

- ‘The various forms of Christian renewal highlighted here constitute the only fast-growing religious movements in the world today.’ (127)
- ‘Liberal, traditional, Constantinian Christendom is dying. Present trends indicate that future Christians could be more spiritual, dynamic and prophetic, but also more persecuted.’ (129)
- ‘Are the very successes of Evangelicalism sowing the seeds of its spiritual demise by grieving the Spirit of God through pride, division, disobedience, carnality, moral laxity, theological error or prayerlessness?’ (141)
- ‘In 1900, fewer than 2% of all Evangelicals were Asian. However, by 2000 this figure had increased to over 29%, and by 2050 it could exceed 33%. Asian Evangelicals are still the most persecuted.’ (148)
- ‘It is very important to consider the world’s peoples by affinity bloc and people cluster. It is strategic to reach out to people groups in many countries by evangelizing local immigrants-who in turn can evangelize those from other less accessible groups in their cluster. (171)
- ‘The old, Western ways of forming relationships and strategies and working in the field will no longer do now that missionaries are being sent out from all over the world. Increasingly, everyone will need to deal with multiple initiatives aimed at the same populations; agencies and networks will have to cooperate across cultures, and multicultural teams will become the norm. This is no longer an option, but essential.’ (228)

I highly recommend *The Future of the Global Church* to anyone interested in earnest prayer or strategic thinking about the completion of the great commission.

**Reviewed by L.D. Waterman**

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## ***What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission***

**Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert  
Wheaton: Crossway, 2011**

Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert have given the church a great gift. Through an exegetically careful analysis of the whole Bible they give the church, lay leaders and scholars alike, an understanding of these issues that will help us all keep ‘the main thing the main thing.’ They grapple with ‘this whole issue of mission...the most confusing, most discussed, most energizing, and most potentially divisive issue in the evangelical church today’ (25) and give their answer to this vital question: ‘What

is the Mission of the Church?’ Their approach is refreshing, since they are ‘...writing for the average Christian and the ordinary pastor trying to make sense of a whole host of missiological questions.’ (10)

The book’s three parts challenge the reader to consider varying definitions of common terms and to look to scripture for clarity: (1) Understanding Our Mission, (2) Understanding Our Categories and (3) Understanding what we do and why we do it.



## Part I Understanding Our Mission

DeYoung and Gilbert ask some great questions, such as-

- What do we even mean by *mission*?
- Is the mission of the church the same as the mission of God?
- Is the mission of the church distinct from the responsibilities of individual Christians?
- Is the mission of the church a continuation of the mission of Jesus?
- If so, what was his mission anyway?
- Does God expect the church to change the world, to be about the work of transforming its social structures?
- How does the kingdom relate to the *gospel*?
- And how does all this relate to *mission*? (16)

Before addressing the mission of the church, they give this simple, working definition of mission—a task a person or group is sent to accomplish.

In the section ‘A Correction to the Correction’, they laud the missional lifestyle, or getting out of your holy huddle, but they express concern about how missional thinking changes the conversation about the church’s mission. I share their concerns, especially ‘...that in all our passion for renewing the city or tackling social problems, we run the risk of marginalizing the one thing that makes Christian mission Christian: namely, making disciples of Jesus Christ.’ (22)

Part one continues with chapter two asking ‘What does Jesus send us into the world to do?’ Before answering this by looking at the Great Commission texts, they look at some passages that are commonly used to support a broader definition of missions. Part one ends with a preliminary conclusion that the church’s mission, or task, is to make disciples.

They clarify with ‘Though we do not believe that the mission of the church is to build the kingdom or to partner with God in remaking the world, this does not mean we are against cultural engagement. Our point is simply that we must under-

stand these endeavours in the right theological categories and embrace them without sacrificing more explicit priorities.’ (12)

## Part 2: Understanding Our Categories

This part of the book, ‘Understanding Our Categories,’ begins

It’s never a good idea to make a biblical case for something—especially something as monumentally important as the mission of the church—from just a few texts. The bible isn’t just a potpourri of pithy sayings from which we can pick up a nugget here and a nugget there. No it’s a grand sweeping, world encompassing story that traces the history of God’s dealing with mankind from very beginning to very end. If we really want to understand what God is doing and what he would have us do as his people, we need to have a good grasp of what that story is, what its main themes are, what the problem is, what God’s remedy to the problem is, and what it all looks like when the story ends. (52)

I appreciate that before they look at theological categories they highlight the importance of grasping the whole story first. I have been passionate about reading the bible as one narrative, finding many benefits personally and in ministry. I had not considered that this big picture view is also helpful in organizing our thoughts about mission into categories. The authors choose four categories that most often affect how we think of missions: gospel, kingdom, social justice and shalom. In three of these, they discuss the definition and go on to compare different views. Two chapters are given to social justice, one on exposition and one on application. I appreciate the fair, scholarly exegesis throughout the book but especially in this exposition chapter. In the application chapter, they put forth some proposals for those involved with social justice. Learn what the Bible says about the poor and social justice, but do not undersell it or oversell it. Be careful with the term social justice. The call to love, rather than a call to action, is always biblical. The authors believe talking in terms of love will make the discussion less controversial and therefore more profitable.

The chapter on the kingdom of God is the heart of the book. After summarizing what the kingdom of God is with these words ‘So the kingdom of God then, we may say, is God’s redemptive reign, in the person of his Son, Jesus Messiah, which has broken into the present evil age and is now visible in the church,’ (111) they go on to ask when and how the kingdom will be finally and fully established. Again, relying on sound exegesis, rather than anecdotal stories and personal experience/passion, they make the biblical case that the kingdom is not built by human effort. Drawing from conversations Jesus had with the disciples, and from Revelation they conclude ‘The final events—the defeat of the nations arrayed against the lord and his anointed, the defeat of Satan, the creation of the new heavens and the new earth— it all happens when *and only when*, King Jesus returns in glory, and not before’ (113). They cite a lengthy quote from *The Presence of the Future* by George Eldon Ladd, on

the kingdom, what it is and is not, including scripture references.

They summarize with ‘...the disciples were not simply to sit and enjoy the fact that all authority now belonged to Jesus; they were to go and proclaim that fact to a dark world that had no idea of that reality. They were to ‘witness’- not build, not establish, not usher in, not even build for the kingdom—but bear witness to it. They were to be subjects and heralds, not agents of the kingdom.’ (122)

### **Part 3 What We Do and Why We Do It**

This last part suggests that a new category is needed between that of utmost importance and that of no importance, ‘The thinking seems to be that good works have to be motivated by the highest imaginable reasons—We’re building for the kingdom! We’re doing the gospel! We’re joining God in his mission! We’re spreading Shalom!—or else people will think they’re not important at all’ (230). They give the example of marriage, not of utmost importance in heaven, for sure, but not by any means unimportant!

They also address the difference between what scripture says an individual Christian should do and what the church should do. Humorous examples are given that really drive this point home. Lastly, they point out that the church must keep the main thing the main thing.

The danger is real. If we do not share the gospel—with words!—the story will not be told. Just as bad, if our priorities mirror the Millennium Development goals, we will be redundant. (220)

Decisions have to be made; trade-offs have to be done. You have to decide not just if something will further the mission, but also *how directly* it will do so, and therefore whether it is worth doing when there are five other things on the table. (238)

For the missions teams grappling with tough decisions I suggest they read and discuss the whole section in chapter nine ‘So What Should We Do, as Churches?’ Their main point is this: ‘Ultimately, if the church does not preach Christ and him crucified, if the church does not plant, nurture, and establish churches, if the church does not teach the nations to obey Christ, no one else and nothing else will’ (219).

### **Who should read this book?**

Workers will find this book refreshing as so many ‘tasks’ present themselves on the field. One of the quotes from the chapter on the social justice would be well for missionaries to recall on their long days. ‘If we need fifty hours in every day to be obedient, we’re saying more than the bible says’ (172). Workers are encouraged to remember, whether directly or indirectly, that their main task is to make disciples.

Mission agency leaders would do well to read this book often, evaluating their

fields for ‘mission creep.’ Pastors should read this and consider if maybe they are asking their ‘Missions Leader’ to do too much. Church leaders should be clear about what the mission of church is while making room for individual’s callings/passions for other kinds of outreach. In light of the popularity of the contemporary *missional* movement, all Christians should seriously and humbly consider the questions DeYoung and Gilbert posit.

Lastly, missions leaders in churches should read this book and ask their elders to discuss some of the questions with them. ‘Making Sense of Social Justice, Sha-

‘So What Should We Do, as Churches?’ Their main point is this: ‘Ultimately, if the church does not preach Christ and him crucified, if the church does not plant, nurture, and establish churches, if the church does not teach the nations to obey Christ, no one else and nothing else will’

lom and the Great Commission’ is exactly what is needed to responsibly, faithfully and biblically serve the church as a missions leader. I have grappled with definitions trying to bring clarity to the task remaining. In order to raise these issues gently I drafted a handbook for my church to define missions and to guide the team in the difficult task of prioritizing mission opportunities. I needed a tool that would help us make decisions less subjective. I

thought a rubric would do the trick but I could not define the categories. After reading this book, I have some new categories to help me complete the rubric.

I pray that readers will rethink their theological categories and consider whether their endeavours could more *directly* further the mission of the church, making disciples among all nations.

### **Reviewed by Pat Noble**

*Pat is the news editor for [Missions Catalyst](http://missionscatalyst.net) online magazine. She has been the Missions Team leader at her church for about 15 years and loves working with international students and with IVCF. Her greatest passion is to see churches catch the vision for church planting among unevangelized peoples. You can read her bio here: [http://missionscatalyst.net/?page\\_id=615](http://missionscatalyst.net/?page_id=615), and visit her blog here: <http://www.flavors.me/patnoble>.*