

THE CHURCH AND MISSIONS

by David E. Moss

Several of my missionary friends have expressed dismay over the attitude toward missions they find in some local churches. In one instance, a missionary on furlough called one of his supporting churches to arrange a meeting. In that phone conversation he discovered the church had changed Pastors -- he was never informed. On another occasion, a missionary tried to contact a church, but no one there recognized his name even though they had been sending him money for years. In another case, a missionary spent more money traveling to a church to report to them than they had sent to him in support during his entire term on the field.

To be fair, there are equally as many stories on the other end of the spectrum. Many churches are very generous to missionaries. In fact, some people may even feel that their church goes "overboard" in their missions program. With the economy the way it is, with the world growing smaller through advanced communication technology and with all the services required by our own people here at home, how much emphasis should a local church place on missions?

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It is my conviction that missions must be one of the highest priorities of every local church. In the dark ages, there was little zeal for reaching the lost. The Church became ingrown. It hid the Word of God from its lay people and isolated its clergy in cold monasteries. With the dawn of the Reformation came a renewal of the evangelistic enthusiasm so vividly displayed by the Apostles and their first followers.

The modern day church, however, is in danger of creeping into the shadows of selfish internalism. We have so heavily committed ourselves to the maintenance of elaborate edifices and monstrous programs that budgets strain to provide meager funds for missionary efforts. If all of this was accomplishing something we might have more of a forgiving attitude. The unfortunate thing is that in spite of all the services which have been provided and for all the lessons which have been taught to numberless groups of Christians in the last twenty years, Bible knowledge and Christian living skills are at dangerously low levels.

I truly hope the Church can once again revive its evangelistic priorities before we plunge headlong into another age of spiritual darkness. It really would not be very difficult. A simple willingness to obey the instruction of the Word of God would be sufficient.

So what does the Bible teach about the Church's involvement in Missions?

A BIBLICAL MANDATE

"Mandate" is defined by the dictionary as a command or a commission. It implies that something is required.

I believe the Bible teaches that the local church should be actively involved in missionary endeavors. There is, of course, the obvious statement of Jesus Himself which we refer to as the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Some may argue that this was intended only for the original disciples. Yet many statements in the New Testament Letters clearly define the

importance of a gospel witness by all believers.

II Corinthians 5:20

"Now then we(all inclusive) are ambassadors for Christ."

II Timothy 1:8

"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord...but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel."

Jude 3, 22-23

"It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that **ye** should earnestly contend for the faith...and of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire."

There is also much evidence in the Acts and the Epistles that the distribution of the Gospel is a corporate responsibility as well as an individual one. Consider the following.

1. It was a local church at Antioch that sent out Paul and Barnabas as the first missionaries.
Acts 13:1-3
2. It was to the local church at Antioch that those missionaries returned and reported.
Acts 14:27
3. It was the local churches that sustained the financial support of the missionary efforts of Paul.
Philippians 4:15-16
4. It was because of their support of missions that God promised to meet all the needs of the church at Philippi.
Philippians 4:17-19
5. It was from the local churches that Paul solicited prayer support for his missionary efforts.
Colossians 4:3-4
Ephesians 6:19-20
II Thessalonians 3:1

The most striking of these statements is from Philippians 4:17-19. In that context, Paul praised the Philippians for faithfully sending money to him to provide for his personal needs while he carried out his missionary work. **Under Divine inspiration, he associates God's promise of provision for the Philippian Church with their commitment to contribute financially to the spread of the Gospel.** As David testified that he never saw the righteous forsaken, I believe God will not forsake the church that will set Missions, local and abroad, as one of its most important priorities.

The most ignored of these statements is the one concerning the sending of missionaries. The Church has failed for too long to understand some of its most important responsibilities. Did you ever wonder where preachers and missionaries come from? For too many local churches, they come from some place else. **A local church to be successful must be able to identify specific individuals who have gone out from that congregation and are presently active in full time ministry.**

Conclusion

Many churches seem to be struggling these days merely to survive. We are stretching all our energies to pay our bills and to keep our families intact. Perhaps if we changed our emphasis we would find our attempts at self preservation less desperate. Our internal efforts should have external goals. Our buildings should be tools for discipleship and ministry preparation. Our budgets should reflect an evangelistic priority. We should be a people with a mission - selflessly.