the inclusion (*nepioi*, "infants") or omission (*epioi*, "gentle") of one Greek letter.
37. See Trevor J. Burke, "Paul's Role as 'Father' to His Corinthian 'Children' in Socio-Historical Context," *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict, Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott (Leiden, England: Brill, 2003), 95–114. For a similar approach in 1 Thessalonians see Trevor J. Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Series 247 (London: T & T Clark International, 2003).
38. For all the primary source material, see Burke, *Family Matters*, chaps. 2 and 3.
39. Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 32B (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 114.
40. For a strong argument in favor of missionaries being as theologically well qualified as pastors, see Ron Blue, "The Necessity of Theological Training," 173–188.
41. Blue, "The Necessity of Theological Training," 173.
42. The term *contextualization* can mean different things to different people; missiologists distinguish between linguistic contextualization and contextualization of thoughts. For a working definition of contextualization see, for example, David Hesselgrave, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).
42. Byang H. Kato, "Contextualization and Religious Syncretism in Africa" *Biblical Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: African Christian Press, 1985), 23.