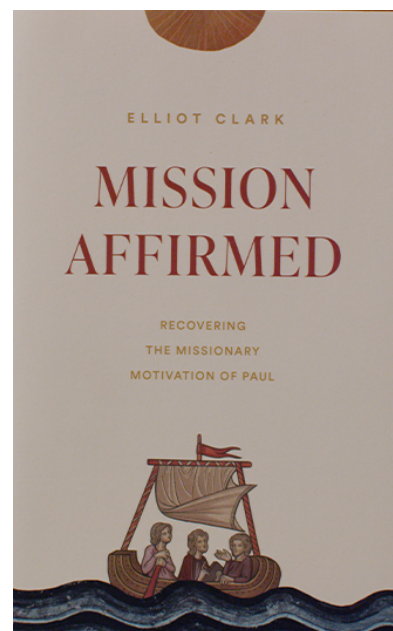


**Clark, Elliot. *Mission Affirmed: Recovering the Missionary Motivation of Paul*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022.**

Reviewed by Bo Parker, IMB Field Personnel, Asia Pacific Rim

*Mission Affirmed* is a work that focuses on the strategy of the Apostle Paul and the motivation behind Paul's mission practice. Elliot Clark proposes that the motivation behind Paul's ministry goes beyond the urgency of evangelism and the advance of the Kingdom. Paul's missionary motivation was driven by a desire to stand affirmed on the last day and to know that the work he had done would be approved by his Master. Paul preached the whole counsel of God and sought to bring all disciples to maturity in Christ in a way that would bring greater glory to God and thus stand affirmed. We also ought to be motivated by our satisfaction in knowing God and Him receiving that glory.



Clark takes the reader through the various epicenters of Paul's ministry and focuses on how the principles and motivations of Paul's ministry were carried out in each place. It is a refreshingly unique approach to highlighting the comprehensive nature (from entry to exit) of his ministry. He highlights how misplaced motivation can also lead to compromise in mission practice. In addition to demonstrating Paul's approach to ministry, Clark also presents ways in which the modern church has fallen short or become near-sighted in her approach to equipping and sending out those who are called to cross-cultural work. Longevity and sustained gospel presence should be our target

rather than urgency to send anyone who may sense a call. In addition, Clark includes a careful examination of the western church's reticent and inadequate theology pertaining to suffering for the sake of Christ. He also tackles issues related to a missionary's partnership with existing national churches and issues of dependency. Though short in length, *Mission Affirmed* is comprehensive in scope and pointed in application.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

As a field practitioner, Clark applies a seasoned and experiential look at current missiological trends. His keen focus on the Scriptures and sound application within modern context is the primary strength of his book. He provides important critiques of current missionary methods and approaches, while also providing a strong course correction that can be applied regardless of denominational background. Clark does not single out the proponents of the methodology he is critiquing. Instead, he addresses the methodology and offers a solution. This is refreshing considering our current cultural trends of criticizing without providing practical alternatives. He is genuinely concerned with the why and how of missions and seeks to encourage the church to grow in her understanding of what God wants to accomplish.

While I applaud Clark's concise approach, one area worthy of further discussion is his criticism of obedience-based discipleship and reproducibility. In chapter 4 entitled "Seeing the Invisible," Clark suggests these cannot be the benchmarks of evaluating missionary work. It is unclear in the chapter what markers signify genuine faith and growth in knowledge of Christ. A person's doctrinal fidelity is not the clearest way to evaluate whether that person is growing as a disciple of Christ. While true, that simplicity and reproducibility cannot merely be the marker of a comprehensive discipleship approach, neither can complexity of doctrine and knowledge alone. Both can be of the flesh. Not all those who desire reproducibility do so to the detriment of Spirit-filled, Spirit-led obedience nor aim for reproducibility through a shallow, hands-off discipleship. We need not create a dichotomy between

grace and obedience in discipleship. The two do not exist independently but jointly demonstrate the reality of a transformed life. This chapter addresses an issue that requires more discussion.

### **Significance as a Resource for Cross-Cultural Work**

In *Mission Affirmed*, Clark presents a work that is relevant for both the individual missionary and the church who sends the missionary. He sets before us a reasoned evaluation of Paul's motivation and strategy from both the equipping and field practitioner standpoint. It would be advantageous for church leadership (pastors, mission leaders, mission committees, sending boards), those considering long-term cross-cultural work, and those currently on the foreign field to read and interact with this work both individually and collectively. In an age when everyone is looking for the latest novel missionary strategies, this work deserves attention for its commitment to biblical orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

### **Recommendation for Additional Reading**

This book is a valuable tool to further sound missiological conversation. Clark does a calculated job of presenting the issues at hand and providing a biblical and practical response. He humbly provides the opportunity for his work to drive discussions across the broad evangelical landscape of missions. *Mission Affirmed* continues the tradition of works like Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, John Nevius' *Methods of Mission Work*, and Roger Greenway's *Cities: Missions' New Frontier* by focusing our attention on biblical patterns with contemporary application.