What is mission work? I suppose it depends who you ask. If you would ask that question in so-called evangelical churches in Europe, according to a friend of mine, you would be told that mission work is feeding the hungry and taking care of the sick, or giving money for someone in a foreign country to build houses and schools and hospitals.

What is mission work? If you would ask that question in a large number of mainline churches in the USA, you would get pretty much the same answer, except that Americans are getting more hands-on. Well, a lot of Europeans are too, but still, more Americans would probably tell you that mission work is actually going to a distant place, Africa, South Amer, Asia or at least downtown in some inner city, and feeding people and putting up buildings and teaching them how to take care of themselves.

These are great things to do, and activities which every Christian should consider doing. But is that really mission work?

Again I will ask: what is mission work? Is it sending someone across the ocean to gather Africans or Chinese or people in Thailand around the Word of God and teach them about Jesus and his salvation? Certainly that is mission work. But is that the only kind of mission work? What about sending someone to a location in the US or Canada where the Word of God is not currently being taught in all its truth? Of course, that is mission work. What about putting a financial contribution into your envelope so that people can be sent, through our church body, to places where they would not get to otherwise? Yes, that is mission work.

But mission work is also right here. Calling a pastor to share God’s Word with the community, by writing newspaper columns and other activities, is mission work. But is mission work limited to the pastor? Or is it limited to a small number of people in the congregation? I think you know the answer to that: The answers: No, mission work is part of the life of every believer in Jesus Christ. Every contact that any of us has with anyone who is not of the Christian faith can be an opportunity for mission work.

St Paul says in verse 5 here: Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. There are those who think the term outsiders seems somewhat derogatory. Actually, the term outsiders is a good term and not that bad of a translation here in this verse. An outsider is simply someone who is outside the membership of our congregation, or more appropriately, as in Paul’s day, outside the Christian Church. There does not have to be anything offensive about this term, although it is true the way we use the term today does kind of imply isolation and separation, maybe in a negative way - whereas the words in the original Bible language do not seem to imply anything negative. The Bible simply is acknowledging a fact that those who believe in Jesus Christ are on the inside of the Christian Church, and those who do not are on the outside.

Both the Bible, and we, want outsiders to become insiders, by coming to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. In order to do this we will certainly want to be tactful and sensitive, and not flaunt the fact that we consider ourselves on the inside and come across as arrogant. On the other hand, we dare never forget that we are different, and that until a person comes to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior they can never be on the inside, in this life or in the next.

Paul had a special reason for instructing his readers to be wise in the way they act toward outsiders. Non-Christians were persecuting Christians and taking advantage of them. We still have to be alert to that, but not nearly to the extent that Paul’s readers did
nearly 2,000 years ago. There are still plenty of scam artists who want to take advantage of Christian churches. So we have to be wise.

But in 95% of the cases, our motives for being wise in the way we act toward outsiders will not be to protect ourselves, but to help them. We will be wise for one reason: Mission work. We want to win people to faith in Jesus Christ so they can have eternal life.

So, what is mission work? Mission work is anything that is done by a Christian to win someone to faith. Being wise in the way we act toward outsiders includes many things: Outsiders need to see Christians who live godly lives. They need to see Christians who can control their tongues, not only avoiding profanity but also other kinds of unwholesome talk, complaining and criticizing. They need to see Christians who take their faith seriously and worship regularly and read their Bibles. They need to see Christians who are not lazy, but dedicate themselves to their jobs, not only to earn a living, but to do good for the world. They need to see Christians who treat their spouses and families with love and respect. They need to see the way Christians spend money. They need to see Christians who do not give up when life gets tough. The list goes on and on.

According to verse 6, being wise also involves speaking: Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. We are to remember that every time we open our mouths, we do so as God’s representatives. Therefore we are not to speak blandly, only of things that do not have any lasting value, but we are to sprinkle things in that matter eternally, and try to do so in a manner that will get people’s attention in a positive way. A knowledge of the Bible is not just optional for the very Christian, it is essential. As Paul writes: That you may know how to answer everyone.

But lest anyone be scared off and think they are not qualified, let me ask again: What is mission work? At its most basic level mission work is letting someone know that you believe in Jesus Christ and inviting them. Invite them to your church.

If you are ashamed or embarrassed to invite someone to this church because there is something you do not like about the congregation, or the pastor, please let us know, and we will see what we can do to fix it. If you are convinced it cannot be fixed, maybe you should be involved in a church where you can do mission work and invite people, without any qualms.

Personally I do not think there’s anything to be ashamed of here. I cannot think of many churches where it is easier to go from the status of outsider to insider. Not only do we have the Word of God, but we are small enough and friendly enough that, anyone who wants, could join us in 3-4 months, and if they really want, they could hold some kind of church office within a year or so – of course, you might not want to tell them that at first - it might scare some people off.

What is mission work? Mission work is you inviting someone. If you are not ashamed of either your Savior or your church, what is stopping you from inviting your friend or family member? Did you know that 50% of new church members are brought first by family members, and over 30% by some friend, and only 3% by the pastor - and very few as a result of advertising and publicity? You might be someone’s connection to the church and the Lord. You might be the one to do mission work and act wisely toward outsiders. There might be someone in your life just waiting to be asked, or at least ready to be asked, because, unbeknown to you, the Lord has arranged their life in such a way that their hearts prepared for your invitation.
St Paul said: **Make the most of every opportunity.** You have to act when the time is right. Now might just be the time to give that invitation to Jesus to someone on the outside. Giving that invitation might just be the single most important thing that you can do this week. Be wise! Do mission work! Amen.

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