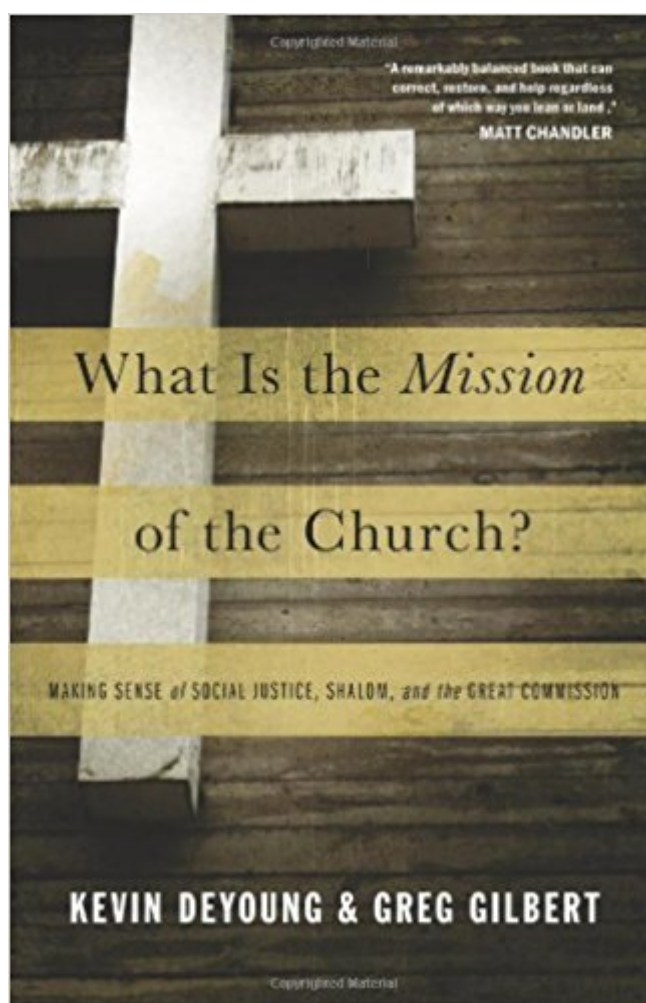


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# What Is The Mission Of The Church?: Making Sense Of Social Justice, Shalom, And The Great Commission



## Synopsis

Christians today define mission a more broadly and variably than ever before. Are we, as the body of Christ, headed in the same direction or are we on divergent missions? Some argue that the mission of the Church is to confront injustice and alleviate suffering, doing more to express God's love for the world. Others are concerned that the church is in danger of losing its God-centeredness and thereby emphasize the proclamation of the gospel. It appears as though misunderstanding of mission persists. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert believe there is a lot that evangelicals can agree on if only we employ the right categories and build our theology of mission from the same biblical building blocks. Explaining key concepts like kingdom, gospel, and social justice, DeYoung and Gilbert help us to get on the same page united by a common cause and launch us forward into the true mission of the church.

## Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Crossway (September 8, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1433526905

ISBN-13: 978-1433526909

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 5.5 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 117 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #71,712 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #77 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Missions & Missionary Work #132 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Evangelism #13800 in Books > Religion & Spirituality

## Customer Reviews

"In what appears to be a growing tension over what the mission of the church encompasses, DeYoung and Gilbert bring a remarkably balanced book that can correct, restore, and help regardless of which way you lean or land on all things missional. I found the chapters on social justice and our motivation in good works to be especially helpful. Whether you are actively engaging the people around you with the gospel and serving the least of these or you are hesitant of anything missional, this book will help you rest in God's plan to reconcile all things to himself in Christ. Matt

Chandler, <sup>1</sup> lead pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas; president, Acts 29 Church Planting Network; author, *The Mingling of Souls and The Explicit Gospel* <sup>2</sup> “Christ is the greatest message in the world, and delivering it is the greatest mission. But are we losing our focus? Are we being distracted, sometimes even by good things? Zealous Christians disagree sharply today over the church’s proper ministry and mission. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert bring us back to first things in an age of mission creep and distraction. Offering balanced wisdom, this book will give us not only encouragement but discomfort exactly where we all need it. It’s the kind of biblical sanity we need at this moment.” <sup>3</sup> • Michael Horton, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Seminary California; author, *Core Christianity: Finding Yourself in God’s Story* <sup>4</sup> “Among the many books that have recently appeared on mission, this is the best one if you are looking for sensible definitions, clear thinking, readable writing, and the ability to handle the Bible in more than proof-texting ways. I pray that God will use it to bring many to a renewed grasp of what the gospel is and how that gospel relates, on the one hand, to biblical theology and, on the other, to what we are called to do.” <sup>5</sup> • D. A. Carson, <sup>6</sup> research professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; cofounder, The Gospel Coalition <sup>7</sup> “DeYoung and Gilbert have put us in their debt with their clear, biblical, theological, and pastoral exposition of the mission of God’s people. That mission, which they rightly understand within the story line of the whole Bible, is summarized in the Great Commission and involves gospel proclamation and disciple making. This superb book will encourage its readers <sup>8</sup> “to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship and obey Jesus’s commands now and in eternity, to the glory of God the Father.” <sup>9</sup> • Peter T. O’Brien, Former Vice-Principal and Senior Research Fellow and Emeritus Faculty Member, Moore Theological College, Australia <sup>10</sup> “A very timely and eminently engaging book for all those who care deeply about the church’s mission in our day. Again and again, I found myself nodding in agreement as the authors made a key point from Scripture or noted the missional relevance of a given biblical passage. I highly recommend this book, not just as food for thought, but more importantly, as a call to obedient, biblically informed action.” <sup>11</sup> • Andreas J. Käpfgenstenberger, Senior Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary <sup>12</sup> “Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert have written an important book on an important topic. Fair, keenly observant, startlingly honest, this book is replete with careful exegetical work. Verses are not merely cited; they are considered in context. The length of an idea is considered, all the way from its

expression in the local church back to its source in Scripture. The result is a book that is nuanced and clear, useful and enjoyable to read, and that is no small gift from two young pastor-theologians who have already become reliable voices. Open this book and you'll want to open your Bible and open your mind on everything from justice to capitalism, from mercy to love.

•Mark Dever, pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC; president, 9Marks

“DeYoung and Gilbert clear the fog that has settled over the nature of the church's mission. Their tone is gracious, the style is accessible, but most importantly this book is marked by fidelity to biblical revelation and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The authors have succeeded in what they exhort us to do: they have kept the main thing as the main thing.”

•Thomas R. Schreiner, James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Professor of Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

“DeYoung and Gilbert provide clarity to some of the most complex contemporary issues facing the church. Focusing us squarely on the redemptive nature of the gospel, they ultimately point us not only to the church's mission, but to practical ways to understand and live it. The result is a book that will be of great help to pastors, missiologists, theologians, and practitioners.”

•M. David Sills, Faye Stone Professor of Christian Missions and Cultural Anthropology, Director of the Doctor of Missiology Program and Great Commission Ministries, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Every generation is tempted to augment or diminish, even nuance or redefine the mission of the church. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert have provided a biblical corrective and protection for our generation in *What is the Mission of the Church?* With a gracious and kind spirit, this book reclaims the ecclesiastical concepts of mission, purpose, social justice, and the Great Commission from those who have redefined these words with a dictionary other than Scripture. Pastors should read this book with their elders, deacons, and leadership teams to wrestle with answers to the most pressing questions about the church in our day.”

•Rick Holland, Senior Pastor, Mission Road Bible Church, Prairie Village, Kansas

Kevin DeYoung (MDiv, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary) is the senior pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Matthews, North Carolina. He serves as a council member at the Gospel Coalition and blogs at DeYoung, Restless, and Reformed. He is assistant professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte) and a PhD candidate at the University of Leicester. He is the author of several books, including *Just Do Something*; *Crazy Busy*; and *The Biggest Story*. Kevin and his wife, Trisha, have seven children.

Greg Gilbert (MDiv, The Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary) is senior pastor at Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. He is the author of *What Is the Gospel?*, *James: A 12-Week Study*, and *Who Is Jesus?*, and is the co-author (with Kevin DeYoung) of *What Is the Mission of the Church?*.

I have been a cross-cultural missionary in Southeast Asia for the last sixteen years. In my many interactions with Christian workers of various background from around the world, I have been often shocked by the lack of biblical compass on the majority of people seeking to serve Christ where I minister. There are so many good people who love Christ, and have sacrificed to serve Him, who are in a real state of confusion, even chaos, regarding missions and missions practice. It all stems from shaky theology back home. This book is a refreshing as it relies on exegesis and sound theology. It also is written in a very readable style. This is an excellent practical resource for those passionate about missions. There are too few people with the courage to write on these topics this way! Too few people who venture into ministry cross-culturally have read resources like these to encourage them towards biblical priorities in their tasks. At times it seems that the authors, trying to be gracious perhaps, quote people favorably those who actually promote the chaos that the book is meant to dispel. There is also a hesitance to make clear applications, but this may be intentional.

**Summary of Contents of the Book** The book is broken down into 3 parts: Understanding our Mission; Understanding our Categories; Understanding what we do and why we do it. Part 1 might have been the most helpful for understanding for what is the current consensus within evangelicalism. Quoting from well-respected guys as Christopher Wright and Tim Keller. Since there are differences of opinion there is need for clarity. DeYoung and Gilbert are guys I've come to respect and was most interested to hear from them based on their reformed convictions and their sensitivity to church history and the Bible. They carefully lay out the options of the mission of the church. They look at all the passages that could imply our mission and show how probably not. Gen. 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6; and Luke 4:16-21 are closely examined. They show that the point of the passage is not a commissioning of the church but rather a description of God's plan to bless the world with Salvation through his appointed Messiah. They use thorough exegesis and make their case well. The reason why we call the great commission 'Great' is because of the priority it should receive. Not only is need most crucial but also the means by which people receive the blessings of Salvation come through the gospel. They then take a close look at the great commissions in the Bible: Luke 24:44-49; Matt: 28:19,20; Mark 13:10 and Mark 14:9; Acts 1:8 and John 20:21 (DeYoung 51). To be honest I hadn't yet laid all the commissions for an

in-depth comparison, to my shame. This was fruitful as the showed at the heart of the commission is to take the message of what God has done in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. This means that although as Christians we need to be full of Good works our mission must have proclamation of the gospel as our central focus. Jesus Mission serves as the model (Deyoung, 54). Some say the mission of the church is service because Christ didn't come to be served but to serve and in John 20:31 he sees the main focus of the disciples being sent is to serve. This reading has been extremely influential. Deyoung and Gilbert carefully offer a corrective, "It's not Jesus driving ambition to heal the sick and meet the needs of the poor, as much as he cared for them. He was sent into the world to save people from condemnation (John 3:17)" (Deyoung, p. 55). They say there is not a single example of Jesus going into a town with the stated purpose of healing or casting out demons. Summing it all up. The mission consists of preaching and teaching, announcing and testifying, making disciples and bearing witness. The mission focuses on the initial and continuing verbal declaration of the gospel, the announcement of Christ's death and resurrection and the life found in him when we repent and believe (DeYoung 59). Part 2 I found to be the most engaging of the book. The story line of the Bible is so compelling and a wonderful way to understand the parts of the whole and the whole to the parts. When the Bible is read canonically or as they say "from the Top of Golgotha" you get God's driving passion to be glorified through the giving up his Son for rebels and the to be the universal King of a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Then they do a helpful corrective the pendulum swinging from one side to the next in our gospel understandings and presentations. Is there a bifurcation between the cross and the kingdom of God? How does it fit in? They answer satisfyingly that the Kingdom comes through the Cross. Christ was crowned king on the cross. The Kingdom has been inaugurated with his coming and now we invite all people to enter into it: To bow the knee to the King of Kings and serve the Creator as Citizens under his rule. Then they have two sections on social justice and one on seeking shalom. Social Justice is extremely popular in my generation and rightfully so as long as we understand its place in the mission. Social Justice comes as the people are made knew and start to apply the commands of Christ. It is an outflow of our discipleship as we obey all that Christ has commanded. But we always lead with the gospel as the church for that it man's biggest need. We don't only do good works when we can share the gospel but we don't spread the church so thin with Non profit organizations or renew al ministries devoid of gospel proclamation. It is our mission to make and train disciples and as disciples will do

good works, and meet needs. Part 3 seeks to put it all together: What we do and why we do it. So what are the purpose of Good works then? Their answer is compelling: to obey God, because we love our neighbors, to show the world God's Character and God's Work, the fruit of the Spirit's work in us, to win a hearing for the Gospel. Deyoung and Gilbert explain "Moral Proximity" and how that governs what they do as stewards of time. There are a million needs in the world. How do we keep from being overwhelmed and neglecting some of the other things we are called to do. We are called to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ, Make disciples, be good spouses, parents, etc. I'm thankful Christ made it explicit as to what gets greatest priority for the church: Make and Train disciples who make and train disciples. So what should we do as Churches? They claim that it wouldn't be illegitimate to do things that have to do with the mission even though they are not the direct mission of the church. So would it be ok for a church to have a celebration for their pastor or missionaries home on furlough? Of course! This is part of encouraging and honoring God's workers so that they can continue on in the mission of the church. So they don't make the case that all we should do is evangelism, discipleship, church planting and leadership development but that these things get the priority. Evaluation of the Book The strengths of this book are the clarity and the content. They interacted with all the relevant books and sought from sound exegesis to formulate their arguments. Although their argument seems nuanced and only slightly different than some it makes a big difference of what your church prioritizes. The authors' experience as pastors shines through, as they have had to wrestle through countless questions regarding this subject from congregants, pastors, conferences, and others. It was a wise undertaking to complete this project and the church is better for it. One weakness might be the little interaction with Tim Keller who might differ from both Deyoung and Gilbert. They only quoted Keller favorably from *Generous Justice* but they were hesitant to show the strong importance he gives to justice. If I'm not mistaken his church's mission statement would include just and mercy. Personal Reflection on the Implications of the Book for Future Ministry This book has already been instrumental for our church in clarifying what we are to prioritize and from it we made our mission statement: We aim to make and train disciples who will make and train disciples. At our core is multiplication and rooted in our evangelism and discipleship is training new believers to share the gospel, support the mission of the church through serving and giving, and praying towards the fulfillment of the great commission. This will be a book to give away, come back to, use in developing leaders for years to come.

DeYoung answers this question with great clarity and Scriptural support. It is important for the church to understand the difference between her primary and secondary responsibilities, to ensure that the church doesn't place unnecessary pressure upon herself or neglect the main thing.

This almost 300 page book covers a great deal of topics aiming at a better understanding of the church's understanding of mission. Going through great lengths to show what it is not. The overarching main outline seems to be in refocusing the book's audience, through exegetical exposition, towards the singularity of definition when the specific word mission is utilized, answering early on the question of its own title on page 62, which is basically going into the entire world, making disciples and declaring the gospel. The authors touch upon a spectrum of genres such as the Kingdom of God, social justice and God's Shalom as well as a brief digression into the continuity/discontinuity of the Old and New earth debate which I found particularly fascinating. The main idea, here retitled, *What the Mission of the Church Is Not*, is well-developed in part 2 the book. To do this the authors systematically addresses various aspects of current missiology through looking into the biblical narrative exegetically to more fully define what is truly the 'mission' of the modern church. First we see a careful defining of what it is that is encompassed by the word 'mission' although they admittedly do not "attempt to define missional" as such. (25) They move to categorizing the various approaches or missiological terminologies/genres that have been associated with the Great Commission ideologically. They feel that establishing the definition of mission is a means to an end, that being "God with man". (247) Defining what missions means is important, because for the church to stay focused "definitions matter". (242) This book will be an effective tool for understanding missions in the hands of those who already have the mindset of the authors. While its aggressive style may solidify the stance of those with differing views of missiology. I enjoyed its well thought out exegesis of the critical proof texts for current missiological impetus. One critic though feels the authors "have a different view than the prevailing approach in evangelical missiology." Stating "you cannot critique others and not expected be critiqued". In summarizing their work, I feel the authors have gone at length to understand and establish what mission is. I found the book to be very enjoyable to read and a very well organized. A well thought out critique of what missions is not.

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