

## A BIBLICAL MISSIOLOGY

*“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.”* ( I John. 5-8)

Neither of the words “missions” or “missionaries” are found in the Bible, but itinerant evangelism is the principle activity described in the book of Acts; and the whole of Scripture is occupied with a divine mission of the Almighty to fallen men. As such, it is filled with principles of evangelism, teaching, exhorting, warning and instruction from God to man, by means of divinely chosen, called, and empowered men of God. The call to missions or evangelism springs from our Lord’s commands found in Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-48, John 20:21, and Acts. 1:8. The word “mission” itself gained its present prominence through the apostate Medieval Church’s planting of sacralistic “Missions” in pagan nations which had been subjugated under the state power of Rome. Such Missions were an important political tool in subjecting and conforming the populace to Roman rule by “Christianizing” these nations. These Missions were not called churches, for the simple reason that the only “church” recognized was the one at Rome. With the Protestant Reformation, and the emergence of Protestant churches, these began to send out their own “missionaries”, establishing their own “missions” with little less political strings attached than Rome had imposed. These were useful instruments in colonizing second and third world countries, America included. Non-Catholic, non-Protestant churches, as they were able to throw off the hindrances imposed by state churches, followed suit, dropping the political agenda, so that now, in addition to pastoral, teaching, and evangelism ministries, we have a category called “missions”, the purest of which is “foreign” missions, evangelistic activities in countries other than one’s home nation. Most of today’s so-called “foreign missions” are efforts to plant the true gospel in those countries “Christianized” by Rome, or attempts to recover and reestablish the faith among peoples where the true gospel once flourished but has long since apostatized. Relatively little of the globe has never heard the gospel. A Biblical evangelist or missionary has no interest in Christianizing a country or an area. He is rather occupied with planting the gospel in the souls of people.

While the book of Acts is rich with principles of evangelism, no firm consistent missiology, doctrine of the activity of missions, has emerged. This is likely for the simple reason that a carnal, unbelieving, and highly commercialized Christendom refuses to be guided by the divine principles in the word of God. Most everyone is guided by whatever might be the shibboleth of his sect’s practices, or pragmatism...whatever seems to work best.

### Terms in the Text

It will be helpful to clarify the terms the terms John uses to identify various categories of people in his epistles.

- “Children”: Converts to Christianity.
- “Little children”: Relatively new converts in contrast to seasoned and veteran believers.
- “My children”. Those whom John counts among those whom he has discipled and mentored. Not his “converts”. (Paul’s “I have begotten you through the gospel” does not mean regeneration’.) His greatest joy is that they walk in truth.
- “Brethren”. Not “Jewish brethren”, but brethren in Christ with whom one is acquainted. Familiar fellow Christians.
- “Strangers”. Christians with whom we have not previously been acquainted, some of which are those “going forth” in the name of Christ.
- “Gentiles”. Not non-Jews, as *ethnos* usually indicates in Pauline epistles. This letter was written late in the first century, 20 years after 70 A.D. The Jew/Gentile dichotomy no longer exists. All of John’s ministry and all his letters are addressed to churches in Asia minor, none of which were Jewish. The word is equivalent to what we commonly have in mind when speaking of “foreigners”...someone different from us who speaks and behaves differently. It was commonly used by Jews to denote Gentiles, but Gaius, and those to whom John has reference as hosts, are all non-Jews or “Gentiles” themselves, so the word cannot

have been used in that sense. Rather, *ethnos*, is used in a special sense here, indicating lost people. They are different, in that they are not Christians. They live differently. They are those who do not know the Lord, and those to whom these people are going to preach. (Eph. 2:11, I Thess 4:5, Rev. 11:2)

- “They” (vs.7). Those “brethren” and “strangers” who are “going forth” for Christ’s Name’s sake, what we now call “missionaries”. These are itinerants, persons or groups who are going forth to preach the gospel to people who have not heard. They are actively fulfilling the “Great Commission”. What we have here is a scriptural, efficient and highly effective method of evangelizing, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in places where there is no gospel testimony. A Biblical missiology.

This particular Biblical missiology cannot but bring to our attention the absence of much that has become absolutely imperative in modern missions.

- These missionaries had no “official credentials”. There was no established denomination or missionary society whose name they bore, which had schooled, trained and prepared them in theology and the science and art of missions.
- We are told of no creed, confession, or covenant to which they were bound to subscribe in order to go.
- They were not *sent*, authorized and commissioned by a mission board of any sort.
- Nor were they authorized and sent by any particular local church.
- They had no salaries or “pledged” support to secure their welfare and the prosperity of their work.
- There were no persons, societies, or organizations whose job it was to “raise support” and keep them going.
- There was no set tenure, or period of time, which they were required to serve.

### **Hindrances and Defects in Modern Missions**

It might be now suggested that the lack of these things do not commend early missionaries, that their work would have been much more effective and efficient if these had been more like modern missions. In response to those thoughts let us consider the evils that attach themselves to modern missiology.

1. Credentials or accreditation comes from the unbelieving educational cartel of this world. A religious educational institution must apostatize enough to conform to that unbelief before it can be accredited and bestow accreditation. This insures that what their missionaries preach will be an unwholesome and limited message from the beginning. The lump will be leavened at the outset.
2. When sent by a mission board or a denomination, one must make disciples of that denomination, churches of that denomination, holding the man-made creed of the mission board. He is not free to make disciples of Christ, develop churches of Christ. He cannot expect Christ to be the Head of them, nor can one expect Christ to keep them as He keeps His church. It is not His church, but the mission’s, or the denomination’s, church.
3. If sent by a local church, one must make disciples bearing the same brand as the authorizing church. A mission field is commonly targeted, not because there are no Christian churches there, but because there is no church of their particular creed. Most churches cannot support missionaries on their own, so they have to pan-handle and beg from other churches to support *their* missionary.
4. The loyalty of the missionary is divided and misplaced. He cannot be the servant of men and the servant of Christ at the same time. In addition to the scriptures and the Holy Spirit, and the needs of the people to whom he ministers, he must at the same time, keep an eye and ear attuned for the approval or disapproval of the men who send and support him.
5. He who goes forth conditioned on the pledged support of men has put his hope of survival in the arm of flesh, not in God.
6. If men determine the missionary’s tenure, he may not be able to finish what Christ has given him to do. Or, he may stay and cumber the ground long after his work is done, and he should have been somewhere else.

None of this is intended to depreciate the sacrifice of godly men and women who have gone under local churches and mission boards through the centuries, and those who are still going. We cannot be other than eternally grateful for what the Lord has done and is doing through their devout labors. We only wish to point out that the Christian church could spare itself much grief and squandered resources if it could believe God and

believe the scriptures enough to go about this ministry in a Biblical and faithful way, rather than a worldly and unbelieving way.

### **Biblical Missionaries**

The Bible is not wanting in giving us wholesome principles for spreading the gospel. The patterns set forth in the book of Acts, and recorded in the epistles of Paul, Peter and John ought to be our guides in this effort. Before there were any “missionaries” per se, the gospel spread most rapidly simply by Christians traveling and moving from one place to another. They simply took their faith with them and planted it in the community where they lived. This is precisely what the Lord commands in Matt. 28:18-20. A recently established mission board carries on its promotional magazine the by-line “What is it you do not understand about go?” The board is suggesting to its readers that they ought to either “go” to the “mission field” or pay the expenses of someone else going. The fact of the matter is that Jesus is commanding neither in this passage. The active verb, or command, in the sentence is “make” (disciples), not “go”. The word “go” is actually a participle, “going, make disciples”. Believers, like everyone else, travel and move. The going is not a command, but a given. As we go, travel, move, we take our faith with us, and share it with everyone we meet. That is what the Lord commanded, and exactly what the early church did! And that, I dare say, is still the most efficient means of spreading the gospel. In a survey attempting to pin point the means most effectual in people’s conversion, over 90% of Christians testified that a Christian friend, neighbor or associate was the person who was most powerfully influential in their conversion, rather than an official minister.

But there are some like these in our text who do indeed *go* for the particular ministry of the gospel. The evangelists in the Bible, however, were *itinerants*. They did not take their families, make a home on “the foreign mission field” to supervise and oversee churches there. They preached the gospel in one place a while and moved on to the next place. Then they would return from time to time to help the churches that arose, having been constituted of those who had been converted through their former ministry. Nothing has changed in the gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit, or the world scene to warrant a setting aside of this basic principle.

III John 7 speaks of these who “went forth for His name’s sake”. Why did they go? Who sent them? Mission boards have no divine authority to order Christ’s servants’ labors! Nor do churches have authority to send anyone. The church is the body, not the Head. On the contrary, the church itself is sent, by Christ. (Matt. 28:18-20, John 20-21) If these words were intended for the twelve Apostles, the commission and its power expired with their death. It is intended for all of Christ’s disciples, the church.

The Holy Spirit is the Lord of the Harvest. He gives an effectual inward call to the laborer. We pray that He will send. If He sends, we may be certain that **God** will be with them. He will be all they need. If we send, all they will have is us, and that is less than nothing. In whose name and authority do they go? Missionaries go in the name of Jesus (vs.7); for His name’s sake and in His authority .

How should churches be planted and organized? Missionaries, evangelists, do not plant churches. Christ did not send us to plant churches, but to preach the gospel and make disciples. The missionary evangelizes; and the saints, the fruits of the gospel preached, form their own churches. That is the pattern set forth in Acts. The apostles preached Christ, baptized disciples, taught them for a season and then left them to constitute themselves as the Lord led. In many cases they waited until gifts and ministries rose among the fledgling church, then they returned and appointed elders, or wrote letters instructing churches in the appointment of leaders and the orderly employment of different ministers with each one’s peculiar gifts. Churches and their individual members are members of Christ’s body: He, Himself, will shape and alloy them into His Body; and they are bound to obey no one but Him.

How should missions be financed? Money raising is not on the agenda of Biblical missions. “Offerings” were not taken up where they preached. Sinners are not asked to finance their evangelization (vs.7). We have no Biblical precedent that bears any resemblance to the modern practice of missionaries doing “deputation” to raise pledged support for their work, or of churches or mission boards underwriting the expenses of missions or missionaries before they go. A modern churchianity which operates on unbelief would be aghast at the suggestion of abandoning these practices. But this would be an excellent way of weeding out everything that does not originate with God. He will sponsor what He initiates through His people. And His people, who have an “anointing”(I John 3:20-21) and spiritual discernment, will not throw away their money on fleshy, flamboyant religious side shows, or wheedling money-grubbers. They will not be snookered by seductive speeches, emotion-packed stories, slick magazines, and alleged pictures and videos of “the work”. Is this too

severe a test to expect a missionary to endure? What sort of faith does he have, or what sort of God does he believe in, Who can save his soul, but will not feed him while he is doing His will? This is no more nor less than the normal way for one to learn to believe God.

But shouldn't missionaries be accountable? Are not mission boards or churches necessary to require missionaries accountability? Missionaries, like all of us, are accountable to God, to Christ, not to men or human organizations. Is the discipline of men more efficient than that of God? Is God, who sees and knows all, not far more able to bring His servants to account for their actions than men who see little and know less? To trust the oversight and supervision of men rather than that of God betrays an unbelief in the omnipresence, omniscience, and active supervision of the immanent God. We teach that He chastens and disciplines all His children. Do we believe He will He fail to do that for His preachers?

Correspondingly, we do indeed have a responsibility to weigh and evaluate persons and their ministries. If we are of God, and have that unction, that anointing which John speaks of, we will have little trouble quickly discerning the false prophets and hirelings who are ever endeavoring to sneak in through a side entrance, rather than the Door. Our approval or disapproval of them will be expressed in the giving of our prayers, help, hospitality, and financial support or by denying it. That is the instruction John sets before us now.

We are not all itinerants or vocational ministers. All of us do not deliberately "go" for the express purpose of spreading the gospel and making disciples of Christ. Most of us stay at home and labor among those of our home field. And when disciples are made in "foreign lands" the Holy Spirit calls some of these to itinerant ministries in *their* own land. We now call these *indigenous* missionaries. These indigents quickly become the principal and most effective evangelists in that country. We who stay at home, work and care for family and friends, however, are not excluded from participating in outreach missions. We are all one body, members one of another; and we are very much fellow workers for the truth with those whom Christ sends forth beyond our personal borders.

John richly commends Gaius in this, and in doing so he gives us an example to emulate. We are to *receive* such ministers. Love them, embrace them, take them into our homes and bestow upon them our hospitality. When they leave, we are to "send them forward on their journey in a worthy manner". This is certainly not an "official sending" or "authorizing", no more than the church at Antioch officially sent Paul and Barnabas (Acts.13:3): the text plainly declares that they were sent by the Holy Spirit. This is a gracious sending. We send them forth in a worthy manner when we give them material and financial support for their persons, their families and their work.

Whatever it is we do for them, we "do faithfully" (vs.5). It is a work of **faith**. It is **Christian!** It is done according to the Christian faith. We do it in obedience to the command of Christ, and it is done, looking to God in faith when we give beyond our means. God will be no man's debtor. We cannot lose. We shall reap rich spiritual rewards for the investment of our small carnal contributions. We thus become "fellow workers" for the truth. That is a Biblical missiology that cannot be improved upon.

– C. M.