

Is “MISSION” ALL IMPORTANT?

What many Lutherans say: What is really important is mission. Everything else either has to be helping mission along or it is really not important. They do not want to get involved in doctrinal disagreements.

Many congregations work this way too. They emphasize helping people. They send people abroad to dig wells, build roads, and provide better medical equipment and services. Mission is trump.

Those Christians who regard mission as what's really important work out of **a certain perspective**: All doctrinal disagreements they may have with each other and other church bodies pale in comparison to mission. Lutheran, Baptist, Catholic – what does it matter as long as one is doing mission?

Differences on doctrine may have their place, but they not must be allowed to sidetrack mission.

This perspective is often supported by the well known proverb: “If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him how to fish, you feed him for the rest of his life.”

What about “forever?” Something is topsy-turvy in the approach to mission described above. The person we are reaching out to not only lives for a day but forever. The important thing is: **What happens to “forever”?**

Mission, properly understood, is bringing the good news about “forever,” eternal life in Jesus Christ because of the gospel.

Yes, we are also concerned about wells for water and healthy crops and better medicine – food for today. But we dare not and must not put **the cart before the horse**.

Salvation is at stake. Mission is all important because **salvation is at stake**. Everything else is secondary.

How did we end up putting the cart before the horse? We fell into the trap of assuming everyone is saved, no matter what anyone believes. As a consequence, we end up with mission as social work. In the lingo of today, mission = “accompaniment” or “mutual dialogue.”

Mission, properly understood, is preaching Christ crucified for sin and death. Through preaching, the Holy Spirit works to create faith when and where he pleases in those who hear the gospel (*Augsburg*

Confession 5). “Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the preaching of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

We do not presume that God saves everyone. Who God saves is God's business, not ours. We truly leave it up to him. We **really** do not know. We do not presume many are damned. We **really** do not know.

As our Lutheran Confessions say: “Hence if anyone so sets forth this teaching concerning God's election that sorrowing Christians can find no comfort in it but are **driven to despair; or when impenitent sinners are strengthened in their malice**, then it is clearly evident that **this teaching is not being set forth according to the Word and will of God**” (FC SD 11:91-93; Tappert 631-32, K/W 655).

The Truth of the Gospel

(From Luther's Commentary on Galatians)

“The truth of the Gospel is this: that our righteousness comes by faith alone, without the works of the Law. The falsification or corruption of the Gospel is this, that we are justified by faith but not without the works for the Law. **The false apostles preached the Gospel, but they did so with this condition attached to it.** The scholastics do the same thing in our day. They say that we must believe in Christ and that faith is the foundation of salvation, but they say that this faith does not justify unless it is ‘formed by love.’ This is not the truth of the Gospel; it is falsehood and pretense.... **Human reason has the Law as its object. It says to itself: “This I have done; this I have not done.”** But faith in its proper function has no other object than Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was put to death for the sins of the world. **It does not look at its love and say: ‘What have I done? ... What have I deserved?’** But it says: “What has Christ done? What has he deserved?... And here **the truth of the Gospel gives you the answer: “He has redeemed you from sin, from the devil, and from eternal death”** (*LW 26:88; emphasis added*).