

Are all Christians really missionaries?

By: J.D. Greear

"Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor."

Let that sink in for a minute. Quite a bold statement, isn't it? This is a quote from the famous 19th Century British pastor and theologian, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He pastored one of the first megachurches of the modern era, The Metropolitan Tabernacle, in London. Thousands of people came to faith under his ministry and it's estimated that he preached to upwards of 10 million people over the course of his life.

So, why would he say that every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor? Seems odd to me. Is he saying that every true follower of Christ should pack up their bags and move to Africa and become a missionary? That's what a missionary is, right?

I grew up going to church all the time. I remember every few months, a missionary would show up at church. They were always kind of weird and looked odd. Their names were usually something like Herb and Martha. They always had slides with them. Not PowerPoint slides, but clear, translucent slides that were shown on an overhead projector. An overhead projector was basically this huge box that weighed about fifty pounds and sat on a table and had a bright light in the bottom of the box that pointed up at a mirror that displayed the slides on the wall.

Missionaries were varsity Christians. They traveled overseas, usually to Africa. We paid them money to keep up their missionary work. The rest of us were basically losers because we worked normal jobs here in the States, but we always made ourselves feel better by contributing a few dollars in the love offering. No, I'm not sure why it was called a love offering.

Unfortunately, this is the only thing that comes to mind when we talk about missionaries. However, in Spurgeon's mind, the essence of what it means to be a Christian is that you live your life as a missionary, regardless of where you live, stateside or overseas.

In fact, if we take a look at the life of Jesus, he was a missionary. At least thirty-nine times in the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to himself as "sent" on a mission. He left his home in heaven, left his family, and left his culture to come to the earth as a missionary to reach a people who would've otherwise never been restored to the Father.

Additionally, Jesus not only refers to himself as "sent," he refers to every Christian as "sent." We are all sent as missionaries here and now to the culture where we live.

As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world (John 17:18).

This is why the early church made disciples at lightning speed. It wasn't because they had fancy programs or great productions. It was because every believer operated as a missionary. There was no such thing as a "foreign missionary."

I love what Michael Green says in *Evangelism in the Early Church*. He says that early Christianity's explosive growth was in reality accomplished by means of informal missionaries.

Tim Keller communicates a similar concept in *Center Church*. He says, Not only the apostles but every Christian did evangelism – and they did so endlessly. Numerous passages indicate that every Christian was expected to evangelize, follow up,

nurture, and teach people the Word. This happened relationally – one person bringing the gospel to another within the context of a relationship.

All believers must see themselves as missionaries sent by Jesus Christ, sent into the world, and sent on a mission. If your Christian life doesn't look like this, then you need to ask the hard question, "Am I a missionary or impostor?"

Is every Christian a missionary?

By: Matt Bredmond

"Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor." – Charles Spurgeon

The above quote by Charles Spurgeon has been making the rounds on Twitter and facebook recently. I have benefited from Spurgeon's sermons and writings and life story for a number of years. But at the risk of killing a sacred cow here, I must say, "I disagree."

Let me start by saying, I am fine with saying every Christian is to be salt and light where they find themselves. And I agree that our speech should be appropriately seasoned with words which betray our faith sooner or later. And contrary to popular opinion on what I have previously written, I am not against missions or evangelism.

If it is true, that every christian is a missionary, then the word really has no meaning beyond what a Christian should be doing, missions. There is no point in calling missionaries to Eritrea, "missionaries" because accountants in Meridian are doing the same thing. The word becomes nearly meaningless. And while most missionaries, who have have cast off the comforts of ours for foreign lands, would be too gracious to be bothered by the idea, it would be understandable if they were just a little put-off by such an idea. Of course, then we would criticize them for pride. "Oh you are a Nurse! Me too! I just told my sister to take some Ibuprofen."

Nursing your children back to health does not make you a Nurse.

My guess is people love the quote because they are still mired in the paradigm of elevating missionary work as the height of spirituality. Ordinary work that is not vocational ministry is not valuable enough in the kingdom if we are not using it as a vehicle for witnessing to people. It is not dignified by itself as kingdom work, something more is needed. So we call ourselves missionaries to justify our taking up of spiritual space.

However, I think most people mean well. Their thinking about Christianity is primarily defined by evangelism and missions. This is not merely part of the Christian experience, it defines it.

All of this seems to support a paradigm of thinking foreign to the New Testament writers. In other words, the quote demands we see ourselves as missionaries. If we do not, then we are impostors. Also, we must see others the same way. "Are they living like missionaries? Well they

are impostors, if not." The problem with this is that the writers of the NT do not ever talk like this. No one is ever called out for the sin of not being a missionary or witnessing or evangelizing. No one's salvation is ever questioned for anything of the sort.

So while I understand the need for all Christians to be salt and light I disagree with Spurgeon on this. It confuses the difference between those who go and those who stay. And also it evaluates someone's faith based on a variable of the christian life which almost goes entirely unmentioned in the New Testament letters to the churches.