



## "Mission" and "Missions" –3 TO THE END OF THE EARTH

### INTRODUCTION

In many languages, the words "mission" and "missions" look very similar and are sometimes used interchangeably by Christians. However, when we fail to notice the distinction between them, we lose something important.

#### I. MISSION

The word "mission" is used in religious and secular contexts to refer to a task to be accomplished or a goal to be achieved. The Great Commission is the primary "mission" of the Church—to make disciples everywhere, both at home and abroad. This was the final command of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. "Mission" is a broad, all-encompassing word for our divine assignment.

#### II. MISSIONS

Historically, the word "missions" has been used in a more specialized sense. It referred specifically to cross-cultural ministry to people in another country. Actually, the term has never been a perfect one since people of different cultures have never been neatly divided by national borders. Nonetheless, it conveyed the idea that many of the unbelievers we are to evangelize are separated by significant geographical, political, and cultural barriers. They will not be reached in normal daily activity—converting them will require special effort on the part of the Church.

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"Missions" is no longer universally understood as ministry to foreign peoples. Increasingly, missions is being redefined as the evangelization of any lost person—whether near or far. It is becoming common to hear that every believer is a "missionary" since the "mission field" is everywhere. This change has had the positive effect of making more Christians aware of the need to reach the lost around them and to be more actively involved in evangelistic and discipleship ministry. However, when everyone is a "missionary," no one is a "missionary" in the special sense of being sent out to distant lands for cross-cultural ministry to foreign peoples.

Defining "missions" more narrowly as cross-cultural ministry helps the local church to focus on the entire lost world. It is normal human nature to pay more attention to the people we see around us every day (Jerusalem) and those who are like us (Judea and Samaria), and to forget about people who are far away and different from us. It is even more difficult to actually do something about the spiritual need of these distant people when we know it will require major effort and sacrifice on our part to do so.

### CONCLUSION

When "missions" loses its status as a unique, vital part of the "mission" of the church, it will often be replaced with same-culture evangelism and discipleship. The light of the church may continue to shine brightly in "Jerusalem" but be barely visible at the "end of the earth."

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