

REACHING THE WORLD: GOD’S GLOBAL AGENDA

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Scripture is clear that God eternally purposed to offer His gift of salvation to all the peoples of the world. The Hebrew Scriptures exhort God’s redeemed people to declare His mercy and grace. Likewise, the New Testament outlines a similar responsibility for God’s church. As a result of God’s redemptive work, His redeemed people are given the privileged position of being His emissaries. Reaching the world through evangelism involves passion, prayer, and proclamation through the power of God’s Holy Spirit and Word.

Introduction

Cover to cover, the Bible is a missionary story. From the *proto-evangelium* (Gen 3:15) to the creation of the new heavens and earth (Rev 21–22), God is about the business of “reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). Remarkably, God has ordained that His former but now redeemed enemies should shoulder the responsibility of heralding this incredible offer of amnesty. That was Christ’s closing charge—to go and make disciples (Matt 28:18–20). The clarion call to reach the world is fueled and driven by this mandate from the greatest missionary of all time—One who was sent by His Father to open the door of reconciliation to “whoever will call on the name of the Lord” (Rom 10:13).

In some respects, never in the history of mankind has this charge been easier to carry out. The world has become small and continues to shrink at an incredible rate. In a matter of hours, one can travel to any of the world’s 200+ countries. Population centers have become concentrated, with one third of the world’s population now living in only two countries. The impact of the Tower of Babel has been minimized dramatically, with language barriers increasingly neutralized by influences from the West. Computer programs now permit people to translate from one language to another simply with the stroke of a key. Electronic communications enable the masses to communicate around the world almost instantaneously.

At the same time, however, the world is expanding exponentially. Worldwide population is now estimated to be 7 billion, growing at a rate of a billion people every decade. With this population explosion has come a remarkable shift—a shift away from the bastion of Christianity in Europe and America to Asia and the southern hemisphere. Yale University professor Lamin Sanneh describes this new phenomenon. He writes:

With unflagging momentum, Christianity has become, or is fast becoming, the principal religion of the peoples of the world. Primal societies that once stood well outside the main orbit of the faith have become major centers of Christian impact...We seem to be in the middle of massive cultural shifts and realignments...¹

Mark Noll, in his book, *The New Shape of World Christianity*, reiterates this phenomenon, adding that on any given Sunday, “more Christian believers attend church in China than in all of so-called ‘Christian Europe.’”²

This global shift is due, in part, to a growing apathy and, in some cases, apostasy in the West. The western church, it seems, has fallen prey to the seduction of prosperity (Deut 31:20) and the cultural syncretism that afflicted the ancient nation of Israel (Amos 5:25–26; Acts 7:42–43). It is not unlike the Church at Ephesus, who valiantly stood for the truth all-the-while allowing other “loves” to woo them away from giving preeminence to their first love (Rev 2:4). Although we would adamantly disdain the health and wealth gospel, the West has intentionally or unintentionally bought into it, causing mission work to be negatively impacted. A “health and wealth” mentality does not send missionaries. Instead, it creates “a deep mission-forgetfulness within the church.”³

While this is disconcerting and disturbing, there is, on the other hand, much for which to be thankful. The missionary efforts of the past two centuries have borne fruit. New centers of Christianity are rising out of the ash heap of darkness, extending the influence of the gospel to places previously unreached. As promised, God’s Word has not returned void. And, while the wealthy West can and does invest financially in the work of these new major centers of Christianity (and thus soothe its conscience for no longer investing with manpower), that nevertheless does not abrogate or alleviate the divine

¹ Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xix.

² Mark Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 10.

³ Peter Kline, “Is God Missionary? Augustine and the Divine Missions” *Princeton Theological Review* (Spring 2010), XVI:1:32. Wilbert Shenk agrees, arguing that present-day “Christendom...may be characterized as *church without mission*.” *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1995), 35; italics his.

exhortations for a more personal, individual investment. In his book, *Let the Nations be Glad*, John Piper exhorts: “The fundamental task of world missions remains the same—as it has for two thousand years... Declaring his glory—the glory of grace in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus—is the great task among all the unreached peoples of the world.”⁴

God's Eternal Purpose

The foundation of any endeavor, whether secular or religious, human or divine, is bound up in the purpose given to that endeavor by its creator. No place is that more evident than in the eternal purpose God established for His creation. Discerning God's global agenda as revealed in Scripture depends upon and commences with a true understanding of God Himself. Beginning with the genesis of human history and God's self-revelation, the very essence and being of God's nature exudes the reality and foundation of His mission. To understand this is to begin to grasp a crucial aspect of the nature of God and His overarching purpose in this world.

From the opening chapters of Genesis, the reality of Romans 3:11—“There is none who seeks for God”—stands in stark contrast to God's insatiable pursuit of man. The ongoing revelation of man as one who flees from and even disdains the presence of God (e.g. Gen 3:7–8; 4:16) is repeatedly contrasted by God's pursuit of man (e.g. Gen 3:8–9; 4:9; 12:1–3; Acts 7:2; 9:1–9) and His intervention on man's behalf (e.g. Gen 3:21, 22–24; 4:15; 6:1–9:17; 11:1–9). While mankind throughout history has been bent on self-destruction (e.g. Gen 4:8, 23–24; 6:5, 11), God, beginning with the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15, repeatedly declares His intent to save and redeem.

Though God's design to seek and to save the lost is first evidenced and initiated in the Old Testament, it is not reserved for Israel alone. Yes, it is true that beginning with the Fall there is a very specific focus on God's creation of a people through whom He would announce and prepare His action-plan of redemption and reconciliation. But the scope of this plan was never limited exclusively to the biological descendants of Abraham. Quite the contrary! The writers of the New Testament, and especially Paul “the apostle to the Gentiles,” exuberantly announce that the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ extends beyond the Jewish people to include the Gentiles too.⁵

The universal scope of this divine intention is accentuated in the major events of Christ's earthly life. The incarnation is about reaching the world; it

⁴ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 32.

⁵ Cf. Andreas J. Kostenberger & Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 25 and Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 257–72.

was a *missionary* event (Matt 1:21; Luke 2:10). The Messiah's death and resurrection is about extending His kingdom to all nations (Luke 24:47; 2 Cor 5:19–21). His final instructions to His disciples just prior to His ascension were exhortations to take this Good News to the ends of earth (Matt 28:16–20; Acts 1:8). The life of Christ reflects the emphasis of the Scriptures—from cover to cover, it is consumed with God's global missionary agenda.

The door of God's redemptive action-plan was cracked ajar ever-so-slightly in the *protoevangelium* (Gen 3:15), in the sacrificial provision of clothing to cover the first sin and sinners (Gen 3:21), and in the saving of Noah and his family in the Ark (Gen 6–9). But it is the divine promise to Abram (Gen 12:1–3) that begins to open the door more widely, unveiling something more than a scant key-hole perspective. In bold relief, the LORD announces, "In you will all the families⁶ of the earth be blessed" (12:3). When this divine promise is later ratified at the unilateral, covenant-cutting ceremony (Gen 15), God's promise to the entirety of mankind not only provided unequivocal surety for Abram's physical offspring but it was also codified unconditionally for his seed (Rom 4:11–12, 16–17; 11:11ff; Acts 10:34–36)—including both Jews and Gentiles. "God's intention to bless him, his seed and all peoples of the world is a reassertion of his original purpose for humankind."⁷

The Pentateuch does not stand alone in revealing glimpses of God's redemptive plan and its extension to all peoples. The Psalms and the prophets sprinkle the theme throughout the Old Testament. The psalmist declares: "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and they shall glorify Your name" (86:9; also cf. Pss 22:27; 66:4; 67:1–2). The prophets exuberantly join in the chorus as well. Isaiah records: "I will also make you a light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:6b; also cf. Isa 60:3; 45:22; 52:10). Jeremiah (1:5, 10; 3:17) continues the refrain. Jonah is sent by God to preach repentance to Nineveh (3:10–4:2). Nebuchadnezzar responded to the testimony of Daniel and his three friends (Dan 4:34–37). God's redemptive plan brought good news of great joy for *all* people (Luke 2:10).

Thus, while the Old Testament gives significant focus to God's creation of a covenant-bearing, covenant-witnessing people through whom He would announce and prepare His plan of redemption, one should not lose sight of the fact that His plan of redemption from the beginning includes an invitation to "all the families of the earth" (Gen 12:3), e.g. people from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9–10). "The fact remains that the goal of the Old Testament was to see both Jews and Gentiles come to a saving knowledge of the Messiah who was to come. Anything less than this goal was a misunderstanding

⁶ In context, the mention of "families" would include the nations of Genesis 10.

⁷ Kostenberger and O'Brien, 30–31. The promise of this worldwide extension is reiterated to the patriarchs that followed (Gen 26:2–4; 28:13–14).

and an attenuation of the plan of God. God's eternal plan was to provide salvation for all peoples...⁸

God's Ethnic Priority

As noted above, the Scriptures, both Old and New, declare with perspicuity the divine purpose of God—His redemptive plan is intended for all people. He is “not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). To implement this sovereign design, God devised and charted an arrangement whereby He would bring this phenomenal transaction to fruition, a plan that would astound the world (1 Cor 1:18–31). The offer to all would come through the family of one. One family would be given priority—the family of Abraham.⁹

Priority of Birthright

This ethnic priority is evidenced in a number of ways, the first being the priority of birthright. In ancient times, the firstborn child was dedicated to God (Exod 22:29) and entitled to a double share of the family inheritance (Deut 21:17). That Israel as a nation was to be the recipient of this birthright is unveiled in the account of God's covenant with Abram.¹⁰ Although this covenant clearly reveals, albeit in seminal form, God's eternal purpose to make His salvation available to all the families of the earth, it also unmistakably attests to the fact that it would be through Abram's seed—“*In you* will all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:3; emphasis mine). God ordained that His offer of redemption would come through His chosen people Israel. They would be the channel of His blessing to the world.¹¹

⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 10.

⁹ Kaiser, 9. He notes that the table of nations in Gen 10–11 is “far from being a nationalistic section that favored the Jews. It is one of the most universalistic sections of the Bible, ending with a list in Genesis 10 of seventy nations—the very ‘families’ and ‘all peoples’ that were to receive the blessing from God through Abraham and his collective seed in Genesis 12:3.” Kaiser is quick to add that “The expression ‘all peoples’ did not mean that every person on earth would universally believe in the Messiah, but that every ethnic group would receive this blessing of God's grace and the joy of participating in worshiping and serving Him” (8).

¹⁰ There is little doubt that Israel was the recipient of this birthright. The rights and privileges prescribed for the firstborn in each Jewish home (cf. Gen 37:22; 43:33; Deut 21:15–17) were extended by God to the nation as a whole (Exod 4:22). Isa 61:7 and Zech 9:12 leave no doubt that a double portion of blessing is promised for her nationally in the future when, having returned to the land (cf. Joel 2:21–3:21), Messiah's spirit of grace and supplication is poured out on the house of David and Israel drinks from the fountain of salvation opened for her (Zech 12:10–13:1).

¹¹ The Hebrew Scriptures reveal numerous attempts by Abraham and his descendants to choose an alternative plan, an action that would have derailed this integral part of God's design (e.g. Gen 15:2; 16:2; 17:18; cp. 25:23 with 27:4; Numbers 25). Each attempt is decisively rebuffed by

Priority of Privilege

A second evidence of ethnic priority is evidenced in Israel's priority of privilege. Such is not surprising, since priority inevitably results in privilege. She was given a unique place of honor in all of history. She was the only one "chosen among all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). The Psalmist exults: "He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and his ordinances to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation" (147:19–20a). She was the one "to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ..." (Rom 9:4–5). They had been adopted (Ezek 16:6, 8) and were endowed with fame and fortune (Ezek 16:10–14). They were given unequalled access to the God of the universe with the Shekinah glory dwelling in their midst (Exod 40:34–35; Zech 2:5). Because of their heritage and ancestry, they were beloved by God (Rom 11:28) and made the channel through whom the Messiah would come. In every way, they were truly the "apple of His eye" (Zech 2:8; cf. Hos 11:8–11; Ps 105:15).

Furthermore, she was the first to be entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom 3:2).¹² The children of Israel were the custodians and guardians of His self-disclosure, given to them as a divine trust.¹³ As John Murray observes, "When we think of what, above all else, was the Jew's privilege as an abiding possession it was his entrustment with the Word of God."¹⁴

Priority of Responsibility

Responsibilities are always concomitant with privilege and status. And Israel realized that. Her very own constitution, the Mosaic Covenant, stipulated

God and reveals His unequivocal intentionality. Each episode is answered with elevated definitude. Note the growing specificity from "in you" (Gen 12:3) to "your own body" and "your seed" (Gen 15:4–5) to "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac" (Gen 17:15–21).

¹² Numerous interpretations have been suggested for the meaning of "oracles," including entire OT & NT, the Decalogue, or OT promises. However, given its usage in the LXX and the NT, it seems best to understand it as designating the totality of the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. Douglas Moo, *Romans 1-8* in *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary*, ed. by Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 182; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), I:92-93; and James Denny, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 603.

¹³ The leaders of Israel were very cognizant of the privileges given to them (Deut 4:8; Ps 147:19–20).

¹⁴ Murray, *Romans*, I: 93. E. H. Gifford adds: "Over and above their share in the general promise, the Jews had a great and special advantage in having this trust committed to them. For the trust...was further accompanied by special and peculiar promises given to the Jews as a nation, that they should themselves be heirs of the promised salvation" *Romans* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 82.

the rights and responsibilities that accrued to the firstborn—expectations that firstborn sons were to perform for their parents and siblings (Deut 21:15–17). But they also knew that their standing among the nations of the world was not without obligations; it came with significant spiritual duties. Scripture reveals two of these responsibilities most prominently.

A Priest to the Nations—Representing the Nations before God

In the first of these responsibilities, Israel was to be a priest to the nations. More than 500 years after Abraham, God met Moses on Mt. Sinai to delineate the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. This covenant/treaty not only reaffirmed His redemptive initiative that He made with Abraham, but it also spelled out the priority His chosen people would have in its implementation. The preamble to this theocratic constitution (Exod 19:4–6) specified that Israel was to be “a kingdom of priests.” As a nation, Israel was to fulfill a mediatorial function, representing other nations to God and serving others.¹⁵ She would be “a people comprised wholly of priests, a people that will occupy among humanity the place fulfilled by the priests within each nation.”¹⁶

From the very outset, both the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants reveal that God's eternal design was not restricted to the house of Israel; rather, it was international in scope. How else would she be able to carry out God's intention to bless all the nations of the earth? How else could she perform her role as a priest to the nations unless God's redemptive grace would extend to other, non-Israelite families of the earth (Isa 2:1–4; 55:5; 60:6; 66:16; Jer 12:15–16; Zech 8:20–23; 14:16)?¹⁷

A Light to the Nations—Representing God before the Nations

Not only was she ordained to be a priest to the nations, but Israel was also created to declare the excellencies of God's greatness and lovingkindness to the nations—something other nations could not do. “Other nations can give no witness for their own impotent deities, but Israel has so much to declare; for the Lord's wonderful works have been done before her and on her behalf.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Kaiser, 22. Later he comments: “All were to be agents of God's blessing to all on earth. Nothing could be clearer from the missionary and ministry call issued in Exodus 19:4–6” (24).

¹⁶ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 227. John Mackay agrees: “Israel was not so much to be a kingdom with priests, as a kingdom which as a whole was to function in a priestly role vis-à-vis the rest of the world.” *Exodus* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 328.

¹⁷ The explicit statements of God's international expectations and intentions in the very covenants themselves make it difficult to comprehend the level of national exclusivity later practiced by some of Israel's spiritual leaders (cf. Jonah 1:2–3; 4:1–2; Acts 10:34–35; 11:1–18).

¹⁸ G. W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *EBC*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 260.

During his sojourn in Canaan, Abraham erected altars and made proclamation in the name of the LORD (Gen 12:8; 21:33). David gave thanks and sang praises to the LORD among the nations (Ps 57:9; 108:3). Jonah was sent to Nineveh expressly to declare God's righteousness (Jon 1:2) and, as a result of Nineveh's repentance, for God to reveal His mercy and lovingkindness toward the Gentile nation (Jon 3:10–4:2). At the dedication of the temple, Solomon exhorts his people to live righteously "in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You..." (1 Kgs 8:43).

Jesus exhorted them to be like a city set on a hill (Matt 5:14–16), where it can be seen by all and provide an undeniable witness of God's great acts (Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8). Every Jew knew of this divine expectation and obligation (cf. Ps 18:49). They viewed themselves as a guide to the blind and as "a light to those who are in darkness" (Rom 2:19). "That has always been God's intention for His people. He gives them light not only for their own spiritual benefit but also for the spiritual benefit of the rest of the world, before whom they are His witnesses."¹⁹

Furthermore, Israel was to be a forerunner of the Coming One, One who would be "A light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). Isaiah prophesied seven centuries earlier that the nations would come to behold the light of His glorious presence (Isa 9:2). In the Suffering Servant songs (Isa 42, 49, 50, 53), this Israelite *par excellence* would become "a light to the nations" (Isa 42:6; 49:6; cf. 60:1, 3). Paul reiterated this in his defense before Agrippa, noting "that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23).²⁰

Apparently, such missionary activity was occurring in the Second Temple era. Kaiser notes that "[t]his is why Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6 in his attempt to convince the Jews at Antioch of Pisidia that it had been God's intent all along to extend his blessings of redemption to the Gentiles."²¹ Such missionary engagement, birthed in early Jewish history, apparently was being undertaken in Jesus' day. In Matt 23:15, Jesus remarks: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte..."²²

¹⁹ John MacArthur, *Romans 1–8* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 154.

²⁰ This motif was a theme in the early church as well. Paul, for example, exhorts the Philippians to live "above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15; also cf. Acts 13:47; 26:18; 1 Pet 2:9; Col 1:12–13).

²¹ Kaiser, 9.

²² Others disagree. Kostenberger and O'Brien, for example, contend: "This common assertion, however, is unsatisfactory both exegetically and theologically. To contend that Israel had a missionary task and should have engaged in mission as we understand it today goes beyond the evidence. There is no suggestion in the Old Testament that Israel should have engaged in 'cross-

Priority of Chronology/Methodology

The apostle Paul exclaims that the gospel of Christ “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, *to the Jew first* and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16; cf. 2:9, 10; emphasis mine). While the gospel is for all, on the same terms without distinction, yet there is a stated prerogative—“to the Jew first.” Historically, Jesus instructed the twelve disciples to “go to the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6), focusing His evangelistic efforts on “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24). Even after being rejected by His own people, He nevertheless instructed His followers to begin their missionary endeavors in Jerusalem and Judea before launching out into Samaria and the remote parts of the world (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

Israel's rejection of the Messiah at His first advent did not abrogate or alter this priority; her position of priority remained (Rom 3:1–2; 9:4–5). God's love for His people was unconditional, and although they had turned from Him, He was unwilling to reject them permanently (Rom 11:2). Thus God sent His Son as “a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers” (Rom 15:8).²³ Israel was God's specially chosen people through whom He would announce and prepare His action-plan for reconciling the world to Himself. Thus, they were “given the first opportunity to receive the Lord Jesus, both during His ministry (John 1:11) and in the Christian era (Acts 1:8; 3:26).”²⁴

But when the apostle Paul employs the phrase, “to the Jew first,” does he mean something more than a historical chronology? In evangelism, must the gospel be presented to the Jew first?²⁵ Some suggest this phrase connotes only

cultural' or foreign mission” (35). Later they add: “By the time of the New Testament, there appears to have been little thought of an active reaching out in order to seek ‘proselytes’” (36).

It is true that Scripture recounts situations where an anti-mission, “us only” mentality was prominent among Israel (cf. Jonah, *et. al.*). However, if that is deemed to be the preeminent perspective among First and Second Temple Judaism, Matt 23:15 seems to suggest otherwise. Michael Bird suggests that this verse is full of “hyperbolic invective” and thus “cannot be used as evidence of Jewish missionary activity” (*Crossing Over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010], 67). He admits “that *περιπατω* (“I cross”) implies a sense of itinerancy and the same word is used in Matt 4:23 and 9:35 of Jesus' own mission activity” (67). Nevertheless, he does not believe that is a valid understanding. Rather, he suggests it refers to Pharisees' efforts to convert Jews to their brand of Pharisaism (68) or to their efforts to “recruit God-fearers into the cause of Jewish resistance to the Roman Empire” (69).

²³ Cf. Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (MacDill AFB, FL: MacDonald Publishing, 1958), 48 for a list of reasons as to why this chronological priority was important.

²⁴ E. F. Harrison, “Romans,” in EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 19.

²⁵ The NT use of “first” (*πρῶτον* [*prōton*]) does not provide closure in this discussion. *Πρῶτον* (*prōton*) occurs more than ⁶⁰ times, with a range of emphases that includes a spatial sense, a

the historical, believing that Paul is merely reflecting on God's choice of Israel through whom the Gospel would come into the world. In other words, he is not setting forth an evangelistic protocol. E. F. Harrison embraces this understanding. He contends: "It is a case of historical priority, not essential priority..."²⁶ James Denney elaborates, adding that "the Gospel is for all, the same Gospel and on the same terms, but without prejudice to the historical prerogative of the Jew."²⁷

Others disagree, contending that Paul's use of *πρωτον* (*prōton*) requires an essential "priority rather than a sequential order of events."²⁸ They argue that because the phrase is ensconced in the theological context of Rom 1–11²⁹ (in comparison to something *historical*, such as the narratives of the Gospels or Acts), something more than merely a historical, sequential perspective is intended. Wayne Brindle observes: "The promise of the gospel has a special applicability to Israel. Romans 9–11 is sufficient to show this. Paul presented Jesus not only as the Savior of the world, but also as Israel's Messiah."³⁰

Douglas Moo agrees:

[T]he promises of God realized in the gospel are "first of all" for the Jew. To Israel the promises were first given, and to the Jews they still particularly apply. Without in any way subtracting from the equal

precedence/sequential sense, a hierarchal sense, and an "above all" sense (Wilhelm Michaelis, "πρωτος" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich; trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 1968), 865–70.

²⁶ Harrison, 19. In reference to the same phrase in Romans 2:9, S. Lewis Johnson draws a similar conclusion ("The Gospel That Paul Preached," *BSac* [October-December 1971], 128: 332), as does William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 61. William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1938) points to the use of *πρωτον* (*prōton*) in Rom 1:8 for support (21–22). W. H. Griffith Thomas adds: "We must always remember that it invariably means precedence, not preference" (*Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1966], 61). Also cf. John Calvin, *The Epistles to the Romans*, in Calvin's Commentaries, trans. by John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 19:83.

²⁷ Denney, *Romans*, 589.

²⁸ Mitch Glaser, *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, Darrell Bock & Mitch Glaser, eds. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 16. C. E. B. Cranfield concurs: "At the same time, 'first' indicates that there is a certain priority of the Jew" (*Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985], 20).

²⁹ Romans, especially chapters 9–11, was written in part to counteract the rumors that Paul had totally abandoned the Jews and that the rejection of Christ had broken God's covenant promises with them. Cf. J. C. Beker, "The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *The Romans Debate*, ed. by Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 328.

³⁰ Wayne A. Brindle, "'To the Jew First': Rhetoric, Strategy, History, or Theology?" *BSac* (April–June, 2002), 159:226.

access that all people now have to the gospel, then, Paul insists that the gospel, 'promised beforehand...in the holy Scriptures' (1:2), has a special relevance to the Jew.³¹

Paul's use of the same terminology in Romans 2:9–10³² suggests that something more than mere precedence is in view. When 2:9 speaks of judgment to the Jew first, it is difficult to see how historical, chronological precedence can be deduced. And, if 2:9 is broader than just the historical, then 2:10 is expected to reflect that as well. "As the word of the promise has gone 'first' to the Jew, so does punishment for failure to respond to that word go 'first' to the Jew.... Paul insists that their priority be applied equally to both."³³

The language used by Paul suggests that the Jewish people were a priority not only in the historical sense. "Paul's strategy, 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek,' has its roots in the divine plan for the role of Israel as revealed in the OT."³⁴ Henry Alford adds: "πρῶτον is not *first* in order of time, but principally (compare ch. ii. 9), spoken of *national precedence*... Not that the Jew has any *preference* under the gospel; only he *inherits*, and has *precedence*."³⁵

To illustrate this, Mitch Glaser points to Matt 6:33, where πρῶτον (*prōton*) is also used:

The kingdom of God should always be sought as a priority in our lives, even as we seek other things. In a similar way, reaching Jewish people with the gospel must be a priority for all who know Jesus as their Savior. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, focused his ministry on reaching non-Jews with the gospel message. But this did not lessen his concern for the salvation of Jewish people.³⁶

³¹ Moo, *Romans 1–8*, WEC, 64.

³² "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

³³ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996) 139. Brindle adds: "The Jews have priority in both salvation promises and in judgment for their disobedience" (233).

³⁴ J. Julius Scott, "Gentiles and the Ministry of Jesus: Further Observations on Matt 10:5–6; 15:21–28," *JETS* (June 1990), 33:169.

³⁵ Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1865), 2:319; emphasis his.

³⁶ Mitch Glaser, 16. Also cf. John Murray, *Romans*, 28.

Paul followed this practice by going first to the Jews, claiming that “it was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first” (πρῶτον [*prōton*]; Acts 13:46; emphasis mine). Paul’s argument in Romans 11 hinges on the fact that the Gospel belonged to the Jew first and that Gentiles were to acknowledge that.³⁷

The priority of the Jew must not be lost in our endeavor to reach the world. Paul’s mention of “to the Jew first” is given not only to reflect Christ’s instructions to His disciples or to explain Paul’s own chronological practice. Nor is he demanding that the gospel be given to the Jew first as a principle of methodology. Rather, as was noted earlier, “to the Jew first” must be understood from a theological perspective. “Christ’s mission to fulfill God’s covenants with Israel has theological priority.”³⁸ It is a perspective that must pervade our missions perspective, as Cranfield explains: “Paul’s personal declaration is a pointer, often unheeded, to the Church’s continuing duty seriously and wholeheartedly to desire, and earnestly and faithfully to pray for, the salvation of the still unbelieving Jews.”³⁹ Salvation has been made available to all through the seed of Abraham and therefore Gentiles who have been grafted in should, with unceasing gratitude, strategically seek the salvation of those through whom this great gift has come. Though Israel has ethnically rejected her Messiah, God has not terminated His covenant promises with the Jews—as Romans 9–11 so clearly reveal. God’s plan for His covenant people remains unfinished. He has not abandoned His desire for them to be saved. And neither should we!

God’s Effectual Plan

The Scripture is abundantly clear; God eternally purposed to offer His gift of salvation to all the peoples of the world (2 Pet 3:9). The Hebrew Scriptures exhort God’s redeemed people to declare His mercy and grace⁴⁰ (e.g. Ps 96:3; 107:1–2; 146:10–12). From the very beginning, human instrumentality was a central feature of His plan for reaching the world.

The New Testament outlines a similar responsibility. As a result of God’s redemptive work, His redeemed are given the privileged position of being

³⁷ Mark Seifrid observes: “The apostle intends for Gentiles to look backward not only to Abraham and his faith, but also to Jerusalem and to recognize our present indebtedness to them” (“‘For the Jew First’: Paul’s *Nota Bene* for his Gentile Readers,” *To the Jew First: The Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, Darrell Bock & Mitch Glaser, eds. [Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008] 31). Earlier he notes: “The root is not dependent on us; we are dependent on the root (Rom 11:18)” (27).

³⁸ Brindle, 233.

³⁹ Cranfield, *Romans*, 251.

⁴⁰ Often translated “lovingkindness,” the Hebrew term *hesed* is frequently used of God’s acts of grace.

His emissaries. Paul's words to the Corinthians make this abundantly clear: "Now these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us..." (2 Cor 5:18, 20). It is clear that the redeemed of both Testaments are called upon to herald His redemptive offer. It is part of God's effectual plan.

While man occupies a place of honor and preeminence in this plan for reaching the world, he is not the only one assigned this responsibility. In addition to the human component, there are other elements that provide significant substructures to the redemptive overtures God makes to mankind.

Evidences

Though general revelation is limited in its role, Scripture reveals that it does have a place in reaching the world. God, in executing His sovereign plan of redemption, planted witnesses of His divine character and being into the physical creation of the universe. For example, the psalmist exclaims that the heavens incessantly declare the glory of God (Ps 19). Paul elaborates further: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so they are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). The powerful force of this non-verbal communication must not be undersold. God's divine attributes, power, and nature are "clearly seen" and even "understood." Charles Hodge writes: "God therefore has never left himself without a witness. His existence and perfections have ever been so manifested that his rational creatures are bound to acknowledge and worship him as the true and only God."⁴¹

The physical creation points vividly to a creator, designer, sustainer and grace-giver. John MacArthur observes: "God's divine nature of kindness and graciousness is reflected, as Paul told the Lystrans, in the 'rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness' (Acts 14:17)."⁴² John Murray adds: "From the things which are perceptible to the senses cognition of these invisible perfections is derived, and that thus a clear apprehension of God's perfections may be gained from his observable handiwork. Phenomena disclose the *noumena* of God's transcendent perfection and specific divinity."⁴³

It is not the universe only that reveals the divine; the innermost being of the human heart testifies to that as well. Paul declares that man's conscience

⁴¹ Charles A. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1909; reprint, 1983) 37.

⁴² John MacArthur, *Romans*, 79. Hendriksen explains it as an "exhibition of God's power, wisdom and goodness in the created universe" (*Romans*, 80).

⁴³ Murray, 40.

bears witness (Rom 2:15). Solomon records that God has planted eternity into the human heart (Eccl 3:11). The very presence of this impulse declares the existence of the Eternal One and is intended by Him to lead mankind to understand that, if he is to lay hold of it, it will have to be by means outside himself.

The same is true during Jesus' earthly ministry, where His miracles were designed to attest to His deity. In John 5:36, He says: "The very works that I do testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me." Later He adds: "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves" (John 14:11). At the close of his Gospel, John remarks that the signs Jesus performed were recorded "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31).⁴⁴

Evidences, such as the physical creation, mankind's innate knowledge of God's existence, and the miraculous possess evangelistic value and purpose. Though inadequate in and of themselves to generate saving faith, they are instruments used by the Spirit of God to evoke faith. They are designed by God to be a part of His plan for reaching the world.

Example

Another paramount element in the task of reaching the world is the power of a godly, exemplary life. Closely related to the purpose and value of evidences, the life of the believer is to reflect the reality of Christ's redemptive work. Jesus exhorts His listeners to "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Elders are instructed to "have a good reputation with those outside the church" (1 Tim 3:7). Peter admonishes wives to live in such a way before unbelieving husbands so that "they may be won without a word" (1 Pet 3:1-2).

Godly living provides powerful ammunition in every missionary's arsenal. A life of holiness makes the gospel visible, not just audible. Purity cleanses the human vessel, making it useful as an instrument in the hands of the Spirit.⁴⁵ Thus Paul exhorts the Philippians to "prove yourselves blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world" (2:15). Anything

⁴⁴ Even non-miraculous circumstances, such as the man born blind (John 9:1-3) or David's slaying of Goliath (1 Sam 17:46), are divinely orchestrated to demonstrate God's eternal power and divine nature and to eventuate in His glory.

⁴⁵ As Isaiah vividly illustrates, his sinful condition made him utterly useless (6:5-8) as God's missionary herald. In the vision of Ezekiel, the prophet was exhorted to eat the scroll, thereby picturing God's requirement to live according to His word and speak His message to the Israelites (2:8-3:4, 10).

that would dim their light or disfigure their (and by extension our) witness must be eradicated.⁴⁶

That is the essence of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians: "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ..., written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:2–3). These words were on the heart of Annie Johnson Flint when she penned this poem:

We are the only Bibles the careless world will read
 We are the sinner's gospel, We are the scoffer's creed.
 We are the Lord's last message Given in deed and word;
 What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?⁴⁷

The power of godliness in the life of the Christian cannot be overstated. In any missionary endeavor, it becomes the mortar between the bricks of God's Word. As D. L. Moody so aptly remarked, "A holy life will produce the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns; they just shine."⁴⁸

Evangelism

A third, and most obvious, element of reaching the world is evangelism (*ευαγγελιον* [*euangelion*])—"to announce Good News." The spectacle of God's creation, the incredible miracles of Jesus' earthly ministry, the holy life of a believer—all testify to the power of God. But they do not generate redemption or produce reconciliation between God and man. Rather, it is the Word of the cross that is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor 1:18). It is the Word that is the divine catalyst in the regenerative work of the Spirit (John 16:13; 2 Pet 16–21). But the act of proclamation does not begin with preaching. Rather, reaching the world with the gospel must first spring out of a heart of passion.

Passion

The necessity of having a passion for those who languish in spiritual darkness is first revealed in the nature and character of God. As noted earlier, unredeemed man does not seek God. Yet God has an unending desire for all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). He passionately pursues mankind, not wishing that

⁴⁶ That is David's point in Psalm 19. Having noted how physical creation (1–6) and special revelation (7–11) both testify with perfection the revelations of God, he sees the imperfections of his own life and cries out for mercy and forgiveness (12–14; cf. Ps 51; 1 Pet 2:12).

⁴⁷ Annie Johnson Flint, "The World's Bible," *Home Missions Monthly* 22 (January 1918), 3:66.

⁴⁸ William R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody* (New York: Revell, 1900), 368.

any should perish (2 Pet 3:9).⁴⁹ This is so incredibly foreign to other religions and so unique to Christianity. His passion was so strong that He was pleased to crush His own Son at Calvary (Isa 53:10). It was this same passion that motivated Christ to die for us—while we were “sinners” and “enemies” (Rom 5:8, 10). To have a heart after God’s own heart is to have a compassion for the lost.

This same passion is put on display in the life of Paul. In Romans 9–11, the apostle Paul opens his treatise on the history and future of his people with an impassioned description of his desire for Israel’s salvation. Noting the “great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart,” this apostle to the Gentiles makes a most incredible declaration: “For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (9:2–3).⁵⁰ His expression is hyperbolic, for he knew his salvation was secure (Rom 8:38–39); but the passion of his heart was genuine (Rom 9:1).⁵¹

Following one of the greatest passages on the sovereignty of God in salvation (Rom 9:6–33), the apostle continues in Rom 10:1, reiterating his strong desire for Israel’s salvation. Although regarded as a traitor (Acts 22:22; 25:24), Paul wanted his countrymen to know that he was not their enemy.⁵² Nor did his understanding of the sovereignty of God in bringing people to salvation undermine his immense yearning and passionate pleading for his kinsmen.⁵³ It was this passion that drove Paul to endure beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, imprisonment, hunger, and thirst (2 Cor 11:23–27). Paul, following the lead of his Savior (Luke 19:41; 13:34–5; cf. Phil 2:5–8), is a prime example that any

⁴⁹ The passion of the Father is reflected in Jesus’ parable of the banquet (Luke 14:16–24) where, after some invited guests turned down the invitation, the slaves were exhorted to invite still others and to persuasively urge them to attend.

⁵⁰ Cf. Moses’ similar perspective in Exod 32:32. John Phillips adds: “Paul’s soul-winning passion for men, especially for his own countrymen, was such that he could actually, soberly, honestly say that he would be willing to go to hell and be eternally damned, if that were possible, if by so doing it would lead his kinsmen to a saving knowledge of their Messiah” *Exploring Romans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 145.

⁵¹ The LXX employs the same term to describe the Messiah’s earthly ministry in Isa 53:4.

⁵² “From the position of an intensely bigoted devotee of Judaism, he had been transformed into a servant of Christ, whose intensest [*sic*] desire was for the salvation of his brethren” (Griffith Thomas, *Romans*, 246).

⁵³ Connecting 10:1 with chapter 9, Murray keenly notes: “Here we have a lesson of profound import. In the preceding chapter the emphasis is upon the sovereign and determinative will of God in the differentiation that exists among men.... But this differentiation is God’s action and prerogative, not man’s. And, because so, our attitude to men is not to be governed by God’s secret counsel concerning them. It is this lesson and the distinction involved that are so eloquently inscribed on the apostle’s passion for the salvation of his kinsmen. We violate the order of human thought and trespass the boundary between God’s prerogative and man’s when the truth of God’s sovereign counsel constrains despair or abandonment of concern for the eternal interests of men” (*Romans*, 47).

proclamation of the gospel without a passion for the lost has little impact. Thus the preaching of the good news must be fueled by an overflowing passion for setting captives free (cf. Isa 61:1).⁵⁴

Prayer

In all missionary endeavors, prayer follows closely on the heels of passion. Every spiritual desire and pursuit must eventuate in prayer.⁵⁵ Where there is no prayer, it is doubtful that there is any passion. Knowing this, Paul adds intercessory prayer to his treatise on proclaiming the gospel (Rom 10:1). Because of his intense passion and desire, he is driven to his knees in prayer for the salvation of his kinsmen.

In John 15:16, Jesus inextricably connects prayer with missionary endeavors: “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.” In Eph 6:10–18, the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” is wielded by prayer.⁵⁶

Elsewhere, Paul reiterates this vital link between prayer and evangelism. His exhortations in 1 Timothy 2—“that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men” (vv 1–2) and for “men in every place to pray” (2:8)—provide contextual bookends to his desire for all men to come to saving faith (2:4–7).⁵⁷

Prayer throughout the epistles is a precursor to and catalyst for effectively reaching the world. Prayer, like passion, is not missions; rather, it is antecedent to and rudimentary to the work of missions. A. B. Simpson understood this relationship between prayer and passion: “Put in my heart the woe; put in my feet the go.”⁵⁸ Prayer wraps the passion and desire of the missionary’s heart within the full acknowledgement that God is sovereign in salvation. As Piper notes: “We really are totally ineffective as missionaries in

⁵⁴ Piper adds: “Missions is not a recruitment project for God’s labor force. It is a liberation project from the heavy burdens and hard yokes of other gods (Matt. 11:28–30)” (*Let the Nations be Glad*, 55).

⁵⁵ “*Deesis* (prayer) conveys the idea of pleading and entreaty, of persistent petition to God” (MacArthur, *Romans 1–8*, 57).

⁵⁶ Verse 18 does not begin a new sentence. It begins with the preposition *διὰ*, showing the vital connection with the believer’s armor. “Prayer is not merely another godly weapon, as important as those weapons are.... Prayer is the very spiritual air that the soldier of Christ breathes. It is the all-pervasive strategy in which warfare is fought” John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 376–77). Piper adds: “Prayer is communication with headquarters by which the weapons of war are deployed according to the will of God” (*Let the Nations Be Glad*, 69).

⁵⁷ The same connection is made in Col 4:2.

⁵⁸ Wentworth Pike, *Principles of Effective Prayer* (Three Hills, Alberta: Prairie Press, 1983), 177.

ourselves.... So, he [God] promises to do for us and through us what we can't do in and of ourselves."⁵⁹

Proclamation

While passion and prayer are foundational to any effective gospel outreach, they are only forerunners. Any missionary endeavor requires proclamation, the preaching of the Word. The very mention of the concept connotes instrumentality. That is Paul's point in Romans 10. In a series of rhetorical questions, he lays out the essence of biblical missions: "How then will they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14–15a).

Proclamation begins with a herald, someone who is sent on a mission to deliver a message.⁶⁰ Being sent is an essential element of biblical missions. The apostle John, writing to Gaius regarding missionaries who had visited his church, admonishes him: "You will do well to *send them on their way* in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from Gentiles. Therefore we *ought* to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth" (3 John 6–8; emphasis mine). Steller observes: "This phrase, 'to send on one's way,' occurs nine times in the New Testament,⁶¹ and each one occurs in a missionary context."⁶² Sending is not only a church's obligation; it is the life-blood of every healthy church and foundational to fulfilling the Great Commission.

The apostle Paul was fully cognizant of that fact. From the day of his conversion (Acts 9), he understood the obligation of the one who is sent to deliver the message. He realized that people will not hear without a preacher. That is why the apostle Paul was so driven to preach the gospel. He knew that the powerful message of holy living and the impact of miraculous deeds was inadequate to save. He knew that all of creation incessantly declares the glory and attributes of God, but that such knowledge was inadequate to save; it was

⁵⁹ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 79.

⁶⁰ The Old Testament recounts how many of the Hebrew prophets were called and commissioned, such as Moses (Exod 3–4), Samuel (1 Sam 3), Isaiah (Isa 6), Jeremiah (Jer 1), and Ezekiel (Ezek 1–3). The experience of John the Baptist (Luke 1:13–17) and Paul and Barnabas was similar (Acts 13:1–4). Quite appropriately, the NT term for apostle (αποστολλος [*apostolos*]) means "sent one." At other times, God's servants were "sent out" without a formal "call" as the result of judgment, persecution and scattering (cf. Acts 8:4, 5; 11:19–21), including Daniel or Aquila and Priscilla. Conversely, false prophets are often described as lacking a divine commission (Jer 14:14, 15; 23:21; 28:15; Ezek 13:6).

⁶¹ Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 16:6, 11; 2 Cor 1:16; Titus 3:13; 3 John 6.

⁶² Tom Steller, "Afterword: The Supremacy of God in Going and Sending," in *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 262.

only able to condemn.⁶³ Thus Paul cries out, “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16).⁶⁴ He was driven to preach because he knew the proclamation of the Good News was the only means to salvation (1 Cor 1:16–21). Without following through on this divine mandate, Paul stood under God’s judgment.⁶⁵

God’s Exclusive Power

The Scriptures

Scripture leaves no doubt as to the source of power for salvation. It is centered in the Word of the cross. First Corinthians 1:18 so explicitly states: “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Because man is incapable of changing himself (Isa 29:13–14), regeneration can come only through the power of God’s Word.

Reaching the world with the gospel requires that the missionary exude a tenacious, unshakable confidence in God’s Word. Carl F. H. Henry has rightly observed: “No Christian movement can impact society if its leaders are ignorant of or continually undermining the veracity of and applicability of its charter documents.”⁶⁶ Any attempt to accomplish the Great Commission without an unequivocal and irrevocable commitment to announce God’s instructions and message is to violate the divine trust and responsibility given to the messenger. It is destined to utter failure.⁶⁷

The words of the psalmist reinforce the divine power for salvation inherent in the Scriptures. Among the six descriptions of the sufficiency of God’s Word, David begins: “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul”

⁶³ Commenting on Rom 1:20, Moo observes: “That Paul teaches the reality of a revelation of God in nature to all people, this text makes clear. But it is equally obvious that this revelation is universally rejected, as people turn from knowledge of God to gods of their own making (cf. vv.22ff.)” (Moo, *Romans 1–8*, 101). Piper adds: “Natural revelation is not getting through. Honor and thanks to God are not welling up in the hearts of the peoples when they see his glory manifest in nature.... That’s why missions is necessary” (*Let the Nations Be Glad*, 230).

⁶⁴ Paul’s sense of obligation and urgency was not unlike Jeremiah’s (Jer 20:9).

⁶⁵ Cf. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 301.

⁶⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, “The Renewal of Theological Education,” *Vocatio* (Summer 1989), 4.

⁶⁷ The account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) vividly illustrates the power and preeminence of the Word—“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 19:31). Jesus’ description of the missionary endeavors of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:15) also reinforces this profound, unique role assigned to the Word.

(Ps 19:7a). Only the Word is capable of converting and transforming the soul; it is the only means through which conversion can take place.⁶⁸

The Spirit

The second source of power in missions is derived from the Holy Spirit. He is the catalyst, infusing the preached Word with divine power. Nowhere is that truth more evident than in Eph 6:17, where the “sword of the Spirit” is identified as “the word of God.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, Paul’s use of the Greek word *ῥημα* (*rhema*) instead of his usual *λογος* (*logos*) suggests that this power of the Spirit extends not just to the written Word but also to the proclamation of the Word as well. Peter O’Brien explains:

This sword of the Spirit is identified with “the word of God,” a term which in Paul often signifies the gospel. However, he normally uses *logos* (“word”) instead of *rhema*, which appears here. The two terms are often interchangeable, but the latter tends to emphasize the word as spoken or proclaimed (as in 5:26). If this distinction holds here, then Paul is referring to the gospel (cf. Rom 10:17), but stressing the actual speaking forth of the message, which is given its penetration and power by the Spirit.⁷⁰

That the Word of God and the Spirit of God go hand in hand is reiterated in John 16:13: “But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for *He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak*” (emphasis mine). The Word and the Holy Spirit are inextricably linked. Consequently, the Word of God without the Spirit of God is powerless, and the Spirit of God without the Word of God is speechless! The two always work in concert with one another.⁷¹

With the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, the missionary’s arsenal is fully supplied. Nothing else is needed for the task of reaching the world. The missionary is endowed with everything that Christ had during His earthly ministry. Empowered with the Word and the Spirit, the believer has been granted “everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge

⁶⁸ And remarkably, it comes with a guarantee—it will not return empty (Isa 55:10–11).

⁶⁹ As Peter O’Brien argues, the phrase, “of the Spirit,” is best understood as a genitive of source, “indicating that the Spirit makes the sword powerful and effective, giving to it its cutting edge (cf. Heb. 4:12)” (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC, ed. D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999] 481–82).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 482.

⁷¹ The role of the Spirit in regeneration is also evidenced elsewhere in the NT (e.g. Gal 3:3; Titus 3:5; John 3:5; 6:63; 16:8).

of him" (2 Pet 1:3). Like an arrow launched from a strong hand bears within itself the strength of the archer long after it has left the bow, the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit, will never fail to hit its mark; it is promised perpetual vitality.⁷² It cannot be defeated (Isa 40:8). "Any victory that is being won today either at home or abroad is the result of the wielding of this sword."⁷³

God's End Product

As crucial as an impassioned heart for the salvation of the enemies of the cross might be, there is an even greater motivation that must undergird this desire to bring the Good News to the world. The whole purpose of creation is to put the glory of God on display. Al Mohler asserts: "The most important dimension of any vision for world missions is a passion to glorify God.... The impulse of the missionary conviction is drawn from the assurance that God saves sinners, and that He is glorifying Himself by creating a new people through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ."⁷⁴

Worship must be the foundation and supreme crown of any missionary endeavor—to see God's glory put on display, most notably in the redemption of mankind. It is the epitome of missions, the capstone of God's global agenda. Reaching the world attains its ultimate triumph in bringing God glory and worshiping Him. As Piper notes, "When every knee bows at the name of Jesus, it will be 'to the glory of God the Father' (Phil 2:10–11)."⁷⁵ Redemption's inaugural purpose and final achievement is that we should be "to the praise of His glory" (Eph 1:6, 12, 14).

Conclusion—God's Every-Person Plea

The central element of Christianity is the proclamation of the gospel. Preaching the Good News is the critical component of the Great Commission and sits at the very core of the every believer's responsibility. Unless the gospel is shared verbally, it is impossible "to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to prisoners" (Isa 61:1). Serving as an ambassador of reconciliation (2

⁷² S. R. Hirsch, *The Psalms* (New York: Scribner's Publishing, 1966), 388.

⁷³ William Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 280.

⁷⁴ In AlbertMohler.com Blog, <http://albertmohler.com/2009/07/30/christian-missions-in-the-third-millennium/> (accessed on 1 February 2011), 1.

⁷⁵ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 58. Later, commenting on Rom 2:24, he observes: "Missions exists because *worship* doesn't. The ultimate issues addressed by missions is that God's glory is dishonored among the peoples of the world.... The infinite, all-glorious Creator of the universe, by whom and for whom all things exist—who holds every person's life in being at every moment (Acts 17:25)—is disregarded, disbelieved, disobeyed, and dishonored among the peoples of the world. That is the ultimate reason for missions" (230, 231).

Cor 5:18–19) in God's kingdom requires proclaiming the Good News to those who reside in the kingdom of darkness.

But the freedom to carry out this mandate is not always granted. Fearing terrorist retaliation, governments around the world are increasingly restricting this central feature and obligation of the Christian faith. In numerous countries, even those outside the Islamic world, public evangelism is strictly forbidden. In Greece, for example, any attempt to proselytize is met with arrest and imprisonment. Being instrumental in someone's conversion is a capital crime. Jordan trumpets its freedom of worship, but does not permit its own Muslim Background Believers, including those from any other country, to attend the local evangelical seminary. Russia's parliament has made attempts recently to pass legislation that would restrict evangelism outside the walls of the church.⁷⁶

And America may not be far behind! A growing chorus of individuals in American government, including our President and Secretary of State, has begun substituting the phrase "freedom of worship" for "freedom of religion." At first blush, this change of terminology may seem innocuous. It is not! "Freedom of worship" restricts one's religious activities to the church building, whereas the "freedom of religion" allows for the public proclamation and evangelism. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, "the new language signals concrete policy implications for religious freedom because *freedom of worship* is 'a much narrower view' of religious liberties."⁷⁷ Public preaching and open-air evangelism is protected by the principles of the First Amendment. But this is much more than a First Amendment, freedom of speech issue. This is a biblical issue! Freedom to publicly declare God's Word is at stake.

The apostle Paul remarked: "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel," to which Doug Moo insightfully adds:

It is vital if we are to understand Paul's gospel and his urgency in preaching it to realize that natural revelation leads not to salvation but to the demonstration that God's condemnation is just: people are "without excuse." That verdict stands over the people we meet every day just as much as over the people Paul rubbed shoulders with in the

⁷⁶ UN Declaration of Human Rights Article 18 "protects 'teaching, practice, worship and observance,' but overtly and explicitly fails to protect public preaching. The UN's 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance uses the same approach on matters of religion. Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms allows evangelism to be banned to protect 'public order'" (Craig L. Parshall, "Tampering with Freedom of Religion," *Israel My Glory* [November/December 2010], 31).

⁷⁷ Parshall, 27 (emphasis his).

first century, and our urgency in communicating the gospel should be as great as Paul's.⁷⁸

The public proclamation of the gospel is in the DNA of Christ's mandate to every believer. Reaching the world is dependent on it. The Great Commission cannot be obeyed without it.

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (Isa 6:8).

⁷⁸ Moo, *Romans 1–8*, 101.