

UNPACKING THE CONCEPT OF MISSION

By Bob Young

From time to time I read a statement that is so power-packed and full of meaning and application that I have to spend more time than normal grasping the ideas, unpacking, processing, thinking. Such is the quote I recently shared from Gailyn VanRheenen.

“Missions is the lifeblood of the church, the means by which searchers come to know God and learn to participate in His mission. The church must not be understood merely as a human institution but as the result of mission or sending that begins with God.” --Gailyn VanRheenen

When I shared this quote on my Facebook page, it brought only five responses and one share! Why? Perhaps people do not read Facebook to be challenged and thus they pass over such items. Perhaps the power of the quote was not understood. Perhaps the quote was understood and was too painful to accept and respond.

This brief article is another attempt to share something important! Briefly, I want to unpack four major ideas from the two sentences!

Mission work is the lifeblood of the church...

The life of the church, the future of the church, depends on the church's commitment to and involvement in effective mission work. The reference to the church is not to a local congregation but to the corporate, universal church. However, what VanRheenen says about the church universal is also true of the local church. Fulfilling God's mission for the church will bring ever-increasing life to the church. Failing to fulfill God's mission will eventually result in death. All would do well to ask about and seriously evaluate the current progress of the church around the world.

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The mission work that is the lifeblood of the church must be defined and understood. The mission work that is the lifeblood of the church helps searchers come to know God. Central to mission work is the proclamation of the Good News to those who are searching. Mission work that does not bring searchers to a knowledge of God (in a saving relationship) fails to bring life and instead results in spiritual eternal death. The mission work being described not only brings searchers to a knowledge of God, it also teaches new believers how they can participate in the mission work of God. This mission enables and empowers believers around the world to participate in God's mission in the context of their own lives.

The church must not be understood merely as a human institution...

The church that is God's church will be organized for and active in the purpose of God's mission — bringing people to Jesus, maintaining relationship with Jesus. The church must not be institutionalized. Such institutionalization invariably follows human wisdom, desires, thoughts, plans. The church must be responsive to one thing — what is God's purpose? That purpose is never so narrow that it can be understood in the context of only one local church. The purpose of God is so big and so broad that it must always be considered world-wide. What is God trying to do in this world through the church?

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The church in every place comes into existence as a result of God's eternal purpose and mission. Every Christian today is a Christian because of God's call. God sent someone to share the message of Jesus. Every Christian is the result of mission. The mission is of God, never of us.

God is the one who sends his people into the world with the specific purpose of helping others know God and participate in his mission. The contemporary church struggles in two dimensions. First, mission work often fails to help others come to know God. Second, when people are brought to God through Jesus, they are not confronted with the demand that they must now participate in the mission!