

# BEING JESUS, *MISSIO DEI*, AND KINGDOM WORK: AN ANALYSIS, CRITIQUE, AND PROPOSAL FOR MODERN APPROACHES TO HOLISTIC MINISTRY

by  
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There are a growing number of voices in evangelicalism advocating an approach to ministry that is holistic. Many believe that the church has unnecessarily adopted a Platonic dualism that separates spiritual ministry from physical ministry by arguing that it is the responsibility of the church to minister to men's souls and not their bodies. In response to this faulty division, holistic ministry presents a comprehensive approach to ministry, one that ministers to the entire person, both body and soul. This approach seeks to meet people's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. It recognizes that ministry must relate to social, economic, political, and spiritual realities. Various related issues are often included in the call for holistic ministry, including cultural engagement, social justice, and socioeconomic development.

This essay will provide an introductory analysis of some of the more prominent calls for holistic ministry. The various foundations for holistic ministry cannot be considered in depth, but the basic approaches will be laid out followed by a brief analysis of some concerns with these approaches. Then, a modest proposal of a way forward in promoting a holistic approach to ministry will be presented. I will seek to demonstrate that the current approaches to holistic ministry must be adjusted to more accurately reflect the teaching and example of Scripture, which will allow for a more careful and sustainable foundation for holistic ministry.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>It may be helpful to clarify at the beginning that I am not opposed to many of the issues tied to a holistic approach to ministry. Rather, I am sympathetic to many of the concerns presented by holistic advocates and believe some conservative churches are not addressing these concerns adequately. However, I am not convinced that the more common foundations for holistic ministry accurately reflect a biblical understanding of the issues, nor will they ultimately be able to sustain holistic activities.

## INTRODUCTORY ANALYSIS OF CURRENT APPROACHES TO HOLISTIC MINISTRY

In analyzing current approaches to holistic ministry, I will begin by summarizing the key elements of three commonly cited foundations for a holistic approach by considering key representatives from each emphasis. Then, I will present what I see to be as weaknesses in the foundations they provide.

### Foundations for Holistic Ministry

Though many are arguing for holistic ministry, not all provide the same basis for this approach. Within mainstream evangelicalism there appear to be at least three distinct foundations for holistic ministry: the mission of Jesus, the mission of God, and the presence of the Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> These foundations at times overlap, and some proponents may employ more than one in their approach, but the emphasis placed on each of these foundations allows for a separate analysis.

### The Mission of Jesus

One of the more prominent historical advocates of holistic ministry, John Stott, rests his case primarily on the fact that the mission of Jesus is the foundation for the church's mission. The Commission passage in John 20:21 helps transform the mission of the church from a focus on evangelism and discipleship to one that intentionally seeks its model in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> While the mission of Jesus may have been unique in regard to his atoning work, a more general understanding of his mission recognizes that Jesus came to serve and that believers can follow him in his example of service.<sup>5</sup> Jesus did proclaim the good news of the kingdom, but he also ministered through deeds: "It would be impossible in the ministry of Jesus to separate his works from his words. He fed hungry mouths and washed dirty feet. He healed the sick, comforted the sad and even restored the dead to life."<sup>6</sup> This approach to ministry has often been labeled an Incarnational Model, since Christians are called to imitate Christ by serving the world and identifying with them in their culture and suffering.<sup>7</sup> The idea has continued to

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<sup>3</sup>I do not intend to address approaches presented by the emergent movement or those involved with the New Perspective. For a summary of those views, see David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 20–25.

<sup>4</sup>John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World: What the Church Should Be Doing Now!* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 23.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>"Christ's incarnation has become one of the most widely used motifs in conceptualizing mission.... Though the incarnation was used to describe social ethics in nineteenth-century Anglican theology, John Mackay, former president of Princeton Theological Seminary and founding president of the WCC, has been credited with

be promoted by the Lausanne Congress, as evidenced in its 1989 Manila Manifesto: "True mission should always be incarnational. It necessitates entering humbly into other people's worlds, identifying with their social reality, their sorrow and suffering, and their struggles for justice against oppressive powers. This cannot be done without personal sacrifices."<sup>8</sup>

In light of this new understanding of the church's mission, Stott lays out three ways that social action could be related to gospel proclamation.<sup>9</sup> The first views good deeds as a means to evangelism, making the winning of converts the primary view. His critique is that this approach can amount to a bait and switch tactic and is a rather deceptive form of humanitarian aid. The second sees good deeds as a manifestation of evangelism, or the gospel. Social action gives a voice to the message of the gospel, providing evidence for the reality of the gospel. Stott's concern here is that the deeds are still a means to an end—they are good works done expecting something in return. The third view, which Stott supports, is that good deeds are the partner of evangelism. "As partners the two belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Each stands on its own feet in its own right alongside the other. Neither is a means to the other, or even a manifestation of the other. For each is an end in itself. Both are expressions of unfeigned love."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, a proper understanding of our mission as related to Jesus's mission of service provides a foundation for holistic ministry that sees evangelism and social action as equal partners in the church's mission:

If we can accept this broader concept of mission as Christian service in the world comprising both evangelism and social action—a concept which is laid upon us by the model of our Saviour's mission in the world—then Christians could under God make a far greater impact on society, an impact commensurate with our numerical strength and with the radical demands of the commission of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

## The Mission of God

There has been a movement in recent years to determine the mission of the church in light of the *missio Dei*, or mission of God.<sup>12</sup>

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being the first to develop the concept of the incarnation in connection with mission, in 1964" (Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, with Timothy C. Tennant, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010], 97–8).

<sup>8</sup>"The Manila Manifesto," A.4, accessed 4 November, 2014, available from <http://www.lausanne.org/content/manifesto/the-manila-manifesto>.

<sup>9</sup>Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 25–28.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>12</sup>"Originally [*missio Dei*] was used (from Augustine on) in Western discussion of the Trinity for the 'sentness of God (the Son)' by the Father (John 3:17; 5:30; 11:42;

Christopher Wright<sup>13</sup> has written two works pursuing this theme: *The Mission of God*<sup>14</sup> and *The Mission of God's People*.<sup>15</sup> Wright argues that we “need to read the whole Bible comprehensively to discern and describe what the implications are for [God's people]” in light of what a comprehensive reading of the Bible reveals concerning “God's great mission of cosmic redemption.”<sup>16</sup> In the former book he argues for a missional hermeneutic of the Bible—one that views Scripture in light of God's mission. In the latter, he considers what a missional understanding of the Bible means for the mission of God's people.

In Wright's view, *mission* “speaks of all that God is doing in his great purpose for the whole of creation and all that he calls us to do in cooperation with that purpose.”<sup>17</sup> God has a “great mission of cosmic redemption” and God's people are called to participate in that mission.<sup>18</sup> To gain an understanding of the mission of the church, believers must first gain an understanding of God's mission. Therefore, the place to start is not with the Great Commission passages of the New Testament but with the recognition of the grand narrative of Scripture that reveals a missionary God who is working out his mission and calling out a people for the purpose of being co-workers with him in that mission. Once we realize that God's mission is a “vast, comprehensive project of cosmic salvation,” then “it becomes clear that the mission of God's people is vast and various.”<sup>19</sup> Since God's mission includes dealing with everything that is wrong in his creation, everything that has been affected by the fall, the church's mission must be just as comprehensive as God's.<sup>20</sup>

God's mission includes things like the redemption of creation; the

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17:18). Georg F. Vicedom popularized the concept for missiology at the CWME meeting in MEXICO CITY in 1963, publishing a book by this title: *The Mission of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (*Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, s.v. “Missio Dei,” by John A. McIntosh, 631). Very quickly, the term gained popularity in the ecumenical movement, shifting the focus from God's mission for the church to God's providential work directly in the world. See Arther F. Glasser and Donald A. McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 90–99.

<sup>13</sup>Wright is the International Director of the Langham Partnership International and formerly chaired the Theology Working Group for the Lausanne Movement.

<sup>14</sup>*The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup>*The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 46–47

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

blessing of the nations by bringing *shalom*;<sup>21</sup> holistic redemption that includes political, social, economic, and spiritual implications; and rescuing people from all forms of oppression. Therefore, the mission of God's people can include various missions like ecological care or serving society. An example of a mission that serves society would be tent-making:

"Tent-making" need not be only a means of self-support for the "real" job of doing evangelism, nor a somewhat phony cover for getting access to countries otherwise closed to Christian witness. Rather, it is the conviction that engaging in legitimate business is intrinsically valuable for the sake of society, for human welfare, for positive social and spiritual ends. There is a missional dimension to conducting sound business in God's world for God's sake.<sup>22</sup>

When believers begin to understand their mission in light of God's mission, they will stop trying to narrowly define mission. Instead, they will recognize that everything they do is done as participants in God's mission.<sup>23</sup> They will no longer try to argue for a primacy of evangelism, for they will realize that God calls his people to address a whole list of needs and opportunities created by a variety of factors that includes "spiritual, moral, physical, familial, political, environmental, educational, economic, ethnic, cultural, religious and many more."<sup>24</sup> Wright prefers to speak of the ultimacy<sup>25</sup> or perhaps centrality<sup>26</sup> of evangelism, but both evangelism and social action are vitally important and neither can be neglected. Holistic ministry is grounded on an understanding of God's holistic mission and his people's participation in it.

## Presence of the Kingdom

In 1947, Carl Henry sought to call Fundamentalists back to the realm of social engagement with his book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. In it, he argues that Fundamentalists would become irrelevant if they did not begin to address the issues of social reform facing the world. In order to provide a theological foundation for social engagement, an understanding of the present form of the kingdom for both premillennialists and amillennialists had to be reintroduced. Henry says: "The burden of these articles is not to press a personal kingdom viewpoint, but rather to promote an evangelical conviction that nothing is so essential among Fundamentalist essentials as a

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<sup>21</sup>The idea of *shalom* points to everything being rightly related to each other and God.

<sup>22</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 273; cf. 25.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>24</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God*, 316–18.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 319.

<sup>26</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 277–78.

world-relevance for the Gospel. Whatever in our kingdom views undercuts that relevance destroys the essential character of Christianity as such.”<sup>27</sup>

Since that time, many evangelicals have looked to the presence of the kingdom as the impetus for social engagement. In a book addressing the problem of poverty, Steve Corbett argues that many Christians fail to be involved in helping the poor because they do not recognize the true task of the church. The task of the church is not the salvation of souls but the spread of the good news of the kingdom, using both words and deeds: “When people look at the church, they should see the One who declared—in word and in deed to the leper, the lame, and the poor—that His kingdom is bringing healing to every speck of the universe.”<sup>28</sup> The early church cared for the poor because they were “embodying King Jesus and His kingdom, a kingdom in which there is no poverty (Rev 21:1–4).”<sup>29</sup>

In general, there has been a growing shift in the last-half of the twentieth century from a church-centered understanding of missions to a kingdom-centered one.<sup>30</sup> This approach recognizes that missions includes “a view to the transformation of the world, as a sign of the coming of the kingdom in Jesus Christ.”<sup>31</sup> Social engagement is designed to point people to the reality of the presence of the kingdom and give them a taste of its future:

Our responses of compassion and service, like our actions for peace and justice, are deeds of authority and therefore signs that the reign of God is present now in our world and is on the way as its future. Our responses may be small and personal: a cup of cold water, a warm blanket, or a visit with cookies and cakes. They may be bold: ‘Rise up and walk,’ or the expulsion of evil spirits in the name of Jesus. They may engage the complexities of corporate modern living: pressuring governments and corporations for the sake of the disadvantaged or the ravaged earth, lobbying for just laws, solidarity with oppressed peoples, initiatives to cease hostilities among nations, care for marginalized peoples and the creation, or compassionate remodeling of socioeconomic structures. Whatever our responses may be, they bring wholeness and dignity to the world and thereby provide a taste of a future in the reign of God under the rule and authority of Christ’s lordship. These are signs that invite people to “enter and taste more, to eat and be full.” They cultivate the hunger to pray the petition, Give us today the bread of tomorrow’s heavenly feast. This

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<sup>27</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 53.

<sup>28</sup>Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009), 39–41.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>30</sup>Charles Van Engen, “‘Mission’ Defined and Described,” in *MissionShift: Global Issues in the Third Millennium*, ed. David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 25–26.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

eschatological rendering of the phrase from the Lord's Prayer is in keeping with the whole emphasis of the prayer as well as the meaning of the Greek text. When the church prays this way, the reign of God intrudes on the life of the world.<sup>32</sup>

### Weaknesses in the Foundations

Though each of these foundations has commendable elements, the comments here will be focused on weaknesses in each of these approaches. I believe these weaknesses constitute substantial flaws in the foundations that would make them unable to serve as a basis for holistic ministry.

### The Mission of Jesus

There is no doubt that the church's mission is related to the mission of Jesus. However, there are at least three weaknesses with Stott's use of Jesus's mission as the foundation of holistic ministry. First, he offers a flawed understanding of John 20:21 as the key Commission passage. He provides no reason to accept it as determinative for the other Commission passages.<sup>33</sup> As well, he misinterprets the verse as providing a model for the mission of the disciples: "As the Father sent me, so I send you."<sup>34</sup> The point of the verse is not to present Jesus's mission as a model for the disciples, but to present Jesus's relationship to his sender as a model for their relationship to their sender. "The disciples are to relate to Jesus in the same way as Jesus related to his sender, the Father."<sup>35</sup>

Another weakness in Stott's approach is a failure to recognize the unique character of Jesus's mission. As Andreas Köstenberger has convincingly shown, Jesus maintains a unique relationship to the Father (John 1:14; 18; 3:14, 18).<sup>36</sup> For example, Jesus's mission included descending from heaven and ascending back to heaven, while this language is never applied to the disciples. Jesus's incarnation was "thoroughly unique, unprecedented, and unrepeatable."<sup>37</sup>

The final, and perhaps greatest, weakness in Stott's approach is his

<sup>32</sup>George R. Hunsberger, "Missional Vocation: Called and Sent to Represent the Reign of God," in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 106.

<sup>33</sup>For a brief but helpful look at the essential connection between John's Commission and the Synoptic Commission passages, see Chris Green, "The Incarnation and Mission," in *The Word Became Flesh: Evangelicals and Incarnation*, ed. David Peterson (London: Paternoster Press, 2003), 129–32.

<sup>34</sup>Stott, *Christian Mission*, 23, emphasis original.

<sup>35</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 216.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

redefinition of Jesus's mission in terms of service rather than redemption. Though Jesus did serve, the essence of his mission was his provision of eternal life (John 3:16–17; 6:53–58; 10:10; 17:2). Even his works were signs that pointed to the identification of his person and the revelation of his Sender.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Jesus did not come to meet human needs through his service but to provide salvation through his life and death.<sup>39</sup> These weaknesses would seem to make the grounding of holistic ministry on the mission of Jesus an unstable endeavor. What relationship does Jesus's mission have to our mission? Our mission is to announce the completion of His mission. We are called to be witnesses of Jesus's person and work (Acts 1:8).

### The Mission of God

It is important to recognize that God has a purpose that he is working out in the world and that our mission is connected to his. However, using God's mission as the grounds for an all-encompassing mission for the church fails to consider crucial distinctions. First, it fails to account for the distinctions between tasks that God accomplishes himself—in his role as God—and tasks that he gives to his people. For instance, God alone carries out all that he ordains, while the believer has no ability to carry out his own plans (Isa 46:9–11; Prov 16:9; Jas 4:13–16). Though men are called to judge by fruit since they can only see external things, God can discern men's hearts (1 Sam 16:7; Matt 7:16; Heb 4:12). God is sustaining every part of the universe, while man apparently plays no role in this regard (Col 1:17). Since God has unique activities that he carries out in connection with his mission, Christians do not share in the entirety of God's mission. His mission and their mission are not fully equal in scope.

When the Bible does point to the believer's sharing in the mission of God, there are often distinctions between how God accomplishes his purpose and how believers participate in it. In salvation, God provided the grounds, the means, and the power to enact redemption in the world, while believers proclaim these truths and live them out (Rom 1:16; 10:12–15; Eph 2:8–9; Phil 1:27; Col 1:14). In his establishing of the kingdom, God will completely destroy the wicked. Though believers will judge the world, they seem to possess no active role in the destruction of the wicked (1 Cor 6:2; Rev 19:11–21). God forgives sins, but believers can only announce the possibility of forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 13:38; 1 John 1:9). It is not sufficient to simply determine what God's purpose in the world is. Believers must also determine what role they are to play, if any, in that purpose.

Finally, it is necessary to maintain a distinction between God's ultimate purpose for the world and his present purposes. God will

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 215.

<sup>39</sup>Jesus's life and death do serve as an example for the believer (e.g., 1 Pet 2:21ff.), but the purpose of salvation is central.

ultimately remove all sickness, pain, and death, but today he allows believers to experience these things for his purposes (Rev 21:4; Phil 2:27; 1 Tim 5:23). God's ultimate purpose includes a removal of all oppression, but his present purposes include unjust suffering (1 Pet 2:18–25). God's ultimate purpose includes the eternal suffering of the wicked, but his present purposes include his kindness toward them (Matt 25:46; 4:44–45). His ultimate purposes include a perfect created order, but his present purposes include natural disasters (Gen 6:17; Job 37:10–13). The fact that God's ultimate mission includes certain elements does not necessarily mean that God's people are called to work towards that end today.<sup>40</sup> As these distinctions are worked out further, one will find that more is needed than an appeal to the mission of God to establish a basis for holistic ministry.

### The Presence of the Kingdom<sup>41</sup>

Though the present form of the kingdom has become a common foundation for holistic ministry, it too possesses weaknesses that jeopardize its stability. The kingdom is clearly a dominant idea in the synoptic Gospels, but it is mostly absent in John, being replaced by an emphasis on eternal life. The language of the kingdom diminishes significantly in the epistles as well. "This seems to caution against elevating the 'kingdom of God' as the only paradigm by which the church's mission is to be understood."<sup>42</sup>

The common argument for the presence of the kingdom usually fails to consider whether or not God's present reign is manifested in different ways in the church than in the world at large. God has established governments in the world at large to reward good and punish evildoers (Rom 13:1–7). However, in the church evildoers are not to be punished provided they repent (Matt 18:15–20). Thus, in the church God's reign includes forgiveness that transcends human justice, while in the world his reign is intended to provide a more conventional sense of justice.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>To complicate matters further, it is often challenging if not impossible to determine what God's purposes in a situation are. Thus, we are unable to choose how to act based on what God is doing in the world. Rather than trying to determine God's purposes, believers would be better served to determine God's directives to them and to seek to follow those.

<sup>41</sup>I present no argument either for or against a present form of the kingdom, since I believe a decision about a present form of the kingdom is not necessary to consider its strength as a foundation for holistic ministry. Many who hold to a present form of the kingdom reject using the kingdom as a basis for social involvement, e.g., the two-kingdom proponents.

<sup>42</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Twelve Theses on the Church's Mission in the Twenty-First Century: In Interaction with Charles Van Angen, Keith Eitel, and Enoch Wan," in *MissionShift: Global Issues in the Third Millennium*, ed. David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 64–65.

<sup>43</sup>VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 141–42.

Certain realities of the kingdom are difficult to point to at the present time. How are believers to demonstrate to the world the reality that Jesus will rule with a rod of iron? Since there will be no marriage in the resurrection, should believers refrain from marriage today to help people get a taste of the future kingdom (Matt 22:30)? If believers are not to demonstrate every aspect of the future kingdom in the present time, then it weakens an appeal to the future kingdom for present holistic ministry.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps the greatest issue with the argument for holistic ministry from the presence of the kingdom is the connection between Jesus's pointing to the reality of the kingdom through his miracles and believers' pointing to the reality of the kingdom through their social engagement. This approach overlooks a significant disconnect between Jesus's works and the believer's works today. Jesus's activities were miraculous signs of power that pointed to the authority of the King (Matt 12:28; John 10:37–38), while the believer's activities are mostly ordinary works of service. Jesus feeds five thousand with a few loaves and fishes to point to the reality of the kingdom, while Christians today run food pantries to point to the reality of the kingdom. Jesus healed people instantaneously with a word, while Christians today heal people through the use of hospitals and clinics. The differences between Jesus's signs and believers' "signs" today are far greater than the similarities. Some recognize that the "signs" of the church are "broken" and imperfect, arguing that the brokenness of the signs show that the final reign is still future.<sup>45</sup> But the final reign was future with Jesus, and his signs were not broken.

As well, the apostles do not point to their good deeds as signs of the presence of the kingdom, nor do they encourage churches to be active in social work to reveal the reality of the kingdom. If social justice is a sign of the presence of the kingdom, then are unbelievers pointing to the reality of the kingdom when they engage in deeds of mercy even though they themselves are not citizens of that kingdom? How can activities common to believer and unbeliever alike reveal the presence of the kingdom? Since the realization of the kingdom depends on the Father and not the activity of the church, could believers be making promises on which they cannot deliver when they promise the glories of the kingdom today, including incredible social and economic benefits?<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Another potential weakness of the emphasis on working towards the kingdom is a transfer of focus from the King to the kingdom. People can be more concerned about the glories of the new earth, with its removal of poverty and injustice, than with the presence of Jesus. "As Christians, we want our eyes to be not so much on the kingdom as on the kingdom's King" (Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011], 131).

<sup>45</sup>Hunsberger, "Missional Vocation," 108.

<sup>46</sup>Christopher R. Little, "In Response to 'The Future of Evangelicals in Mission,'" in *MissionShift: Global Issues in the Third Millennium*, ed. David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 208–9.

Issues like these seem to render the presence of the kingdom as an unsuitable foundation for holistic ministry.

### Other Issues

Two other problems often arise in relation to each of the foundations given, though they do not seem to be necessarily tied to the foundations. First, holistic ministry is often presented as the only way for the church to be successful in the world or to remain relevant. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* is a prime example of this mindset. Wright also reflects this attitude when he points to the hypocrisy of Christians as the reason people do not accept the gospel.<sup>47</sup> Instead, Scripture points to the blindness of unbelievers and their suppression of the truth as the reason Christians are "unsuccessful" (Rom 1:18ff.; 2 Cor 4:4).

The second issue is the selective approach to what falls under holistic ministry. Current advocates promote things like environmental care, poverty alleviation, and the end of oppression. But they often neglect other issues related to social justice in the Old Testament, such as capital punishment, abortion, and homosexuality. It can create the impression that the reason certain aspects are promoted is that they will be more readily accepted in the culture at large and not because they more closely reflect the character of God and his desires for his people.

### A MODEST PROPOSAL OF A WAY FORWARD

So, is holistic ministry legitimate for believers? None of the above criticism should be construed as signaling an antagonism for a holistic understanding of ministry. It is intended to show that the common approaches do not provide a solid foundation on which to build a ministry that is holistic—not to discard the concept of holistic ministry altogether.

It is certainly easier to critique the arguments of others than to offer an acceptable alternative. But it is also less beneficial. Therefore, in the remainder of the essay I will set forth what I call a modest proposal of a way forward. I refer to it as a modest proposal for two reasons. First, I have no delusions that the limited thoughts set forth here will be sufficient for forming a comprehensive approach to understanding the mission of the church, her relation to society and culture, the nature and role of good works, etc. Rather, my goal is to begin to clarify certain misunderstood issues and to offer some direction that will enable others to form a more comprehensive and consistently biblical approach. Second, I deem it modest in that this proposal is probably less alluring than the foundations listed above. It is not a call to accomplish what Jesus did, or an invitation to join God on his mission to transform the universe, or a summons to extend God's reign over all of society or serve as signs of the presence of the kingdom breaking into the world. Rather, it is a call to faithfully follow and serve God in the all the ways he has

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<sup>47</sup>Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 275.

specifically commanded us. But what it lacks in excitement I trust it compensates for in scriptural support and long-term sustainability.<sup>48</sup>

### The Church's Relationship to Society

Most Christians recognize that the New Testament establishes a measure of separation between the church and the state, though there may be disagreement as to the extent of that separation. However, it is clear that in Jesus's statement "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" he was recognizing two separate spheres in the present world (Mark 12:17).<sup>49</sup> There were certain parts of life that fell into the realm of human government as established by God and other parts of life that belonged exclusively to God. In most discussions of holistic ministry, this distinction is minimized or dismissed altogether. It is considered dualistic to speak of secular and sacred realms because everything has been consumed under God's reign. That God rules over every realm of life is not disputed. The real issue is whether or not He rules over every area of life in the same way. The Scripture seems to point to certain tasks that God has given to government (and other institutions) that he has not given to the church, and vice versa. The church does not carry the sword that God has given to government (Rom 13:4), nor does the government carry the task of administering church discipline (1 Cor 5–6).

In this area, I find the two-kingdom theology a helpful starting point.<sup>50</sup> In the Noahic Covenant, God established a common kingdom<sup>51</sup> or sphere to provide a natural order for all humanity in which they can pursue normal cultural activities (as opposed to cultic/religious ones such as worship and devotion).<sup>52</sup> In the Abrahamic Covenant, God established a redeemed people or kingdom for his name's sake. Whereas the Noahic Covenant deals with ordinary cultural activities for the common human race to preserve the natural and social order while the earth remains, the Abrahamic Covenant deals with religious faith and worship for a holy and distinct people to bestow the benefits of salvation for eternity.<sup>53</sup> During Abraham's life, he lived as a citizen of both kingdoms, functioning normally in culture at large but worshipping in a distinct way. As a sojourner, he was waiting for God to fulfill his

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<sup>48</sup>Of course, the reader will have to determine whether or not I have been successful in my endeavor.

<sup>49</sup>All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the ESV, 2001.

<sup>50</sup>For a history of two-kingdom approaches versus one-kingdom approaches, see David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>51</sup>Throughout the remainder of this section, the word *kingdom* could be replaced by the word *sphere*.

<sup>52</sup>VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 79.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 82–83.

promise.<sup>54</sup> With the establishment of the Mosaic Covenant, these two kingdoms were merged into one for those living in Israel, so that both cultural activity and worship were to be distinct from the world at large and part of one's service to God.<sup>55</sup> The Israelites were no longer sojourners in the land, and every area of life was regulated by the Mosaic Covenant. No longer were they to interact on an equal plane with those in the land.<sup>56</sup>

However, when they interacted with those outside the borders of the land or when they themselves were displaced from the land, they reverted back to a two-kingdom approach. They were to wage war differently between cities inside the land and those outside the land (Deut 20:10–17). When the people were removed from the land and placed in Babylon, they were now to incorporate themselves into the larger cultural life of the city and seek its welfare (Jer 29), which was a reversion to practices under the Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants (cf. Deut 23:6, where Israel is told not to seek the prosperity of the inhabitants of the land). However, they were still citizens of two kingdoms, for their religious practice was to be centered on God and his promise of restoration (Jer 29:11–13).<sup>57</sup> Once again they lived as sojourners in a foreign land. However, when they returned to the land in Ezra, they were again forbidden to seek the prosperity of those in the land (9:12). The reason for these different commands was that this earthly reign, the union of cultural and religious activity, depended on a geographic location or distinct land where God's people lived.<sup>58</sup> In the New Testament, believers are not grounded in a geographic location, but are called to be sojourners, waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises while living within the common culture of their day (Heb 11; 1 Pet 2:11).

This understanding of two kingdoms helps believers recognize the nature of their cultural engagement. They do not establish God's reign through their engagement, nor do they restore or redeem creation. They are not called to accomplish the task that Adam failed to do—to live in perfect obedience, including subduing the earth, in order to enjoy the world to come—but to enjoy the benefits of Christ's accomplishing Adam's task.<sup>59</sup> Believers engage in cultural activities, such as work, art,

<sup>54</sup>Jason J. Stellman, *Dual Citizens: Worship and Life Between the Already and the Not Yet* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2009), xxi.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>56</sup>Non-Israelites continued to live within the common kingdom, since the Mosaic Covenant was only for the nation of Israel.

<sup>57</sup>VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 92–94.

<sup>58</sup>Stellman, *Dual Citizens*, xxii–xxiv.

<sup>59</sup>VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 56–58. VanDrunen's point that a Protestant understanding of justification is incompatible with the concept that believers are to take up Adam's task to restore creation is intriguing. Just as Jesus accomplished everything for our salvation by obeying where Adam failed, he also accomplished everything for the redemption of the world by obeying where Adam failed. And in both situations, obedience comes as a result of what has been accomplished: "We pursue

ecology, etc., as part of common humanity and to demonstrate a godly life as a consequence of what Christ already accomplished on their behalf.<sup>60</sup> The reality of two kingdoms does not mean that believers divorce their Christianity from their cultural pursuits. Though being Christian does not provide a unique foundation for engaging in cultural activities such as government, marriage, and work, it does alter the manner in which believers engage in them (Eph 5–6; Col 3–4).<sup>61</sup>

### **The Church's Unique Role in the World**

Once one recognizes the existence of the two kingdoms, it becomes necessary to consider what tasks are unique to the sphere of God's redeemed people constituted in the present age in the church. Though many things in life are common to all mankind, the distinctions between the Christian and the non-Christian in this present age center on the church. Thus, the unique role of the church is to be found in the explicit commands of Scripture given to the church.

Since the church is not tied to any physical institution or corporation, it is not designed to establish governments or to create policies for society.<sup>62</sup> Rather, the church has been granted ministerial authority to present and promote what God has said. The church's role is to uphold what God has said in his Word to govern his people—not to create their own laws.<sup>63</sup> The church will function best in the world when it limits its ministry to activities explicitly tied to the tasks it has been given in Scripture. Nowhere in Scripture is the church called to provide universal education or health care. It is not given the task of stimulating the economy to provide employment for all people, nor is it called to judge criminal or civil disputes.<sup>64</sup> All of these are easily carried out within the structures of society that are common to all mankind. Rather, the church's role is focused on worship, discipleship, fellowship, and evangelism. These are areas that are unique to God's redeemed people, and the world at large cannot share in them.

To say that the church should focus on its unique role in society does not mean that nothing else in life matters. While the church does not directly bear the responsibility of shaping society at large, it is required to equip its members to function in society in ways that honor God. Through its discipleship ministries, the church can help believers live in the culture with completely different motivations and, at times, different activities. For example, a Christian assembly line worker will

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cultural activity in response to the fact that the new creation has already been achieved, not in order to contribute to its achievement" (57).

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>61</sup>Stellman, *Dual Citizens*, xxvi.

<sup>62</sup>VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms*, 146–47.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 151–52.

<sup>64</sup>An exception could be arbitrating civil disputes among believers (1 Cor 6).

not necessarily perform different tasks on his job than a non-Christian. Both are called to work diligently, honestly, and skillfully. But the Christian does not do his job simply to earn money, to further his career, or to please his employers. He ultimately works “as for the Lord and not for men” because he is “serving the Lord Christ” (Col 3:23–24). The church does not fulfill his job for him on the assembly line, but it should help him to understand his motivations for doing what he does and call him to do it for God’s glory. The church functions in a similar realm in other areas of society.

The church’s worship and fellowship are other key areas that the unbelieving world does not participate in. The gathering of the church for worship and fellowship is not merely a means of equipping people to go out and do the real Christian work in the world at large but is a crucial task to be done for God’s glory regardless of the world at large—they are not means to an end but an end in themselves.<sup>65</sup> The corporate life of the church is not secondary to God’s work in the world but is central to it.

However, the church does have a unique responsibility to the world at large to proclaim the gospel. Unbelievers may share in tasks of improving society, but they do not share in the task for verbal gospel proclamation. The church must never lose sight of its call to be a means of blessing to the nations through calling all people to follow in the faith of Abraham (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:7–9).<sup>66</sup> The church must fulfill its task of communicating the good news of Jesus Christ, forming new communities of believers, and communicating how to live out the implications of the gospel.<sup>67</sup>

### Distinction Between the Church and Individual Believers

One of the crucial points in this discussion is the distinction between the church *qua* church and individual Christians. Though the church is a group of believers, the church is not identical with

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<sup>65</sup>VanDrunen, *Living in God’s Two Kingdoms*, 132–33. Contra Wright’s claim that “The pastor goes to church on Sunday to support the people in *their* ministry. And *their* ministry, the ministry that really counts as mission, is *outside* the walls of the church, in the world, being salt and light in the marketplace” (*The Mission of God’s People*, 272).

<sup>66</sup>Often the emphasis on holistic ministry leads to a greater allocation of energy and resources to efforts for societal improvement with the result that the unique calling of the church to reproduce local congregations is neglected. Joel James and Brian Biedebach lament this reality that they have observed occurring in Africa over the last two decades: “As resources are fed into the gaping maw of social justice projects, by default, essential ministries are left undernourished. The West can finance, train, and send only so many missionaries to Africa. And since so many of the new missionaries being sent are focusing on relief projects, what suffers by default are the essential ministries of Christian missions: the things that *only* the church can do” (“Regaining Our Focus: A Response to the Social Action Trend in Evangelical Missions,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 25 [Spring 2014]: 36).

<sup>67</sup>Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 28–29.

believers.<sup>68</sup> Further, there are distinctions between the responsibilities given to believers and responsibilities given to the church as church. For example, the church has the responsibility of overseeing the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper), of administering church discipline, selecting its leadership, etc. Individual believers cannot take that responsibility on themselves. As well, individual believers have some responsibilities that the church does not fulfill. The church is not called to love my wife—I am. The church is not called to fulfill my responsibilities as an employee—I am. One passage that clearly shows this distinction in regards to mercy ministry is 1 Timothy 5:3–16. Paul points out that believing relatives rather than the church are to care for needy widows in their family, whereas the church has the responsibility to care for the widows who are truly in need because they have no relatives. Thus, the responsibilities of the church and the responsibilities of believers are not co-extensive.

### **Priorities of Biblical Tasks**

The issue of priorities can be an unpopular one in relation to holistic ministry. The normal fear is that giving a task higher priority means that the tasks below it will be deemed unimportant or will be neglected. However, prioritization does not have to be an enemy of holistic ministry.

It is important to note that prioritization is a biblical practice. Jesus speaks in language of prioritization and importance when he refers to the greatest commandment and the second commandment (Matt 22:34–40). He also tells the Pharisees that they are neglecting the “weightier matters of the law” (Matt 23:23). To make these distinctions does not mean that the less important issues are unimportant or can be ignored, for Jesus also tells the Pharisees that they should have observed both the greater and lesser matters of the Law. It is surely biblical to recognize that God is more important than anything else, or that humans are more important than the rest of creation, without viewing any lesser thing as therefore unimportant.

It is also crucial to note that the biblical teaching regarding doing good contains aspects of prioritization. Paul's command in Galatians 6:10 sets doing good to those inside the church as more important than doing good outside of the church. In 1 Timothy 5:3–8 Paul touches on priority issues twice: verse four indicates that the responsibility to care for widows falls first at the feet of their children and grandchildren, and verse eight points out that believers have an even greater responsibility to care for those in their immediate household than for their relatives in general. Therefore, it is legitimate to state that needs in the church or in the family have priority to those outside.

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<sup>68</sup>If a church was identical with believers, any time a group of believers happened to be together they would constitute a church—making a believing family a church, a Bible study a church, a Christian university a church, etc.

Perhaps the greatest point of tension comes from considering evangelism as having priority over doing good. Yet the Bible is clear that eternal issues are more significant than temporal ones (e.g., Matt 16:24–25; Luke 12:4–5, 13–21; John 6:27). Granted, the importance of eternal matters does not necessarily give evangelism a place of priority. But it should certainly contribute to the discussion and help believers to recognize that eternal suffering is more significant than temporal suffering. Thus, their efforts to relieve eternal suffering are more significant than their efforts to relieve temporal suffering.<sup>69</sup>

### **Distinguishing Between Obligation and Opportunity**

In their zeal to promote a holistic approach to ministry, some confuse opportunities with obligations. In other words, they fail to distinguish what believers *can* do in relationship to social involvement from what believers *must* do. In so doing, they unnecessarily bind the consciences of believers and overstep the authority given to the church.

Every believer has the obligation to fulfill the Great Commission passages, but they may partake of various opportunities to do so—planting a church in their home country, training national pastors in another country, overseeing a congregation that sends out church planters, participating in a church planting effort, supporting those who are involved in church planting, joining a local club or organization in order to build redemptive relationships, etc. It would be wrong to take one of these opportunities and treat it as an obligation for all believers. Similarly, every believer has a responsibility to do good, but there are various opportunities for them to fulfill this responsibility: caring for an elderly parent or grandparent, volunteering at a homeless shelter, providing food or clothes for those in need, working with inner-city teens, adopting an orphan, doing yard work for a neighbor who is physically disabled, etc. To try to convince believers that one particular expression of doing good is necessary when it is not delineated as such in Scripture is to abuse God's people.

One of the dangers in advocating opportunities as though they were obligations is that it fails to consider how various circumstances may call for different responses. There may be times in which it is more important to seemingly “waste” resources in demonstrating love for God, while at other times it may be more important to use those resources to provide for the poor (Mark 14:3–9).<sup>70</sup> There may be other times when a response of mercy is called for rather than justice, or tough love must be demonstrated over kind love.<sup>71</sup> Rather than forcing particular expressions of biblical principles as the only valid means of

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<sup>69</sup>The relationship between doing good and the gospel will be considered further below.

<sup>70</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 52–53.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

obedience, church leaders should help the believers in their ministry to understand the obligations that they have and urge them to find ways to demonstrate their obedience in those areas. They may help their people to become aware of different opportunities to live out the biblical injunctions, but they should never elevate any particular activity as the only truly Christian application unless it is expressed as such clearly in Scripture.

### Biblical Teaching on Doing Good

In forming a more biblical approach to holistic ministry, it is vital to think through the believer's responsibility to do good.<sup>72</sup> Two issues will be addressed here: the reasons for doing good, and relationship of doing good to the gospel.

#### Reasons for Doing Good

If the foundations listed earlier are inadequate, are there any reasons left for doing good? The Bible actually presents several reasons for believers to do good works. The first and most obvious reason for believers to do good is obedience to God's commands. The Scriptures include commands to do good on multiple occasions (2 Cor 9:8; Gal 6:10; Eph 2:10; 2 Thess 3:13). Therefore, believers who want to obey God will seek to follow those commands.<sup>73</sup>

The second reason for doing good is to glorify God by displaying his character. Matthew 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:10 explicitly tie the believer's good deeds to God's receiving of glory. One of the main reasons God receives glory through the believer's good deeds is that it displays God's character. When believers do good to those who hate them, they are simply reflecting the character of their Father, who is "kind to the ungrateful and the evil" (Luke 6:35), and "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:44). When they minister to those who cannot repay them, they are following in the footsteps of their Father who ministers to those who cannot repay him (Luke 14:13–21).

Another reason believers should do good is to love their neighbors. Jesus's commands to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39) and "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them"

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<sup>72</sup>For this discussion, the generic category of "doing good" would include things like social justice, deeds of mercy, meeting physical needs, contributing to society, etc. It refers to acts that are beneficial to others and are morally good.

<sup>73</sup>Duane Litfin points to this motivation in discussing Christian education: "I am highly motivated to be about the business of cultivating our minds and our learning, but it seems to me that our first motives for doing so must be intrinsic rather than instrumental. In other words, we must learn to love God with our minds, to use our artistic gifts for Christ, to embody him in serving our neighbor and our society. But our primary motive for doing so must not be the transformation of culture. Our prime motive must be *obedience to Jesus Christ*" (*Conceiving the Christian College* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 57).

(Matt 7:12) naturally lead believers to do what is beneficial for those God has providentially placed in their paths. Believers want to have their needs met, so they should be willing to help meet the needs of others. They ought to be willing to help others gain access to sufficient employment, for they would want others to offer them that opportunity. They usually desire safe neighborhoods and quality education for their children, so they should be willing to support those things for others. If believers began to take these commands of Jesus seriously, then they would naturally be involved in a holistic approach to ministry.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, doing good arises from the cultural mandate found in the Noahic Covenant.<sup>75</sup> Believers pursue justice in society as part of general humanity made in God's image. When given the opportunity, they endeavor to uphold God's universal standards of justice in government so that evil is punished and good is rewarded (Rom 13). These standards are part of God's moral law, written in the hearts of all people (Rom 2:14–15). They do not seek to force kingdom ethics on society at large but seek to uphold God's moral law that is intended for generic humanity. In so doing, they are honoring God's desire for society.<sup>76</sup>

### Relationship of Doing Good to the Gospel

Another common area of contention in discussions of holistic ministry comes from the relationship that doing good has to the gospel.<sup>77</sup> Doing good is not the essence of the gospel, which would destroy concepts of individual sin, God's wrath, and personal justification. Nor is it a replacement for the verbal proclamation of the gospel. Two possibilities for the relationship of doing good to the gospel that appear more helpful are (1) doing good is a means of gaining a hearing for the gospel—i.e., it is a means of gaining credibility; and (2) doing good is an outgrowth of the gospel—i.e., it is a means of adorning the gospel.

The suggestion that doing good is a way to gain a hearing is sometimes criticized as a bait-and-switch tactic.<sup>78</sup> There have surely been some who have used acts of mercy to lure people in, only later to spring the gospel on them. This attitude not only denigrates good deeds to the level of cheap marketing ploys but also degrades evangelism to little

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<sup>74</sup>By founding holistic ministry on a love for others the issue of wisdom in application is opened up. Sometimes, what is most loving for your neighbor is not what your neighbor wants or believes he or she needs. It also keeps the focus on eternal matters first and foremost, since the most loving thing a person can do is share the gospel with their neighbor.

<sup>75</sup>This mandate includes activities for the common human race to preserve the natural and social order while the earth remains.

<sup>76</sup>For a similar list of reasons for doing good, see DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* 223–29.

<sup>77</sup>Though some speak primarily of the relationship of good deeds to evangelism, it is better to consider them in light of the gospel itself.

<sup>78</sup>E.g., Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 26.

more than a sales pitch. However, the problem seems to lie more in a faulty understanding of gospel proclamation than in the role of good deeds. When the goal of evangelism is simply to produce decisions from the highest quantity possible, then anything related to it will necessarily be marred. A more biblical approach to evangelism would easily reduce the harm done by bait-and-switch tactics.

A more careful approach does not view good works as a means to lure people in but as a means of removing barriers to the proclamation of the gospel. Since evangelism is not a subversive act designed to build up the evangelist but is rather a supremely loving act intended for the eternal benefit of the other person, there are no ulterior motives in sharing the gospel after doing good. "It makes perfect sense to love someone by giving them food and at the same time to love them in a different, eternally consequential way by giving them the gospel. There's no bait-and-switch there; that's simply holistic compassion—compassion for the whole person, not just part of him."<sup>79</sup> Verses like Matthew 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:12 lend credence to this understanding.

However, a clarification is in order: to say that doing good is a way to gain a hearing does not mean that doing good is an essential element of evangelism or that it is the hidden key for conversions. If good deeds are an essential element of evangelism then evangelism cannot be accomplished apart from good deeds. However, there is no indication that Paul waited to preach the gospel in Athens until he had done some visible good in the city (Acts 17). Peter did not first minister to physical needs in Jerusalem before proclaiming Christ to them at Pentecost (Acts 2). If it is possible to do evangelism that is not directly accompanied by doing good, then doing good is not essential for evangelism. Whether or not verbal proclamation of the gospel will be accompanied in any way by good deeds depends on several factors, including resources, abilities, location, etc. To claim that no one will listen to the gospel unless they first see the preacher doing good is going beyond the biblical witness.

Also, good deeds are not the hidden key for effective evangelism. The social action of the early church is often identified as the reason the missionary efforts of the apostles were so effective.<sup>80</sup> However, the New Testament seems to point more closely to the power of the gospel through the working of the Holy Spirit as the reason for the gospel's advance (e.g., Acts 13:49; Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:18–2:16; 2 Cor 4:1–12). If doing good were the key to people's salvation, then surely Jesus would have seen much greater success. No one did more good than he did, but the majority of people rejected him. Doing good does not necessarily make the gospel more believable, which should provide some caution for the emphasis on credibility.<sup>81</sup> Good deeds may cause others

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<sup>79</sup>DeYoung and Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church?* 228.

<sup>80</sup>E.g., Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 146–47.

<sup>81</sup>Some argue that good deeds do not give credibility to the message of the gospel

to be willing to listen to the message, but only the Spirit can make them believe it.<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps a better way to understand the relationship between doing good and the gospel is that good deeds are the outgrowth of a life transformed by the gospel. Therefore, doing good is a means of adorning the gospel. Paul teaches that the lives of believers can “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:10). Good deeds help show the beauty of the gospel because they point to its life-changing power. However, that does not mean that believers only do good to make the gospel attractive to unbelievers. Since their good deeds are the result of a changed life, they do them regardless of the response of unbelievers. They do good because they love the gospel of Jesus Christ and want to display its splendor in their lives.<sup>83</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Adjustments must be made to the current approaches to holistic ministry to help them more accurately reflect Scripture and allow for a more careful and sustainable foundation for holistic ministry. The attempts to base holistic ministry on the mission of Jesus, the mission of God, and the presence of the Kingdom are flawed and therefore unable to serve as the grounds for holistic ministry. The believer’s mission is distinct from the mission of Jesus and the mission of God. Believers are not able to reproduce Jesus’s signs of the presence of the kingdom, and the New Testament authors did not tie their good deeds to its presence.

As an alternative to current approaches, the two-kingdom approach appears to be a more biblical starting point for a consideration of holistic ministry. It recognizes that believers live as sojourners, citizens of both the common kingdom of humanity and of God’s redemptive kingdom. They should not seek to extend the authority of the church beyond its scriptural boundaries. Christians should seek to implement biblical priorities in their approaches to holistic ministry and should not treat opportunities for service as obligations from Scripture. However, they should do good for all of the reasons laid out in Scripture, seeking to adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If the goal is to get churches to take a more holistic approach to ministry, does it really matter what basis is given? If the end result is the same, why even quibble over minor distinctions? A simple answer is that theology matters. God does not merely want his people to act in certain ways, but to think in certain ways. Therefore, our basis should

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but to the messenger of the gospel. There is certainly wisdom in this approach. However, this can still communicate the idea that people will be more likely to accept the message of the gospel if they think the messenger is credible.

<sup>82</sup>The idea that good works gives credibility to the gospel is related to the concept that good deeds are signs of the presence of the kingdom. Thus, the above critique regarding good works as signs of the kingdom would apply equally here.

<sup>83</sup>Obviously, Christians should always want to see unbelievers saved, but the salvation of unbelievers is not the driving force behind all they do.

be as biblical as possible.

However, another reason is that a faulty foundation will not be able to sustain holistic ministry long-term. Either believers will begin to abandon key scriptural tenets such as the significance of individual sin, the uniqueness of Christ's ministry, the reality of future judgment, and the glories of the coming kingdom. Or, they will be disillusioned as they are unable to effectively redeem society, restore the universe, or complete Jesus's mission. But, if they are able to see holistic ministry as a means of obeying and glorifying God, of loving their neighbor, and of participating in the common culture, then they can adopt a more realistic and biblical attitude that can sustain holistic ministry in the long run.

Granted, this approach to holistic ministry may not seem as grand as others. It does not speak of changing the world, of transforming society, or of redeeming culture. Nor does it call believers to participate in every aspect of God's mission of cosmic restoration. But, a believer should take no greater joy than simply serving God in the way that he has called him. If this approach to holistic ministry accurately reflects God's call, then it is grand indeed.