BIBLICAL BASIS: TAXONOMY OF MISSION 1

Posted on August 25, 2014 by Eddie

Category: Observations

Over the next few weeks, I'm going to post four or five short pieces that explore the different ways that approaches to Christian mission can be categorised. I'm sure that this isn't new, but it's the first time I've done it.Â These are not academic posts, so don't expect lots of footnotes and references. This article looks at the way in which people find justification for mission in the Bible.

I think it is fairly safe to say that most evangelical writers agree that the Bible talks about mission. They may disagree about what mission is, exactly (we'll come back to this), but they do find it in the Bible. That being said, there is not universal agreement about how exactly the Bible talks about mission.

Mission in The Bible

The most common way in which people find justification for mission in the Bible is by finding passages which teach about it. For some authors, this doesn't go much beyond quoting the 'Great Commission' in Matthew 28:19, 20. Others will go well beyond this; quoting Luke 4, John 20, the book of Jonah and a myriad of other texts to show that the Bible sees mission as very important.

The Bible As Mission

At the other end of the scale is an approach which says that the justification for mission is found not in individual texts, but in the whole narrative of the Bible. The Bible itself is a missional document. At first glance, this might seem as though we are splitting hairs, but the difference is quite profound. The Bible as Mission (or missional hermeneutic) approach, essentially says that God's mission to the world is primary and that Scripture both emerges from and tells the story of thatÂ mission. The other, more common approach, starts with the Bible as a book which has many themes, of which mission is one.

Evaluation

For my own part, I tend to prefer the 'Bible as Mission' approach, I think it provides a coherence to the Bible and God's activity in the world, which is difficult to find otherwise. If you'd like to read more about it, the classic text isÂ The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand NarrativeÂ by Chris Wright. Though if you do not want to buy or read such a large book, you can get a good feel for his argument from this (much shorter) pdf. Â That being said, I would not wish to turn my back on the other approach entirely. It is well worth readingÂ What Is the Mission of the ChurchÂ by DeYoung and Gilbert who make a strong case for the 'Mission in the Bible' approach, while raising some interesting criticisms of Chris Wright's work.

Pragmatically, I suspect that I live somewhere on a continuum between these two approaches. What about you?