



Theology of Missions

Christian missions make sense only in light of a real abnormality or emergency and with the conviction that a response and remedy for such infirmity are available. The emergency is the fact of sin in the world that has dominated and infested the human race, threatening humanity's very existence.

The Reality of Sin

Sin is wrong not merely due to its inherent cruelty and terrible consequences in time and eternity, but above all because it is committed against God. God is the measure of all sin. Sin derives its gravity from the being of God against whom it is committed.

The unity of the human race and the universality of sin are assumed and affirmed in Scripture. The consequences of sin are exposed in clear terms: it is inherently evil, corrupting, polluting, degrading, and carries destruction and death in its nature.



God's Remedy for Sin

Divine Wisdom

In His infinite wisdom, God designed salvation

Divine Grace

At infinite cost, God granted salvation through Jesus Christ

Divine Power

God sent the Holy Spirit to effect salvation in individuals and history

In His infinite compassion, God institutionalized mission—first through Israel and now through His church—so that weak and hopeless humanity might hear, know, and believe the good news of God's infinite salvation.

Biblical Universality

Before tracing the fundamental universality of missionary intention in the Bible, we must clarify the meaning of terms. We use "universality" rather than "universalism" to avoid common misunderstandings.

Definition of Universality

In the biblical sense, universality means that God's purpose is broad rather than singular, including all the human race rather than being national or merely individual. This term alleges that God's promise and provision of salvation include all humanity, not just a "selected remnant."



Types of Biblical Universality

01

Ideal Universality

Speaks of God's gracious provision of salvation in Christ for all men. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

The Bible teaches in clear terms that not all people will be saved. The godless will be deprived of God's presence and condemned to eternal punishment.

02

Practical Universality

Implies that it is God's will that the Gospel should be proclaimed universally, that all humanity should have the opportunity to hear the good news of redemption.



Methodology of Universality

Centripetal Method

The Old Testament pattern where Israel, living in God's presence, would attract nations to Jerusalem and the Lord through divine magnetism. The principle is illustrated by the Queen of Sheba's visit to Jerusalem.

Centrifugal Method

The New Testament pattern where messengers cross boundaries to carry the good news to godless peoples. This marked a change in methodology but not in principle and purpose.

Threefold Universality in Scripture

Universal Revelation

Genesis 1-11 shows God revealing Himself to the entire human race. All nations share the same knowledge of God with equal access.

Mediated Universality

Israel becomes the mediator between God and the nations. This doesn't interrupt God's broad purpose but serves as His method to mediate to the world.

Church Age Universality

Due to Israel's failure, God temporarily set aside Israel and called the church to be His chosen generation, royal priesthood, and holy nation.



Mission as Missio Dei

Douglas Webster opens his series with these words: "We begin, then, where mission begins: with God." Only if mission has its source in and derives its nature and authority from the triune God can it truly generate lasting motivation and become Christian and meaningful.

"The failure of reformed Protestantism to generate the dynamics of missions is due mainly to its incomplete and unbalanced theology. Theology concerned itself almost exclusively with God's 'being' and 'character' but sometimes dealt more with the heavenly God than with the God of creation, salvation, and missions."

Three Definitions of Mission

Progressive Objectification

Mission is the progressive objectification of God's eternal and benevolent purpose originating in His own being and character, involving all ages, races, and generations.

Historical Effectuation

Mission is the historical effectuation of God's salvation obtained on behalf of all humanity through Christ Jesus due to His incarnation, death, and resurrection.

Practical Realization

Mission is the practical realization of the Holy Spirit's work in this world on behalf of God's eternal purpose and effective application of salvation.



Christianity's Universal Claims

Christianity claims to be the religion of absolute fulfillment and finality. In Christianity, all promises and inscriptions of the Old Testament are realized, and all religious needs and spiritual anxieties of humanity are satisfied. Christ is the desire of all nations.

Four Major Claims

- Absolute power regarding religious authority
- Integrity and finality as God's revelation
- Universality in extension and domain
- Unique and universal influence over all nations

Jesus Christ and Missionary Theology



The Central Question

What was Christ's attitude toward non-Jewish peoples? Did He relate His ministry to the universe of nations? Was Christ a universalist with a world mission, or was He a nationalist and particularist?

Four historical viewpoints have emerged regarding Christ's universal consciousness and mission to the world.

The Four Gospel Portraits of Christ

Mark: The Servant-Prophet

Presents Christ as God's Prophet and Jehovah's Servant, always active fulfilling God's will. The urgency is emphasized through recurring words "and," "immediately," and "directly."

Matthew: The King

Amplifies Mark's portrait by adding Christ's nobility and kingship. Shows Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament visions and prophecies, with universal authority over creation and history.

Luke: The Priest-Savior

Adds Christ's priesthood and salvation, placing them in the framework of universal history beginning with Adam, showing the universal validity of Christ's priesthood and salvation.

John: The Eternal Son

Presents the cosmic Christ, the eternal Son equal with the Father. Uses "cosmos" 79 times, demonstrating God's universalist activity and benevolent relationship with the world.



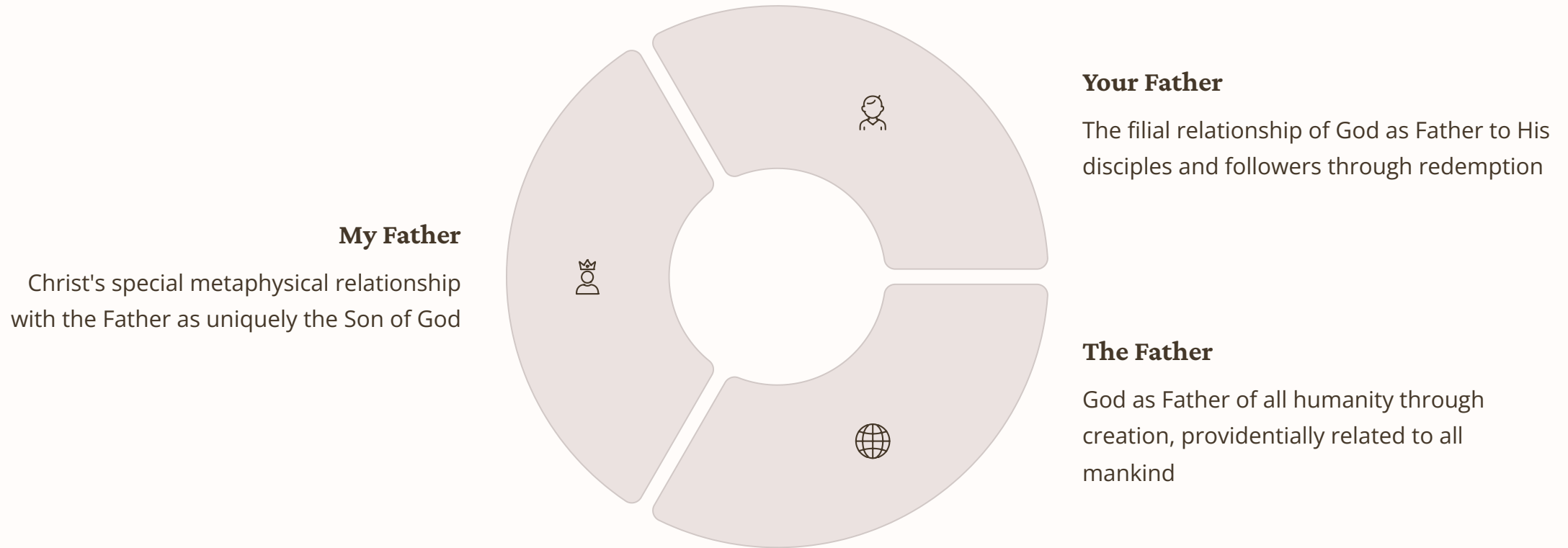
Christ's Core Theological Concepts

The missionary thrust of Christ becomes clear when we consider His theological concepts and basic presuppositions. All are filled with missionary content and charged with missionary dynamics.

The Kingdom of God

The concept of God's Kingdom was most prominent in Jesus' teaching. Christ was truly a Preacher of the Kingdom of God, with over sixty references in the Gospel accounts. The Kingdom includes individual, national, racial, and cosmic aspects—both spiritual and eternal.

Christ's Central Revelation: God's Fatherhood



In the center of Christ's revelation, national particularism disappears and universality prevails. God is peculiarly the Father of all who believe, regardless of nationality or race.

Christ as Son of Man

Although His human name was Jesus, Christ's favorite self-designation was "Son of Man"—recorded 84 times in the Gospels. This title reveals five crucial aspects of Christ's universal mission:

1 True Humanity

Expresses Christ's sharing in human nature, communion with human feelings, and true experience of human life

2 Ideal Humanity

Christ as the ideal Man in whom humanity finds its fulfillment, hope, and example—the Leader and Representative of all nations

3 Prophetic Succession

The true Successor of Israel's prophets, the one to whom God addresses Himself uniquely

4 Promised Messiah

The anticipated Messiah of Israel, the Anointed One sent by God for God's mission

5 Kingdom Relationship

Uniquely related to God and the establishment of His Kingdom over all nations



Christ's Fundamental Purpose

Christ came not merely as a model or revealer, but fundamentally to deal effectively with sin. John the Baptist's declaration captures this: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

Three Key Terms

Takes Away

Christ removes sin from all humanity, fulfilling the proto-evangelization of Genesis 3:15

Sin (Singular)

Christ dealt not just with sins but with sin itself—the root and principle of sin

Lamb of God

A divine and infinite sacrifice obtaining divine and infinite salvation for all humanity

The Nature of God and Mission

The deepest foundation of missionary effort must be found in the very being and character of God. We cannot think of God except in terms that compel the missionary idea.



God is Spirit

As Spirit, God is unlimited, transcending all limitations. He is the Unlimited and Friendly One, the God of missions who seeks worshippers.



God is Light

Light is diffusive, penetrating, investigative. As Light, God penetrates the world to overcome darkness and illuminate every person who comes into the world.



God is Love

Love is the dynamic quality by which God leaves Himself and relates in all His sufficiency to His creation, seeking the greatest good of His creatures.

The Triune God as Missionary

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in cooperation to recover man from his sinful wanderings and lead him back to his primitive state, purpose, destiny, and glory.

God the Father

The eternal love of God is the dynamic quality by which He seeks to communicate and participate with the object of His relationship. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

God the Son

Christ shares with the Father all aspects of divinity. While sent by the Father, He also came to the world voluntarily. His own name "Jesus" implies that He is a Savior.

God the Holy Spirit

The Spirit is God's presence in the world, operating universally to preserve the world as a missionary field and create periods of high potential and responsive people.



The Incarnation-Cross-Resurrection Event

The Decisive Moment

According to the New Testament, Christ's coming, death, resurrection, and ascension is the decisive moment in God's salvation plan. This event is crucial for interpreting history and stands at the core of biblical revelation.

Here the Old and New Testaments merge and divide. This event is central to divine salvation history (Heilsgeschichte). Promise is replaced by fulfillment, shadow gives way to reality, sin is judged, and forgiveness is offered.

Principles of Biblical Salvation

1

Essentially Divine in Origin

Salvation originates with God and has its source and initiative in God

2

Essentially Christocentric

All salvation is found in Christ; there is no salvation apart from Christ

3

Essentially Free

Salvation is a gracious gift of God, not earned through human works

4

Essentially Moral

Grace is moral in nature and purpose, requiring conscious response through faith

5

Intentionally Universal

God's provision for all humanity—Christ died for the whole world

6

Potentially Cosmic

Salvation will ultimately triumph with complete victory over all creation



Universal Scope of Salvation

John declared: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Paul was led to write: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." The New Testament teaches clearly that Christ died for all men.

"Just as through one offense judgment came to all men resulting in condemnation, so also through one act of righteousness the free gift came to all men resulting in justification of life." (Romans 5:18)

The greatness of the sacrifice also ensures its finality. This is the strong argument of Hebrews—the "once for all" is conclusive. An eternal salvation has been provided with sufficient potential to save everything salvable on divinely ordained terms.

The Holy Spirit's Universal Operations

The Holy Spirit is God's presence in the world, operating universally to preserve humanity in a condition where they can be saved. Four specific universal expressions are recorded in John's Gospel:

01

Universal Illumination (John 1:9)

God doesn't allow man to fall into total darkness; consciousness of God is preserved in the human soul

03

Universal Drawing (John 12:32)

God doesn't allow humanity's longing for salvation to be completely satisfied by false religious practices

02

Universal Conviction (John 16:8)

God doesn't permit humanity's consciousness of sin and guilt to be completely extinguished

04

Universal Teaching (John 6:45)

There is universal teaching occurring, though hidden, of which man isn't even aware

Old Testament Missionary Theology

Jesus Christ constantly related Himself, His message, and mission to the Old Testament. He claimed to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Did He also find the realization of missionary thrust in the Old Testament?

The Proto-Evangelism (Genesis 3:15)

Genesis 3:15—the proto-evangelism, the morning star amid humanity's darkest night—is a promise of universal importance. Here biblical universality was born as hope was announced for the entire human race.



Six Facts of Genesis 3:15

God's Operation

Salvation is operated by God; thus it is certain and full of grace

Satan's Destruction

Salvation will destroy Satan, the enemy. Evil is not permanent punishment

Humanity's Inclusion

Salvation will affect humanity as a whole; it's greater than individual or national

Mediator's Coming

Salvation will come through a Mediator organically related to humanity

Redeemer's Suffering

Salvation is linked to the Redeemer's suffering; the enemy will bruise His heel

Historical Reality

Salvation will be experienced in history, as real and present as defeat itself

Israel's National Religion

Divine Design

Genesis 12 introduces a new era—particularist in method but universalist in promise, design, and effect. God's call of Abraham begins a divine counter-culture designed both to stem evil and clarify God's glorious plan of salvation.

This was a new flame of hope for the world, revealing more fully God's universal salvation purpose.



The Uniqueness of National Religion

The beginning of Israel's national religion has its origin in God's supernatural act and revelation. Abraham didn't seek God; rather, the God of glory miraculously penetrated history to seek Abraham.

The Abrahamic Promise

The first handful of promises made to Abraham includes a promise to the world. Indeed, this is the fullest promise of all: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

This promise and guarantee are repeated throughout Scripture. The important factor is that Abraham's call was not personal favoritism from a particularist god to establish a local religion. It originates from the God of glory and is designed for humanity's welfare.

This promise, with its universal design intention, was transferred in due time to the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, and eventually became the carrying motivation throughout Old Testament history.





The Mosaic Period

The Mosaic phase enriched Israel's religion in many ways, making it a religion of miraculous redemption, positive monotheism, devoted consecration, dynamic ethics, responsible faith, love and obedience.

Israel's Threefold Calling (Exodus 19:5-6)

1

Relationship with Jehovah

"My treasured possession among all peoples"—Israel's unique relationship with the Lord

2

Relationship with Nations

"A kingdom of priests"—Israel as God's mediator, organizing a priestly ministry to the world

3

Relationship with Themselves

"A holy nation"—separated from worldly corruption, dedicated to God with fervent devotion



Davidic Era and the Psalms

David's impact on Israel's religious life was enormous. He founded renewal and prosperity, making Israel uniquely a community of worshippers with Jerusalem as its politico-religious center.

The Psalms as Missionary Literature

The book of Psalms contains over 175 universalist references related to the nations of the world. Many carry hope of salvation to the nations. "Hymn praise is missionary preaching par excellence."

"All the peoples You have made will come and worship before You, Lord; they will bring glory to Your name. For You are great and do marvelous deeds; You alone are God." (Psalm 86:9-10)



The Prophetic Era

The prophetic era brings the clearest missionary awakening in the Old Testament. The prophets spoke not only to Israel but to the nations, demonstrating God's universal sovereignty and concern.

Isaiah: The Great Missionary Prophet

Isaiah stands out as the great evangelistic prophet and prince of Old Testament prophets. A great internationalist with cosmic vision, he sees not only Israel and the nations renewed, but heaven and earth as well.

In Isaiah 40-53, we find the most complete exposition of the "servant" theme, with Israel called to be God's witness and the ideal Servant bringing salvation to the ends of the earth.

Israel as God's Servant

Divine Mission

God created, formed, and liberated Israel for His purposes. "The people I formed for Myself will proclaim My praise."

1

2

3

Mission to Nations

Israel finds true meaning in world mission. Though judgment of rebellious nations is implied, salvation is for all humanity.

God-Centered Mission

Israel existed to sustain ethical monotheism in opposition to polytheism and philosophical monism.

The final part of Isaiah (chapters 55-66) deals with Israel's restoration while maintaining universality. Beautiful promises of rich graces for the nations are confirmed alongside Israel's destined glory.

The Ideal Servant

The four "servant songs" in Isaiah present the ideal Servant as the perfect man, yet publicly rejected. He suffers innocently, voluntarily, sublimely, devotedly, and silently.

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6)

Both Israel as servant and the Messiah as ideal Servant have universal significance and find full meaning only in worldwide scope.



New Testament Missionary Theology

We need only remember that the book of Acts is the authentic missionary record of the apostles and early church, and all epistles were written to churches established through missionary efforts.

The New Testament is a missionary book in discourse, content, spirit, and design. It is more theology in action than theology in reason and concept—it is "missionary theology."

The Great Dividing Line

The great dividing line in the lives of the twelve is Pentecost—the dividing line of evangelical missions. Here New Testament missions began its progressive course toward realization.



Apostolic Missionary Motivation

God's Sovereign Act

The apostles were taken by God's great sovereign act rooted in His eternal plan, accomplished in Christ Jesus according to prophecy.

Christ's Unique Salvation

They were convinced of salvation uniquely through Christ crucified and risen. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ.

Historical Reality

God's act in obtaining salvation was a historical event with historical results—reality manifested in time and space.

Prophetic Fulfillment

Everything that happened was in perfect harmony with Old Testament prophetic prediction, giving them firmness amid persecution.

Universal Scope

God's redemptive act in Christ was for the benefit of all humanity. The particularistic nationalism had no place in apostolic theology.

Faith Response

Repentance and faith were God's indicated way to obtain salvation, requiring conscious and voluntary response to Christ.

Paul's Universal Mission

Paul stands out as the central figure in interpreting and spreading Christianity. He is the best interpreter, chief theological representative, greatest evangelical apologist, and most persistent defender of Christianity.

Paul's Theological Foundation

Paul presents a logical and convincing series of missionary thoughts in Romans:

1. The entire universe is God's creation under His sovereign command
2. The whole human race is an organic unity created in Adam
3. All humanity fell in Adam and became sinful
4. All humanity was represented in Christ, and salvation was provided for all
5. God provided only one way of salvation—justification by faith in Jesus Christ
6. Salvation comes by revelation and must be preached through God's revealed Word
7. Paul was called by God to bring men and nations to the obedience of faith

The Eternal Mission

John's vision in Revelation presents the ultimate missionary presentation. God is revealed as the God of the cosmos—the God of all earth and nations, with no domain excluded. His majestic throne is high and lifted up, with lines of governance spreading in all directions.

In the final scenes, the Lamb triumphs over all world systems. As new heavens and earth emerge, the Lamb shares the Father's glory and worship, while nations enjoy graces flowing from the Lamb's abundant throne.

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9)

Thus, from Genesis to Revelation, God's universal missionary purpose unfolds—from the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed, through Christ's commission to make disciples of all nations, to the final gathering of redeemed humanity from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation before the throne of God.