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C0831 – September 17, 2008 – Doctrine Of Missions - Part 6

Now we could say a lot about missions in the NT. One author said that the NT does not so much talk about missions as it is a mission's document.ⁱ Missions permeates virtually every page of the NT. If we start analyzing the Gospels of the NT you immediately run into John the Baptist, a confrontational missionary and the forerunner of the Messiah. The Gospels are still a part of Israel's History and they are operating under the Old Covenant. In Matt 3 he preached a baptism of repentance to the nation Israel in preparation for the coming Messiah and warned them of the wrath to come. His words were strong, vehement and directed solely to Israel as far as we can tell. He preached in Judea and in the Jericho region where he was baptizing.

Then came Jesus the Messiah in Matt 4 and he also preached a baptism of repentance to the nation Israel in preparation for the coming kingdom. But He ministered not in Judea but up in the Galilee region where Jews and Gentiles lived. In this region he interacted with a Roman centurion in Capernaum (Matt 10). At another time He passed through Samaria and interacted with the Samaritan woman at the well and went on to spend two days in Sychar (John 4). And though in his early ministry he told the twelve to go "only to the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-15) when the nation Israel had rejected Him He died a substitutionary death for all men and gave His apostles the Great Commission. So let's turn to Matt 28:19 to see this commission. You can see a clear contrast between John the Baptist and Jesus in that Jesus reached out beyond Jewish people. I think this was a set up for the Book of Acts, He planted seeds in those regions and in doing so He crossed over racial and cultural barriers to show his apostles what they must do in the future. He gave them an example of how to walk. So we come to Matt 28, verse 19, here's the commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of

all the nations...” and he goes on to exclaim the two-fold means of how to make disciples. A few words about this verse. This is one of the greatest missionary verses in all Scripture, but there’s a shift in method here. Before the nations were to “come to” Israel but now the apostles are to “go to” the nations. So this is looking forward to Acts 2ff. And verse 20 assures them they are not alone in this endeavor. But notice v 19, the English translation makes it sound like “Go” is the command but actually “make disciples” is the command. So you’re not fulfilling the Great Commission just by preaching the gospel. You fulfill the Great Commission only when you are making disciples and that takes place by baptizing believers and teaching them. The “go” is not a command at all in this passage, it’s a passive participle meaning “having gone,” something like, when you find yourself having gone or been sent out make disciples. This is closely related to what’s happening in Acts. Who gets the credit for going out of Jerusalem? It’s not the native Hebrew apostles or the Hellenistic Jews but the Holy Spirit. They are not just jumping at the chance of moving out to Judea or Samaria or the remotest parts of the earth. They are quite happy at home so they have to get forced out of Jerusalem by the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is the one who gets the credit. So that’s why this participle “go” is in the passive, it’s sort of a prophecy that you’re going to find yourself going out and when you do make disciples but don’t worry, I’m going to be with you, I’m going to help you in this endeavor. Now turn to Mark 16:15, here’s Mark’s account of the Great Commission. “And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” Again, you have the same structure, the command is not “go” it’s “preach.” The “go” is another attendant circumstance, they’re going to find themselves out there in the world and when they do they are supposed to “preach the gospel.” Watch this carefully because in both the Matt record and the Mark record you want to pick up on the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Both are there, both Matthew and Mark capture this in the syntax, that God is going to sovereignly set up the circumstances and when they find themselves having gone their responsibility is to preach. Both are essential, neither is excluded. God has decreed human involvement in getting the message out, we have a responsibility. People are not just going to come to Christ if we all just sit on the couch. We have the responsibility to “preach the gospel.” And he goes on in v 16 to discuss how He’s going to be with them in the Book of Acts and so forth. Now turn to Luke’s account, Luke 24:45, here’s the man who wrote the two-volume work of Luke-Acts, he was a doctor, a man who loved chronology,

liked to get everything in its proper order, he attached a lot of value to the sequence of history and here we are in the last chapter, the last days of Christ's life on earth and he records the Great Commission, "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," up to this point they didn't understand when He talked about dying and so forth so just before He departs He makes sure they understand this critical information, v 46, "He said to them, "Thus it is written," so what follows is fulfillment of prophecy, "that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day," alright there's the universal substitutionary blood atonement and the resurrection, the new content of the gospel then and for all time, "and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." Notice here there's something a little different, there's nothing about going out, it's much more certain, this message *quote*, "would be proclaimed." And the starting point, geographically, is Jerusalem but it's going to go out to "all the nations" from there, "You are witnesses of these things." There's the historical precondition, it happened in history if it didn't just forget it, eye witness testimony, real history is crucial to the Christian faith. "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." See, there's the help again, you're not going to be alone in this work. This moves into Luke's second volume, so let's turn there, Acts 1:8, you've seen this before and you're seeing this unfold in the Book of Acts but it never hurts to see it again. What we're doing is just putting all the passages that record the Great Commission together and when you do that the picture emerges that on one hand you have the sovereignty of God; He's going to set up the circumstances so they are out there, He's going to provide the Holy Spirit, He's going to be with them but on the other hand man is responsible, man is to preach the gospel, man is to make disciples. And so we see the same thing in Acts 1:8, theme verse of the book we might add, "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;" now that's God's side, they're not going to do anything to get this, God is just going to sovereignly bestow the Spirit on them, same truth is taught in v 5, "you will be baptized," there's no cooperation here by man. This is a work of God and then in v 8 He declares their responsibility "and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." But it's given with a ring of absolute certainty to it. "you will be my witnesses." So ultimately, in the final analysis God is going to set it all up through the Book of Acts and that's why I've called it the Acts of the

Holy Spirit. You might call it the Acts of God the Holy Spirit or the Acts of God the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ or something similar but the point is that the primary actor is God. The apostles are secondary. Both are essential, both are involved, we don't want to diminish the importance of either side but God takes the foremost role. This is always the case. For example, God provides salvation for all in His Son Jesus Christ, God sends the Spirit to his believers, God providentially arranges the circumstances in their life and only then is man responsible to be a witness, preach the gospel and make disciples. God has decreed to use men in His program. So Universal Missions Rests Upon the Universal Great Commission. So then I take it that we are to "offer" the gospel to all men or to "invite" men to salvation. I know of only one theologian who said the gospel was not an offer or an invitation. I mean to point out Dr Gordon Clark who in other areas is worthy to be read but in this I think he falters. Even many of his Calvinist friends would disagree with him here. There is a genuine offer of salvation implicit in the gospel. I think to this almost everyone can agree no matter their theological persuasion.

Before we move to the Book of Acts because we don't draw doctrine from Acts, you can use it to illustrate but we want to go to the epistles to get our doctrine. Having emphasized both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in this endeavor we want to look at some of the means involved. What means does God use to bring people to Christ? See, some people state God's sovereignty in such a way that all or most human means are excluded. For example, take William Carey, the father of the modern missionary movement in the English speaking world. He was a Calvinist but not in an extreme sense because he struggled with the way extreme Calvinists taught sovereignty. What he was struggling with was the idea that sovereignty was simple and symmetrical. That's a view called simple symmetrical sovereignty, it just means God is sovereign over good and evil in the same way. Dr Pink, Dr Gill, John Owen and others have taught this. It's a very heavy-handed determinism. And when Carey encountered this over the course of time he said it nurtured passivity, laziness and carelessness. They just sat around and waited for God to do something. But as he studied the word of God he saw that Christians play a role in bringing men to Christ. And that we are responsible to fulfill these roles. And because of this Carey wanted to go out to the heathen. He wanted to preach the gospel to them. And so he came before the Baptist Ministers' Association and said, "I want to

go out to the heathen,” and his senior colleague, John Ryland told him *quote*, “Young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine.”ⁱⁱ Do you feel the heavy handed view of sovereignty? Ryland and other extreme Calvinists thought that the only thing man could do is pray for the heathen. I get a lot of Christians who think the same thing today. Maybe they’re having a problem with someone in their family or a friend and they conclude, “Well, all you can do is pray.” That is not true, there is more that can and should be done. Not to downplay prayer. Prayer is essential, turn to Luke 10:2. Prayer is one of the means God has decreed to bring His plan to pass. Here’s another of the great missionary texts. “And He was saying to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

Prayer is something we can and should do but it is not all we can do. Men must also be sent out. There is praying and there is going and preaching. All are means God uses.

So turn to Rom 10 to see these “means” developed, here is what many title the “great missionary chapter.” Here we find some of the means God decreed. In other words, just because there are human means does not mean God is not sovereign because God in fact has sovereignly decreed the human means to begin with. And He works in terms of His decree, a decree that includes human responsibilities. Now, without going into all the details of this passage that deals with the nation Israel in the latter days, look at v 14, Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions all requiring a negative answer. “How then will they call on 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?¹⁵How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!” All these questions demand the same answer, “They can’t.”

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There is a logical progression to get from one end of this equation to the other and Paul is outlining five means to get to the final result. So start in v 15 and let's work our way backward to get the sequence. This is basically an outline of Paul's life! He witnessed this sequence over and over and over. What's the first thing according to v 15 that has to take place? Someone has to be sent. What's second, the person sent has to preach. What's third, back in v 14, the audience has to hear. Then the fourth thing, they can believe. And finally the fifth thing, they can call on him and then if we look back up to v 13 we see if they do call on Him they will be saved. So at least five means are given here. 1) Sending, 2) Preaching, 3) Hearing, 4) Believing at which point they are Justified and 5) Calling at which point they are Saved. There's a distinction there as up in Rom 10:9-10, justification and salvation are not the same in Romans (cf 5:9). Now, a simple question: Is prayer the only thing we can do? No, of course not, God has told us to send people, and notice, they are to be sent out, trained people are to be sent out, missions is not a playground for irresponsible people who don't want to work, just want to live the easy life. Missions is hard work as we'll see. So the men who are sent out need to have a good work ethic and they need to be well-trained, they need to be able to pass doctrinal and theological examinations issued by a church's elder board, "Yes, tests," you have got to know if they are able to articulate the Christian faith or not. The church has a responsibility in this. If they can't articulate Christianity then you don't send them out. It's that simple. All the zeal in the world will not make up for lack of training. Then Paul says after they are sent they have to preach the gospel, if they don't preach the gospel then people can't hear the gospel and if they don't hear the gospel they can't believe the gospel. It's that simple. There are means involved.

For some more means turn to James 1:18. This will repeat in part what we just read but it's worth it. Sometimes you get people who have this view of sovereignty where God regenerates people independent of the word of God. God just zaps them while they're watching Oprah or something. Now it's strange to claim that God works independent of His word since the word is His commanding instrument. He always works through His word not independently of it but nevertheless people who misconstrue God's sovereignty get pushed into the impossible position that God regenerates independent of His word. For some reason we're deprecating God's sovereign grace or something. I'm not deprecating anything, I'm just following the word rather than an impossible theological system. In James 1:18 what do we read,

“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.” Now clearly God is the author of regeneration in this verse, “He brings us forth...” we’re not denying that. Regeneration is solely a work of God. But what’s the means here? “by the word of truth.” That’s a dative of instrument. It’s saying God uses the word of truth to regenerate. He doesn’t work independently of it. It’s the primary instrument. And who’s going to preach the word of truth? God has given that responsibility to us, to humans, angels in the Tribulation, but look, these are responsible agents doing this. That’s the human side of this. It’s very simple what James is saying. His word is preached by man and God uses that to regenerate. Or He could just use the Scriptures. A person can sit down and be reading the Scriptures and be regenerated. He could be sitting there thinking about some Scripture he read or heard but in any case the word of God is a part of the equation. It has to be a part. NO one was ever regenerated apart from the word of God.

Turn to John 1:12. Here’s another one that emphasizes God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. And this time I want to go through the verse piece by piece and ask yourself at each juncture whether what we read is God’s side or man’s side. “But as many as received Him,” human or divine side? Human, humans do the receiving. “to them He gave the right to become children of God,” human side or divine side? Divine. He gives. “*even* to those who believe in His name,” human side or divine side? Who does the believing? Man. “to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Human or divine? Who is the author of our regeneration? God clearly, we are born of God. So what is John saying? That God regenerates those humans who believe. This is not rocket science. Now of course someone will say, “Oh, but you left something out. Why does a person believe?” Turn to Eph 2:8-9. They will say that a person only believes because God gives them the gift of faith. “God believes for them.” That’s what they always say. But that’s not what the Bible teaches, that is an *a priori* deduction. I am not interested in *a priori* deductive systems. Now some people say Eph 2:8 teaches that faith is the gift of God. And therefore it is not really man who believes but God gives man the faith. Now, in that verse, “For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...” The argument is that faith is the gift. But the problem with that is that “faith” is feminine and the demonstrative pronoun “that” is neuter. Neuter and feminine do not go together. It’s

impossible in the Greek. The final word on Eph 2:8-9 the gift of God is the whole package of salvation, the only sense in which faith is a gift of God is in that God arranged faith to be the channel through which He saves. God designed salvation to be imparted through the means of human faith. So this is not answering the issue of “How does a person believe?” or “Why does person A believe and person B reject? If faith were the gift of God in the sense that extreme Calvinists state then the Scriptures could not say that “Abraham believed” it would have to say God believed for Abraham. Nor could Paul tell the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved,” for it would mean that Paul was commanding God to believe for him since he would or could not.

Now the solution just offered to resolve man’s depraved dilemma, is contrary to the Scriptures and overly simplistic, but they do lure the minds of many because they do proffer a solution, they do satisfy the longings of man to have it *quote* “all figured out.” I, however, along with many others, say that things are simply not that simple and that other operations of God are involved in bringing a man to faith. Turn to John 16. This is in the midst of the Upper Room Discourse started back in chapter 13. The Gospel of John is really about “life” and that Jesus Christ is “life” and in Him is “life.” It’s an exploration of the “life” concept. Now, who is Jesus speaking to here? Anyone know? The eleven, Judas the Iscariot has already departed. And so Jesus is speaking to Peter and John and Matthew and so forth, the remaining apostles and he says in verse 8, “And He, when He comes,” who’s He? The Helper from v 7 who is the Holy Spirit, when is the Holy Spirit going to come? On the day of Pentecost, Jesus said in the Great Commission He was going to be with them, they would not be alone in this, the Holy Spirit would be sent, He’s there Helper, “He, when He comes will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; ⁹concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; ¹¹and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.” So it’s a three-fold ministry of the Holy Spirit, He’s going to convict the world on three issues. The Greek word for “convict,” *elegcho* means “to expose, to bring to light.” See, men suppress the truth of sin, they try to give another explanation for sin and evil and suffering in our world, “I’m not responsible for it. Hey, it’s just there, I’m just a victim of my environment, don’t blame me.” This has been going on since the beginning of time. When Adam sinned and they were hiding and God comes looking for

them, "Where are you Adam?" And finally they get face to face and God says, "Did you eat the fruit?" And what was Adam's response? Anyone remember? "It was this woman you gave me. See, it's your fault God, don't blame me, if You hadn't given me this woman I'd be alright." See how he's claiming the victim mentality. That's suppression of personal sin, personal responsibility. The Holy Spirit convicts of that. He exposes their suppression of sin. He breaks through all the crap. Second thing He convicts of and they suppress is the truth of righteousness. Unbelievers are busy attacking the nature of God, what do you read if you go back to the Greeks and the Romans? Mythology, the gods and goddesses, they're good and evil, they're not righteous, so they create gods in their own image, gods who are just like men, gods who lie, fight and fornicate. Why are men doing this? We can't have a righteous God because then we know we're in trouble with Him so we just reduce God so he's like us. Now I'm comfortable again. Now I can continue in my rebellion. So John says the Spirit of God is going to expose this. There is a righteous God with whom we have to do and He never compromises His character. And third, God the Holy Spirit will convict them of judgment, they suppress the truth of judgment, somehow He's got to cut through that, they keep putting that off, "all continues as it has since the beginning," there are no major disturbances, we just go on and on building the kingdom of man, no interferences. No, see, they forget their history here, very cleverly they re-write their history so they can all join in on this collective amnesia project to erase God's work in history, that God has intervened in history and judged and that He will intervene once again, this time on a grander scale and He will judge, history does not just go on and on and on. Now, how is the Spirit of God going to expose the world going to convict them of sin, righteousness and judgment, how is he going to expose what they've suppressed? The preaching of the word of God. Turn to Acts 17, we're jumping a little ahead here but this is Paul at Athens. We've used this before as a model apologetic but I just want you to see how Paul does this with Gentiles. In v 22 Paul begins the indictment. What are the charges in v 22, 23 and 29? If you could sum up those verses what word would you use? Idolatry. What's idolatry? It's sin. So here's our first element from John 16. The Holy Spirit will convict of sin. So Paul preaches it. What's he indicting them on in v 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28? That series of verses, what's the subject? Who God is, He's made Himself known to you, you know Him, why are you worshipping idols, things you made with your own hands, why are you suppressing this righteous God, you think you're going to get away with it, c'mon, don't be foolish, you know Him very

well. So there's our second element from John 16, the Holy Spirit will convict of righteousness. And then the indictment comes to a head in v 31 what's the key truth there. That God's going to judge on a particular day, already set from time immemorial, and what's the standard here? His righteousness which you guys have not met. So get with the program, it's time to repent, have a change of mind. So there's your three fold-ministry of the Holy Spirit right there in Paul's missions to these people. Paul says, "Hey, I know what the Spirit is up to so I'm going to gear my message to His program because I know how He works." This is not coming out of Paul's brilliance, this is coming out of Paul's reverence for the word of God. And he knows that the Holy Spirit carries out this ministry when the word of God is preached, so Paul says to himself, "My responsibility is to preach these truths and through preaching them the Holy Spirit will convict these people." Did he get some conversions? Some, not many, verse 34, some believed. Did Paul do something wrong. No, not at all. Just because the word is preached, just because the Spirit convicts does not guarantee a person will believe. It's like one of my seminary professors told me, look, you can get four different responses when you preach the word; 1) no hearing, these are you're people who are asleep, konked out, trust me, we have some of those, week in week out people come here to get a nap, they're not interested in the word of God, I don't know why they are here, the bed is more comfortable. 2) hear but are not convicted. Why? Because they've so hardened themselves, like Pharaoh they have rejected the word, rejected the word, rejected the word to the point that they are so hard it wouldn't matter if they're whole family resurrected they wouldn't believe, they are just there in church to keep the pew warm. 3) Hear and are convicted but reject, the word gets to them but they quickly forget it, they walk out without any change of mind, just go on with life. And 4) hear, get convicted and respond positively, they believe. Now, Jesus got those four responses, Peter got those four responses, Philip got those four responses, Paul got those four responses. I get those four responses. You get those four responses. Why do some people respond positively and others don't? I don't know. God is at work, God is doing something with people. It's our job to pray, send and preach, if you don't do that people can't hear, be convicted and believe. That's the simple truth.

So let's see how this worked in the Book of Acts. Let's see how the apostles did in early Acts. Acts is undoubtedly the greatest record of missions in the NT. It records the three stage process of the witness going out. First the

apostles remained at Jerusalem, chapters 2-7. In chapter 8:1 the persecution that resulted from Stephen's martyrdom scattered the church. And the verse tells us they were "scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." It is evident that the apostles who first heard the Great Commission were in no hurry to fulfill it! The job was therefore left to the Hellenistic Jews who had seen the greater implications of the cross; it was not just for Israel it was for all nations. The apostles had been told this but it is apparent that they were not responding well to this truth. There was a hesitancy to cross cultural boundaries despite the fact that Jesus had paved the way in the gospels by evangelizing a Gentile centurion and a Samaritan city. So the Hellenists were the ones who went out in connection with the persecution of Stephen, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem.

Now, let's pause here for a minute, Acts 2-7 is an interesting case study because it parallels in many ways how your theology affects missions. We've spoken about limited atonement, sometimes called definite or particular atonement, the idea that Christ only died for a particular group of men not all men. I mentioned John Ryland telling William Carey, "Look when God wants to convert the heathen He'll do it without your help." Now what is the difference between that and the attitude of the apostles in Acts 2-7? What would you say is the theology of the apostles? Their message is confined to Israel. They're not going out. In a way they have a theology that mirrors particular atonement; somehow Jesus the Messiah is for Israel but not for everyone else. If their theology made room for the Samaritans and Gentiles wouldn't they be going out to them? See, you can tell they haven't warmed up to that idea. This is very interesting because it shows that there is a definite link between your theology and missions. If you in any way limit what Christ did on the cross you will tend to limit missions. I'm preparing you for something later in church history that we'll come to.

Let's just stop here, what we're saying tonight is that your theology greatly affects your missions, they're linked like every other truth in Scripture, knitted together and however you view sovereignty and human responsibility that is at work under the carpet of all these issues. We can be very hard toward the heathen, very cursory, very unconcerned if we get this wrong because when you turn to the word of God you find there are many things God has sovereignly decreed to be our responsibility; praying, sending, preaching, listening and believing. But there are things God does too; He

provided His Son to die on the cross for our sins, He sets up the circumstances in our lives to minister to others, He sent His Spirit to be with us, to aid us, He convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment, He regenerates and so forth. But if your theology does not admit the human responsibilities outlined in Scripture then you're going to have a weak doctrine of missions, a hesitancy toward going out, an impotence in this area.

ⁱ George N. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*.

ⁱⁱ Kane, *Concise Theology*, 85.

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