ELEMENTS OF MISSION

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An attempt to define the essential elements of mission.
Category: Observations

If you had to boil the concept of mission down to a few brief statements, what would it look like? I've been thinking about this for a project that I'm considering for the next year or two and this is what I've come up with.

Mission is, glorifying God through our intentional participation in his purpose to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through Christ's blood shed on the cross.

I return to Colossians 1:20 again and again as I believe it is the most complete and all encompassing statement of the gospel in all of Scripture (feel free to disagree).

Some things that I see as essential in this definition (not in order of priority):

- The purpose of mission is to bring glory to God. Preaching salvation and doing good works are important, but they are ways to achieve the main purpose.
- Mission is intentional. A sovereign God will use us to achieve his purposes whether we want to be involved or not. However, unless we are making a conscious decision to do something, we can't really call it mission.
- The scope of mission is cosmic; it ultimately involves everything.
- The cross is central to mission; both as the mechanism through which reconciliation is achieved and as a model for the way in which we are to participate.

With that in mind, I think there are two key elements of mission that we need to consider.

God is calling a people to himself, in order to send them out into the world. This principle runs through all of the Bible, but is developed and refined as the narrative develops. From creation, through the story of Israel, we see God choosing people for his purpose and then in the New Testament, the principle of these people being sent out into the world develops.

In practical terms, our involvement in this aspect of God's mission involves calling people to follow Christ (evangelism), disciple-making and crossing barriers to reach new people.

Ethics. In a sense, this could be included in the previous heading; God's people are to be holy - they are to act in an ethical manner. This should typify us. However, I believe that adopting specific ethical stances in particular circumstances is part of the process of calling people to join God's

community. This could include things such as the relief of poverty, caring for the sick and a wide range of other activities.

In all of this, purpose and nature become intertwined. Part of the purpose of God's people is to be sent out into the world in order to draw more people into God's people. Who we are, is what we do. The same thing is true of ethical behaviour; the nature of God's people is to be holy, but our holiness should helps draw people into the family. By the way, by focussing on these concepts, I think that I have, to some extent, bridged the artificial divide between proclamation and social-action. Both are part of who are are and what we do.

One thing that I have not mentioned is worship. God's people are to be a worshipping people and the purpose of mission is to bring glory to God. I know that some people envisage worship (as in sung worship and the like) as an evangelistic act, but I am less convinced about this, but I wouldn't argue with anyone who thought otherwise.

This may turn up in another context more than once...