

Missionary or Missional: The Emerging Church “on a Mission from God”

{I find this excerpt from Bob DeWaay’s book helpful in understanding two terms: “missionary” and “missional”. For a while I have heard some Christians used the term missional and the assumption is always placed on the preaching of repentance and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. However, the term “missional” may have a different connotation altogether as explained hereunder}.

by Bob DeWaay

(Excerpted from Bob DeWaay’s book, *The Emergent Church*, pp. 31-32)

Missionary or Missional? For hundreds, if not thousands, of years Christians have used the term “missionary” to describe one who goes out to preach the gospel to an unsaved world headed toward judgment—repentance for the forgiveness of sin found in the death and resurrection of Christ. The mission of the missionary was to proclaim the absolute truth of the gospel—a fact proven by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. The gospel is “good news” because it provides condemned sinners with a certain escape from God’s wrath.

Missional means zealous—about what ? Emergent’s word “missional” does not convey this meaning. “Missional” sounds like “missionary” except that the “mission” is undefined. Emergent leaders disagree among themselves concerning the definition of their “mission,” but the mission they tend to embrace is to improve society now. They borrow much from Catholic liberation theologians and liberalism itself—that Christianity’s mission is to make the world a tangible paradise immediately. Outside of bettering society, the missional concept has no content; it specifically denies a mission of proclaiming an escape from God’s coming wrath. For Emergent, “The journey is the reward,” and the journey will certainly end well for all—without exception. According to Emergent thinking, being missional means following the journey wherever it leads as long as it corrects society’s evils. In their view, missional is more like the opposite of apathy; it is zeal to right the wrongs of society. Because the eschatological end of the journey is assured for everyone, the path the journey takes doesn’t matter much. One mission to fight social evil is as good as another; what matters most is that we are missional together.

“Escape from Coming Wrath” or a “Certain Future of Hope” The content of the gospel (that God has offered a path to escape His coming wrath) is the core issue to a missionary but irrelevant to one who is missional. To the missionary, those who repent and believe the gospel are reconciled to God and enter His kingdom. That message is unimportant, or at least not central, to one who is missional. Why? Because to the Emergent there is no impending judgment and if we do something nice on our journey nothing more is needed. To them, a focus on the content of the message is a distraction at best and harmful at worst.