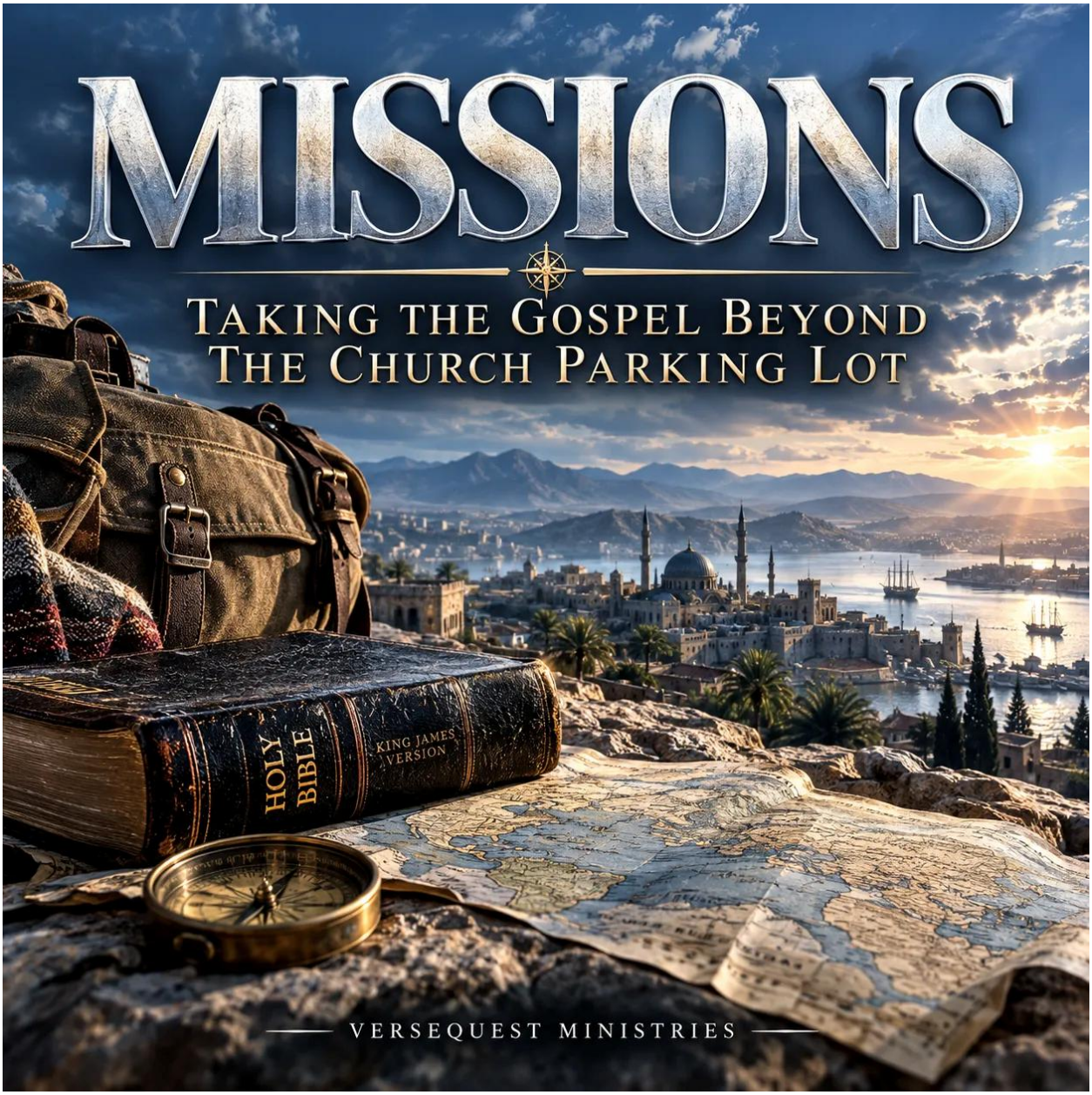
Missions

Taking the Gospel Beyond the Church Parking Lot

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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Taking the Gospel Beyond the Church Parking Lot

A 10-Essay King James Bible Study Series

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Publication Information

Title: Missions — Taking the Gospel Beyond the Church Parking Lot

Author: Paul Tackett

Publisher: VerseQuest Ministries

Edition: First Digital PDF Edition — 2026

Published in: United States of America

Ministry Statement

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"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." — 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

All glory belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

MISSIONS

Taking the Gospel Beyond the Church Parking Lot

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An Illustrated KJV Study of the Biblical Foundation, Message, Methods, Responsibilities, and Eternal Purpose of Missions

Introduction — Missions — Taking the Gospel Beyond the Church Parking Lot

There is something terribly wrong with a Christianity that can fill an auditorium, finance a building program, organize a dozen committees, produce an impressive church calendar, and maintain enough religious activities to keep everybody occupied from Sunday morning until Saturday night, yet somehow cannot find the time, money, or inclination to tell lost sinners how to be saved. The Lord Jesus Christ did not suffer the shame of Calvary, shed His precious blood, rise triumphantly from the dead, and commit the gospel to His servants so that the greatest accomplishment of the local church would be maintaining an attractive piece of real estate. The building may be necessary, the fellowship may be profitable, the teaching may be valuable, and the organization may be entirely legitimate, but none of those things can substitute for the responsibility of making Jesus Christ known. Romans 1:16 declares, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." There is the power. There is the message. There is the purpose. The power is not in the architecture, the musical arrangements, the television equipment, the denominational headquarters, or the personality standing behind the pulpit. A church can possess everything money can purchase and still neglect the one message that money cannot manufacture. The gospel was never intended to remain safely parked inside the church parking lot while the world outside continues toward eternity without Christ.

Before anybody begins waving a missionary flag, collecting an offering, commissioning another religious organization, or announcing that he has received an extraordinary calling to travel halfway around the world, somebody had better open the King James Bible and establish exactly what biblical missions involve. There is no shortage of religious enthusiasm in the world. There are organizations promoting humanitarian projects, denominations expanding their territories, institutions recruiting workers, and ambitious preachers seeking opportunities to establish impressive personal ministries. Some of those efforts may accomplish genuine good. Others have little more to do with the gospel than a commercial enterprise has to do with the Sermon on the Mount. A missionary can travel thousands of miles, learn three foreign languages, establish a school, construct a building, and photograph a thousand smiling faces without ever clearly explaining that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. That is not a minor oversight. That is missing the very foundation of New Testament evangelism. First Corinthians 15:1–4 establishes the gospel, and Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. The world does not need another religious corporation with a heavenly-sounding name and an earthly appetite for money. It needs the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed faithfully by servants who understand what God has entrusted to them.

Now we must be careful not to manufacture doctrinal confusion while attempting to correct practical neglect. The Bible contains several commissions given in different historical circumstances, and those distinctions matter. In Matthew 10:5–6, the Lord instructed the twelve not to enter the way of the Gentiles but to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In Matthew 28:18–20, the risen Christ spoke to the eleven concerning teaching all nations. Mark 16:15–20 records an apostolic commission accompanied by supernatural signs, while Acts 1:8 describes the witnesses receiving power from the Holy Ghost and carrying their testimony outward from Jerusalem. The book of Acts then records the unfolding transition involving Israel, the apostles, the Gentiles, and the revelation of the present Church Age. Paul subsequently identifies himself in Romans 11:13 as "the apostle of the Gentiles," and Ephesians 3:1–9 explains the mystery associated with believing Jews and Gentiles becoming fellowheirs in one body through the gospel. These passages must be rightly divided, as commanded in 2 Timothy 2:15. The man who throws every missionary passage into the same doctrinal bucket and stirs until the distinctions disappear has not simplified the Bible. He has merely made a mess of what God carefully revealed.

Nevertheless, correctly distinguishing the dispensations does not authorize Christians to become spectators while the gospel goes unpreached. Second Corinthians 5:18 declares that God "hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." Verse 19 adds that He "hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation," and verse 20 describes the apostolic ministry as ambassadors for Christ. That message concerns reconciliation through the finished work of the Saviour, not the construction of an earthly religious kingdom through human activity. The Church is not Israel, Israel's national covenant promises have not been cancelled, and the mystery revealed through Paul must not be confused with the prophetic kingdom program. But none of those truths eliminates the responsibility of Christians to communicate the saving gospel during the present dispensation. Right division should produce clearer doctrine and more faithful preaching, not a collection of well-informed Christians who know how to distinguish Israel from the Church but cannot be bothered to tell their own neighbor how to escape the judgment of God. A man can possess an excellent dispensational chart and still be a miserable example of Christian responsibility if the truth he understands never moves beyond his desk.

The apostle Paul provides a remarkable example of what happens when the grace of God takes hold of a man whose religious zeal has been traveling in precisely the wrong direction. Acts 9:1 describes Saul of Tarsus as "yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." He was not searching for the truth with a humble heart and an open Bible. He was persecuting those who believed the truth, armed with religious authorization and convinced that his destructive activities constituted

service to God. Then the risen Lord Jesus Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus, and the persecutor became a preacher. Galatians 1:15–16 reveals Paul's testimony concerning his calling by grace and the revelation of God's Son in him, that he might preach among the heathen. His apostleship was extraordinary, and nobody today has biblical authority to claim the same revelatory office merely because he wishes to become a missionary. But the lesson concerning grace is unmistakable. God did not select Paul because he had the finest religious résumé in Jerusalem. He saved a sinner who had been persecuting His people and appointed him to a ministry that would carry the gospel among the Gentiles. Paul was not sent to make Saul of Tarsus famous. He was sent to make Jesus Christ known. Any missionary who reverses those priorities has misunderstood the calling before the journey even begins.

Then consider the sending church. Acts 13:1–4 presents the congregation at Antioch ministering to the Lord when the Holy Ghost separated Barnabas and Saul for the work He had appointed. The believers fasted, prayed, laid hands upon them, and sent them away. When Paul and Barnabas completed that missionary journey, Acts 14:27 records their return and their report concerning what God had accomplished. There is a biblical relationship between the workers and the congregation, involving fellowship, responsibility, prayer, and genuine participation in the gospel. What the passage does not contain is a religious corporation claiming ownership of every congregation established, an executive headquarters positioned above the authority of Scripture, or a missionary who declares himself accountable to nobody because he possesses a special calling. The local church has responsibilities toward faithful workers, and those workers have responsibilities concerning doctrine, conduct, and stewardship. Philippians 1:5 describes genuine participation as "your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." The church is supposed to help send the message, not become a religious franchise collecting territories. And the missionary is supposed to represent Jesus Christ, not operate as an independent celebrity whose principal qualification is his ability to collect financial support.

Nor was Paul's missionary ministry a one-man performance in which every other believer existed merely to admire the leading preacher. The book of Acts introduces Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Aquila, Priscilla, and numerous others who served in differing capacities. Some preached, some taught, some provided hospitality, some carried communications, and others strengthened believers during difficult circumstances. First Corinthians 3:6 records Paul's explanation: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." The Lord uses different servants for different responsibilities, and none possesses the power to regenerate sinners through personal ability. Even the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36–41 reminds us that faithful workers may experience serious differences of judgment. Their separation did not require inventing a

second gospel or declaring that every disagreement constitutes apostasy. Later, Paul acknowledged Mark's usefulness in 2 Timothy 4:11. The missionary field is not a circus requiring one celebrated performer and a crowd of spectators. It is a place of serious spiritual labor where the planter, the teacher, the helper, and the supporter must remember that God alone gives the increase. The man who refuses to cooperate with anybody else because he cannot bear sharing the recognition may be serving his reputation more faithfully than his Saviour.

There is also the matter of the regions beyond. Romans 15:20 records Paul's determination to preach the gospel where Christ had not been named, while 2 Corinthians 10:16 speaks of preaching "in the regions beyond you." That concern reaches far beyond the desire to visit unfamiliar countries or collect impressive international experiences. A foreign destination does not automatically become a genuine missionary field merely because the scenery looks interesting or the culture appears unusual. Conversely, a population does not become thoroughly evangelized merely because its cities contain large religious buildings and its inhabitants recognize the name of Jesus. Multitudes have heard religious terminology while remaining ignorant of salvation by grace through faith. Some possess ancient traditions, elaborate ceremonies, and impressive institutions without understanding the finished work of Christ at Calvary. Others have little meaningful access to sound biblical teaching at all. Romans 10:14 asks, "and how shall they hear without a preacher?" That question cannot be answered by pointing toward a missionary map and congratulating ourselves for knowing where the countries are located. A church that can identify every nation on the map but has no concern about whether those nations hear the gospel has acquired geographical information without corresponding spiritual responsibility.

And when the missionary reaches those people, he had better communicate the truth in a language they understand. Acts 2:6 records that people heard the apostles speak in their own languages, and Acts 2:11 declares, "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." The supernatural sign belonged to the apostolic setting, but the importance of intelligible communication remains unmistakable. First Corinthians 14:19 emphasizes the superiority of five understandable words over ten thousand words that fail to instruct the hearer. Nehemiah 8:8 describes the reading of God's law, the giving of the sense, and the resulting understanding among the people. Bible translation, Scripture distribution, literacy, and faithful teaching therefore belong among the legitimate instruments of missionary work. But translation must never become an excuse for doctrinal alteration. The gospel does not change because its message crosses a national boundary. Jesus Christ remains the Saviour, sin remains sin, and salvation remains by grace through faith. The objective is not to make the entire world speak English, nor to

rewrite Christianity until every culture finds it agreeable. The objective is to communicate God's unchanging truth in words people can understand.

Missionary work also requires material resources, and the New Testament makes no apology for Christians supporting faithful gospel laborers. Philippians 4:15–18 records the assistance Paul received from the Philippians, while 1 Corinthians 9:14 declares, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Missionaries require ordinary necessities. Their families must eat, their housing must be provided, their transportation costs money, and the materials necessary for teaching and evangelism do not ordinarily appear through supernatural delivery. But legitimate financial support is not a license for covetousness, manipulation, extravagance, or religious empire-building. Second Corinthians 8:21 establishes the importance of "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." There ought to be financial integrity on both sides of the missionary relationship. Supporting churches should give responsibly, and missionaries should administer those resources honestly. There is something seriously wrong when the organization supposedly established to carry the gospel becomes so expensive to maintain that the actual preaching of the gospel receives whatever remains after the executives, advertising departments, and administrative machinery have finished eating. Missionary funds should assist the furtherance of the truth, not become another means of enriching men who have discovered that religion can be a remarkably profitable occupation.

Neither should missionary labor end when a preacher obtains a handful of professions of faith and returns home to announce that another country has been reached. Acts 14:21–23 records Paul and Barnabas preaching, teaching, strengthening disciples, and appointing elders in the churches. Second Timothy 2:2 instructs Timothy to commit sound teaching to faithful men who would be capable of teaching others. This is essential to the development of established congregations. Converts need to understand the Scriptures, distinguish truth from false doctrine, recognize the responsibilities of Christian living, and grow under qualified spiritual leadership. The purpose is not to produce permanent religious dependents who must telephone a foreign headquarters before making every important decision. Nor is it to export every American custom, institutional tradition, and denominational preference into another country. Colossians 1:18 identifies Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church. A missionary who establishes a congregation that knows his organization's regulations better than the doctrines of Scripture has planted the wrong kind of institution. The goal is not to manufacture American churches with foreign addresses. It is to establish Bible-believing congregations under the authority of Jesus Christ and His written word.

Of course, none of this comes with a divine guarantee of comfortable circumstances. Second Corinthians 11:23–28 provides Paul's extraordinary testimony concerning imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, hunger, exhaustion, danger, and daily concern for the churches. Acts 14:19 records his stoning at Lystra, while Acts 16 describes his imprisonment at Philippi. Yet the gospel continued. In Philippians 1:12, Paul declared that the things which had happened to him had fallen out "rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." The difficulties were real, and so was the Lord's sustaining grace. But we must not confuse faithful endurance with reckless behavior or manufacture persecution where none exists. Paul escaped Damascus in a basket, appealed to lawful protections when appropriate, and understood that prudence was not the enemy of faith. Missionaries have families, obligations, physical limitations, and responsibilities that do not disappear merely because they enter Christian service. A missionary does not become more spiritual by ignoring his family's needs, disregarding danger, or manufacturing a dramatic story to impress a supporting congregation. The price of carrying the gospel may be high enough without foolish men deliberately increasing the bill. The responsibility is faithfulness to Christ, not the cultivation of a heroic reputation.

Perhaps the most dangerous confusion of all, however, comes when the missionary message is gradually replaced by humanitarian achievement. Feed the hungry? Certainly. Help the sick? Absolutely. Provide clean water, assist struggling families, teach children, and demonstrate genuine Christian compassion wherever legitimate opportunities exist. But do not confuse those worthwhile activities with the gospel itself. John 6 records the Lord Jesus Christ feeding the multitude, yet He subsequently identified Himself as "the bread of life" in verse 35. The physical provision was genuine, but the spiritual necessity was greater. A hungry man needs food, and there is no virtue in refusing to help him when assistance is possible. Nevertheless, that same man possesses an eternal soul, and providing for his physical needs cannot settle his guilt before God. Second Corinthians 5:21 declares concerning Christ, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." A hospital can treat a man's disease without removing his sins. A school can educate his mind without regenerating his spirit. A charitable organization can improve his earthly circumstances without providing eternal life. Those accomplishments may be valuable, but none can do what Jesus Christ accomplished through His death, burial, and resurrection.

And that brings us to the responsibility resting upon every Bible-believing Christian. Not everybody is called to leave his homeland, establish congregations in foreign countries, or spend his life traveling from one missionary field to another. First Corinthians 12 establishes that the body of Christ contains different members with different responsibilities. Some preach, some teach, some provide material support, some prepare

biblical literature, and others communicate the gospel personally in the places where they already live. A Christian who faithfully witnesses to his neighbor is not performing an insignificant work merely because no international border was crossed. Neither does a missionary become automatically more faithful because his ministry requires an airplane ticket. The important matter is obedience to the truth God has revealed. Romans 10:17 declares, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Believers cannot force another person to receive the gospel, and no amount of human effort possesses the power to regenerate a sinner. But Christians can communicate the saving message faithfully. The Church does not need another generation of believers who know how to discuss missionary programs while remaining personally silent about Jesus Christ. We need Christians whose knowledge of Scripture produces the courage to speak, the willingness to support, and the discernment to recognize whether the gospel is actually being proclaimed.

This series, Missions — Taking the Gospel Beyond the Church Parking Lot, is therefore much more than an examination of missionary organizations, foreign travel, church planting, financial support, or religious outreach. It is a return to the biblical foundation upon which genuine missionary service must stand. We will not replace sound doctrine with religious excitement, confuse Israel's national promises with the Church's responsibilities, or treat humanitarian accomplishments as though they could purchase eternal salvation. We will examine the Scriptures, expose religious pretension, defend the gospel of the grace of God, and insist that missionary labor be measured by biblical faithfulness rather than organizational publicity. The Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is the gift of God, received by grace through faith, not through religious performance, charitable giving, water baptism, or human righteousness. That is the message the world needs, whether the sinner lives beside a magnificent cathedral, inside a crowded city, in an isolated village, or across the street from a Bible-believing church. We do not need to conquer the world for a denomination, build an empire for a missionary board, or make religious celebrities out of men who should be servants of Jesus Christ. We need to preach the gospel, teach the Scriptures, support faithful workers, establish sound churches, and remember that eternity is infinitely more important than earthly recognition. A full parking lot may reveal that people have gathered for a meeting, but it cannot tell us whether anybody is carrying the gospel beyond the meetinghouse. The Church was never commissioned merely to fill buildings with religious people. It was entrusted with a message that tells lost sinners how they can be saved. Let the world have its religious empires, its impressive institutions, and its elaborate machinery. Give us the King James Bible, the gospel of the grace of God, faithful servants who will proclaim it, and

churches willing to stand behind the truth. The gospel must not stop where the pavement ends.

1 of 10 — Missions — The Great Commission Was Never a Parking-Lot Decoration

Key Passage: 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 (KJV)

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." That statement in 2 Corinthians 5:18 ought to shake the dust off a few church pews and put some movement into the feet of people who have spent the last twenty years congratulating themselves for attending religious services. God did not reconcile sinners to Himself through the shed blood of Jesus Christ so that the resulting congregations could become comfortable little religious societies with expensive buildings, impressive parking lots, and absolutely no concern for the lost people living beyond their property lines. The apostle continues in verse 19 by declaring that God "hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation." There is the responsibility, plain enough for any Bible believer to understand. God has committed a message to His people, and that message concerns reconciliation through Jesus Christ. It is not a message about improving society, reorganizing civilization, or making sinners respectable enough to enjoy their journey toward judgment. It is a message concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom lost sinners may be saved. When God commits a message to His servants, He expects that message to be delivered. A mailman who spends his entire career polishing the delivery truck while refusing to deliver the mail would make a rather poor employee. Yet that is an uncomfortable picture of much modern Christianity.

Before examining the Great Commission, somebody had better establish what the Scriptures actually say, to whom the Lord was speaking, and how those instructions relate to the Church under grace. The expression Great Commission is a convenient description, but the Bible records several commissions and instructions given in different circumstances. Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15–20, Luke 24:46–49, and Acts 1:8 belong to the historical setting of the risen Christ instructing His apostles. Those passages must be read according to their actual words, not thrown into a religious blender until every distinction between Israel, the kingdom, the apostles, and the Church has disappeared. The signs promised in Mark 16 are not identical to the instructions given concerning the ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5. Neither does Paul's commission among the Gentiles erase everything the Lord previously said to the twelve. The Bible is not confused. The confusion begins when men refuse to distinguish things that God has distinguished.

Rightly dividing the word of truth, as commanded in 2 Timothy 2:15, does not mean dividing ourselves away from Christian responsibility. It means understanding exactly what God has said before claiming to act upon His authority.

The purpose of this study is therefore not to produce another emotional missionary appeal that leaves everybody excited for fifteen minutes and just as ignorant of the Scriptures afterward. We are going to examine the commands of Christ, the apostolic setting, the signs accompanying the early ministry, the development recorded in Acts, and the gospel responsibility entrusted to believers in the present dispensation. We are going to distinguish the ministry of the twelve from the ministry of Paul without pretending that sinners stopped needing salvation when God revealed the mystery of the Church. We are also going to confront a rather embarrassing fact: a congregation may possess a magnificent sanctuary, a fully equipped fellowship hall, an excellent sound system, a carefully organized calendar, and enough committees to keep a municipal government occupied, while scarcely anybody in that congregation opens his mouth to tell a lost sinner how to be saved. Religious activity is not necessarily gospel obedience. A church parking lot can be full while the church's missionary responsibility remains practically abandoned. The Lord did not save His people merely to assemble a religious audience. He gave them a message that the world desperately needs to hear.

1. The Risen Christ Spoke With Authority, Not Religious Suggestion

Matthew 28:16 identifies the immediate audience: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them." Notice the number. Judas Iscariot was gone, Matthias had not yet been selected, and the risen Lord was addressing the eleven disciples who had followed Him during His earthly ministry. Verse 18 records His declaration: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." That authority belongs to Jesus Christ, not to a missionary board, denominational headquarters, ecclesiastical council, or ambitious preacher seeking another title. The One speaking had conquered death, risen bodily from the grave, and demonstrated that His authority exceeded anything the rulers of this world possessed. The commission therefore rested upon divine authority rather than human enthusiasm. Notice also that verse 17 says, "but some doubted." Even in the presence of the risen Christ, human weakness remained evident. Yet the Lord did not surrender His authority to their uncertainty. The command came from Him, and obedience was required because of who He was. The Church does not need to manufacture authority through religious machinery when the Lord Jesus Christ has already spoken with all power in heaven and earth.

Matthew 28:19 continues, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Verse 20 adds, "Teaching them

to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." There are several things here that modern religious movements would do well to notice. The commission involves going, teaching, baptizing, and continuing instruction. It is not satisfied by collecting professions of faith and abandoning the people afterward. Neither is it satisfied by constructing institutions that never communicate the truth of God. However, the immediate command must be understood in its historical setting. These were the eleven disciples associated with the earthly ministry of Christ and His dealings with Israel. The passage was not originally spoken to an American missionary conference two thousand years later. That does not make the passage useless to the Church; it makes careful interpretation necessary. There is a difference between recognizing a biblical pattern and indiscriminately transferring every doctrinal detail into another dispensation. A man who cannot distinguish the original address from the legitimate application will eventually turn the Bible into a collection of religious slogans.

The promise concluding Matthew 28:20 is equally important: "and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." The presence of Christ is not a substitute for obedience, and obedience is not a means of earning salvation. The Lord's words place the commission under His continuing authority and assurance. But observe what is absent from the passage. There is no instruction to establish a worldwide religious corporation, no command to accumulate political influence, and no authorization to change the message whenever a different culture finds biblical truth objectionable. The emphasis is upon the Lord's authority and the communication of His teaching. There is also no warrant here for making water baptism the means by which a sinner in the present Church Age earns justification before God. Paul's later doctrinal teaching must be allowed to speak in its proper setting. We may recognize the importance of evangelism and instruction without confusing water baptism with the blood of Christ. When the Lord commands His servants to go, the proper response is obedience, not a committee meeting to determine whether His instructions are sufficiently fashionable.

2. Mark's Commission and the Apostolic Signs Religion Loves to Counterfeit

Mark 16:15 records another unmistakable command: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The setting is again important. Verse 14 identifies the eleven as the immediate audience, and the Lord rebuked their unbelief because they had not believed the testimony concerning His resurrection. The instruction was not issued to a modern healing evangelist operating beneath a tent with a collection bucket and a rehearsed miracle demonstration. It was given by the risen Christ to His apostles. Verse 16 continues, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." The wording must be examined carefully, including the difference between the

first and second clauses. The condemnation is explicitly attached to unbelief. Nevertheless, we must not pretend that Mark 16:16 and the Church Age explanation of salvation in Ephesians 2:8–9 were delivered in identical doctrinal circumstances. The record of Acts shows a period of transition in which the apostolic ministry, baptism, Jewish signs, and the expanding Gentile mission must be examined in their proper settings. A Bible believer has no business concealing those distinctions merely to preserve a convenient religious formula.

Mark 16:17–18 describes signs accompanying the apostolic proclamation: "In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues." The passage continues with taking up serpents, protection from deadly poison, and laying hands upon the sick. The historical record of Acts demonstrates that miraculous signs did accompany the early witnesses. Acts 2 records supernatural languages at Pentecost. Acts 3 records the healing of the lame man through Peter's ministry. Acts 5:12 says, "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people." Acts 28:3–6 records Paul's encounter with a venomous serpent on Malta, and he suffered no harm. These events were not religious entertainment. They bore witness to the authority and message of the apostolic ministry. Mark 16:20 explains the purpose by declaring that the Lord was "confirming the word with signs following." The signs confirmed the word. They were never presented as a replacement for the word. When a man spends more time advertising his supposed supernatural powers than preaching Jesus Christ, he has managed to put the signboard in front of the message and then forgotten what the signboard was supposed to advertise.

The distinction becomes especially important when examining Paul's ministry. In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul writes, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." That declaration does not forbid Christian baptism, but it certainly distinguishes baptism from the saving message entrusted to Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Paul defines the gospel by Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. The ordinary Christian today is not authorized to manufacture apostolic credentials by handling poisonous snakes, drinking deadly substances, or promising miraculous immunity from physical harm. God can answer prayer and heal according to His will, but the apostolic signs recorded in Mark and Acts must not be turned into a permanent circus attraction. Hebrews 2:3–4 connects the Lord's original message with the confirming testimony of signs and wonders. A faithful missionary needs the true gospel, the written word, and dependence upon the Holy Ghost. The proof of a sound ministry is not whether the preacher can survive a snakebite. It is whether he faithfully delivers the doctrine God has committed to him.

3. Beginning at Jerusalem: The Gospel Moves Outward Under the Power of God

Luke 24:46–47 records the risen Lord explaining that "thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." The message was grounded in fulfilled Scripture, not religious imagination. Earlier in the chapter, the Lord opened the Scriptures concerning Himself, and in verse 44 He specifically referred to the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms. His suffering and resurrection were not unfortunate interruptions to a political program. They fulfilled what God had written beforehand. Notice also the geographical starting point: Jerusalem. That city had witnessed the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah, yet it became the starting point of the apostolic testimony concerning His resurrection. The Lord did not tell His disciples to invent a message that would be more acceptable to the authorities responsible for His death. The facts of His suffering, resurrection, repentance, and remission of sins were to be proclaimed. The gospel does not begin with man's opinion about what sinners need. It begins with God's declaration concerning what Jesus Christ accomplished.

Luke 24:49 supplies another necessary detail: "but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Here is something the modern missionary enthusiast should consider before confusing motion with ministry. The disciples had been commanded concerning the proclamation of the message, yet they were instructed to remain in Jerusalem until the promised power came. Their commission did not authorize them to launch into the work independently of God's appointed preparation. Acts 1:8 develops the matter further: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The geographical movement is deliberate. The testimony begins in Jerusalem, extends into Judaea and Samaria, and reaches outward toward the nations. Acts 2 records the coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, and the subsequent chapters describe the expanding witness. The biblical pattern is not religious motion for its own sake. The Lord appointed the message, the witnesses, and the power necessary for their work.

Acts 8 provides a striking demonstration of how God advanced that testimony. After the persecution associated with Stephen's death, Acts 8:4 declares, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." The believers were scattered, but the word continued moving. Philip preached Christ in Samaria, and Acts 8:35 later records that he opened his mouth to the Ethiopian eunuch and "preached unto him Jesus." The movement beyond Jerusalem was not the invention of a modern missionary organization. It was already unfolding in the first-century record under God's providence. Yet Acts must be

read as history describing an important transitional period, not as a basket of disconnected commands that every congregation must reproduce mechanically. The scattering of believers does not mean Christians must manufacture persecution to prove their spirituality. The Ethiopian's conversion does not mean everybody must go into a desert to find somebody to baptize. The legitimate application is plain: God's word is to be communicated faithfully wherever opportunities arise. A congregation that never looks beyond its own walls has forgotten that the gospel was never intended to be imprisoned inside a meetinghouse.

4. Israel, the Kingdom, and the Church: Rightly Dividing the Mission

Matthew 10:5–6 records an earlier commission that cannot honestly be ignored: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." That command was given during the Lord's earthly ministry, when He was presenting Himself to Israel in connection with the promised kingdom. Matthew 10:7 instructed the disciples to preach, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Verse 8 included healing the sick, cleansing lepers, raising the dead, and casting out devils. Those instructions were not identical to the later command in Matthew 28 concerning all nations. If a preacher insists that every missionary command in the Gospels applies identically to every Christian today, he has a serious problem with Matthew 10 before he even reaches the book of Acts. One passage restricts the disciples from entering Gentile territory; another sends them toward all nations. The contradiction exists only in the mind of the man who refuses to recognize changing historical instructions. God's word does not contradict itself merely because a preacher has neglected to read the address on the envelope.

Acts 1:6 reveals that the apostles still understood the promised kingdom in connection with Israel: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Christ did not answer by declaring that Israel had permanently ceased to possess its national promises. Instead, verse 7 says, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." The question of timing was withheld; the national identity of Israel was not abolished. Romans 11:25–29 later confirms that God's dealings with Israel have not been cancelled by the present Gentile blessing. Therefore, the Church must not seize Israel's national covenants and announce that the kingdom promises have been transferred permanently to an international religious institution. Neither should the preaching associated with Israel's kingdom expectation be confused carelessly with every detail of the gospel of the grace of God. Acts records the historical transition as the apostolic testimony advances and the Gentile mission becomes increasingly prominent. A

Bible believer can rejoice that the gospel reaches every nation without stealing the promises God made to one particular nation.

Paul's ministry introduces further distinctions that must be preserved. Galatians 1:11–12 declares that the gospel he preached was not received from man but came "by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Ephesians 3:1–9 explains the revelation of the mystery concerning Jew and Gentile being fellowheirs in Christ, while Romans 11:13 identifies Paul as "the apostle of the Gentiles." Acts 13:46 records Paul and Barnabas declaring to opposing Jews, "lo, we turn to the Gentiles." These passages do not establish a second Saviour or contradict the saving power of Christ's blood. They identify the distinctive revelation and stewardship committed to Paul during the present dispensation. The Church is not Israel renamed, and Paul's apostolic ministry must not be swallowed into the earthly kingdom commission without distinction. Nevertheless, the revelation of the mystery does not produce a licence for spiritual idleness. Paul labored tirelessly to make the gospel known. The man who uses right division to avoid every responsibility to witness has divided himself from obedience rather than dividing the word of truth.

5. The Gospel of Grace: The Message That Actually Saves Sinners

If the missionary message is wrong, the missionary enterprise is wrong, regardless of how impressive the organization becomes. Paul identifies the saving gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, declaring "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." Notice the emphasis. Christ died for our sins. The problem is sin, the provision is Christ's sacrificial death, and the victorious resurrection establishes that the crucified Saviour is alive. The gospel is not a proposal for social reorganization, a campaign for improved manners, or an invitation to earn righteousness through religious performances. Romans 1:16 calls it "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Paul was not ashamed of that message, although it offended religious pride and worldly wisdom. First Corinthians 1:18 declares that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish. The world has always preferred a religion that flatters man's abilities over a gospel that exposes his helplessness before a holy God.

Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." That settles the matter for the present dispensation. Salvation is not obtained through water baptism, church membership, missionary giving, humanitarian service, religious perseverance, or promises to reform one's conduct. It is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 4:5 speaks of the man who "worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly." Galatians 1:8 pronounces a curse upon the preaching of another gospel. There is

no permission here for missionaries to exchange justification by faith for sacramental religion, ceremonial righteousness, or an elaborate system of conditions attached to the finished work of Christ. Good works have their proper place, as Ephesians 2:10 demonstrates, but they follow salvation rather than purchasing it. If human works could complete the transaction, Calvary would have been an unnecessary expense. The Lord Jesus Christ did not die to provide the first installment on a salvation plan that sinners must finish paying themselves.

Second Corinthians 5:20 identifies the character of Paul's ministry: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." An ambassador represents the authority that sent him. He does not rewrite the message to impress the country receiving it. Paul had just declared in verse 19 that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, and verse 21 explains the astonishing foundation of that reconciliation: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." There stands the difference between Christianity and every system of human righteousness. The sinless Christ bore what sinners deserved so that those who believe might possess righteousness in Him. The missionary must communicate that truth plainly. Cultural knowledge may help him communicate, and practical compassion may demonstrate love, but neither may replace the saving message. An ambassador who changes his sovereign's message to please the foreign court is no longer representing his sovereign faithfully.

6. The Local Church: A Sending Station, Not a Religious Retirement Home

Acts 13:1–4 introduces the missionary work of Barnabas and Saul in connection with the church at Antioch. As certain prophets and teachers ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The believers prayed, fasted, laid hands upon them, and sent them away. Verse 4 states that they were "sent forth by the Holy Ghost." The biblical account therefore recognizes divine calling alongside the participation of a local congregation. This was not a religious corporation manufacturing missionaries to expand its membership rolls. Neither were Barnabas and Saul operating as independent celebrities who regarded every church as a source of income but acknowledged no Christian fellowship or responsibility. Their work was connected with a congregation, and Acts 14:26–27 later records their return to Antioch and their report concerning what God had done. The missionary is not supposed to be a traveling salesman with a gospel label attached to his briefcase. He is a servant of Jesus Christ entrusted with the preaching of the word.

The same book demonstrates that genuine missionary labor involves more than obtaining decisions. Acts 14:21–22 records that Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel, taught

many, returned to earlier cities, and confirmed the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith. Verse 23 records elders being ordained in the churches. That pattern exposes the inadequacy of missionary programs that count professions, photograph crowds, and then abandon converts without doctrinal instruction. A sinner needs the gospel to be saved, and a saved sinner needs the Scriptures to become established in sound doctrine. Second Timothy 2:2 later instructs Timothy to commit what he had learned to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. Missionary work should therefore produce believers who understand the Bible rather than permanent dependents upon a foreign personality or institution. The church is not strengthened merely because a preacher can announce spectacular numbers. A thousand decisions without sound teaching may furnish an impressive newsletter, but numbers on paper cannot substitute for disciples established in the word of God.

Consider the condition of many congregations that pride themselves upon being active. They maintain recreation programs, entertainment schedules, social gatherings, building committees, promotional campaigns, and elaborate internal ministries, yet the preaching of the gospel receives whatever attention remains after everything else has been financed. There is nothing inherently sinful about maintaining a building or providing orderly facilities for a congregation. First Corinthians 14:40 says, "Let all things be done decently and in order." But decent organization is not an excuse for neglecting the commission of the Lord or the ministry of reconciliation. Philippians 4:15–18 shows that churches can participate materially in gospel work beyond their immediate fellowship. Third John 6–8 likewise speaks of supporting faithful workers who went forth for the Lord's name. Every congregation must examine whether its resources, teaching, and priorities reflect concern for the furtherance of the gospel. A church can have a beautiful nursery for its members, a comfortable auditorium for its visitors, and a splendid parking lot for everybody's automobiles, while the lost world receives nothing from it but a view of the landscaping.

7. Beyond the Parking Lot: Every Believer Has a Responsibility to the Gospel

Romans 10:13 declares, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Paul immediately asks how sinners can call upon One in whom they have not believed, how they can believe without hearing, and how they can hear without a preacher. Verse 17 concludes, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The issue is not whether every Christian must become a foreign missionary. Scripture recognizes different members, gifts, and responsibilities within the body of Christ, as 1 Corinthians 12 plainly teaches. But every Christian should care whether the gospel is being communicated. Some will preach publicly, some will support missionaries, some will distribute Scripture, and others will speak personally with people God places in their paths.

The opportunity varies; the importance of the message does not. You do not need an airline ticket to become concerned about lost souls, and crossing an ocean does not automatically make a man faithful to the gospel.

Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." That statement does not authorize doctrinal compromise. Paul adapted his conduct where legitimate, but Galatians 1:10 shows that pleasing men was never his governing ambition. In Acts 17, he addressed the Athenians in circumstances very different from those encountered in a Jewish synagogue, yet he still proclaimed God's authority, commanded repentance, and preached the resurrection. Effective gospel communication requires understanding the people being addressed without surrendering the truth being proclaimed. Practical kindness and good works may accompany that witness, but they cannot replace it. A missionary may feed the hungry, provide clean water, and assist suffering families, and those are worthy acts of compassion. Nevertheless, temporary physical improvement cannot accomplish eternal reconciliation. A man can possess a full stomach, a clean shirt, and a comfortable house while remaining lost without Jesus Christ.

The responsibility therefore reaches beyond organized missionary programs into ordinary Christian conduct. Colossians 4:5–6 instructs believers to walk wisely toward those who are without and to maintain speech seasoned with grace. Philippians 1:27 calls for conduct becoming the gospel of Christ. Neither passage excuses silence about salvation. A Christian's conduct should support the message rather than contradict it, and his words should communicate truth rather than merely advertise religious membership. The gospel belongs in conversations, personal witness, printed literature, Bible teaching, missionary preaching, and every legitimate opportunity God provides. The local church should equip believers with sound doctrine instead of producing spectators dependent upon one man to do all the witnessing. No believer can save another person; salvation belongs to the Lord. But believers can faithfully communicate the word through which sinners hear of Christ. The Church was not given the gospel to admire its possession. It was entrusted with the gospel so that sinners might hear of the Saviour.

Conclusion

The Great Commission must be understood according to Scripture, not according to religious tradition or promotional enthusiasm. Matthew records the risen Christ commissioning the eleven under His authority. Mark records the accompanying apostolic signs. Luke identifies the preaching of repentance and remission of sins beginning at Jerusalem. Acts describes the expanding testimony and the important transition involving Israel, the apostles, and the Gentiles. Paul's epistles establish the doctrinal foundation for

the ministry of reconciliation during the present Church Age. These distinctions are necessary because God commands His servants to rightly divide the word of truth. But none of those distinctions excuses indifference toward lost sinners. The Church has been entrusted with the gospel of the grace of God, and that message remains the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. Right division should produce clearer preaching, not quieter Christians.

The urgency of the matter cannot be measured by attendance figures, missionary photographs, fundraising totals, or impressive religious facilities. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and verse 11 follows with Paul's statement, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." The judgment seat of Christ concerns the believer's accountability, not another opportunity to obtain salvation through works. Nevertheless, it is a serious reminder that Christian service is not an insignificant matter. Furthermore, the return of Christ for His Church, revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, is the blessed hope of believers, not an excuse for withdrawing from gospel responsibility. The Christian who expects to meet the Lord should be concerned about faithfulness while opportunities remain. We cannot determine the day of Christ's coming, and we cannot compel another person to believe. We can, however, be faithful to the message entrusted to us.

The Church does not need another generation of Christians who know how to organize religious activities but cannot explain how a sinner receives eternal life. It does not need missionaries who substitute cultural exploration for gospel preaching, organizations that confuse institutional growth with spiritual fruit, or congregations that mistake beautiful buildings for obedience to God. It needs believers grounded in the King James Bible, established in sound doctrine, clear concerning salvation by grace through faith, and willing to communicate the truth of Jesus Christ without embarrassment or compromise. Let the buildings serve the ministry. Let the resources advance the gospel. Let the teaching establish believers. Let the missionary go where the Lord opens the door, and let the congregation faithfully support the truth. The final objective is not the expansion of a religious empire but the faithful proclamation of the crucified and risen Saviour. A church parking lot is a place where people arrive to assemble and depart to continue their lives. It was never intended to mark the outer boundary of their concern for lost souls. The gospel that saves sinners inside the church building is the same gospel that must be carried beyond its doors.

2 of 10 — Missions — Paul’s Missionary Call: Sent by Grace, Not Religious Ambition

Key Passage: Romans 1:1–5 (KJV)

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God." Those opening words of Romans 1:1 ought to straighten out a considerable amount of nonsense currently traveling under the respectable title of missionary work. Paul did not introduce himself as the president of an international religious organization, the founder of a successful missionary corporation, or the distinguished graduate of somebody's theological institution. He introduced himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. Before mentioning the nations he would reach, the churches he would establish, or the revelations he would receive, he identified the One to whom he belonged. The word "servant" does not leave much room for religious self-importance. A servant obeys his master; he does not negotiate the terms of obedience according to which assignment offers the greatest personal advantage. Paul was called to be an apostle and separated unto the gospel of God, not separated unto a religious career. The modern missionary establishment could learn something from that distinction. When a man becomes more concerned about making a name for himself than making the name of Jesus Christ known, his ministry has already started traveling in the wrong direction.

The remarkable thing about Paul's missionary calling is that the man who would eventually carry the gospel throughout much of the Roman world began as one of its most determined enemies. Saul of Tarsus was not a confused pagan wandering through the marketplace looking for spiritual enlightenment. He was a zealous Jew, thoroughly convinced of his religious righteousness, fiercely committed to the traditions of his fathers, and actively engaged in persecuting those who believed on Jesus Christ. Acts 9:1 describes him as "yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." That is hardly the biography a respectable missionary recruitment committee would have selected for its promotional literature. Yet God was about to take the persecutor and make him a preacher, turn the destroyer of churches into a servant who established churches, and send a man who once imprisoned Christians to proclaim the very Christ he had opposed. The explanation is not human potential, religious training, or moral improvement. It is the grace of God. Grace does not wait for sinners to become impressive candidates for salvation. It saves the ungodly through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Before proceeding, an essential doctrinal distinction must be established. Paul's conversion, apostleship, and commission were extraordinary events in the unfolding revelation of God's dealings with the Church. His calling was not the ordinary experience every Christian must reproduce before becoming useful in ministry. The risen Christ appeared to Paul, revealed divine truth to him, and appointed him to an apostolic office

that cannot be obtained today through theological education, denominational appointment, or personal ambition. Nevertheless, the principles demonstrated through Paul's life remain tremendously important. God saves sinners by grace, calls believers to faithful service, uses prepared servants, works through local churches, and sends the gospel where it needs to be heard. We must distinguish Paul's unique apostolic authority from the responsibilities of ordinary Christians without turning those distinctions into an excuse for doing nothing. Second Timothy 2:15 commands believers to rightly divide the word of truth, not to divide themselves from every responsibility that requires sacrifice. Paul's apostleship was unique, but his faithfulness provides an example. The Church does not need another apostle Paul; it needs believers who take seriously the gospel Paul preached.

1. Saul of Tarsus: A Religious Expert Traveling in the Wrong Direction

Acts 9:1–2 places Saul on the road to Damascus carrying official authorization from the high priest to arrest believers. His purpose was to find those belonging to "this way," whether men or women, and bring them bound to Jerusalem. Notice the religious credentials behind this persecution. Saul was not operating as an atheist who openly despised the God of Israel. He believed he was defending the religion of his fathers. Philippians 3:5–6 describes him as circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and concerning the law, a Pharisee. Regarding zeal, he writes, "persecuting the church." There is the uncomfortable truth. A man can possess religious ancestry, extensive education, outward righteousness, impressive zeal, and the approval of recognized authorities while being completely wrong about Jesus Christ. Saul had enough religious credentials to decorate an office wall, but those credentials could not reconcile him to God. A man can be thoroughly educated in religion and remain dangerously ignorant of the Saviour.

Paul later explained in Galatians 1:13–14 that he had persecuted the church of God and wasted it, advancing in the Jews' religion beyond many of his equals and being "more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." Those last words explain a great deal about religious deception. Saul's devotion to tradition was not evidence that his opposition to Christ was justified. Religious enthusiasm becomes spiritually dangerous when men elevate inherited customs above the revelation of God. The Lord Jesus had already warned religious leaders in Mark 7:13 about "Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition." Saul's persecution provides a terrible demonstration of what happens when a man mistakes institutional loyalty for obedience to God. He believed himself to be protecting the truth while attacking those who proclaimed the Truth incarnate. The same danger remains whenever a religious system treats loyalty to its organization as more

important than the Scriptures. Zeal without biblical truth is like a locomotive running at full speed on the wrong track. The faster it travels, the greater the disaster waiting ahead.

The lesson reaches directly into missionary service. A man may sincerely desire to establish churches, travel overseas, raise financial support, and devote his life to religious activity, yet sincerity does not establish that his doctrine is correct or his motives are pure. Saul possessed sincerity in abundance. What he lacked was saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. First Timothy 1:13 records Paul's acknowledgment that he had been "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious," although he obtained mercy. Religious ambition can be especially deceptive because it often borrows the language of sacrifice and service. A man may desire the reputation of a missionary without loving the people among whom he proposes to labor. He may enjoy describing unreached nations while neglecting opportunities to witness in his own neighborhood. Saul's history warns us that activity alone proves very little. Before asking where a man intends to minister, we had better establish what gospel he believes. God is not impressed by the mileage on a religious worker's shoes when the man wearing them is traveling contrary to His word.

2. The Damascus Road: When Grace Confronted the Persecutor

Acts 9:3–5 records the interruption that changed Saul's life: "And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven." Saul fell to the earth and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" His question was immediate: "Who art thou, Lord?" The answer destroyed every justification Saul had constructed for his religious campaign: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Consider the force of those words. Saul had been attacking disciples of Jesus Christ, yet the risen Lord personally identified Himself with those whom Saul persecuted. The One Saul believed had been defeated at Calvary was alive, speaking, and confronting him with divine authority. No amount of Pharisaical training could explain away that encounter. His religious superiors had sent him to Damascus with letters of authorization, but heaven had interrupted the journey with a considerably higher authority. Saul left Jerusalem with permission from the high priest to arrest Christians and encountered the great High Priest who could arrest him with a single sentence.

The Lord's confrontation also demonstrates the extraordinary character of Paul's conversion. Acts 9:6 records Saul's trembling response, and the following verses describe his blindness and entrance into Damascus. Instead of marching into the city as a confident persecutor, he was led by the hand. The man who intended to make believers helpless found himself unable to see. Meanwhile, God directed a disciple named Ananias to visit him. Ananias understandably knew Saul's reputation and initially expressed concern about the evil he had done to the saints. The Lord answered in Acts 9:15, "Go thy way: for he is a

chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Verse 16 adds, "For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." There is the divine explanation of Saul's future service. He was chosen by Christ, entrusted with an extraordinary commission, and informed that suffering lay ahead. The Lord did not recruit Saul by promising a comfortable religious career. He announced a calling that would cost him dearly.

First Timothy 1:15–16 provides Paul's later explanation of the grace he received: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." He understood that his salvation displayed the longsuffering and mercy of Jesus Christ. Paul was not saved because God discovered an unusually promising missionary candidate beneath his unpleasant personality. He was saved by grace, and the mercy extended to him magnified the Saviour. Acts 9:18 records the recovery of his sight and his baptism, while verse 20 declares, "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." Notice the transformation in his testimony. The man who had been attacking the disciples began proclaiming the Christ they believed. Yet we must not turn the Damascus road into a mandatory pattern for every conversion. Salvation today is received by grace through faith, as Ephesians 2:8–9 plainly establishes. A sinner does not need a blinding light from heaven to be saved. He needs to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, whose saving gospel has already been revealed.

3. Paul's Distinctive Apostleship: The Gospel to the Gentiles

Romans 1:1–5 establishes that Paul's apostleship rested upon divine calling and the gospel of God. Verse 5 says, "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name." Grace comes before apostleship in Paul's testimony. His apostolic authority was not inherited from his Jewish ancestry, earned through his Pharisaical education, or granted by a Jerusalem religious council. Galatians 1:11–12 declares that the gospel he preached was not after man, for he neither received it of man nor was taught it by man, "but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." This is not a convenient expression describing an unusually strong impression during private prayer. Paul is identifying supernatural revelation from the risen Lord. Romans 11:13 further declares, "I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." That office was distinctive. The Church must recognize it rather than pretending that every sincere missionary possesses the same revelatory authority. A missionary today is authorized to preach the apostolic Scriptures, not to appoint himself another apostle and start adding chapters to them.

First Corinthians 15:8–10 provides another essential distinction. Paul describes the risen Christ appearing to him "as of one born out of due time" and acknowledges, "For I am the

least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." He then declares, "But by the grace of God I am what I am." The office was extraordinary, and Paul never presented himself as worthy of it. Ephesians 3:1–9 explains the revelation of the mystery concerning Jew and Gentile becoming fellowheirs and members of the same body in Christ by the gospel. This was not the replacement of Israel by a Gentile religious organization, nor the cancellation of God's national promises to Abraham's descendants. Romans 11 preserves the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles and warns against Gentile boasting. Paul's apostleship belongs to the revelation of God's present dealings with the Church, composed of believing Jews and Gentiles in one body. When a preacher steals Israel's promises to decorate his denominational headquarters, he has confused biblical revelation with religious real estate acquisition.

Galatians 2:7–9 further distinguishes Paul's ministry from that associated with Peter. Paul speaks of the gospel of the uncircumcision being committed unto him, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter, and records the recognition given to the grace bestowed upon him. These distinctions concern divine stewardship and ministry, not two competing Saviours. Jesus Christ remains the only foundation of salvation. Nevertheless, the historical development of God's revelation must be respected. Peter's ministry among the circumcision and Paul's distinctive apostleship among the Gentiles cannot be flattened into one indistinguishable religious arrangement. Acts 26:16–18 also records Paul's testimony concerning the Lord's appointment of him as a minister and witness, including his mission to the Gentiles. His calling included proclaiming deliverance through faith in Christ, not establishing a political kingdom through human effort. Modern missionaries must learn from this commission without claiming Paul's unique office. The apostle's authority came from Christ Himself; the missionary's authority today comes from faithfully handling the written revelation Christ has already provided.

4. Preparation Before Promotion: God Does Not Need a Religious Celebrity

Galatians 1:15–17 reveals something often overlooked when discussing missionary calling. Paul writes, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." He continues by explaining that he went into Arabia and returned again unto Damascus. Paul's distinctive revelation and apostolic preparation did not depend upon permission from established religious authorities. Nevertheless, this passage does not authorize every ambitious preacher to announce that he has received private revelations from heaven. Paul's calling was part of God's extraordinary revelation concerning the present dispensation. The ordinary Christian's responsibility is to study and obey the Scriptures already given. Second Timothy 2:15

commands believers to study, rightly dividing the word of truth. A preacher who spends more time searching for a new revelation than studying the revelation God has already supplied is trying to purchase additional furniture while his biblical house remains empty.

Acts 9:23–25 records that opposition developed against Saul in Damascus, and the disciples eventually lowered him through the wall in a basket to escape those seeking his life. Second Corinthians 11:32–33 later confirms this humiliating episode. What an introduction to missionary greatness! The future apostle to the Gentiles did not begin with a triumphal procession, an elaborate reception, and a distinguished religious title. He escaped through a window in a basket. When he came to Jerusalem, the disciples were initially afraid of him, and Barnabas helped explain his conversion and testimony. Acts 9:30 eventually records that the brethren sent him to Tarsus. There is no reason to manufacture additional events beyond what Scripture records, but the pattern is instructive. Paul's early service involved preaching, opposition, misunderstanding, dependence upon other believers, and circumstances that provided little opportunity for personal glory. A man who believes missionary greatness requires constant applause should spend some time considering the apostle who escaped his first major assignment as cargo in a basket.

Acts 11:25–26 records Barnabas departing to Tarsus to seek Saul and bringing him to Antioch, where they assembled with the church and taught much people. Before the formal separation recorded in Acts 13, Saul was already involved in substantial teaching and ministry. He did not sit around demanding a more impressive assignment while refusing to serve where opportunities existed. That example exposes the emptiness of religious ambition that despises ordinary faithfulness. A man who cannot teach sound doctrine, demonstrate integrity, work with other believers, or handle local responsibilities has no reason to suppose crossing an ocean will automatically correct those deficiencies. First Timothy 3:6 specifically warns against placing a novice into the office of bishop, lest pride become a snare. Although that qualification addresses church oversight rather than every missionary position, the principle cautions against promoting unprepared men into serious responsibility. The mission field is not a repair shop where an unqualified preacher becomes doctrinally sound merely because his passport receives another stamp.

5. Antioch and the Holy Ghost: Biblical Sending Without Religious Machinery

Acts 13:1 identifies prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, including Barnabas and Saul. Verse 2 declares, "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Notice that these men were already ministering before their missionary separation. Their service did not begin when somebody designed an attractive promotional announcement. Verse 3 records fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands, and verse 4 establishes that they were

"sent forth by the Holy Ghost." Both divine initiative and local church participation appear in the passage. The church recognized and participated in the work rather than manufacturing the calling through institutional pressure. We must not pretend that every element of this apostolic setting becomes a permanent requirement for receiving supernatural instructions today. Nevertheless, the passage establishes the seriousness of gospel service and the importance of prayerful cooperation among believers. The Holy Ghost was directing the work before anybody began arranging the itinerary.

The missionary enterprise that followed was not a leisurely religious excursion. Acts 13:5 records that Barnabas and Saul preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, with John assisting them in the ministry. Their journey involved opposition, doctrinal confrontation, preaching, and the establishment of believers. Acts 14:21–23 describes their return to cities where they strengthened disciples and appointed elders in the churches. When they returned to Antioch, Acts 14:27 says they gathered the church together and rehearsed "all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." Observe where the credit belonged. They reported what God had done, not merely what their organization had accomplished. The missionary and the sending congregation maintained a recognizable relationship. A missionary report should illuminate the work of God, not simply furnish another opportunity for the preacher to admire his own photograph.

This historical pattern corrects two opposite errors. On one side stands the religious organization that assumes it can create a divine calling through recruitment campaigns, emotional appeals, and attractive financial arrangements. On the other stands the independent worker who refuses accountability, despises local churches, and treats every question about doctrine or conduct as interference with his personal ministry. Neither attitude reflects the balance demonstrated at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas were called to an extraordinary apostolic work, but they also labored with other believers and reported to the congregation from which they had departed. For Christian service today, the local church remains an important place for teaching, fellowship, practical assistance, and the recognition of faithful workers. Missionaries should be known for sound doctrine and tested character rather than mysterious claims of spiritual superiority. A genuine concern for lost souls should produce responsible service, not a religious personality cult with a missionary label attached.

6. Necessity Is Laid Upon Me: The Burden That Ambition Cannot Manufacture

First Corinthians 9:16 contains one of Paul's most forceful statements concerning his ministry: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" That was not the declaration of a

man who regarded preaching as an opportunity to establish a successful religious brand. Paul recognized a commission placed upon him by the Lord. Verse 17 speaks of a dispensation of the gospel committed to him, emphasizing the stewardship entrusted to his care. His obligation arose from Christ's calling, not from the applause of an audience or the expectations of an organization. Yet this passage must not be converted into a command that every Christian abandon his occupation and declare himself a missionary. Paul's apostolic stewardship was distinctive. The practical lesson is that servants of Christ must be faithful to the responsibilities God has actually given them. A calling from God is not a certificate authorizing a man to do whatever he pleases while requiring everybody else to finance the experiment.

The surrounding context also addresses financial support. First Corinthians 9:7–14 establishes the legitimacy of material assistance for those who minister spiritual things, and Paul specifically affirms that the Lord ordained that those preaching the gospel should live of the gospel. Yet he explains that he voluntarily refrained from exercising certain rights in particular circumstances. Verse 18 describes his desire to preach without charge rather than abuse his power in the gospel. This distinction is essential. Receiving legitimate missionary support is not inherently sinful, and voluntarily refusing support is not a requirement for every preacher. Philippians 4:15–18 demonstrates that Paul received material assistance from believers. The governing issue is faithful stewardship rather than financial appearance. A missionary should not be condemned for needing ordinary provisions, but neither should the gospel become a pretext for extravagance, manipulation, or covetousness. Money is a useful servant in gospel work, but when money becomes the master, the missionary has changed employers without changing the name on his prayer card.

Romans 15:15–21 reveals the direction of Paul's missionary ambition. He described the ministry given to him by grace and explained his determination to preach where Christ had not been named, "lest I should build upon another man's foundation." His desire was not merely to obtain a convenient religious position in an already established congregation. He wanted to carry the gospel into regions where the message had not been proclaimed. That did not make established churches unimportant; Paul's letters demonstrate his deep concern for their spiritual welfare. But he recognized the necessity of reaching beyond familiar territory. Second Corinthians 10:16 refers to preaching the gospel "in the regions beyond you." Here stands a needed rebuke to churches that spend nearly every available resource maintaining internal comforts while treating missionary work as an optional decoration. The missionary field is not determined by which location provides the finest accommodations. It is determined by opportunities to make Jesus Christ known where the truth is needed.

7. The Cost of the Calling: Suffering, Accountability, and Faithfulness

Second Corinthians 11:23–28 destroys the popular notion that a successful missionary calling guarantees comfort, recognition, and uninterrupted prosperity. Paul recounts imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, dangerous journeys, hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness. He also describes the daily burden of caring for the churches. This was not a theatrical performance designed to impress prospective supporters. It was the testimony of a servant who understood the cost of obedience. Acts 14:19 records that Paul was stoned at Lystra and dragged outside the city, his persecutors supposing him dead. Verse 20 then records his departure for Derbe with Barnabas the following day. That is missionary perseverance. Nevertheless, such accounts do not authorize reckless behavior or teach that suffering automatically proves sound doctrine. False teachers can suffer hardship too. The issue is faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His word. A missionary who wants Paul's authority, Paul's recognition, and Paul's reputation while refusing Paul's hardships has admired the uniform without considering the battlefield.

Paul's commitment to doctrinal accountability was equally remarkable. Acts 20:17–27 records his address to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He reminded them of his manner of life, his tears, his trials, and his public and private teaching. Verse 27 declares, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." That statement should govern every missionary ministry. Paul's responsibility was not to provide whatever religious message produced the largest audience. He preached the truth entrusted to him, including subjects that exposed sin, corrected error, and confronted opposition. Galatians 1:8 demonstrates how seriously he regarded doctrinal purity by pronouncing a curse upon the preaching of another gospel. A missionary is not faithful merely because he remains busy, travels widely, or accumulates impressive financial support. His doctrine must be examined according to Scripture. A preacher who sacrifices the truth to increase his opportunities for preaching has destroyed the very reason those opportunities mattered.

Near the conclusion of his earthly ministry, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Those words reveal the proper measurement of Christian service. Paul did not claim to have converted every sinner, reached every nation, or established every congregation he desired. He testified that he had remained faithful to the course entrusted to him. First Corinthians 3:6–7 supplies the necessary perspective: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." The servant labors, but God gives the increase. That truth guards against both pride and discouragement. A missionary cannot take credit for the saving power of the gospel, and he should not abandon faithful service merely because visible results appear limited. Second Timothy 4:8 directs attention toward the righteous judgment of the Lord. The final

evaluation of missionary service will not be determined by a promotional brochure, a church attendance chart, or a financial report. It will be determined by the Lord who knows whether His servant remained faithful.

Conclusion

The missionary calling of Paul begins and ends with the grace of God. Saul of Tarsus did not climb a religious ladder until he qualified for apostolic service. He was a persecutor confronted by the risen Christ, saved by divine mercy, and appointed to a unique ministry among the Gentiles. His Jewish ancestry, Pharisaical credentials, and former religious accomplishments could not save him. Philippians 3:7 records his judgment upon those former advantages: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." His life exposes the emptiness of religious ambition divorced from saving grace. No missionary can communicate salvation faithfully while trusting his own religious achievements for acceptance before God. The message begins with the finished work of Jesus Christ, not the accomplishments of the preacher. The greatest qualification a man can possess is not an impressive religious history but genuine salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, followed by faithful obedience to His written word.

Neither should Paul's extraordinary conversion become an excuse for Christians to demand supernatural experiences before serving the Lord. God has provided the Scriptures, and 2 Timothy 3:16–17 declares that they furnish the man of God unto all good works. The believer does not need another Damascus road to discover that sinners require the gospel. Romans 10:14–17 already explains the necessity of hearing the word of God. The local church needs men and women who understand sound doctrine, communicate salvation clearly, support faithful missionary work, and serve responsibly wherever opportunities exist. Some will labor in distant countries, others will strengthen congregations, and still others will support the work through prayer, financial assistance, teaching, or personal witness. None of those responsibilities should become an excuse for pride or indifference. The question is not whether a Christian can manufacture a dramatic testimony concerning a special calling. The question is whether he is faithfully obeying the truth God has already revealed.

Paul's missionary service leaves us with a standard far removed from the religious ambition that so often masquerades as spiritual leadership. He preached Christ rather than himself, submitted to the authority of the Lord, accepted the cost of service, labored to establish believers in sound doctrine, and sought opportunities to proclaim the gospel where it had not been heard. His apostolic office was extraordinary, but the message he preached remains the saving gospel for the present dispensation. Churches should support faithful workers without manufacturing religious celebrities, and missionaries should serve Christ

without treating the ministry as a business arrangement designed primarily for personal advancement. The lost world does not need another collection of impressive religious personalities. It needs the gospel of Jesus Christ, faithfully proclaimed by servants who understand that salvation is by grace through faith. Paul was not sent to make Saul of Tarsus famous. He was sent to make Jesus Christ known. When the missionary becomes more important than the message, the ministry has lost its direction. When Christ receives the glory and the gospel is faithfully preached, the servant has understood why he was sent.

3 of 10 — Missions — The Sending Church: God's Work Is Not a Religious Franchise

Key Passage: Acts 13:1–4 (KJV)

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Those words in Acts 13:2 ought to settle a considerable amount of religious foolishness concerning missionary work before another denominational headquarters manages to print a brochure explaining why nobody can serve God without its permission. The Holy Ghost called Barnabas and Saul, and the church at Antioch recognized that calling, prayed over the men, and participated in sending them forth. The passage contains no international ecclesiastical corporation, no religious franchise agreement, no centralized bureaucracy collecting administrative fees from every missionary offering, and no declaration that the authority of Jesus Christ must first pass through several committees before reaching His servants. What it does contain is a local congregation, men already engaged in ministering to the Lord, fasting, prayer, the unmistakable direction of the Holy Ghost, and a missionary work that would carry the gospel beyond familiar territory. The distinction matters. God established the Church to advance the gospel, not to manufacture religious empires that charge admission to participate in His work.

The biblical sending church is not a decorative institution whose only responsibility is to produce a monthly check and display a missionary photograph on a hallway bulletin board. Neither is it a religious employment agency authorized to dictate every movement of a missionary as though the servant of Christ were a salaried representative selling denominational merchandise. Scripture presents a far more serious relationship involving spiritual fellowship, sound doctrine, mutual responsibility, financial integrity, prayer, encouragement, and accountability. The congregation has responsibilities toward those it supports, and the missionary has obligations concerning the truth he preaches, the

character he demonstrates, and the stewardship of resources entrusted to his care. Philippians 1:5 describes this relationship as "your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." That is considerably stronger than a business arrangement and considerably more spiritual than a fundraising contract. The gospel belongs to God, the workers belong to Christ, and the churches participate in the ministry through faithful cooperation. When missionary work becomes a competition for institutional territory, somebody has forgotten whose gospel was being preached in the first place.

We must also establish the proper dispensational setting before treating Acts 13 as a mechanical formula for every missionary arrangement. Barnabas and Saul were ministering during the historical transition recorded in Acts, and Paul's apostleship included an extraordinary calling and revelation from the risen Christ. The Holy Ghost's direct separation of these men must not be reduced to a permanent requirement that every modern missionary receive an audible supernatural announcement. Nor should anybody claim Paul's apostolic authority merely because a congregation has laid hands upon him. The Church today possesses the completed Scriptures, and 2 Timothy 3:16–17 declares their sufficiency to furnish the man of God unto all good works. Nevertheless, the biblical principles remain powerful: God directs His work, qualified believers should be recognized, the local church participates responsibly, and the gospel must remain central. We will examine the sending church according to the King James Bible rather than according to institutional advertisements. The Church does not need permission from a religious corporation to obey Jesus Christ, but neither does a missionary have permission to ignore biblical responsibility simply because he has learned to operate independently.

1. Antioch: The Missionary Work Began With a Ministering Church

Acts 13:1 identifies the setting plainly: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers." The verse then names Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, and Saul. Notice that God begins the account with a church, not a missionary corporation. This congregation already possessed men engaged in teaching and spiritual ministry. Antioch was not attempting to create something impressive enough to earn recognition from Jerusalem or Rome. The believers were ministering to the Lord, and the Holy Ghost directed the separation of Barnabas and Saul. That is significant because missionary service did not begin with two unknown men suddenly announcing that they had discovered a foreign country where they would rather live. These men had already demonstrated usefulness in ministry. Acts 11:25–26 records Barnabas bringing Saul to Antioch, where they assembled with the church for a whole year and taught much people. A man unwilling to serve faithfully where God has already placed him has little business demanding financial support to become unfaithful somewhere else.

Acts 13:2 also reveals that the separation occurred while the believers "ministered to the Lord, and fasted." Prayerful service preceded missionary expansion. The work was not established through manipulation, pressure, or an emotional appeal designed to persuade reluctant Christians that donating money would purchase spiritual approval. The Holy Ghost declared, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The words "Separate me" identify the divine ownership of the assignment. Barnabas and Saul were not being transferred into the permanent possession of a missionary organization. They belonged to the Lord, and their ministry was being directed toward the work He had appointed. Certainly, God uses human instruments, but the instruments must never confuse themselves with the One directing the operation. A church can organize meetings, examine workers, supply resources, and provide practical assistance, but it cannot manufacture divine authority through paperwork. A thousand signatures on a denominational certificate cannot produce what the Holy Ghost alone has authority to establish.

Acts 13:3–4 continues, "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus." Observe the two complementary statements. The church sent them away, and the Holy Ghost sent them forth. There is no contradiction because the congregation participated in the divine work without claiming ownership of it. The laying on of hands expressed the church's identification with the workers; it did not transform Barnabas and Saul into apostles through some mystical transfer of ecclesiastical electricity. Their ministry depended upon God, not upon religious ceremony. Modern churches should recognize the value of prayer, serious examination, fellowship, and practical participation without imitating apostolic experiences they have no authority to reproduce. The sending church should put its hands to the work without trying to put its hands around the missionary's throat. Biblical cooperation is not institutional captivity.

2. Recognizing Faithful Workers Before Sending Them Into the Field

The sending church has a responsibility to examine the people it recommends and supports. First Timothy 3:1–7 establishes qualifications for bishops, while Titus 1:5–9 addresses the appointment and character of elders. These passages concern church leadership rather than prescribing a separate qualification list for every missionary assignment, but they reveal God's concern for doctrinal integrity, moral character, family responsibility, and spiritual maturity. Titus 1:9 requires a qualified elder to be "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." A missionary who intends to preach, teach,

establish congregations, or train leaders must understand the Scriptures he proposes to communicate. The foreign mission field is no place to experiment with doctrinal ignorance at the expense of people who desperately need biblical instruction. A congregation that sends an unqualified preacher overseas has not necessarily expanded its ministry; it may simply have exported its problems at considerable expense.

The examination must begin with the gospel itself. Galatians 1:8 declares that even if an apostle or an angel from heaven preached another gospel, he would be accursed. That is not a minor doctrinal concern that can be postponed until the missionary returns from his first assignment. First Corinthians 15:1–4 identifies the gospel through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. A church should not finance a worker who confuses baptism with regeneration, adds human merit to salvation, preaches religious perseverance as the means of obtaining eternal life, or substitutes humanitarian activity for the saving gospel. Neither should financial need excuse doctrinal compromise. Second John 9–11 warns against participation with those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. If a missionary's message cannot survive an examination by the King James Bible, his promotional presentation should not survive the church's next business meeting.

Character is equally important because religious activity does not excuse dishonesty, arrogance, or disorderly conduct. First Timothy 5:22 warns, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." Although that instruction concerns a particular church setting, its caution against hasty identification with another man's ministry is directly relevant. A sending congregation ought to know a worker's testimony, doctrinal convictions, reputation, conduct, and demonstrated willingness to be accountable. That requires more than listening to a polished presentation and admiring photographs of foreign villages. Acts 6:3 establishes the principle of selecting men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, for responsibility in the congregation. A missionary should not resent appropriate questions about his teaching or stewardship. The church is not exercising persecution when it asks a prospective missionary what he believes, how he lives, and what he intends to do. It is exercising the common sense that prevents good people from financing foolishness.

3. Fellowship in the Gospel: More Than a Check and a Photograph

Philippians 1:3–5 reveals the heart of genuine missionary partnership. Paul writes, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." The word "fellowship" deserves attention because it describes participation in a common spiritual undertaking, not merely a pleasant relationship between people who attend religious

functions. The Philippian believers had identified themselves with Paul's gospel ministry and continued their concern for his work. Their participation involved prayer, financial assistance, affection, and steadfast loyalty to the truth he preached. Paul did not regard them as names on a list of monthly donors. He remembered them before God and rejoiced in their continued fellowship. The missionary relationship becomes dangerously shallow when the preacher sees nothing but a financial account and the church sees nothing but another photograph on the wall. Genuine fellowship remembers that real people are serving a real Saviour in a real spiritual conflict.

Philippians 1:7 deepens that relationship: "inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." Paul wrote from circumstances involving imprisonment, yet he recognized the Philippians' participation in his ministry. They were not physically standing beside him during every confrontation, but their fellowship connected them with the furtherance of the gospel. This provides a powerful correction to the assumption that missionary responsibility belongs exclusively to those who cross national borders. A congregation can participate through faithful support, prayer, instruction, and practical assistance without pretending that every member possesses the same calling. First Corinthians 12 establishes that the body of Christ contains different members with different functions. The hand is not the eye, and the foot is not the ear, yet each belongs to the same body. Not everybody who participates in a missionary work needs a passport, but everybody who participates ought to understand the gospel that makes the work worth supporting.

This fellowship also requires communication. When Paul returned to Antioch, Acts 14:27 records that he and Barnabas gathered the church together and "rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." Their report directed attention toward the work of God rather than personal accomplishments. Modern missionary communication should likewise be truthful, substantial, and spiritually useful. Supporting believers need to understand what is being taught, what difficulties have arisen, what opportunities exist, and how they can pray intelligently. They do not need invented conversion statistics, exaggerated reports, staged photographs, or emotional stories stretched beyond recognition to keep donations arriving. Second Corinthians 4:2 rejects dishonesty and handling the word of God deceitfully. That principle certainly belongs in missionary reporting. A missionary letter should be a window into gospel work, not a theatrical advertisement designed to separate sympathetic Christians from their money.

4. Financial Support: Giving That Advances the Gospel Instead of Feeding a Machine

Philippians 4:14–16 provides one of the clearest New Testament examples of financial partnership in missionary work. Paul writes, "Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction." He reminds the Philippians that when he departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with him concerning giving and receiving except them. He adds that even while he was in Thessalonica, they sent assistance more than once to meet his necessity. Notice that the support addressed genuine needs associated with his ministry. Paul was not ashamed to acknowledge their generosity, nor did he pretend that gospel work required no material resources. Food, transportation, lodging, supplies, and ordinary living expenses are legitimate concerns for those serving the Lord. First Corinthians 9:14 establishes that the Lord ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. A missionary may possess heavenly citizenship, but the landlord still expects the earthly rent to be paid. Biblical spirituality does not require pretending that material necessities have ceased to exist.

Philippians 4:17 gives the proper spiritual perspective: "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." Paul appreciated the assistance, but he placed greater emphasis upon the spiritual fruit connected with faithful giving. Verse 18 describes their contribution as "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." This was not a commercial transaction through which the Philippians purchased salvation, earned justification, or acquired authority over the apostle. Salvation remains entirely by grace through faith, according to Ephesians 2:8–9. Their giving was an expression of fellowship in the gospel, and Paul recognized its spiritual significance. Second Corinthians 9:7 further establishes that giving should not arise from grudging necessity, for "God loveth a cheerful giver." Missionary support is not a heavenly investment scheme promising wealthy donors a guaranteed financial return. It is the willing participation of saved people in the work of making Jesus Christ known.

Financial stewardship must therefore be examined seriously by both the missionary and the sending church. Second Corinthians 8:20–21 reveals Paul's concern to avoid blame in administering a substantial contribution, "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." That principle has not expired. Missionary funds should be handled honestly, recorded responsibly, and used for their stated purposes. Administrative expenses may sometimes be necessary, but their existence does not grant an institution unlimited permission to consume the resources intended for gospel work. A missionary board with reasonable operating costs may provide valuable assistance; one that increasingly exists to support its own elaborate machinery deserves careful examination. Likewise, a congregation should budget thoughtfully rather than promise financial support it has no reasonable intention of maintaining. There is something seriously wrong when a religious organization can afford another executive office, another

promotional campaign, and another impressive headquarters while claiming that the missionaries actually preaching the gospel must learn to survive on whatever crumbs remain.

5. Accountability: The Missionary Is a Servant, Not an Untouchable Celebrity

Acts 14:26–28 records Paul and Barnabas returning to Antioch, "from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled." They gathered the church and reported what God had accomplished. This is a beautiful example of missionary communication and accountability, but we must interpret it accurately. Paul possessed a unique apostleship directly received from Jesus Christ, as Galatians 1:1 and 1:11–12 establish. His apostolic authority did not originate with Antioch, and the church did not possess the authority to rewrite his divine commission. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas maintained meaningful fellowship with the congregation connected to their departure. There is no biblical support here for the notion that a missionary must become answerable to nobody simply because he believes God has directed his work. A man may have received a legitimate opportunity to preach, but that does not mean he has received a divine exemption from honesty, correction, financial responsibility, or ordinary Christian conduct.

Scripture repeatedly warns against religious leaders who desire prominence without proper responsibility. Third John 9–10 describes Diotrephes, "who loveth to have the preeminence among them," and exposes his malicious words and refusal to receive faithful brethren. That is an ugly picture of spiritual pride occupying a position of influence. A missionary who cannot tolerate biblical questions, refuses to explain his doctrine, threatens supporters who request accountability, or treats himself as indispensable to the work ought to consider that passage carefully. First Peter 5:3 warns elders against being "lords over God's heritage," and although the passage directly addresses pastoral oversight, its prohibition against domineering spiritual leadership has obvious practical relevance. The Lord's servants are not authorized to build personal kingdoms. When a preacher begins treating accountability as rebellion and criticism of his conduct as an attack upon God Himself, the ministry has developed a dangerous confusion between the servant and the Master.

Accountability must operate in both directions. The sending church should not support an individual indefinitely while refusing to examine persistent doctrinal error, financial misconduct, or serious moral failure. Yet neither should church officers assume that financial contributions give them authority to micromanage every lawful decision made by a faithful worker in another country. A missionary may understand local circumstances, legal restrictions, language difficulties, and practical dangers that distant supporters do

not fully comprehend. Wisdom requires communication, patience, and appropriate respect for assigned responsibilities. Galatians 6:2 calls believers to bear one another's burdens, while verse 5 reminds each man to bear his own burden. These instructions are complementary rather than contradictory. Christian fellowship includes assistance without eliminating personal responsibility. The sending church is not supposed to become a religious dictator, and the missionary is not supposed to become a religious dictator in exile. Both are servants under the authority of Jesus Christ and His written word.

6. Missionary Boards and Denominational Headquarters: Helpers Must Never Become Masters

The New Testament recognizes order, responsible administration, and cooperation among believers, but it never places a denominational corporation above the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:18 declares concerning Christ, "And he is the head of the body, the church." Ephesians 1:22–23 likewise identifies Him as head over all things to the Church. First Timothy 3:15 describes the church of the living God as "the pillar and ground of the truth." Notice what these passages do not say. They do not identify an international missionary headquarters as the supreme interpreter of Scripture, the owner of local congregations, or the necessary mediator between God and His servants. Administrative organizations can assist churches with legitimate practical responsibilities, but their usefulness does not transform them into divinely appointed masters. A filing cabinet may help organize missionary records, but nobody should confuse the filing cabinet with the throne of Jesus Christ. Religious machinery becomes dangerous when it begins demanding the authority that belongs to the Lord and His word.

There are legitimate reasons for churches and missionaries to use administrative assistance. International travel, immigration requirements, financial transfers, emergency arrangements, communication systems, and legal obligations can become complicated. Romans 12:17 instructs believers to provide things honest in the sight of all men, and 1 Corinthians 14:40 establishes the principle that things should be done decently and in order. Nothing in Scripture requires Christians to reject every practical tool simply because it was not specifically described in the first century. The problem begins when helpful arrangements become compulsory religious structures claiming authority beyond Scripture. A missionary organization may assist with financial administration without acquiring ownership of the missionary's conscience. It may provide useful counsel without becoming the final judge of biblical truth. It may establish reasonable policies without pretending those policies carry the same authority as the commandments of God. A tool becomes a tyrant when the servant begins obeying the organization even where the organization contradicts the Bible.

Acts 20:28 commands the elders of Ephesus to take heed to themselves and to the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers. Their responsibility was to feed the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. That is a solemn responsibility, not an authorization to surrender the congregation to distant ecclesiastical authorities. Paul warned in Acts 20:29–30 that grievous wolves would enter and that men would arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves. The danger of institutional ambition is therefore not imaginary. Religious leaders can begin gathering followers around themselves rather than directing believers toward Christ. Nevertheless, rejecting abusive authority does not justify rejecting all spiritual oversight. Hebrews 13:17 recognizes legitimate responsibility among those who watch for souls. Sound churches need accountable leadership under Scripture, not religious anarchy. The answer to a denominational dictator is not a congregation where every man crowns himself king. The answer is biblical authority exercised under the written word of God.

7. Fellowhelpers to the Truth: Caring for Those Who Carry the Gospel

Third John 5–8 brings missionary fellowship into wonderfully practical terms. John commends Gaius: "Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers." He then urges him to bring faithful workers forward on their journey "after a godly sort." Verse 7 explains, "Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles." Verse 8 supplies the principle: "We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth." There is no complicated denominational formula hidden in those words. Faithful believers were assisting faithful servants who had gone forth for the Lord's name. Their cooperation made them fellowhelpers to the truth being proclaimed. This was not a general command to finance anyone carrying a religious title. The context emphasizes faithful brethren serving the truth. Supporting the gospel is not simply giving money to somebody who can pronounce the word missionary with sufficient enthusiasm. It is participating in the work of those who faithfully carry the truth of God.

The sending church should also remember that missionaries remain human beings with legitimate needs and responsibilities. They may face illness, family difficulties, unexpected expenses, opposition, separation from loved ones, exhausting travel, or problems requiring assistance from believers at home. Philippians 2:25–30 describes Epaphroditus, whom Paul calls "my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier," and who ministered to Paul's wants. His service involved serious personal sacrifice, and Paul instructed the Philippians to receive him with gladness and hold such men in reputation. Similarly, 2 Timothy 4:11 records Paul's appreciation for Mark, who was profitable to him for the ministry. These passages remind us that gospel workers need more than occasional

financial transactions. They need faithful fellowship, honest communication, encouragement, and practical concern. A church that remembers its missionary only when the monthly check is prepared has reduced Christian fellowship to bookkeeping. The worker carrying the gospel is a brother in Christ, not a piece of equipment purchased for foreign deployment.

The relationship should continue through changing circumstances without becoming careless or sentimental. A missionary may need additional assistance during a legitimate emergency, counsel concerning an important decision, or help returning home when circumstances demand it. Conversely, persistent doctrinal compromise, dishonesty, or misconduct may require the church to reconsider its support. First Thessalonians 5:12–14 presents a balanced picture of Christian relationships involving recognition, admonition, comfort, patience, and responsibility. Supporting churches should neither abandon faithful workers at the first inconvenience nor continue financing serious wrongdoing under the mistaken belief that loyalty requires blindness. The missionary likewise should communicate honestly rather than manufacture urgency whenever additional money is desired. Christian fellowship must be governed by truth. Faithful support is neither a blank check nor a leash. It is a solemn partnership in the gospel, maintained through honesty, prayer, sound doctrine, and mutual responsibility before Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The sending church established in Scripture bears little resemblance to the religious franchise systems that have sometimes overshadowed missionary work. Acts 13 demonstrates a local congregation recognizing and participating in the work appointed by the Holy Ghost. Acts 14 demonstrates the importance of returning, communicating, and recounting what God accomplished through faithful service. Philippians reveals a congregation participating with Paul through prayer, affection, financial assistance, and continued fellowship in the gospel. Third John commends believers who supported faithful workers for the Lord's name. These passages provide substantial instruction without requiring us to manufacture a worldwide ecclesiastical corporation or pretend that Paul's extraordinary apostolic calling is reproduced in every missionary today. The doctrinal foundation remains the gospel of the grace of God, through which sinners are saved by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The sending church exists to help carry that message, not to place its own institutional name above the Saviour whose gospel makes missionary work necessary.

Every congregation should examine its missionary responsibilities with an open King James Bible. Are workers being examined according to sound doctrine, or selected because they possess impressive presentations? Are financial contributions administered honestly, or

absorbed by an expanding religious machine? Are supported missionaries remembered in prayer, encouraged through communication, and assisted in legitimate needs? Are the workers themselves faithful to Scripture, responsible in conduct, and honest about their ministries? These are biblical questions, not attacks upon missionary service. Second Corinthians 8:21 requires honest conduct before God and men, and Galatians 1:10 reminds us that serving Christ cannot be reduced to pleasing men. The church must never confuse a large missionary budget with genuine faithfulness. Neither should it use imperfect missionary organizations as an excuse to neglect the work altogether. A congregation capable of financing another decorative building project while refusing to consider the needs of faithful gospel workers has mistaken the appearance of prosperity for the exercise of spiritual responsibility.

The final authority belongs to Jesus Christ, the message is the gospel, and the objective is the salvation and establishment of sinners through the truth of God's word. The missionary must not become an untouchable religious celebrity, the sending church must not become a controlling institution, and the administrative organization must not become a substitute for biblical authority. Each has responsibilities, and each must remain subject to Scripture. First Corinthians 3:9 declares, "For we are labourers together with God." That statement removes every legitimate excuse for personal empire-building. The harvest belongs to God, the gospel belongs to God, and the glory belongs to God. Let the church pray, examine, send, support, communicate, and remain faithful. Let the missionary preach, teach, serve, report honestly, and conduct himself as a servant of Christ. Let whatever administrative assistance is necessary remain assistance rather than domination. A missionary organization may own its buildings, vehicles, office equipment, and bank accounts, but it does not own the gospel, the Church, or the servants of Jesus Christ. God's work is not a religious franchise, and the saving message of Calvary was never placed on the market for denominational ownership.

4 of 10 — Missions — Missionary Teams: The Gospel Is Not a One-Man Circus

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:5–9 (KJV)

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" That question in 1 Corinthians 3:5 ought to knock a little religious pride out of the modern missionary establishment before another preacher begins acting as though the gospel would collapse if his name disappeared from the promotional material. Paul did not ask the Corinthians to admire his personality, subscribe to his personal brand,

or organize themselves into competing religious fan clubs. He asked them to remember that he and Apollos were ministers through whom they had believed, while God was the One responsible for the increase. The Corinthians had already demonstrated their carnality by dividing themselves into factions, with some boasting of Paul and others of Apollos. Apparently, religious celebrity worship did not require television cameras or social media accounts to get started. Human nature managed to manufacture the foolishness centuries before anybody invented an electronic device. The gospel was never intended to become a one-man circus where everybody watches the performer, applauds his accomplishments, and forgets the Saviour who made salvation possible.

The missionary journeys recorded in Acts reveal a far richer picture than the popular imagination usually provides. Paul was unquestionably the central apostolic figure in the Gentile mission, having received a distinctive commission from the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the inspired record repeatedly introduces faithful men and women who participated in the work without possessing Paul's extraordinary apostolic office. Barnabas encouraged and accompanied him. John Mark assisted before withdrawing and later becoming profitable for ministry. Silas traveled with Paul through opposition and imprisonment. Timothy became a trusted fellow laborer. Luke accompanied missionary journeys and remained with Paul during difficult circumstances. Aquila and Priscilla opened their lives, home, and occupations to gospel service. Other believers carried messages, strengthened congregations, supplied necessities, and labored faithfully without receiving anything resembling a celebrity endorsement. Their individual responsibilities differed, but their common concern was the furtherance of the gospel. God did not build the New Testament missionary work around a collection of independent religious celebrities competing to see whose photograph occupied the largest portion of the church bulletin.

We must distinguish Paul's unique apostleship from the ordinary cooperative ministry of believers in the present Church Age. His authority came through the revelation of Jesus Christ, as Galatians 1:11–12 establishes, and his ministry among the Gentiles was connected with the revelation of the mystery concerning the body of Christ. Modern missionaries do not become apostles because they travel overseas, experience persecution, or establish congregations. Neither does the importance of cooperation authorize churches to surrender doctrinal purity in the name of unity. The New Testament teaches cooperation in the truth, not cooperation at the expense of the truth. We will therefore examine missionary companionship, the training of younger workers, disagreements among faithful servants, practical assistance, church establishment, and the danger of elevating personalities above Scripture. The governing principle is found in 1 Corinthians 3:9: "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are

God's building." When the work belongs to God, the workers have no legitimate reason to fight over who gets the largest portion of the glory.

1. Barnabas and Saul: The Holy Ghost Sent Workers, Not a One-Man Institution

Acts 13:2 records the Holy Ghost declaring, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." Notice the names. The Holy Ghost did not instruct the church at Antioch to build an international organization around Saul's personality and then hire a collection of assistants to maintain his reputation. Barnabas and Saul were separated for the work, and Acts 13:3–4 records the church fasting, praying, laying hands upon them, and sending them away. The passage also declares that they were sent forth by the Holy Ghost. The historical circumstances were extraordinary because Saul possessed a distinctive apostolic calling, but the cooperation remains instructive. These men were not strangers randomly paired together by a religious employment agency. Barnabas had already sought Saul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch, where they assembled with the church and taught much people, according to Acts 11:25–26. Their missionary partnership grew out of actual ministry, tested fellowship, and a shared commitment to the word of God. The best missionary team is not necessarily the one with the most impressive résumés, but the one whose members are faithfully occupied with the work God has placed before them.

Acts 13:5 adds another detail that deserves attention: "And they had also John to their minister." This John was John Mark, who assisted Barnabas and Saul during the opening stage of their journey. The word "minister" in this setting identifies his service alongside them, not an independent claim to apostolic authority. Here were men functioning in different capacities within the same missionary undertaking. Barnabas and Saul were engaged in the commission given them, while Mark provided assistance. The arrangement illustrates an important truth: not every faithful worker must occupy the same position to contribute meaningfully to the gospel. First Corinthians 12:18 declares, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him." Paul was addressing the body of Christ rather than establishing a formal missionary staffing chart, but the principle of differing functions applies. A missionary team consisting entirely of men determined to be the chief preacher would soon resemble a room full of conductors fighting over the baton while nobody bothered to play an instrument.

The missionary enterprise also required more than arriving in a city, delivering a message, and disappearing into the sunset. Acts 14:21–23 describes Paul and Barnabas preaching the gospel, teaching many, returning to earlier cities, confirming disciples, and ordaining elders in the churches. Their work involved evangelism, instruction, encouragement, and the establishment of congregations under responsible leadership. Acts 14:27 records their

return to Antioch, where they rehearsed what God had done and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. The emphasis remained upon divine accomplishment rather than the personal prestige of the workers. Missionary cooperation should produce similar concern for the salvation and establishment of believers. One worker may preach, another teach, another assist with practical needs, and another help younger converts understand the Scriptures. The missionary assignment is not completed merely because the preacher has collected enough interesting experiences to fill a newsletter. The objective is to make Christ known and establish believers in the truth.

2. Paul and Barnabas: When Faithful Workers Disagree

Acts 15:36 records Paul's proposal to Barnabas: "Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." That statement reveals a concern often missing from missionary programs obsessed with collecting new territory. Paul wanted to revisit believers who had already received the gospel. Converts needed instruction, congregations needed strengthening, and the work required continuing attention. Barnabas agreed concerning the general objective but determined to take John Mark with them. Paul disagreed because Mark had previously departed from them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them to the work, as Acts 15:38 explains. Acts 13:13 records Mark's earlier return to Jerusalem but does not explain his motive. We should therefore resist the temptation to manufacture a detailed account of cowardice, homesickness, rebellion, or some other imagined explanation. The Bible tells us what Mark did, not everything that passed through his mind. A preacher who invents missing details has ceased expounding the passage and started writing unauthorized additions.

Acts 15:39 declares, "And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other." Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. The disagreement was real, serious, and painful enough to separate two men who had previously labored together. Yet the passage does not declare that Barnabas became an apostate or that Paul abandoned the gospel. Their disagreement concerned whether Mark should accompany them again after his earlier departure. Scripture does not provide sufficient grounds to announce that every aspect of either man's conduct was unquestionably correct. The account demonstrates that faithful servants can experience serious disagreements over judgment, personnel, and ministry arrangements without necessarily surrendering foundational doctrine. Nevertheless, sharp contention should not be romanticized as an ideal method of missionary administration. Some Christians behave as though every disagreement requires a church split, three public announcements, and a

permanent declaration of war. Acts records the contention; it does not command believers to reproduce it.

The later record concerning Mark provides an important conclusion. In Colossians 4:10, Paul mentions Marcus, Barnabas' sister's son, and instructs the Colossians concerning receiving him. Most strikingly, 2 Timothy 4:11 records Paul's request: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry." Whatever difficulties surrounded Mark's earlier withdrawal, Paul later recognized his usefulness. This does not prove every detail of the intervening relationship, but it establishes that Mark's earlier failure did not permanently disqualify him from profitable service. That should sober churches that treat every mistake as an irreversible sentence of religious exile. Serious misconduct and doctrinal corruption must be handled biblically, but weakness, inexperience, and disputed judgments should not automatically be treated as permanent apostasy. Galatians 6:1 establishes a principle of restoring those overtaken in a fault with meekness. A worker who once stumbled may later become tremendously useful, and the preacher who refuses to recognize genuine restoration may be more devoted to protecting his original judgment than helping the work advance.

3. Silas and Timothy: Training Workers Instead of Building Personal Empires

After separating from Barnabas, Paul chose Silas, and Acts 15:40–41 records their departure through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. Silas was not simply a convenient replacement standing beside Paul to make the missionary photographs appear more balanced. Acts 15:22 identifies him among the chief men of the brethren at Jerusalem, and Acts 15:32 declares that Judas and Silas, being prophets, exhorted and confirmed the brethren with many words. Silas therefore brought demonstrated spiritual usefulness to the work. Later, Acts 16 records Paul and Silas imprisoned at Philippi after opposition arose from those whose financial interests had been disturbed. At midnight they prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. Their companionship extended beyond pleasant journeys and successful public meetings. They shared imprisonment, opposition, and uncertainty. It is easy to advertise missionary brotherhood while everybody is enjoying comfortable accommodations. The sincerity of that brotherhood becomes considerably more visible when both men are sitting in the same prison with their feet fastened in the stocks.

Acts 16:1–3 introduces Timothy as a disciple whose mother was a believing Jewess and whose father was a Greek. The brethren at Lystra and Iconium reported well of him, and Paul desired that Timothy accompany him. Notice that Timothy already possessed a good testimony among believers who knew him. Paul did not select an unknown young man merely because he could deliver an impressive speech or possessed an energetic

personality. The passage also records Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy because of the Jews in those regions, who knew that his father was Greek. This was a practical accommodation connected with their Jewish audience, not a declaration that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Galatians 2:3 records that Titus, being a Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised. Paul refused religious compulsion where the truth of the gospel was threatened. The same apostle could accommodate a Jewish audience without compromising doctrine and refuse circumcision when false teachers attempted to make it a condition of spiritual acceptance. That is biblical discernment, not contradiction.

Timothy's later ministry demonstrates the value of preparing dependable workers who can continue serving without remaining permanently dependent upon one older preacher. Philippians 2:19–22 records Paul's confidence in Timothy, declaring, "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state." Paul commended Timothy's genuine concern for the believers and reminded the Philippians that they knew the proof of him. The relationship involved instruction, service, character, and shared concern for the gospel. Second Timothy 2:2 carries the principle forward: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." That is spiritual multiplication grounded in faithful doctrine. The objective is not to produce permanent admirers of a famous preacher but to prepare men capable of teaching the truth. A minister who refuses to train others because they might eventually become more useful than himself is not protecting the ministry. He is protecting his ego from the possibility that God might accomplish something without his name printed across the top.

4. Luke and the Lesser-Known Laborers: Not Every Faithful Worker Stands Behind the Pulpit

The missionary record introduces Luke through a remarkable feature of the book of Acts. In Acts 16:10, the narrative begins using "we" when describing the journey following Paul's vision concerning Macedonia. That change indicates the writer's participation in the events being recorded, although we should not pretend the narrative provides a complete diary of his every movement. Colossians 4:14 identifies Luke as "the beloved physician," and Philemon 24 includes him among Paul's fellowlabourers. Near the end of Paul's life, 2 Timothy 4:11 contains the touching statement, "Only Luke is with me." Here was a man whose usefulness cannot be measured merely by counting public sermons attributed to him. His companionship, service, and inspired historical record contributed enormously to the Church's understanding of the gospel's advance. The modern obsession with platform personalities would have difficulty evaluating a man whose greatest contribution was not demanding the microphone but faithfully serving and recording what God accomplished.

The New Testament identifies other workers whose contributions were equally important in their own circumstances. Ephesians 6:21–22 describes Tychicus as "a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord," sent to communicate Paul's circumstances and comfort the believers' hearts. Philippians 2:25 identifies Epaphroditus as Paul's brother, companion in labor, fellowsoldier, and the Philippians' messenger who ministered to his wants. Second Timothy 1:16–18 records the faithfulness of Onesiphorus, who often refreshed Paul and was not ashamed of his chain. Romans 16:1–2 commends Phebe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea, who had been a succourer of many, including Paul. These people served in differing capacities, and the Bible does not require us to assign them identical offices to appreciate their faithfulness. Some carried letters, some provided assistance, some communicated news, and some stood beside suffering brethren. The gospel advanced through servants whose names rarely appear on the largest religious signs.

That distinction matters because missionary work requires responsibilities beyond preaching. Language study, Scripture instruction, transportation, hospitality, correspondence, financial administration, care for the sick, and practical assistance may all contribute to a legitimate gospel ministry. Such activities must remain subordinate to the biblical purpose rather than replacing it. Romans 12:6–8 recognizes differing gifts and ministries among believers, while 1 Corinthians 12 explains that the body contains many members with distinct functions. The missionary field should therefore not become a contest in which everybody tries to perform the same public task. Neither should the importance of practical service become an excuse for abandoning sound doctrine or neglecting evangelism. A missionary organization may possess excellent administrators and capable assistants while accomplishing little if the gospel itself is no longer preached. An army needs more than generals, but an army that spends all its time polishing equipment while refusing to engage its assigned mission has mistaken preparation for accomplishment.

5. Aquila and Priscilla: A Home, a Trade, and a Marriage Used for Gospel Work

Acts 18:1–3 introduces Aquila and Priscilla when Paul arrived at Corinth. Aquila was a Jew born in Pontus, recently come from Italy with Priscilla because Claudius had commanded Jews to depart from Rome. Paul stayed with them because they shared the same occupation: "for by their occupation they were tentmakers." There is a tremendous amount of practical missionary instruction in those few verses. Paul did not regard ordinary labor as beneath his apostolic dignity, and this couple did not require prominent religious titles before becoming useful in gospel service. Their occupation provided a natural connection, their home provided hospitality, and their fellowship contributed to the developing ministry at Corinth. Acts 18:4 records Paul reasoning in the synagogue every sabbath, persuading

Jews and Greeks, while verse 11 describes his extended teaching ministry there. A man who believes he is too spiritual to work with his hands should remember that the apostle to the Gentiles was perfectly capable of handling a needle without losing his apostolic authority.

The involvement of Aquila and Priscilla extended beyond providing accommodations. Acts 18:24–26 introduces Apollos, an eloquent man mighty in the Scriptures who knew only the baptism of John. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him speaking boldly in the synagogue, "they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." Notice the distinction between their private instruction and the public pastoral authority addressed in 1 Timothy 2:12. The passage does not establish a woman pastor occupying the authoritative teaching office over a congregation. It describes a believing husband and wife assisting a capable preacher whose understanding needed further instruction. Neither should their contribution be minimized simply because they were not apostles. Apollos possessed considerable knowledge and speaking ability, yet he benefited from correction. A preacher may possess enough eloquence to impress an auditorium and still need somebody with an open Bible to explain what he has overlooked. Eloquence can carry a message across a room; only truth can make the message worth hearing.

Romans 16:3–5 provides another testimony concerning this faithful couple. Paul writes, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus," and acknowledges that they had laid down their own necks for his life. He also mentions the church in their house. Their home was not merely a private residence maintained for personal comfort; it became a place connected with the fellowship and instruction of believers. That does not mean every Christian household must reproduce the same arrangements, but it demonstrates how ordinary possessions and relationships can serve extraordinary spiritual purposes. The missionary enterprise needs faithful marriages, hospitable homes, honest occupations, and believers willing to assist without demanding recognition. It also needs to remember that tentmaking was one legitimate arrangement, not a universal prohibition against missionary support. First Corinthians 9:14 and Philippians 4:15–18 establish the legitimacy of material assistance for gospel workers. The lesson is not that every missionary must become a tentmaker. The lesson is that no honest occupation, faithful home, or willing servant is too ordinary for God to use in the advancement of His truth.

6. Planting, Watering, and the Increase: God Does Not Share His Glory With Religious Celebrities

First Corinthians 3:5–7 brings the entire question of missionary teamwork back to its proper foundation. Paul asks who he and Apollos are, then answers that they are ministers through whom the Corinthians believed. Verse 6 declares, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but

God gave the increase." The agricultural comparison is perfectly chosen. One servant plants the seed, another waters the ground, and neither possesses the divine power necessary to produce life. The planter cannot manufacture spiritual regeneration, and the waterer cannot force a sinner to believe. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, according to Romans 1:16, and salvation is received by grace through faith, not human achievement. Paul understood that preaching and teaching were essential responsibilities, but he refused to claim the saving power belonged to the preacher. A missionary may carry the seed, cultivate the field, and labor until his hands are worn, but he had better remember that he cannot manufacture eternal life any more than a farmer can command a dead seed to awaken by giving it a motivational speech.

First Corinthians 3:8 continues, "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." The workers are united in purpose, yet their individual labor remains subject to divine evaluation. This corrects both the arrogant missionary who claims every accomplishment as his personal achievement and the irresponsible worker who hides laziness behind the statement that God gives the increase. God giving the increase does not eliminate the obligation to plant or water. First Corinthians 3:10–15 further addresses the quality of Christian labor upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. The day will declare every man's work, and the fire will try what sort it is. The passage concerns the examination of Christian service, not the final condemnation of an unsaved sinner at the Great White Throne. The Lord will not reward a preacher merely because his ministry appeared successful in a newsletter, nor will He overlook faithful labor simply because it never produced a crowd large enough to impress the religious establishment.

The same principle governs missionary reports, financial support, and cooperation among churches. A missionary should faithfully communicate genuine accomplishments without exaggerating conversions, inventing miraculous events, or claiming credit for the labors of others. Supporting churches should appreciate reports of spiritual fruit without reducing the value of ministry to numerical competition. One worker may preach to many people, while another spends years carefully teaching a small congregation. One may distribute Scripture broadly, while another establishes faithful teachers capable of instructing future generations. Their responsibilities differ, and God knows the quality of their labor. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where their service will be evaluated. That prospect ought to remove considerable foolishness from missionary publicity. When the Lord examines the work, He will not need an advertising department to explain why inflated statistics should count as spiritual fruit. God knows what was actually accomplished, who remained faithful, and whose glory the servants were attempting to promote.

7. Unity in the Truth: Cooperation Without Ecumenical Compromise

Ephesians 4:3 instructs believers to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That is a biblical command, but it must never be twisted into the idea that doctrinal differences are irrelevant or that every religious organization mentioning Jesus Christ belongs in the same missionary partnership. The unity described in Ephesians belongs to believers joined together in Christ, and the surrounding passage emphasizes one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Galatians 1:8 pronounces a curse upon the preaching of another gospel. Romans 16:17 instructs believers to mark those causing divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine they have learned and to avoid them. These instructions do not contradict biblical unity; they protect its foundation. Missionary cooperation must therefore rest upon truth rather than institutional convenience. A collection of religious organizations cannot manufacture biblical unity merely by agreeing not to discuss the doctrines that divide them. Silence about error is not the same thing as agreement in the truth.

Second Corinthians 6:14 warns believers against being unequally yoked together with unbelievers. That warning should not be turned into a prohibition against every ordinary interaction with unbelieving people, for missionary work necessarily involves contact with the lost. It does, however, establish a serious principle concerning spiritual partnership. A Bible-believing missionary cannot faithfully preach salvation by grace through faith while forming evangelistic partnerships that require him to endorse sacramental regeneration, religious merit, denial of Christ's deity, or another gospel. Second John 9–11 likewise establishes boundaries concerning those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. The desire to reach more people does not authorize corrupting the message used to reach them. Neither does cooperation require surrendering biblical distinctions concerning Israel and the Church, Paul's apostleship, or the present dispensation of grace. A missionary team that abandons the gospel to keep everybody comfortable has achieved the kind of unity a ship enjoys after everybody agrees to stop arguing about the hole in its hull. The agreement may be unanimous, but the ship is still sinking.

Yet doctrinal separation must not become an excuse for unnecessary personal warfare among faithful believers. Second Timothy 2:24 declares, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient." The following verses address correction and instruction, not surrender to error. Paul could rebuke Peter publicly when the truth of the gospel was at stake, as Galatians 2:11–14 demonstrates, while also recognizing faithful fellow laborers whose assignments and abilities differed from his own. The missionary must learn the difference between compromising doctrine and exercising patience concerning legitimate differences of judgment. The disagreement between Paul

and Barnabas concerned Mark's participation in their journey; it was not a license to manufacture a permanent doctrinal war over every disputed decision. First Corinthians 1:10 calls believers to reject divisions and speak the same thing. Biblical unity does not require everybody to possess the same personality, occupy the same position, or agree about every practical arrangement. It requires faithfulness to the same Lord and the truth He has revealed.

Conclusion

The New Testament missionary enterprise was never designed to become a stage upon which one religious personality performs while everybody else applauds. Paul possessed an extraordinary apostleship, but the Scriptures deliberately record the faithful contributions of Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Aquila, Priscilla, and numerous other servants. Their work included preaching, teaching, encouragement, hospitality, practical assistance, communication, and the establishment of congregations. Some disagreements arose, some workers demonstrated weakness, and some required further instruction, but the gospel continued advancing through the labors of faithful believers. First Corinthians 3:9 supplies the governing truth: "For we are labourers together with God." The work belongs to Him, and the servants must never confuse their responsibilities with ownership of the ministry. A preacher who believes the gospel cannot advance without his personal supervision has forgotten that Jesus Christ was building His Church long before that preacher arrived and will remain Lord of His Church after the preacher is gone.

The practical responsibility of every sending congregation is to encourage genuine cooperation without sacrificing sound doctrine. Missionaries should be prepared, examined, supported, and held accountable according to Scripture. Younger workers should be taught rather than exploited, experienced servants should be respected without being worshipped, and faithful assistants should be appreciated even when their responsibilities attract little public attention. Disagreements should be handled according to biblical truth rather than personal revenge, and genuine restoration should be welcomed where Scripture permits it. The gospel itself must remain unmistakably clear: Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, as 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 declares. Salvation remains by grace through faith, not through religious accomplishment. Missionary teamwork becomes worthless when cooperation requires replacing that gospel with a collection of doctrines acceptable to everybody except the word of God. The objective is not the largest possible religious coalition. It is the faithful proclamation of Jesus Christ.

When Paul reached the end of his ministry, his concern was not that his personal reputation should be preserved through an elaborate religious monument. He desired

faithful workers, sound doctrine, and the continued proclamation of the gospel. Second Timothy 4:11 records his request for Mark because he was profitable for the ministry, demonstrating that usefulness mattered more than preserving an old disagreement. His final testimony in 2 Timothy 4:7 was, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." That is the proper objective for every servant of Jesus Christ. Let the preacher preach, the teacher teach, the supporter give, the helper assist, and the congregation strengthen the work according to Scripture. Let none of them mistake individual importance for indispensability. Let the doctrine remain pure, the fellowship remain honest, and the glory remain with God. The gospel is not a one-man circus, the missionary field is not a stage for religious celebrities, and the Church is not a fan club organized around impressive personalities. We are labourers together with God, and the only name that deserves to stand above the entire missionary enterprise is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

5 of 10 — Missions — The Regions Beyond: Reaching People Religion Has Forgotten

Key Passage: Romans 15:19–21 (KJV)

"Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." Those words in Romans 15:19 ought to disturb a considerable number of comfortable congregations whose idea of missionary expansion consists of installing another television in the fellowship hall and adding a few photographs to the missionary bulletin board. Paul was not describing a religious sightseeing expedition through the Roman Empire. He was explaining the geographical extent of a ministry devoted to making Jesus Christ known. Jerusalem, the surrounding regions, and the territory extending toward Illyricum represented an enormous field of gospel labor, including opposition, hardship, preaching, teaching, and the establishment of believers. Yet Paul did not congratulate himself and settle into a comfortable religious retirement. Verse 20 reveals his continuing ambition: "Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." The apostle was not interested in collecting impressive destinations for his travel record. He was concerned about reaching sinners who had not heard the truth about Jesus Christ.

There is something spiritually revealing about the way religious people calculate missionary success. Some count airplane tickets, others count countries visited, and still others collect conversion statistics with the enthusiasm of a businessman counting

quarterly sales. Meanwhile, entire communities may remain without anyone capable of explaining salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. A country can possess magnificent cathedrals, ancient religious traditions, nationally recognized Christian holidays, and enough church bells to disturb every sleeping animal within twenty miles, while multitudes of its inhabitants remain ignorant of the gospel Paul preached. Hearing the name of Jesus is not necessarily the same as understanding why He died, what His resurrection accomplished, or how a sinner receives eternal life. Romans 10:17 declares, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The missionary question must therefore reach beyond geographical labels and religious appearances. A nation does not become thoroughly evangelized merely because somebody erected a steeple, installed a bell, and taught the population to recognize religious vocabulary.

The subject of the regions beyond requires sound biblical distinctions, not emotional manipulation or romantic stories about dangerous destinations. Paul's calling was extraordinary because the risen Christ appointed him as the apostle of the Gentiles, as Romans 11:13 establishes. The supernatural signs accompanying his apostolic ministry belonged to that historical setting and must not be reproduced as imaginary credentials for every modern missionary. Nevertheless, the principles of gospel expansion, doctrinal faithfulness, concern for the unreached, and responsible labor remain applicable to believers today. We must examine what Paul actually meant by preaching where Christ was not named, how the Holy Ghost directed his movements in Acts, how he addressed idolatrous Gentiles, and why the word of God remains essential to salvation. We must also distinguish legitimate missionary service from religious tourism and faithful evangelism from institutional empire-building. The goal is not to make Christians feel guilty for remaining in their own country or superior because they travel abroad. The goal is to understand that lost sinners need the gospel, whether they live across the street or beyond the farthest familiar horizon.

1. From Jerusalem to Illyricum: Paul's Gospel Was Never Confined to One Neighborhood

Romans 15:19 places Paul's missionary labor within a recognizable geographical setting: "from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum." Jerusalem occupied a special place in the early apostolic testimony because the risen Lord had instructed His witnesses to begin there. Acts 1:8 describes the expanding witness through Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Yet Paul's ministry among the Gentiles must be distinguished from the original kingdom commission given to the twelve. Romans 15:16 identifies him as "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of

God." His assignment involved the revelation of God's grace and the incorporation of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body in Christ. Ephesians 3:1–9 explains the mystery associated with that present dispensation. Paul did not need to turn Gentiles into Israelites to make them acceptable to God. The gospel crossed national boundaries without requiring God to cancel His promises to Israel or transfer Israel's national inheritance to a Gentile religious institution.

The geographical scope of Paul's ministry is remarkable because the world in which he traveled offered few of the conveniences that modern missionaries take for granted. The record of Acts describes journeys by land and sea, dangerous opposition, imprisonment, and repeated confrontations with religious authorities. Second Corinthians 11:25–27 records shipwrecks, perils of waters, perils of robbers, weariness, painfulness, hunger, and thirst. Those hardships were not romantic decorations added to an otherwise comfortable missionary career. They were realities associated with carrying the gospel into places where opposition and uncertainty accompanied the work. Nevertheless, hardship itself was never the objective. Paul was not hunting for dangerous situations so that he could return with more exciting stories. He was preaching Christ, and difficulties arose in connection with that responsibility. The missionary who deliberately manufactures danger to make his ministry appear heroic has confused suffering for the gospel with advertising for himself. Paul endured hardship because of the message, not because hardship made a better promotional photograph.

The expression "fully preached the gospel of Christ" deserves careful examination. Paul was not claiming that every individual from Jerusalem to Illyricum had personally heard him preach or that every community had been permanently established in sound doctrine. Romans 15:23 records his statement that he had "no more place in these parts," while the preceding context explains his particular missionary ambition concerning foundations not yet laid. He had carried out an extensive pioneering ministry throughout those regions and now contemplated further opportunities. This does not mean churches established in those territories no longer required instruction, correction, or pastoral care. Paul's letters themselves demonstrate ongoing concern for believers after their conversion. The missionary responsibility therefore includes both reaching new fields and strengthening existing congregations. There is no virtue in planting a congregation today only to abandon it tomorrow because another unexplored location offers a more impressive story. The gospel must be preached to sinners, and saved sinners must be established in the Scriptures.

2. Another Man's Foundation: Missionary Expansion Without Religious Competition

Romans 15:20 explains Paul's distinctive missionary ambition: "not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." This was not a declaration that existing congregations were unworthy of further instruction or that preachers serving established churches were inferior Christians. Paul was describing the particular pioneering responsibility associated with his apostleship. First Corinthians 3:6 supplies the complementary principle: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." One servant may establish a work, another may strengthen it, and God remains the One who gives spiritual increase. The planter has no legitimate reason to despise the waterer, and the waterer has no legitimate reason to claim ownership of another man's labor. Paul's determination to reach previously unserved regions must be understood in that context. The missionary field is not a religious property auction where ambitious preachers compete to place their names on the largest number of congregations. Souls are not trophies, and churches are not franchise locations.

Second Corinthians 10:14–16 adds an important warning against boasting in another man's labor. Paul declares in verse 15, "Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours," and then refers in verse 16 to preaching the gospel "in the regions beyond you." The immediate passage addresses the proper sphere of Paul's ministry and his refusal to claim accomplishments belonging to others. This is a needed rebuke to religious personalities who arrive after years of faithful labor by local believers, hold a few large meetings, photograph the crowds, and depart announcing that they have personally conquered the entire region for Christ. The Bible does not prohibit visiting existing congregations or assisting established ministries. Paul himself revisited churches and encouraged believers. It does prohibit dishonest boasting and the proud appropriation of another servant's work. A preacher who claims to have planted a field that somebody else cultivated has not demonstrated missionary vision. He has demonstrated an impressive ability to harvest credit without doing the corresponding labor.

Paul's desire to reach beyond established foundations also guards against needless religious duplication. A region may already possess faithful congregations preaching the gospel, while another population nearby has little meaningful access to sound biblical teaching. Wise missionary planning should consider those realities rather than concentrating every available worker in locations that are already familiar, comfortable, or financially convenient. Nevertheless, the decision cannot be made through statistics alone. Existing congregations may require doctrinal strengthening, and apparently evangelized communities may be saturated with false teaching rather than biblical truth. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 3:10–11 reminds us that Jesus Christ is the only foundation upon which genuine Christian service can ultimately stand. Churches do not belong to the men who planted them. The goal is not to establish the largest personal collection of

missionary territories. It is to preach Christ faithfully, strengthen His people, and carry the gospel where its saving message remains unknown or obscured.

3. The Macedonian Vision: When the Holy Ghost Redirected the Journey

Acts 16:6–7 records an extraordinary development in Paul's missionary travels. After passing through Phrygia and Galatia, the missionary company was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." When they attempted to enter Bithynia, "the Spirit suffered them not." Notice the remarkable distinction. They were not prohibited from preaching a false message; they were restrained from carrying the true message into particular regions at that time. The passage concerns the province of Asia and the regions associated with Paul's actual travels, not a condemnation of an entire continent or its inhabitants. God was directing the movement of His apostolic servants according to purposes they had not yet fully understood. The lesson is not that certain populations were unworthy of hearing the gospel. Acts 19 later records substantial ministry in Ephesus and the wider province of Asia. A closed door in the Lord's service does not necessarily mean the destination is wicked, the missionary is worthless, or the gospel is unnecessary. Sometimes it means the servant has been directed elsewhere.

Acts 16:9 records the vision that followed: "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." Verse 10 describes the missionary company's response: "immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." That final phrase identifies the nature of the help being requested and the purpose understood by the workers. Macedonia needed the gospel. Paul did not conclude that the vision required establishing a political movement, constructing a cultural monument, or importing an elaborate religious entertainment program. He understood that Christ was directing them to preach. The following account brings the company to Philippi, where the gospel reaches Lydia, a jailer, and others under very different circumstances. The Macedonian cry was not an invitation to enjoy foreign hospitality. It was a call to bring the message of eternal life to people who needed to hear it.

A necessary doctrinal warning belongs here. Paul's vision occurred during the apostolic period, when the Lord was directing His commissioned servants through extraordinary revelations. Modern Christians must not convert Acts 16 into a requirement that every missionary wait for a mysterious dream, heavenly voice, or supernatural apparition before purchasing an airline ticket. Second Timothy 3:16–17 establishes the sufficiency of Scripture for furnishing the man of God unto good works. James 4:13–15 teaches believers to acknowledge the Lord's will when considering future plans. Prayer, biblical wisdom, genuine opportunity, sound counsel, financial responsibility, and lawful practical

arrangements all have their place. None of these requires claiming new revelation equal to Scripture. Neither should a failed visa application or cancelled journey automatically be interpreted as a supernatural judgment. God has already provided enough written truth to keep a serious Christian occupied for a lifetime. A man who refuses to obey the Bible while waiting for a private vision has mistaken spiritual laziness for heavenly guidance.

4. Athens and the Unknown God: Preaching Christ Where Idolatry Reigns

Acts 17:16 places Paul in Athens, where "his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." Athens was not a settlement lacking civilization, education, philosophical discussion, or religious architecture. It possessed intellectual traditions and abundant religious activity. Yet the abundance of religion did not mean its inhabitants possessed saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Paul disputed in the synagogue with Jews and devout persons and daily in the marketplace with those who encountered him. Certain Epicurean and Stoick philosophers then confronted him, and others regarded him as a setter forth of strange gods because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. There stands a powerful missionary lesson. Intellectual sophistication does not remove man's need for divine revelation, and religious enthusiasm does not guarantee the worship of the true God. Athens had plenty of philosophy to occupy the mind and plenty of idols to occupy the streets, but all its impressive learning had not produced the saving gospel of the risen Christ.

When Paul addressed the Athenians at Mars' hill, he began with a religious altar bearing the inscription, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." Acts 17:23 records his declaration, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." He did not endorse the city's idolatry or announce that all its religions were equally acceptable paths toward heaven. He proclaimed the Creator who made the world and everything therein, who is Lord of heaven and earth, and who does not dwell in temples made with hands. Verse 25 declares that God is not worshipped with men's hands as though He needed anything, since He gives life and breath to all. Paul confronted false worship by revealing the true God's character and authority. He understood his audience without surrendering his message. The missionary's responsibility is not to find the nearest idol, polish it, attach a Christian label, and announce that everybody now worships the same God. The responsibility is to expose ignorance through the truth of Scripture.

Acts 17:30–31 brings Paul's message to its necessary conclusion: "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent." Paul then proclaimed the appointed day of judgment and God's assurance of that judgment through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The response was divided. Some mocked, some desired to hear him again, and certain individuals believed, including Dionysius and Damaris. Paul did

not measure his faithfulness by whether the entire philosophical establishment applauded him. Nor did he modify the resurrection to make Christianity more acceptable to an audience offended by supernatural truth. His discourse in Athens belonged to his historical apostolic ministry, but its principle remains instructive: address the actual errors confronting the hearers while faithfully communicating the truth about God and Christ. A preacher who removes judgment, repentance, and the resurrection because his audience finds them uncomfortable has not adapted the gospel to a foreign culture. He has abandoned the message he was sent to deliver.

5. How Shall They Hear? The Unanswered Question of Romans 10

Romans 10:13 declares, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." That magnificent promise is followed by questions that expose the necessity of gospel proclamation. Verse 14 asks, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Verse 15 continues by asking how they shall preach except they be sent. The sequence is not complicated. Sinners need to hear the saving message of Jesus Christ, and that message must be communicated. The immediate setting of Romans 9–11 concerns Israel, righteousness, unbelief, and the extension of God's saving mercy. Paul has not forgotten his brethren according to the flesh. Nevertheless, the "whosoever" of Romans 10:13 demonstrates the availability of salvation without making Jewish ancestry or Gentile nationality the determining condition. An unanswered missionary question cannot be silenced by decorating the church auditorium with a beautiful map of the world. Somebody must communicate the gospel.

Romans 10:17 settles the means by which saving faith is brought into view: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The missionary does not possess the power to regenerate sinners through his personality, emotional appeals, impressive credentials, or carefully designed religious ceremonies. The message is essential because God's truth reveals the Saviour in whom sinners must believe. First Corinthians 15:1–4 identifies the saving gospel through Christ's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. These truths must be communicated clearly whether the hearer lives in a remote village, an enormous city, or a community surrounded by historic religious institutions. The issue is not whether the recipient recognizes Christian terminology. A man can pronounce the name of Jesus correctly, repeat an ancient creed, and participate in elaborate religious ceremonies while remaining ignorant of justification by faith in Christ's finished work.

The question of hearing also gives proper importance to translation, Bible distribution, teaching, and communication in understandable language. First Corinthians 14:9 asks, "except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken?" The immediate chapter addresses the proper use of spiritual gifts and intelligibility in the assembly, not a complete missionary translation program. Nevertheless, its insistence upon understandable communication has obvious practical relevance. A missionary must communicate the true message in words the hearer can understand, without altering doctrine to accommodate false religion. Printed Scripture, faithful translation, responsible teaching, and suitable means of communication can assist in that work. Yet technology does not automatically equal evangelism. A device may transmit religious material to distant places without ensuring that anybody understands the saving gospel. The missionary problem is not solved merely because modern machinery can send a message around the world in seconds. The message must be true, the words must be understood, and sinners must hear of the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. Forgotten Fields: The Lost Are Not Always Beyond an Ocean

When Christians hear the expression unreached peoples, they often imagine distant mountains, isolated islands, enormous deserts, or villages without modern conveniences. Those places may indeed present serious missionary needs, but geography alone does not determine whether a population possesses meaningful access to the gospel. A crowded city can contain communities separated by language, religious tradition, poverty, hostility, or simple neglect. A neighborhood surrounded by church buildings may still possess remarkably little sound biblical instruction. Acts 18:9–11 records the Lord encouraging Paul in Corinth, assuring him that He had much people in that city, and Paul continued teaching the word of God there for a year and six months. Corinth was not an isolated wilderness. It was an important city containing people who needed Christ. The spiritual darkness of a community cannot be measured by the distance between its inhabitants and the nearest church steeple. A thousand religious buildings cannot save one sinner if the saving gospel is never preached.

There is also a distinction between a population that has never meaningfully encountered the gospel and one that has encountered a corrupted religious message. Galatians 1:6–9 demonstrates that another gospel is no gospel at all, and Paul treated its corruption as a matter of extraordinary seriousness. Missionary necessity therefore cannot be determined simply by counting institutions displaying Christian symbols. A community dominated by sacramental regeneration, religious merit, idolatry, or traditions contradicting salvation by grace may be familiar with religious language while remaining deeply confused about eternal life. At the same time, we must avoid arrogantly declaring that every individual

within such a community is lost without examining what he actually believes. God knows those who are His, and salvation depends upon faith in Jesus Christ, not the missionary's demographic assumptions. Religious familiarity can become one of the most effective disguises for spiritual ignorance. A man who believes his baptismal certificate guarantees heaven may be harder to reach than someone who freely admits he has never understood Christianity.

Missionary concern must therefore include remote villages, restrictive regions, overlooked language communities, neglected neighborhoods, and people whose religious environment conceals rather than communicates biblical truth. But this concern must not become an excuse for theatrical presentations about exotic destinations. A missionary is not automatically more faithful because he works in a dangerous country, nor less faithful because he ministers among people living close to home. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." That requirement applies wherever God places responsibility upon His servants. Genuine missionary planning considers opportunities for preaching, language competence, lawful access, practical provision, family responsibilities, and the possibility of establishing believers in sound doctrine. Some doors will open, others will close, and wise workers must refuse both cowardice and recklessness. The regions beyond are not vacation destinations for adventurous Christians or proving grounds for men desperate to appear courageous. They are places where real sinners need the real gospel, communicated by faithful servants who understand why they have come.

7. Carrying the Gospel Further: Faithful Workers, Sound Churches, and Lasting Fruit

Romans 15:22–24 reveals Paul's continued missionary planning. He explained that his previous responsibilities had hindered him from visiting Rome and expressed his desire to see the believers there while traveling toward Spain. His intended visit included fellowship with an established congregation and assistance in proceeding toward another field. The passage records his intention, not a complete historical account proving that every proposed journey occurred exactly as planned. That distinction matters because faithful missionaries can establish legitimate plans without possessing advance knowledge of every future circumstance. Paul was not too spiritual to consider routes, destinations, established congregations, or practical assistance. His plans were connected with the gospel rather than personal luxury. Romans 15:30–31 also records his request that believers strive together with him in prayer. A missionary does not become less dependent upon God because he plans carefully. He becomes foolish when he confuses careful planning with divine control over circumstances that remain in the Lord's hands.

A healthy missionary enterprise also recognizes that the regions beyond require more than occasional preaching campaigns. Acts 14:21–23 records Paul and Barnabas returning to strengthen disciples and establish leadership in the churches. Acts 20:27 records Paul's declaration that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God. Second Timothy 2:2 later instructs Timothy to commit sound teaching to faithful men capable of instructing others. These passages establish the importance of continuing doctrine, responsible leadership, and spiritual maturity. Missionaries should desire believers who understand the Scriptures rather than congregations permanently dependent upon foreign personalities. Churches should support genuine work without confusing financial sponsorship with ownership of converts. The Bible must govern the congregation, and Jesus Christ remains its Head. A mission that produces permanent dependence upon a celebrated foreign preacher while failing to establish local believers in sound doctrine has constructed a religious monument to the worker instead of strengthening the people he was sent to serve.

The ultimate responsibility is faithfulness to the gospel, not the achievement of spectacular statistics. Acts 20:24 records Paul's determination to finish his course and the ministry received of the Lord Jesus, "to testify the gospel of the grace of God." He understood that suffering, opposition, and uncertainty might accompany that responsibility. Missionaries today should not manufacture claims of apostolic authority, promise results God has not guaranteed, or equate visible numerical growth with spiritual approval. Neither should they surrender the gospel because results appear slow. First Corinthians 3:6–7 declares that Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. Supporting churches must pray, give responsibly, examine doctrine, and encourage faithful workers while remembering that salvation belongs to the Lord. The missionary's responsibility is to proclaim the truth faithfully. God's responsibility is to give the increase. Confusing those responsibilities produces either unbearable pride when numbers rise or unnecessary despair when the visible harvest appears small.

Conclusion

Paul's ambition to preach Christ where He had not been named exposes the narrow vision of religious institutions satisfied with maintaining their own comforts. The apostle crossed familiar boundaries because the gospel was worth carrying and sinners were worth reaching. His movements from Jerusalem toward Illyricum, his intended journey toward Spain, his obedience concerning Macedonia, and his preaching among the philosophers of Athens demonstrate a ministry governed by the truth of Jesus Christ rather than the pursuit of comfortable circumstances. Yet the biblical record also shows that missionary expansion required doctrinal faithfulness, practical judgment, perseverance, and continued concern for established believers. The regions beyond were not simply

unexplored destinations on a religious travel map. They represented opportunities to proclaim the gospel where it had not yet been made known. The Church has not fulfilled its missionary responsibility merely because Christians have learned to travel farther. The gospel must travel with them, and it must arrive without being corrupted along the way.

Every Bible-believing congregation should examine its priorities in the light of Romans 10:14–17. Are people hearing the saving gospel, or merely encountering religious activity? Are missionary workers communicating salvation by grace through faith, or replacing the finished work of Christ with ceremonies, charitable programs, and institutional loyalty? Are neglected communities receiving sound biblical instruction, or are churches concentrating their attention where facilities are comfortable and financial support is easiest to obtain? These questions are not intended to condemn legitimate pastoral ministry among established believers. The Church requires faithful teaching at home as well as missionary expansion abroad. But there is no biblical excuse for treating gospel outreach as an optional decoration while spending extraordinary resources upon matters of far less eternal significance. A congregation can build a magnificent sanctuary, maintain an impressive calendar, and organize enough committees to govern a small country, yet still have little to show concerning the proclamation of Jesus Christ beyond its own membership. Religious machinery may be running perfectly while the missionary engine has never left the parking lot.

The final issue is the eternal condition of sinners who need to hear the truth. Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is by grace through faith, not of works, and the gospel remains the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. That message does not become less necessary because a nation possesses ancient religious traditions, impressive universities, substantial wealth, or advanced technology. Nor does it become more powerful because the missionary arrives with elaborate equipment, a distinguished title, or a spectacular presentation. The power belongs to God, and the message concerns His Son. Let faithful workers go where the Lord opens doors. Let churches support sound gospel ministry. Let believers communicate the truth in understandable language, strengthen converts, and refuse every temptation to substitute religious reputation for biblical responsibility. The regions beyond are not waiting for another religious empire to extend its territory. They are waiting for the gospel to be faithfully proclaimed. The missionary question is not how far a man can travel, how many countries he can visit, or how impressive his ministry can appear. The question is whether lost sinners are hearing about Jesus Christ. A passport can carry a preacher across the world, but only the gospel of the grace of God can tell a sinner how to get to heaven.

6 of 10 — Missions — One Gospel, Many Languages: Translation Without Doctrinal Compromise

Key Passage: Romans 10:17 (KJV)

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That declaration in Romans 10:17 ought to settle one of the most important questions confronting missionary work before another religious organization decides that translating the gospel requires removing everything the world finds objectionable. The apostle did not say that faith comes by cultural entertainment, impressive humanitarian programs, philosophical discussions, or cleverly packaged religious experiences. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. The message must therefore be communicated, understood, and believed. A sinner living in another country does not need to become an American, learn English, adopt Western customs, or develop an appreciation for American church traditions before receiving eternal life through Jesus Christ. But he does need the truth concerning the Saviour. Language is the instrument through which that truth can be communicated, and the instrument must not be permitted to corrupt the message. The purpose of Bible translation is not to manufacture a gospel that foreign cultures will find more comfortable. It is to communicate faithfully the gospel God has already given.

The English-speaking world possesses an extraordinary privilege in the King James Bible, a trustworthy standard by which English-speaking Bible believers can study, compare Scripture with Scripture, recognize doctrinal error, and establish their teaching. Yet that privilege should never be transformed into the ridiculous assumption that God requires every sinner on earth to become fluent in English before salvation becomes possible. The same Lord who commanded the preaching of the gospel among the nations demonstrated at Pentecost that language differences did not place the message beyond His power. Acts 2 records people hearing the wonderful works of God in their own tongues, while the missionary labors of Paul carried the gospel into regions populated by people of differing backgrounds and languages. The message did not become a collection of competing gospels merely because it crossed national boundaries. Jesus Christ did not die one way for an Englishman and another way for a foreigner. There is one Saviour, one finished sacrifice for sin, and one saving gospel for the present Church Age. A change in language must never become a change in doctrine.

This subject demands more than sentimental praise for missionary translators or endless complaints about modern religious publishing. We must examine the actual words of Scripture, beginning with the supernatural languages spoken in Acts 2, the reading and explanation of God's law in Nehemiah 8, and Paul's insistence upon intelligible communication in 1 Corinthians 14. We must distinguish the apostolic sign gift of tongues

from the ordinary responsibility of learning languages and translating written material. We must also consider the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the seriousness of corrupting God's words, the proper relationship between accurate translation and biblical exposition, and the responsibility of placing sound literature into the hands of people who possess few trustworthy resources. The objective is not merely to increase the number of languages represented in a missionary advertisement. The objective is to communicate God's truth without turning the Bible into a religious product shaped by whatever doctrines happen to be fashionable. A missionary who makes the message understandable has served the truth. A missionary who changes the truth to make it acceptable has betrayed the very message he was sent to proclaim.

1. Pentecost: God Spoke Through Real Languages, Not Religious Gibberish

Acts 2:5 introduces the setting: "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." The historical and dispensational circumstances are essential. The events occurred in Jerusalem, among Jews associated with the feast of Pentecost, during the opening period of the apostolic testimony following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Acts 2:4 records that the disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost and began speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. The surrounding verses establish what those tongues were. Verse 6 declares that "every man heard them speak in his own language," while verse 8 asks, "And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" The passage is not describing meaningless syllables produced through religious excitement. These were recognizable languages understood by people who had learned them from childhood. When God gave tongues at Pentecost, the hearers did not require a theological committee to explain why unintelligible noise should be considered a heavenly conversation. They heard actual languages.

Acts 2:9–11 identifies people associated with Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete, and Arabia. The geographical details demonstrate that the audience represented numerous language backgrounds. Verse 11 records the astonished testimony: "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." Notice whose works were being proclaimed. The miracle directed attention toward God, not toward the supposed spiritual superiority of the speakers. It was supernatural communication within an apostolic setting, not an invitation to turn Christian worship into a contest over who could produce the most unusual sounds. First Corinthians 14:22 later identifies tongues as a sign, and 1 Corinthians 1:22 reminds us that "the Jews require a sign." The phenomenon belongs within the historical development of God's dealings through the apostles, not the permanent qualifications of every Christian witness. God supplied an extraordinary sign for an extraordinary period, and modern

religion has spent considerable energy attempting to counterfeit the sound while neglecting the message.

The missionary application must therefore be carefully distinguished from the original doctrinal event. Acts 2 does not promise that every Christian can enter a foreign country and immediately preach fluently without learning the language. Neither does it establish that ordinary language study demonstrates a lack of faith. The apostolic signs served the purposes God appointed during the transitional period recorded in Acts. A missionary today should not claim supernatural linguistic abilities merely because he finds studying vocabulary difficult. The same Bible that describes Pentecost also emphasizes the responsibility of communicating truth intelligibly. Romans 10:17 establishes the necessity of hearing the word of God, and 1 Corinthians 14 insists that communication must convey understandable meaning. Genuine missionary translation serves that continuing need without pretending to reproduce the miraculous credentials of the apostles. A preacher who refuses to study a foreign language because he expects a Pentecostal miracle may discover that the only thing his audience understands is his extraordinary confidence in his own abilities.

2. Nehemiah 8: Reading the Word and Giving the Sense

Nehemiah 8:8 provides a foundational principle concerning the communication of Scripture: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." The setting must not be ignored. Israel had returned from captivity, Jerusalem's restoration was underway, and the people gathered to hear the law of Moses. Nehemiah 8:1 identifies the book involved as "the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel." Ezra the scribe stood before the congregation, and the Levites assisted the people in understanding what was read. This was not a New Testament missionary conference, and the national covenant obligations given to Israel must not be transferred indiscriminately to the Church. Nevertheless, the communication principle is unmistakable. God's written words were read, their meaning was explained, and the people were brought to understand the message. The purpose of opening the Bible is not to impress the congregation with how many words the preacher can pronounce. It is to communicate what God has actually said.

Three expressions in Nehemiah 8:8 deserve particular attention: "read," "gave the sense," and "caused them to understand." Reading established the authority of the written revelation. Giving the sense involved explaining what the words meant. Causing understanding addressed the hearers' need to comprehend the instruction. None of these activities required changing God's law into a collection of comfortable suggestions. The distinction between explanation and alteration is fundamental. A faithful teacher explains

difficult words, identifies the setting, compares relevant passages, and clarifies the message without substituting his personal preferences for divine revelation. Second Timothy 2:15 later instructs believers to study and rightly divide the word of truth. The same discipline must govern those communicating Scripture across language barriers. A preacher who changes a verse because he dislikes its doctrine has not given the sense of Scripture. He has given the sense of his own opinion while borrowing God's name to make it sound authoritative.

Nehemiah 8:9–12 demonstrates that understanding produced a meaningful response among the people. Their initial weeping reflected the seriousness of what they heard, while the leaders directed them concerning the occasion and the joy associated with the Lord. Verse 12 explains that the people rejoiced greatly "because they had understood the words that were declared unto them." Their response was connected with comprehension, not merely exposure to religious sounds. Missionary work must appreciate that distinction. Distributing literature nobody can read, delivering sermons nobody can understand, or repeating familiar religious expressions without explaining their meaning does not automatically establish believers in biblical truth. Literacy instruction, careful teaching, and responsible translation can therefore become valuable instruments in a larger gospel ministry. Yet the objective remains understanding God's written revelation, not replacing it with an entertaining presentation. A Bible that remains closed because the reader cannot understand its language is not fulfilling its intended teaching purpose in that reader's life. The answer is faithful communication, not doctrinal reconstruction.

3. Paul's Plain Speech: Five Understandable Words Beat Ten Thousand Empty Sounds

First Corinthians 14:6 establishes the issue of intelligibility with remarkable directness: "Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?" The apostle was addressing a congregation struggling with the proper exercise of spiritual gifts during the early Church period. His concern was not whether somebody could produce impressive religious sounds. His concern was whether the assembly received understandable spiritual instruction. Verse 7 compares communication to musical instruments that must give distinct sounds if their meaning is to be recognized. Verse 8 then asks, "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" The comparison is devastating to religious confusion. If the signal cannot be understood, the hearers cannot respond appropriately. A trumpet that makes a noise nobody recognizes may produce an impressive performance, but it will not help an army understand whether to advance, retreat, or prepare for supper.

First Corinthians 14:9 continues, "So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air." That last expression describes a considerable amount of modern preaching more accurately than some religious professionals would appreciate. A preacher can fill a room with sound without communicating a single useful biblical truth. Verse 10 explains that the world contains many kinds of voices and that none is without signification, while verse 11 describes the alienation produced when the meaning of a voice is not understood. The immediate subject remains the proper use of tongues in the assembly, but the principle has unmistakable relevance to missionary communication. Speech must convey meaning. Translation must communicate what the words actually signify. The purpose of a sermon is not to prove that the preacher possesses functioning lungs and a vocabulary large enough to exhaust the congregation. It is to make the truth of God understood.

First Corinthians 14:19 delivers the decisive comparison: "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." Paul's emphasis was on edification through comprehensible instruction. The passage does not require Christians today to reproduce the apostolic gift of tongues, nor does it authorize reducing doctrinal teaching to five-word slogans. It establishes the superiority of intelligible communication over religious display. First Corinthians 14:27–28 further required interpretation when tongues were used in the assembly, and verse 40 concludes, "Let all things be done decently and in order." In missionary work, faithful communication may require learning unfamiliar expressions, developing appropriate terminology, and carefully checking whether hearers understand the intended meaning. Five words that accurately communicate biblical truth accomplish more than ten thousand impressive sounds that leave the hearer ignorant. God did not commission missionaries to demonstrate verbal gymnastics. He entrusted them with a message worth understanding.

4. All Scripture Is Given by Inspiration: The Words Belong to God

Second Timothy 3:15–17 provides the doctrinal foundation for handling Scripture faithfully. Paul reminds Timothy, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." He continues, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The passage identifies Scripture as divine revelation, not merely the religious reflections of intelligent men. Timothy had known the holy Scriptures from childhood, long before the completed New Testament was available. This historical fact matters because God's revelation was already communicating truth before the English language possessed the King James Bible. The

authority belongs to God's words, not to the nationality of those reading them. The Bible is not a cultural possession that one nation may lock inside its borders. It is divine revelation that must be handled faithfully wherever its truth is communicated.

Second Peter 1:20–21 reinforces that authority: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The Scriptures did not originate through human imagination or religious committees voting upon which doctrines would become acceptable. God used human instruments to deliver His revelation, and those words possess an authority human opinion cannot manufacture. Psalm 12:6 declares, "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." A translator must therefore treat biblical words as sacred responsibilities rather than disposable materials available for literary experimentation. The responsibility is fidelity, not originality. A man hired to deliver a king's message has no authority to rewrite the message because he believes his own vocabulary sounds more impressive. How much less should anyone presume to improve upon the words of Almighty God?

The King James Bible provides English-speaking believers with a dependable biblical foundation for doctrine, preaching, comparison, and instruction. Its authority in Christian study must not be surrendered to the shifting opinions of those who approach Scripture as though divine revelation were permanently unfinished business. Yet respect for the King James Bible does not require teaching that an individual must understand seventeenth-century English to believe the saving gospel. The Scriptures themselves were communicated in historical settings long before that English translation existed. What must remain constant is the truth God revealed: the identity of Jesus Christ, His finished sacrifice, His bodily resurrection, salvation by grace through faith, and the doctrines governing Christian life. John 17:17 records Christ's declaration, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." Translation must carry the truth into another language without pretending that the truth becomes whatever a translator's preferences require it to become.

5. Faithful Translation: Explaining the Words Without Rewriting the Doctrine

Translation necessarily involves communicating meaning through the vocabulary and grammatical structures of another language. Languages do not always arrange sentences alike, possess identical expressions, or divide their vocabulary into corresponding categories. A responsible translator must understand the biblical statement and communicate it accurately without introducing ideas the passage does not contain. The difficulty of that work never grants permission to eliminate uncomfortable doctrines. Isaiah

28:10 declares, "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little." Although the passage belongs to a specific prophetic setting involving Israel and judgment, the importance of attending carefully to God's words is undeniable. The missionary who translates Scripture must exercise patience and precision. Making a sentence understandable is legitimate service. Removing its doctrinal teeth because somebody dislikes being bitten by the truth is religious dishonesty.

Consider the essential doctrines surrounding salvation. First Corinthians 15:3 declares that Christ died "for our sins according to the scriptures," while verse 4 establishes His burial and resurrection. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, "Not of works, lest any man should boast." Second Corinthians 5:21 reveals that the sinless Christ was made sin for us so that believers might be made the righteousness of God in Him. These statements cannot be reduced to vague expressions about finding hope, discovering purpose, or experiencing spiritual improvement without destroying their doctrinal substance. Sin, grace, faith, redemption, righteousness, judgment, and resurrection communicate definite biblical truths. Where a receiving language lacks an immediately obvious equivalent, faithful explanation becomes essential. A translation that turns the blood atonement into a general lesson about kindness has not made Christianity easier to understand. It has removed Christianity's saving foundation and left the reader with a religious morality lesson.

The same responsibility extends beyond the initial gospel presentation. Romans 11 preserves God's future dealings with Israel, while Ephesians 3 explains the mystery concerning Jew and Gentile in one body. First Thessalonians 4:13–18 describes the catching away of believers, while Revelation 19 concerns the visible return of Christ in judgment. A translation must not deliberately flatten these distinctions because a religious institution prefers replacement theology or rejects dispensational truth. Likewise, passages concerning eternal security, biblical holiness, church leadership, and false doctrine must retain their meaning. Second Timothy 2:15 requires rightly dividing the word of truth. Translation cannot excuse wrongly dividing it. When a translator changes biblical distinctions to accommodate denominational theology, he is no longer simply communicating Scripture. He is attempting to make God speak with the accent of his religious organization.

6. Bible Distribution and Literacy: Getting the Written Word Into Understanding Hands

Acts 8:27–35 provides a tremendous example of Scripture, personal witness, and biblical explanation working together. The Ethiopian eunuch was returning from Jerusalem and reading the prophet Esaias when Philip approached him. Philip asked, "Understandest thou

what thou readest?" The eunuch answered, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Philip then explained the passage concerning the suffering servant, and Acts 8:35 declares that he "preached unto him Jesus." The account occurs during the transitional apostolic period, and Philip's extraordinary direction must be understood in that setting. Nevertheless, the relationship between reading, explanation, and gospel proclamation is unmistakable. The man possessed Scripture but needed instruction concerning its testimony of Christ. Putting a Bible into someone's hands is valuable, but the responsibility of Christian teaching does not disappear the moment the package has been delivered.

Missionary work should therefore recognize the value of faithful Scripture distribution, literacy, teaching materials, and accessible instruction. A printed Bible may become a treasured resource in a community where trustworthy biblical literature is difficult to obtain. Audio instruction can assist those who cannot readily read, provided the words communicated remain faithful to Scripture. Carefully prepared studies can help new believers understand the gospel, the distinction between Israel and the Church, and the doctrines governing Christian conduct. Deuteronomy 6:6–7 demonstrates the importance of communicating God's words diligently within Israel's covenant setting, while 2 Timothy 2:2 establishes the Church Age responsibility of transmitting sound teaching to faithful men. The settings differ, but neither treats biblical ignorance as desirable. A library full of unopened books may look impressive on a ministry report, but spiritual understanding requires more than counting how many boxes crossed a national border.

Modern communication methods can extend the reach of biblical instruction, but machinery cannot guarantee doctrinal faithfulness. Printed literature, recordings, digital resources, and correspondence may carry sound teaching to people who otherwise have few opportunities to receive it. They may also carry error with astonishing efficiency. Second Timothy 4:2 commands, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." The obligation concerns the message, not the equipment used to transmit it. Missionaries should seek accurate translation, dependable distribution, and opportunities for genuine instruction without confusing technological sophistication with spiritual effectiveness. A false gospel distributed to ten thousand villages does not become true because the distribution system works perfectly. The devil does not object to efficient communication when the message being communicated contradicts the word of God.

7. Not Corrupting the Word: The Translator's Responsibility Before God

Second Corinthians 2:17 delivers a warning that belongs above every desk where biblical teaching is prepared: "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." Paul was contrasting his

ministry with those who handled God's word corruptly. The immediate passage concerns the sincerity and character of his apostolic preaching, but its principle extends naturally to anyone claiming to communicate divine revelation. The word must not be manipulated for profit, personal reputation, institutional loyalty, or doctrinal convenience. A translator is not free to remove biblical teaching simply because the intended audience finds it offensive. There is an enormous difference between explaining God's words in another language and replacing God's words with religious opinions. One is service; the other is corruption wearing the respectable clothing of communication.

Second Corinthians 4:2 reinforces the matter by rejecting "the hidden things of dishonesty," including "handling the word of God deceitfully." That warning should govern translation review, doctrinal examination, and the preparation of missionary literature. Translators and teachers should be willing to examine whether essential doctrines have been communicated accurately and whether explanations remain faithful to the passage. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for searching the Scriptures daily to determine whether Paul's preaching was so. If the preaching of an apostle could be examined against Scripture, no modern missionary organization should resent legitimate biblical scrutiny. Financial support, international reputation, academic credentials, and organizational approval cannot establish the truth of a translation. The proper question is not whether an impressive committee approved the wording. The question is whether the wording faithfully communicates what God said.

There must also be a distinction between rejecting corrupt teaching and demanding uniformity in every ordinary feature of communication. Languages differ, and faithful explanations may require different sentence arrangements without changing doctrine. A missionary should not condemn unfamiliar grammatical structures merely because they do not resemble English. At the same time, no amount of cultural complexity justifies altering the deity of Christ, the reality of sin, the necessity of faith, or the sufficiency of His finished sacrifice. First Thessalonians 2:13 commends believers who received the apostolic message "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God." That attitude should govern every stage of missionary communication. The translator must be humble enough to respect the language of the people and faithful enough to refuse the doctrinal demands of those who would rather change the Bible than believe it.

Conclusion

The missionary responsibility to communicate the gospel across language barriers is grounded in the authority of God's word, not the ambitions of religious institutions. Acts 2 demonstrates that God used recognizable languages during the extraordinary apostolic events of Pentecost. Nehemiah 8 establishes the importance of reading Scripture and

giving the sense so that hearers understand. First Corinthians 14 insists that intelligible instruction is superior to impressive but unprofitable speech. Second Timothy 3 declares the inspiration and sufficiency of Scripture, while Romans 10:17 identifies hearing the word of God as essential to faith. These passages do not authorize replacing the Bible with modern religious entertainment or rewriting doctrine according to cultural preference. They establish the necessity of communicating God's truth faithfully. The missionary must cross the language barrier without dragging doctrinal confusion across with him. The language may change, but the gospel must remain the gospel.

Every Bible-believing missionary organization, translating ministry, sending church, and individual Christian involved in Scripture distribution should examine the quality of what is being communicated. Are sinners being told plainly that Jesus Christ died for their sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures? Are they being taught salvation by grace through faith apart from works? Are the words of Scripture treated as divine authority, or are difficult doctrines softened to satisfy religious traditions? Are new believers receiving understandable biblical instruction, or merely collecting literature they cannot properly use? These questions concern eternal truth, not organizational appearances. Galatians 1:8 warns against another gospel, and that warning does not lose its authority when false teaching is translated into another language. A corrupt gospel does not become less corrupt because it has been attractively printed, carefully packaged, and distributed by people with sincere intentions.

The final objective is not to make the King James Bible a substitute for the Saviour, nor to make English a requirement for entering heaven. The objective is to preserve and communicate faithfully the divine truth revealed in Scripture. God's saving message must not be imprisoned behind a language barrier, and it must not be mutilated in the name of removing that barrier. The Church needs faithful translators, competent teachers, honest distributors, sound churches, and missionaries who understand that the eternal destiny of sinners is more important than institutional approval. Let the words be communicated clearly. Let the doctrines remain intact. Let the gospel of the grace of God be proclaimed without addition, subtraction, or compromise. A man does not have to speak English to be saved, but he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The missionary's responsibility is not to make the whole world speak his language. It is to communicate God's saving truth in a language the hearer understands. One gospel, many languages, and absolutely no permission to change the message.

7 of 10 — Missions — Supporting Missionaries Without Financing Religious Empires

Key Passage: Philippians 4:15–17 (KJV)

"Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only." Those words in Philippians 4:15 ought to settle the question of whether supporting gospel workers is a legitimate New Testament practice. The apostle Paul was not embarrassed to acknowledge financial assistance, and the Holy Ghost certainly did not regard material support as some unfortunate necessity that spiritual people should pretend does not exist. The Philippian believers participated in Paul's ministry through their giving, and Paul recognized their generosity as genuine fellowship in the gospel. But the passage also destroys the modern notion that missionary support is primarily a commercial transaction between a religious salesman and a congregation of prospective customers. Paul was preaching Jesus Christ, not marketing spiritual merchandise. The Philippians were helping advance the gospel, not purchasing religious privileges. God never established missionary giving so that a collection of religious entrepreneurs could become wealthy by convincing Christians that the kingdom of heaven operates like a corporation with a particularly aggressive sales department.

The difference between supporting a missionary and financing a religious empire is not difficult to understand when the King James Bible is allowed to speak. A missionary requires food, clothing, housing, transportation, medical care, necessary equipment, and resources for the actual work of communicating the gospel. Those are legitimate considerations. A missionary organization may also incur reasonable administrative expenses when assisting with international arrangements, financial transfers, accountability, or practical emergencies. The problem begins when the machinery becomes more important than the mission, when the administrator consumes what was intended for the laborer, and when the organization spends more energy promoting itself than proclaiming Christ. A ministry can possess an impressive headquarters, sophisticated fundraising campaigns, expensive conferences, and enough professional titles to decorate every door in the building while doing precious little to reach lost sinners. The gospel does not become more powerful because somebody purchased a larger office, installed better furniture, and hired another executive to explain why additional donations are urgently necessary.

The Scriptures provide a balanced standard that rebukes both extremes. On one side stands the covetous religious operator who treats Christian generosity as an opportunity for personal enrichment. On the other stands the self-righteous critic who condemns every preacher receiving support, as though working for the gospel somehow eliminates the

ordinary necessity of eating supper and paying the electric bill. Paul defended the right of gospel workers to receive material assistance, voluntarily surrendered that right in particular circumstances, commended cheerful giving, and insisted upon honest financial administration. These principles must be examined in their proper dispensational setting. Israel's national tithing system under the law must not be imposed upon the Church as though believers were still living under the Levitical priesthood. Neither does salvation by grace eliminate the responsibility of saved people to exercise generosity. A Christian cannot purchase eternal life through giving, but a Christian who has received eternal life ought to understand why the gospel is worth helping others hear.

1. Philippi: A Church That Invested in the Furtherance of the Gospel

Philippians 4:10 records Paul's rejoicing that the Philippians' care for him had flourished again. He immediately clarifies in verses 11–12 that he had learned contentment in varying circumstances, whether experiencing abundance or suffering need. This is important because Paul was not writing as a man whose happiness depended upon the size of the next missionary offering. His spiritual stability rested upon the Lord, and verse 13 declares, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." In context, that statement concerns Christ's strengthening grace amid changing circumstances, not a promise that every believer can accomplish any personal ambition merely by attaching a Bible verse to it. Paul knew how to abound and how to suffer need. Nevertheless, verse 14 commends the Philippians for communicating with his affliction. Their financial assistance was not evidence that Paul lacked faith. Depending upon the Lord and receiving legitimate assistance from believers are not opposing doctrines, regardless of what the professional critics of missionary support may announce.

Philippians 4:15–16 describes the practical arrangement. The Philippians supported Paul after he departed from Macedonia, and verse 16 declares, "For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity." The words "once and again" establish repeated assistance rather than a single emotional offering followed by complete forgetfulness. Their giving met genuine needs connected with his ministry. Notice also that Paul remembered their faithfulness. He did not regard those believers as anonymous financial accounts belonging to his personal missionary operation. Philippians 1:5 had already described their participation as "your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." The relationship involved continuing affection, prayer, responsibility, and concern for the advancement of the truth. There is a considerable difference between supporting a servant of Christ and subscribing to a religious personality. A missionary should see people behind the donations, and a supporting congregation should see a faithful worker behind the financial reports. Christianity is not a collection agency wearing a necktie.

Philippians 4:17 provides the governing explanation: "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." Paul appreciated their generosity, but the spiritual significance extended beyond the material value of the contribution. Verse 18 describes their gift as "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." This language must not be confused with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin or turned into a doctrine that money purchases justification. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. Philippians 4:19 follows within the context of God's provision and the Philippians' generosity; it is not a blank check guaranteeing earthly riches to every person who gives money to a religious organization. Giving toward the gospel is an opportunity for faithful stewardship, not a vending machine into which Christians insert donations and expect heaven to dispense financial prosperity.

2. The Preacher's Right to Live of the Gospel

First Corinthians 9:7 asks three practical questions concerning soldiers, vineyard workers, and shepherds. Paul writes, "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" The comparisons are deliberately ordinary. Soldiers require provisions, agricultural workers benefit from their labor, and shepherds receive legitimate sustenance connected with their responsibilities. Paul then cites the law concerning the ox that treads out the corn, establishing that God's concern for labor and provision extends beyond the animal described in the original command. Verse 11 asks whether those who have sown spiritual things should be considered unreasonable for receiving material assistance. The preacher who spends his days laboring in the Scriptures does not become unspiritual because the grocery store expects payment. Apparently, even the most dedicated missionary has not discovered a way to nourish his family by eating missionary prayer cards.

First Corinthians 9:13–14 develops the comparison with those serving in the temple and concludes, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." This is New Testament instruction given through Paul, and its authority must not be dismissed because the passage also refers to an Old Testament arrangement. The apostle uses earlier Scripture to establish a continuing principle without transferring Israel's national priesthood into the body of Christ. Believers under grace are not commanded to reconstruct the Levitical system, and Christian ministers do not become priests of Israel through ordination certificates. Nevertheless, faithful gospel workers may legitimately receive material support. First Timothy 5:17–18 similarly addresses the honoring of elders who labor in the word and doctrine and declares, "The labourer is worthy of his reward." A church that expects a preacher to devote substantial labor to its spiritual

welfare while insisting that his family survive without ordinary provision has confused sacrificial service with financial negligence.

Paul also demonstrated that possessing a right does not require exercising it in every circumstance. First Corinthians 9:12 records his willingness to suffer rather than hinder the gospel of Christ, and verse 15 establishes that he had not used certain rights he was defending. Acts 18:3 identifies his occupation as tentmaking, while Acts 20:33–35 records his testimony that he had coveted no man's silver, gold, or apparel and had labored to supply necessities. Yet Philippians 4 proves that he also accepted support from believers. There is no contradiction. Paul could labor with his hands when necessary and receive assistance when appropriate. Missionaries today may likewise work in ordinary occupations, receive partial support, or depend upon faithful churches according to their circumstances. The man who condemns every supported missionary has ignored Paul's teaching, while the missionary who believes ordinary work is beneath his dignity has ignored Paul's example.

3. Grace Giving: Sacrificial Generosity Without Religious Manipulation

Second Corinthians 8:1–5 describes the remarkable generosity of the Macedonian churches. Paul explains that in a great trial of affliction, their abundant joy and deep poverty overflowed into rich liberality. Verse 3 declares that they gave according to their power and beyond their power, willingly. Verse 4 records their earnest desire to participate in the ministering to the saints. The immediate setting concerns the collection for needy believers, particularly the saints associated with Jerusalem, rather than a modern missionary deputation program. That distinction must be preserved. Nevertheless, the principles of voluntary generosity, sincere concern, and responsible stewardship remain relevant to Christian giving. These believers were not wealthy investors attempting to manipulate God into multiplying their possessions. They were Christians whose love produced practical generosity despite difficult circumstances. The Macedonians did not need a prosperity preacher promising luxury automobiles before they discovered that helping other believers was worthwhile. Their generosity came from grace, not greed.

Second Corinthians 8:12 establishes an essential safeguard: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." That verse ought to be printed in letters large enough for every manipulative fundraiser to read without his glasses. God does not command believers to give money they do not possess merely to satisfy the demands of an ambitious religious organization. Verse 13 continues, "For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened." Paul did not intend charitable assistance to become an arrangement whereby one group enjoyed comfortable circumstances while another was crushed beneath unreasonable demands. Verse 14

addresses a fair sharing of resources according to actual needs. The passage concerns a particular collection, but its principles rebuke the practice of pressuring struggling families into financing extravagance. When a millionaire religious operator tells a widow she must sacrifice her grocery money to maintain his luxurious lifestyle, the problem is not the widow's insufficient faith. The problem is the operator's excessive appetite.

Second Corinthians 9:6–7 adds another important dimension: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." The immediate passage continues by establishing individual responsibility and willingness: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." Paul was encouraging generosity, not creating a compulsory financial system under which every believer must contribute a prescribed amount to remain spiritually acceptable. The surrounding context concerns God's provision for continued good works and thanksgiving, not a guaranteed financial return for every donation. Verse 12 emphasizes that the administration of the service supplies the wants of the saints and produces thanksgiving to God. Christian giving should never become a spiritual gambling operation in which a preacher promises that a hundred-dollar offering will force heaven to release a thousand-dollar reward. God is sovereign, not the manager of a religious lottery.

4. Financial Accountability: Honest Money Requires Honest Stewardship

Second Corinthians 8:18–21 reveals that Paul took financial administration seriously enough to involve trustworthy brethren in the collection. He refers to a brother whose praise was in the gospel throughout the churches, and verse 19 identifies one chosen by the churches to travel with the contribution. Verse 20 explains the reason: "Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us." Verse 21 supplies the principle: "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." Paul was not content merely to announce that God knew his intentions and everybody else should keep quiet. He recognized the importance of administration that could withstand reasonable examination. If the apostle Paul considered financial accountability important, a modern missionary treasurer has no biblical authority to declare the church's records too sacred for ordinary questions.

Financial integrity requires more than avoiding outright theft. A missionary should distinguish personal income, ministry operating expenses, designated contributions, emergency assistance, and funds collected for particular projects. Supporting churches should know whether donations are being used for the purposes represented when the money was requested. If a congregation contributes toward distributing Scripture, the money should not quietly disappear into an unrelated promotional campaign without

appropriate authorization. If circumstances require a change in the intended use of restricted funds, those responsible should communicate and obtain proper permission rather than pretending that good intentions eliminate financial obligations. Luke 16:10 establishes the principle that faithfulness in little things reveals something about faithfulness in greater responsibilities. A man who cannot explain where the missionary money went should not expect everybody to become more impressed when he announces that next year's budget will be twice as large.

Accountability should also be fair, orderly, and proportionate. Not every small missionary ministry requires an elaborate corporate structure, expensive financial consultants, or administrative procedures more complicated than the work itself. Nevertheless, accurate records, appropriate oversight, lawful handling of contributions, and truthful reporting are responsibilities that serious ministries should recognize. The sending church should exercise reasonable examination without assuming that every legitimate expense indicates corruption. Missionaries have families, ordinary personal needs, emergencies, and responsibilities that cannot always be reduced to convenient promotional categories. At the same time, a worker who refuses to answer every reasonable question while demanding unquestioning financial loyalty has established a dangerous arrangement. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." Financial records do not replace spiritual integrity, but honest stewardship should have no reason to fear the records. A ministry that claims divine authority while operating like a suspicious back-alley business has missed something important about biblical righteousness.

5. Religious Empires: When Administration Consumes the Mission

First Timothy 6:5 warns about corrupt men who suppose "that gain is godliness," and Paul instructs Timothy concerning separation from such thinking. Verse 6 declares, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." The contrast could hardly be clearer. Religious wealth does not prove divine approval, and financial prosperity does not automatically establish sound doctrine. Verses 9–10 warn about those determined to become rich, including the familiar declaration that "the love of money is the root of all evil." Paul does not condemn the possession of every financial resource, nor does he teach that poverty itself produces holiness. He condemns covetousness and the destructive desire for riches. These warnings apply with particular force when religious leaders use the gospel as a means of enriching themselves. A preacher who measures God's blessing by the size of his bank account ought to explain why the apostle who wrote these verses spent so much time suffering hardship instead of purchasing another luxury residence.

Second Peter 2:3 gives an even sharper warning concerning false teachers: "And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you." The expression "make merchandise of you" describes religious exploitation with remarkable accuracy. People become commodities, spiritual language becomes salesmanship, and biblical truth becomes a convenient instrument for collecting money. Titus 1:11 condemns false teachers who subvert whole houses, teaching things they ought not "for filthy lucre's sake." The danger is not limited to individuals. Organizations can gradually arrange their operations so that preserving their own existence becomes more important than accomplishing the purpose they originally claimed to serve. Promotional departments expand, leadership privileges multiply, and administrative expenses become increasingly difficult to justify. When the religious machine requires more fuel than the missionary work it was built to support, somebody ought to examine whether the engine is carrying the gospel or merely transporting the executives.

Nevertheless, condemning dishonest religious operations does not justify treating every administrative expense as corruption. A missionary organization that processes lawful contributions, assists with emergencies, handles necessary documentation, or provides responsible oversight may perform a genuinely useful service. Romans 12:17 instructs believers to provide things honest in the sight of all men, and 1 Corinthians 14:40 establishes the importance of decency and order. The question is whether the administration serves the work or the work increasingly exists to finance the administration. Organizations should be judged by doctrine, integrity, actual service, and transparent use of resources rather than impressive advertising or sweeping accusations. A large ministry is not automatically corrupt, and a small ministry is not automatically faithful. The size of the headquarters proves neither righteousness nor wickedness. The issue is whether the people controlling the money remain servants of the gospel or have quietly promoted themselves into its owners.

6. Missionary Deputation and Field Expenses: Necessary Support Without Financial Theater

Missionary deputation, the practice of visiting congregations to explain a proposed ministry and seek financial support, is a modern administrative arrangement rather than an explicitly prescribed New Testament ceremony. Scripture does, however, establish legitimate principles concerning communication, fellowship, sending, and material assistance. Romans 15:24 records Paul's desire to visit believers at Rome while traveling toward Spain and to be brought on his journey by them. Third John 6–8 likewise commends assistance given to faithful servants traveling for the Lord's name. These passages do not require a missionary to spend a particular number of months traveling between churches,

nor do they forbid responsible presentations concerning financial needs. The arrangement must be evaluated according to its purpose and conduct. A missionary should not be required to spend half his useful life driving around the country collecting promises of support simply because religious tradition has decided that endless deputation is the official proof of a divine calling.

Reasonable missionary expenses may include housing, food, transportation, insurance, medical care, language training, communication, necessary equipment, educational materials, and provision for dependent family members. Some fields involve additional legal requirements, substantial travel costs, or restrictions that complicate ordinary arrangements. Churches should consider these realities rather than demanding that missionary families survive upon imaginary budgets constructed by people who have never examined the actual costs. First Timothy 5:8 establishes the seriousness of providing for one's household, and missionary service does not eliminate that responsibility. The opposite danger is equally real: legitimate needs must not become excuses for personal extravagance disguised as ministry necessity. Financial requests should distinguish essential provision from optional convenience and unnecessary luxury. The missionary does not need to live like a prince to preach Christ, but neither must his children suffer neglect merely to satisfy somebody else's romantic idea that true spirituality requires perpetual poverty.

Missionary presentations should therefore be straightforward, truthful, and doctrinally substantial. A worker should explain the intended field, the gospel being preached, the practical needs involved, the relationship with a sending church, and the arrangements for financial accountability. Photographs and reports may assist communication, but they must not become substitutes for biblical substance. Second Corinthians 4:2 rejects dishonesty and deceitful handling of God's word. A missionary should never invent conversions, exaggerate danger, or manipulate emotions to produce larger offerings. Supporting churches should likewise be honest about what they can afford and whether they intend to maintain promised assistance. Financial commitments affect real households and real ministry decisions. A missionary presentation should help believers understand the work, not resemble a theatrical production in which every sad photograph is followed by another opportunity to increase the offering. Lost souls are not advertising props, and compassion is not a licence for deception.

7. Church Priorities: Are We Supporting the Gospel or Entertaining Ourselves?

Third John 5–8 provides a concise standard for supporting faithful gospel workers. John commends Gaius for ministering to brethren and strangers and urges him to bring such men forward on their journey "after a godly sort." Verse 7 explains that they went forth for

the Lord's name, and verse 8 concludes, "We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth." Notice the final expression. Supporting faithful servants makes believers fellowhelpers to the truth, not shareholders in a religious corporation. This does not mean every Christian must give the same amount, support the same missionary, or disregard legitimate obligations at home. It means gospel work deserves serious consideration among the priorities of God's people. A congregation that can afford endless entertainment, elaborate decorations, and another expensive renovation but cannot find room in its budget for faithful gospel workers ought to examine whether its ministry has become more interested in accommodating Christians than reaching sinners.

The criticism must be balanced by Scripture. Local congregations have legitimate responsibilities concerning pastors, teaching, necessary facilities, needy believers, and the ordinary functioning of church life. First Corinthians 16:1–2 concerns a specific collection for the saints and demonstrates orderly planning for giving, although it should not be misrepresented as a universal command fixing the amount of every missionary contribution. First Timothy 5 addresses practical responsibility toward widows and the honoring of faithful elders. The Church must not abandon these obligations while presenting foreign missions as the only legitimate use of financial resources. Nevertheless, churches should distinguish necessary expenses from endless institutional indulgence. A building is a tool, not the objective of Christian service. There is nothing sinful about maintaining a church roof, but when the congregation spends more money impressing visitors with the ceiling than helping sinners hear about heaven, its priorities deserve biblical examination.

Financial partnership must finally remain subject to doctrinal discernment. Third John commends support for those serving the truth, while Second John 9–11 warns against receiving and assisting those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. These passages cannot be separated without creating confusion. A sincere missionary carrying another gospel is not made trustworthy merely because his intentions appear noble. Galatians 1:8 establishes the seriousness of corrupting the saving message. The Church must support workers who faithfully proclaim that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. Salvation is received by grace through faith, apart from human works, religious ceremonies, or financial contributions. The object is not to increase an organization's collection but to communicate that saving truth. Missionary support is valuable because the gospel is valuable. Remove the true gospel, and the impressive financial machinery becomes an expensive monument to religious confusion.

Conclusion

The New Testament leaves no reasonable doubt that believers may legitimately support those who labor in the gospel. Paul accepted assistance from the Philippians, defended the right of preachers to receive material provision, commended sacrificial generosity, and demonstrated personal contentment and financial integrity. His instructions also expose the dangers of greed, coercion, deception, and religious profiteering. The collection described in 2 Corinthians 8–9 was directed toward needy saints, but its principles concerning willingness, honesty, accountability, and cheerful generosity remain valuable in evaluating Christian stewardship. None of these passages transforms giving into a requirement for obtaining salvation or imposes Israel's national tithing system upon believers under grace. The gospel is free because Jesus Christ paid the price of redemption, but communicating that free gospel throughout the world still involves ordinary expenses that responsible Christians should not pretend do not exist.

Every supporting church and missionary organization should examine whether its financial arrangements genuinely serve the work of Christ. Are workers adequately provided for without encouraging extravagance? Are designated contributions administered honestly? Are unnecessary expenses consuming resources that could accomplish more useful work? Are missionaries communicating faithfully, or have exaggerated reports and emotional appeals replaced substantial biblical accountability? Are congregations supporting genuine gospel ministry, or merely financing institutions because their names have appeared on the missionary calendar for decades? These questions should be answered through Scripture, truth, and careful judgment rather than suspicion or blind loyalty. Second Corinthians 8:21 declares the necessity of providing honest things before God and men. A ministry that cannot survive reasonable questions about its doctrine, conduct, and finances should not expect unquestioning financial support merely because somebody has attached the word Christian to its official name.

The final standard is not the amount collected, the size of the missionary budget, the number of countries represented on a brochure, or the grandeur of an organization's headquarters. The final standard is faithfulness to Jesus Christ and the gospel committed to His servants. Paul declared in Philippians 4:17 that he desired fruit abounding to the account of the believers who supported him. He understood that faithful giving could participate in work whose spiritual value far exceeded the earthly amount contributed. Let the churches give willingly and responsibly. Let the missionaries preach faithfully and live honestly. Let the administrators remain accountable, and let every arrangement serve the gospel rather than compete with it. Missionary money should help carry the gospel to sinners, not simply keep a religious machine well-oiled and comfortably upholstered. A church that finances an empire while neglecting the gospel has purchased an expensive substitute for obedience. But a congregation that faithfully supports the preaching of Jesus

Christ has understood something worth remembering: money cannot buy a soul's salvation, but it can help place the saving message before a soul that desperately needs to hear it.

8 of 10 — Missions — Planting Churches Without Planting Denominational Empires

Key Passage: Acts 14:21–23 (KJV)

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch." Those words in Acts 14:21 ought to correct an enormous amount of foolishness masquerading as modern missionary success. Paul and Barnabas did not consider their responsibility completed merely because they had preached several sermons, obtained professions of faith, distributed religious literature, and collected enough photographs to produce an impressive missionary presentation. They preached the gospel, taught converts, returned to established believers, confirmed the disciples, and ordained elders in the churches. There was substance behind the activity. There was instruction behind the evangelism. There was biblical leadership being established rather than permanent dependence upon traveling personalities. The purpose was not to manufacture another collection of religious properties that could be controlled from some distant headquarters. A missionary who counts decisions but neglects discipleship has confused the beginning of Christian life with the completion of Christian responsibility. And a missionary who establishes churches merely to expand his organization's territory has mistaken the gospel for a real estate development program.

The New Testament presents church planting as a spiritual undertaking founded upon the preaching of Jesus Christ and the establishment of believers in sound doctrine. It is not the religious equivalent of opening another commercial franchise, complete with a corporate logo, approved decorations, standardized ceremonies, and a financial arrangement that keeps the headquarters collecting revenue indefinitely. The local congregation belongs to Jesus Christ, not to the missionary who first preached there or the organization that helped finance the work. Colossians 1:18 declares concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, "And he is the head of the body, the church." That position has not been offered for sale to denominational executives, transferred to missionary boards, or delegated to foreign administrators who consider themselves indispensable. The missionary may labor faithfully, the sending church may provide legitimate assistance, and supporting believers may make considerable sacrifices, but none of those contributions establishes ownership over the people purchased by Christ's blood. You cannot purchase spiritual authority over a

congregation by paying for the chairs, supplying the building materials, or installing your organization's name above the entrance.

The biblical pattern also requires careful dispensational interpretation. Acts records the transition from the early apostolic testimony associated with Israel into the expanding Gentile ministry under Paul's distinctive apostleship. His calling and authority were extraordinary, and modern missionaries must not pretend they possess the same revelatory office merely because they imitate his travels. Nevertheless, the practices of preaching the gospel, teaching believers, recognizing qualified leadership, strengthening congregations, and protecting sound doctrine provide continuing instruction for the Church Age. We must distinguish legitimate cultural adaptation from doctrinal compromise, necessary financial assistance from permanent institutional dependency, and responsible church oversight from foreign religious domination. We must also establish that salvation is by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, not through church membership, baptismal ceremonies, organizational loyalty, or religious performance. The objective is not to manufacture miniature American denominations in foreign countries. It is to see sinners saved, believers grounded in the King James Bible's doctrines, and local congregations established under the authority of Jesus Christ and His written word.

1. Preach the Gospel, Teach the Converts, and Establish the Believers

Acts 14:21 identifies three important movements in Paul's missionary labor. First, the gospel was preached in Derbe. Second, many were taught. Third, Paul and Barnabas returned to cities where believers had already been reached. This was not an accidental travel arrangement. The return journey took them through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia, places where opposition had already arisen. Acts 14:19 records that Paul had been stoned at Lystra and dragged outside the city, his enemies supposing him dead. Yet he returned to strengthen the believers. That is a considerably different attitude from the modern religious operator who abandons a congregation the moment the ministry becomes inconvenient. Paul did not regard church planting as a contest to see how many locations he could mark on a map. He understood that people who had received the gospel needed continued instruction, encouragement, and biblical stability. A missionary's responsibility cannot always be measured by the number of new destinations appearing in his next newsletter.

Acts 14:22 explains the purpose of those return visits: "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." The word "confirming" concerns strengthening and establishing believers, not performing a sacramental ceremony that somehow completes their salvation. These disciples needed instruction concerning their faith and

encouragement to remain steadfast under opposition. Neither should the warning concerning tribulation be converted into a doctrine that Christians earn eternal life through suffering or preserve justification through personal perseverance. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, while Romans 8:38–39 declares the believer's security in the love of God in Christ Jesus. Christian service may involve hardship, but hardship does not purchase redemption. A missionary who preaches salvation by grace on Sunday and teaches converts that they must earn their way into heaven through suffering on Monday has not established the believers. He has contradicted the gospel that supposedly brought them to Christ.

Acts 14:23 continues, "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." Here the missionary pattern advances beyond evangelism and initial instruction into the establishment of responsible leadership. Notice that elders were appointed in the churches, not installed as regional representatives of a distant religious corporation. Notice also that Paul and Barnabas commended the believers to the Lord. They were not transferring ultimate ownership to themselves or establishing perpetual institutional control over every congregation they had helped begin. The historical circumstances include Paul's unique apostolic authority, which modern church planters do not possess. Nevertheless, the concern for qualified leadership and continued dependence upon Christ remains instructive. The missionary who cannot bear the thought of a congregation functioning faithfully without his constant supervision has confused his temporary usefulness with permanent indispensability. God's people need the Scriptures and responsible spiritual leadership, not a lifetime subscription to the founding missionary's personal authority.

2. Corinth: A Church Built Through Preaching, Not Corporate Expansion

Acts 18:1–11 records Paul's ministry at Corinth, an important example of establishing believers in a city filled with religious confusion and moral corruption. Paul arrived from Athens and became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, who shared his occupation as tentmakers. He reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, persuading Jews and Greeks. When opposition developed, Acts 18:7 records that he departed and entered the house of Justus, whose home was joined closely to the synagogue. Verse 8 declares that Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house, and that many Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized. Notice the order of events. The word was communicated, people believed, and baptism followed as part of the recorded ministry. The congregation did not begin because somebody purchased a prestigious building, obtained denominational approval, and announced that a new franchise was officially

open for business. It began through the preaching of Jesus Christ and the response of people who believed.

Acts 18:9–10 records the Lord encouraging Paul in a night vision, instructing him not to fear but to speak, for He had much people in that city. Verse 11 declares that Paul continued there "a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them." The supernatural vision belongs to Paul's apostolic experience and should not be turned into a mandatory pattern for missionary calling today. But the eighteen months of teaching demonstrate something modern church planters should not overlook. Paul remained and instructed believers. He did not assume that conversion eliminated the need for continued doctrinal development. A congregation must understand the gospel, the Christian walk, sound doctrine, spiritual responsibilities, and the proper conduct of its assembly. First Corinthians 3:10–11 later identifies Jesus Christ as the only foundation. A church built upon entertainment requires increasingly impressive entertainment to remain attractive. A church established upon the word of God possesses a foundation that does not depend upon the preacher's ability to keep everybody amused.

The subsequent Corinthian correspondence demonstrates why continuous teaching is necessary. First Corinthians confronts divisions, carnality, fornication, abuses concerning the Lord's supper, confusion over spiritual gifts, and disorder in the assembly. These were real believers living in a congregation that required serious correction. Paul did not pretend that every problem could be solved by announcing another round of conversions or adding more names to a missionary report. First Corinthians 5 addresses moral discipline, chapter 11 corrects abuses in the assembly, and chapter 14 establishes order in spiritual ministry. Those instructions belong to the Church, not to the restoration of Israel's national priesthood. Their authority concerns believers under the present dispensation of grace. Planting a church is not the same as planting a garden ornament that requires no attention after installation. Living congregations contain real people, and real people bring sins, weaknesses, disputes, and ignorance that must be confronted by sound biblical teaching.

3. Elders in Every City: Local Leadership Under Biblical Qualifications

Titus 1:5 establishes the responsibility Paul gave Titus concerning the congregations on Crete: "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." The passage identifies unfinished responsibilities among existing believers. The solution was not to establish a permanent foreign headquarters exercising control over every congregation. Titus was instructed to set matters in order and appoint qualified elders. His assignment belonged to the apostolic ministry associated with Paul, and modern missionaries must not claim authority equal to that extraordinary office. Nevertheless, the importance of established

leadership remains unmistakable. Biblical churches should possess responsible oversight rather than depend indefinitely upon visiting speakers, distant administrators, or the personality of the original missionary. A congregation that cannot make an ordinary biblical decision without telephoning an overseas headquarters has not necessarily become an established church. It may have become a branch office with a hymnal.

Titus 1:6–9 establishes qualifications concerning the elder's character, household, conduct, and doctrinal ability. Verse 7 declares that a bishop must be blameless "as the steward of God," while verse 9 requires him to be "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." The terms elder and bishop appear in this connected discussion of church oversight, identifying spiritual responsibility rather than membership in competing ranks of an elaborate ecclesiastical hierarchy. First Timothy 3 supplies corresponding qualifications and warns against placing a novice into leadership. A missionary should therefore resist appointing an unprepared convert merely because the individual is popular, wealthy, educated, or related to an influential family. A man does not become qualified to shepherd God's people because he owns the largest house in town, possesses an impressive business title, or happens to be the missionary's favorite financial contributor. God has already established qualifications, and those qualifications deserve more attention than anybody's social standing.

Responsible leadership development requires patience because spiritual maturity cannot be manufactured through a brief ceremony. A congregation may need continued teaching while qualified men are being prepared, and a missionary must not place the flock under unfit oversight merely to announce that the work has become independent. First Timothy 5:22 warns, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." The immediate instruction belongs to Timothy's responsibilities in church leadership, but its caution against hasty identification with another man's ministry is directly applicable. At the same time, endless postponement can become another form of control. A missionary who continually declares local believers unprepared while refusing to train them may be preserving his own authority rather than protecting the congregation. The biblical objective is not to install leadership before men are ready, nor to keep qualified men permanently waiting because the foreign missionary enjoys sitting in the largest chair. The objective is faithful oversight according to the word of God.

4. Feed the Church of God: Spiritual Oversight Is Not Denominational Ownership

Acts 20:17 records Paul summoning the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. His address in the following verses is one of the strongest New Testament passages concerning the responsibilities of spiritual leadership. In Acts 20:27, he declares,

"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Then verse 28 commands, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Notice the foundation of their responsibility. The flock belonged to God because He purchased it with His own blood. The elders were overseers charged with feeding and guarding the people. They were not owners authorized to dispose of the congregation according to personal ambition. The blood of Jesus Christ purchased the Church. A missionary's financial investment, denominational affiliation, or years of service did not purchase the right to treat those believers as his personal property.

Acts 20:29–30 explains why doctrinal oversight is so necessary. Paul warned that grievous wolves would enter among the flock, not sparing it, and that men would arise from among the believers themselves, "speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." The danger could originate outside the congregation or arise from within its existing leadership. Religious corruption does not always arrive carrying a strange name and wearing unfamiliar clothing. Sometimes it emerges from a man who has been attending the meetings for years and eventually decides that he deserves a following of his own. The answer is not permanent foreign domination but faithful local oversight established in sound doctrine. Titus 1:9 requires leaders to convince gainsayers, and Titus 1:11 warns against false teachers who subvert whole houses for filthy lucre's sake. A wolf does not become a shepherd because somebody supplies him with an official religious badge. The flock needs men who recognize the difference between feeding sheep and collecting followers.

Paul concludes his warning in Acts 20:32 by declaring, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up." There is the proper destination of missionary instruction. Paul directed the Ephesian elders toward God and the word of His grace, not toward permanent dependence upon Paul's physical presence. He knew that he would depart, and the congregation needed spiritual stability after his departure. A faithful missionary must prepare believers for circumstances in which he is no longer available to answer every question, settle every disagreement, or personally conduct every service. This does not eliminate Christian fellowship, correspondence, assistance, or legitimate cooperation with other churches. It establishes where ultimate authority rests. If the congregation collapses doctrinally the moment the missionary boards an airplane, somebody has spent too much time making himself necessary and not enough time making the Scriptures understood. The missionary may depart; the word of God remains.

5. Faithful Men Teaching Others: The Biblical Answer to Permanent Dependency

Second Timothy 2:2 supplies a clear pattern for the continued transmission of biblical truth: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Consider the progression. Paul instructed Timothy, Timothy was to commit that teaching to faithful men, and those men were to become capable of instructing others. The message was not to remain imprisoned within one generation or dependent upon the permanent presence of one celebrated teacher. Nor was Timothy instructed to develop his own distinctive religious doctrine so that the next generation would recognize his personal originality. The same truth was to be faithfully transmitted. A missionary who builds a congregation that can survive only while he personally holds the microphone has not trained a generation of teachers. He has constructed a spiritual dependency system with himself positioned at the center of every operation.

The qualifications in 2 Timothy 2:2 are equally important. Paul requires faithful men who are able to teach others. Faithfulness concerns loyalty to the truth, while the ability to teach concerns the competent communication of that truth. A man may possess enthusiasm without doctrinal understanding, or biblical information without dependable character. Neither condition automatically qualifies him to instruct a congregation. Second Timothy 2:15 commands studying and rightly dividing the word of truth. Second Timothy 3:16–17 establishes the inspiration and sufficiency of Scripture for furnishing the man of God unto all good works. Training should therefore include serious biblical instruction, comparison of Scripture with Scripture, practical experience, moral accountability, and patient correction. A missionary who appoints an unprepared man because he has completed a few lessons and can repeat the organization's favorite slogans has confused memorizing religious vocabulary with becoming established in sound doctrine. A parrot can repeat a sentence; that does not make it a qualified Bible teacher.

This responsibility becomes especially important when establishing congregations among people whose language and customs differ from those of the sending church. Local believers should be equipped to read, understand, teach, and defend the Scriptures without being forced to imitate every cultural habit of the foreign missionary. Faithful translations and sound literature may provide valuable assistance, while experienced workers can continue offering counsel when needed. Nevertheless, the objective is to develop genuine biblical competence rather than create a permanent market for imported religious personalities. Second Timothy 3:14 instructs Timothy to continue in the things he had learned and been assured of. The emphasis is upon established truth, not dependence upon novelty. The missionary has succeeded in an important part of his work when believers can open their Bibles, recognize false doctrine, explain the gospel, and instruct others without requiring a foreign supervisor to approve every sentence. The Scriptures

must become their authority, not merely the textbook used to advertise somebody else's authority.

6. All Things to All Men: Cultural Understanding Without Doctrinal Surrender

First Corinthians 9:19–23 reveals Paul's willingness to adapt his conduct for the sake of communicating the gospel. Verse 19 declares, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more." He then explains how he approached Jews, those under the law, those without law, and the weak. His object was to remove unnecessary obstacles to the communication of saving truth. Yet Paul was not announcing that every religious practice was acceptable or that the gospel could be rewritten according to local preferences. Verse 21 specifically qualifies his conduct toward those without law, declaring that he was "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ." That limitation destroys the popular excuse that cultural adaptation authorizes disobedience. Paul was willing to adjust his conduct to reach sinners, but he was not willing to adjust God's righteousness to make sinners feel more comfortable. There is a considerable difference between understanding a culture and surrendering the Bible to it.

A missionary may legitimately learn the language, respect ordinary customs, adapt appropriate clothing, understand local hospitality, and avoid unnecessary offense. Different communities possess different foods, greetings, family arrangements, and methods of conducting ordinary business. The Bible does not require every congregation to reproduce American architecture, musical preferences, schedules, or social customs. Yet cultural understanding must be distinguished from incorporating idolatry and false worship into Christian ministry. First Corinthians 10:14 commands, "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." Verses 20–21 warn against fellowship with devils and declare that believers cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of devils. A missionary has no authority to baptize pagan worship, attach Christian terminology to idolatrous ceremonies, and announce that cultural sensitivity has accomplished something wonderful. A false god does not become acceptable because somebody changes the nameplate on its altar. Religious compromise is not missionary wisdom; it is disobedience wearing the costume of cultural understanding.

Galatians 1:6–9 establishes the boundary that missionary adaptation must never cross. Paul marveled that the Galatians were being removed unto another gospel, and verse 8 declared that anyone preaching another gospel should be accursed. The immediate controversy concerned corruption of the gospel through false teaching, including the attempted imposition of religious obligations upon Gentile believers. Acts 15 likewise records the dispute concerning whether Gentile converts must be circumcised and commanded to keep the law of Moses. The Jerusalem council rejected the claim that

Gentiles were required to enter salvation through that legal system. Paul's missionary ministry therefore demonstrates that cultural accommodation must not become religious bondage. The missionary must not turn foreign converts into American church members by cultural force, but neither may he turn them into religious pagans by doctrinal compromise. The objective is not cultural conquest or cultural surrender. It is obedience to Jesus Christ and the gospel of the grace of God.

7. Established Churches, Not Permanent Foreign Branch Offices

The financial arrangements surrounding a new congregation require the same biblical wisdom as its spiritual leadership. During the early stages of a missionary work, outside support may provide meeting facilities, biblical literature, training materials, necessary equipment, and legitimate assistance for workers. Philippians 4:15–18 demonstrates the propriety of churches participating materially in gospel ministry, while 3 John 5–8 commends those who assist faithful servants going forth for the Lord's name. Nevertheless, receiving financial assistance does not automatically make a congregation the property of the supporting organization. Churches should establish honest arrangements concerning buildings, designated funds, lawful ownership, and the responsibilities of those administering resources. Local circumstances may require particular legal structures, and prudence must govern those decisions. A missionary board may purchase a building, but purchasing bricks does not confer ownership of the souls meeting inside it. The congregation belongs to Jesus Christ, and financial generosity must not be converted into ecclesiastical landlordship over God's people.

Financial independence should develop responsibly rather than becoming an artificial deadline imposed upon believers who possess limited resources. Second Corinthians 8:13–15 establishes principles of willing assistance and fair consideration of actual needs, although its immediate setting concerns relief for needy saints rather than a complete administrative system for missionary churches. There is nothing inherently unbiblical about one congregation helping another during a legitimate period of need. The danger arises when permanent dependency is deliberately maintained to preserve foreign control, or when local believers are taught that their responsibilities will always be financed by somebody thousands of miles away. A church should learn appropriate stewardship, generosity, and responsibility according to its actual circumstances. Missionaries should encourage those habits without demanding amounts believers cannot reasonably provide. Financial maturity is not demonstrated by abandoning needy brethren, but neither is it demonstrated by maintaining a religious dependency arrangement in which the foreign headquarters forever holds the purse strings and everybody else waits for permission to purchase another box of hymnals.

The ultimate objective is an established local congregation capable of continuing faithfully under Jesus Christ and His written word, while maintaining legitimate fellowship with other believers. Independence from improper denominational control does not mean independence from Scripture, sound doctrine, biblical accountability, or Christian cooperation. Acts 14:26–27 records Paul and Barnabas returning to Antioch and reporting what God had accomplished. Romans 16 demonstrates extensive relationships among believers serving in different places. First Corinthians 12 establishes the unity of believers in the body of Christ, while local congregations remain responsible for their own scriptural oversight. A mature church may support missionaries, assist other congregations, train future teachers, and participate in the furtherance of the gospel. The finest outcome of missionary church planting is not a permanent collection of dependent congregations sending reports to headquarters. It is believers established in the truth, capable of governing their congregational affairs biblically, teaching another generation, and carrying the gospel beyond their own doors.

Conclusion

The missionary pattern recorded in Acts demonstrates that biblical church planting requires more than preaching a few sermons and gathering a collection of interested people. Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel, taught converts, revisited congregations, strengthened believers, and appointed elders. Paul remained in Corinth teaching the word of God, instructed the Ephesian elders concerning their responsibilities, and charged Titus with establishing qualified leadership. These activities were connected with Paul's distinctive apostolic ministry, but they also reveal continuing principles that churches should take seriously. The objective was not personal empire-building, institutional expansion, or the establishment of religious monuments honoring the missionary. It was the furtherance of the gospel and the spiritual establishment of believers. A missionary who leaves behind a congregation that knows his organization's regulations better than the doctrines of Scripture has planted the wrong kind of institution. Religious loyalty cannot substitute for biblical maturity, and an impressive headquarters cannot perform the spiritual responsibilities of a faithful local church.

The gospel itself must remain central from the first sermon to the final stages of establishing local leadership. First Corinthians 15:1–4 identifies the saving message through the death of Jesus Christ for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8–9 declares salvation by grace through faith, not of works. That doctrine cannot be sacrificed to accommodate traditional religion, sacramental systems, denominational demands, or cultural customs. Nor may the missionary confuse the Church with Israel, appropriate Israel's national promises, or

impose Israel's covenant obligations upon Gentile believers under grace. The Scriptures must be rightly divided, faithfully taught, and defended against false doctrine. Qualified leaders must be recognized according to biblical standards, not financial influence or personal favoritism. The missionary's responsibility is not to make every convert look like the people who sent him. His responsibility is to teach converts what God has written and establish them in the truth. A foreign congregation does not need an American costume to become a biblical church.

When the missionary departs, what should remain? Not merely a building, a religious sign, a collection of organizational certificates, or a group of people permanently dependent upon foreign financial assistance. There should be believers who understand salvation, know the Scriptures, recognize false teaching, exercise biblical fellowship, and possess responsible spiritual leadership. There should be Christians capable of teaching others and communicating the gospel beyond their own community. There should be a congregation governed by the authority of Jesus Christ rather than the ambitions of religious administrators. Acts 20:32 provides the proper final standard: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up." Paul pointed those elders toward the Lord and His word because the future of the church did not depend upon his permanent presence. The missionary may plant, another servant may water, and faithful believers may continue the labor, but God gives the increase. Plant churches, preach Christ, teach the Bible, establish qualified leadership, and prepare the believers to stand upon the truth. Do not cross an ocean merely to establish another denominational empire. The world already has enough religious empires. What lost sinners need is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and what saved sinners need is a church that faithfully teaches His word.

9 of 10 — Missions — Shipwrecks, Stripes, and Suffering: The Price of Carrying the Gospel

Key Passage: 2 Corinthians 11:23–28 (KJV)

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft." Those words in 2 Corinthians 11:23 ought to put an end to the ridiculous notion that missionary success can be measured by the comfort of the accommodations, the size of the offering, or the number of smiling photographs appearing in the latest religious advertisement. Paul was defending his apostolic ministry against men who boasted of their credentials while

undermining his authority among the Corinthians. His answer was not an impressive collection of certificates, a luxurious headquarters, or a promotional presentation featuring his accomplishments. He began describing suffering. Beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks, hunger, exposure, danger, and relentless concern for the churches marked the ministry of a man whom the risen Lord Jesus Christ had personally appointed as the apostle of the Gentiles. This was not religious tourism with occasional inconveniences. Paul did not measure the success of his calling by how comfortable the journey became. He measured his responsibility by faithfulness to the Lord who had sent him, even when obedience carried him directly into suffering.

The modern religious establishment has developed a remarkable talent for presenting missionary service as an exciting combination of foreign travel, cultural adventure, impressive meetings, generous supporters, and spiritual success stories. Certainly, there can be encouragement, friendship, hospitality, answered prayer, and genuine joy in gospel labor. But anybody who reads 2 Corinthians 11 and still imagines that missionary service guarantees uninterrupted prosperity has either skipped the chapter or developed an extraordinary ability to read without noticing the words. Paul did not describe an occasional delayed flight or an uncomfortable hotel mattress. He described thirty-nine stripes received on five occasions, three beatings with rods, stoning, shipwrecks, and repeated danger. Yet we must distinguish actual suffering for Christ from foolish decisions, avoidable irresponsibility, or theatrical attempts to manufacture a martyr's reputation. Getting into trouble does not automatically make a preacher spiritual. The important question is whether the trouble came because he faithfully obeyed Scripture or because he ignored the common sense God expected him to exercise.

This study concerns the genuine cost of carrying the gospel, the opposition that faithful servants may encounter, and the responsibility of churches to support those laboring under difficult circumstances. We will examine Paul's endurance at Lystra, his imprisonment at Philippi, his testimony concerning the advancement of the gospel through suffering, and his determination to finish the course entrusted to him. We will also examine missionary families, physical danger, discouragement, financial integrity, truthful reporting, and the biblical difference between faithfulness and religious showmanship. Paul's unique apostleship and supernatural experiences must remain in their proper historical and dispensational setting. His suffering did not purchase salvation, and it does not establish that every missionary must reproduce his experiences. Salvation remains by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The gospel is free to the sinner because Christ paid the price of redemption, but carrying that message into a hostile world may cost the messenger considerably more than he ever imagined.

1. Stripes, Shipwrecks, and Perils: The Missionary Record Religion Cannot Decorate

Second Corinthians 11:24–25 provides an extraordinary account of the physical punishment Paul endured: "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep." Those statements deserve more attention than the brief acknowledgment they usually receive. Five separate occasions of thirty-nine stripes represent repeated, deliberate punishment. Three beatings with rods added further suffering, while stoning and shipwrecks placed Paul's life in immediate danger. These were not symbolic descriptions of spiritual inconvenience. The apostle bore genuine physical consequences connected with his ministry. Yet the passage must be read in context. Paul was answering the boasting of false apostles who sought to discredit him, and he deliberately used the language of weakness rather than worldly magnificence. The religious pretender boasts about the height of his platform. Paul could describe the depth of the sea in which he had nearly drowned. One was advertising personal importance; the other was defending a ministry marked by costly obedience.

Verse 26 continues with a catalogue of dangers: "In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren." Observe how thoroughly the danger surrounded him. Nationality offered no universal protection, geography provided no permanent security, and even professing religious associates could become sources of betrayal. The opposition came from multiple directions because Paul's ministry confronted unbelief, false religion, and spiritual darkness with the truth of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the passage does not authorize us to label every disagreeable person a persecutor or every inconvenient circumstance a satanic attack. Paul identified genuine danger while continuing his appointed work. Some modern preachers describe a critical comment beneath a religious announcement as though they had survived the persecution of the Roman Empire. Paul had encountered robbers, prisons, rods, and shipwrecks. The comparison could use a little biblical proportion.

Verses 27–28 reveal another dimension of suffering: "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Paul then adds, "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." Physical hardship was only part of his burden. He also carried continuing concern for the believers and congregations associated with his ministry. This was not a man who regarded converts as numbers to be reported and forgotten. Their doctrine, conduct, perseverance, and spiritual welfare mattered to him. Second Corinthians 11:29 asks, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" The language

reveals identification with the difficulties of fellow believers. A missionary who can remember every financial contribution but cannot remember the spiritual condition of the people he claims to serve has learned the accounting procedures without understanding the burden of the ministry.

2. Stoned at Lystra: The Gospel Continued After the Stones Stopped Falling

Acts 14:19 records one of the most remarkable demonstrations of Paul's endurance: "And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." The context reveals the instability of religious enthusiasm. Earlier in the chapter, after the healing of a man crippled from birth, the people of Lystra attempted to honor Barnabas and Paul as gods. Barnabas was called Jupiter, and Paul was called Mercurius. The apostles rejected this idolatrous response and directed the people toward the living God. Yet the same general population that had been prepared to offer sacrifice soon became susceptible to the influence of Paul's enemies. This demonstrates the danger of confusing public excitement with genuine spiritual conviction. A crowd that wants to worship the preacher on Monday may be persuaded to stone him on Tuesday. Popularity is a miserable foundation upon which to build a ministry, especially when the applause can turn into persecution before the collection plate makes another trip around the room.

Acts 14:20–21 continues, "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." Scripture does not identify this event as Paul's death and resurrection, and no preacher has authority to manufacture that claim simply because the account is dramatic. The enemies supposed him dead, but the text records that he rose and subsequently continued his travels. The following day he departed for Derbe, where the gospel was preached and many were taught. Later, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to strengthen the disciples. This reveals courage without requiring us to invent unnecessary details. Paul continued the work, yet he did not simply remain in the same dangerous circumstances to prove he was fearless. Faithfulness does not mean standing motionless while enemies prepare another collection of stones. Sometimes the servant continues by departing, and sometimes he returns when the work requires it. Biblical courage is not the same thing as volunteering for unnecessary injury.

Acts 14:22 explains what Paul and Barnabas taught the believers upon returning: "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." The context concerns disciples facing opposition during the early apostolic expansion of the gospel. The statement must not be twisted into salvation by suffering or a doctrine that justification

remains uncertain until a believer has endured enough persecution. Romans 5:1 declares that believers are justified by faith, while Ephesians 2:8–9 excludes works as the means of salvation. Paul was strengthening believers concerning the difficulties associated with faithful service, not handing them a new list of requirements for earning eternal life. Acts 14:23 then records the appointment of elders in the churches. The apostle did not return merely to display his wounds and collect sympathy. He returned to establish believers in the truth, reminding them that opposition does not invalidate the gospel or cancel their responsibility to remain faithful.

3. The Philippian Prison: Midnight Hymns and an Opened Door of Salvation

Acts 16:16–24 explains why Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi. A damsel possessed with a spirit of divination had brought financial gain to her masters through soothsaying. After Paul commanded the spirit to come out of her in the name of Jesus Christ, her masters discovered that their source of profit had disappeared. Acts 16:19 declares, "And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers." There is a revealing connection between false religion and financial interest. The masters were not suddenly overwhelmed with concern for public morality. They were furious because their profitable arrangement had been interrupted. The accusations that followed brought the missionaries before the authorities, where they were beaten and imprisoned. When the gospel threatens a lucrative religious business, the men collecting the profits can become remarkably enthusiastic defenders of public order. Their devotion to principle often begins exactly where their revenue stream ends.

Acts 16:23–25 records that Paul and Silas received many stripes, were cast into prison, and had their feet secured in the stocks. The jailer placed them in the inner prison under strict instructions. Then verse 25 declares, "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." The circumstances were neither comfortable nor encouraging from an earthly standpoint. Their backs had been beaten, their freedom had been taken, and the future of their ministry appeared uncertain. Yet they prayed and praised the Lord. This does not establish that every suffering Christian must feel cheerful or sing continuously to prove he possesses sufficient faith. The passage records the response of these particular apostolic workers, and it demonstrates that their confidence in God was not dependent upon favorable circumstances. The prison authorities could fasten their feet in stocks, but they had not discovered a way to imprison the truth those men believed. The gospel was still alive inside a building designed to keep its messengers confined.

Acts 16:26–34 records an earthquake that shook the prison, opened the doors, and loosed the prisoners' bands. When the jailer feared the prisoners had escaped, Paul prevented him from harming himself. The man then asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas answered in verse 31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." The promise did not mean the jailer's family would be saved automatically because he believed; verse 32 records that the word of the Lord was spoken to him and those in his house. The account subsequently records baptism and rejoicing associated with believing in God. The doctrinal emphasis upon faith must not be replaced with baptismal regeneration or religious merit. The jailer did not receive instructions to join a denomination, purchase a sacrament, or finance a missionary organization. He was directed to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The same gospel that placed the preachers in prison became the message through which the jailer learned how to be saved.

4. Bonds That Advanced the Gospel: When Opposition Failed to Silence the Message

Philippians 1:12–13 reveals how Paul understood the circumstances of his imprisonment: "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." He continues by explaining that his bonds in Christ were manifest in all the palace and other places. This is a remarkable testimony because imprisonment ordinarily appears to restrict a preacher's opportunities. Paul's freedom of movement had been limited, yet the gospel continued reaching people through circumstances his enemies intended to use against him. We must not turn this into a universal promise that every imprisonment or hardship will produce an immediately visible missionary breakthrough. Paul was describing what God had accomplished in his particular circumstances. The lesson concerns divine sovereignty and faithful service amid opposition. The enemies of the gospel may lock the preacher behind a door, but they have no authority to command the word of God to stop working.

Philippians 1:14 adds that many brethren became more confident through Paul's bonds and were "much more bold to speak the word without fear." The imprisonment of one servant encouraged others to proclaim Christ. That result reveals the difference between a ministry centered upon one indispensable personality and a ministry centered upon the gospel. If the work depends entirely upon the freedom, health, or reputation of one preacher, the whole operation becomes vulnerable to his circumstances. But when believers are established in Scripture, others can continue faithfully even when a prominent worker becomes unavailable. Second Timothy 2:9 expresses the same principle when Paul writes that he suffered trouble as an evildoer, "even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound." A missionary organization that believes the gospel will collapse whenever its celebrated founder disappears has built something considerably more fragile

than the Church Jesus Christ promised to build. The Lord does not require a permanent celebrity to keep His word alive.

Philippians 1:15–18 introduces an uncomfortable reality: some preached Christ through envy and strife, while others preached from goodwill. Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached, although he recognized improper motives among certain preachers. This passage must not be abused to justify false doctrine. Galatians 1:8 pronounces a curse upon anyone preaching another gospel, so Paul cannot be interpreted as endorsing the corruption he condemned elsewhere. In Philippians, the problem involved the motives of men preaching Christ, not permission to substitute another message. The distinction matters when evaluating missionary reports and religious opposition. A preacher may possess imperfect motives while communicating the true gospel, but sincerity or numerical success cannot make a false gospel acceptable. God's truth remains true even when delivered by an imperfect servant, but a dishonest servant cannot make false doctrine true merely by announcing that his organization is experiencing remarkable growth. The message must always be examined by Scripture.

5. Courage Without Recklessness: Biblical Faith Does Not Require Foolish Decisions

The same apostle who endured beatings and imprisonment also took reasonable measures to preserve his life. Second Corinthians 11:32–33 recalls how he escaped from Damascus when the governor under Aretas guarded the city to apprehend him. Paul writes that he was let down through a window in a basket and escaped. Acts 9:23–25 supplies the corresponding historical account, describing the plot against him and the assistance of the disciples. Here was a man specially called by the risen Christ, yet he did not conclude that faith required remaining in place until his enemies succeeded. He escaped. There was no shameful admission of unbelief in the decision. Some modern religious adventurers would probably accuse Paul of lacking courage because he used a basket instead of standing at the gate demanding that the governor throw the first punch. Fortunately, Paul's mission was to preach Christ, not to satisfy somebody else's theatrical definition of bravery.

Paul also exercised legitimate legal rights when circumstances warranted it. Acts 16:37 records his objection after the Philippian magistrates attempted to release him privately following an unlawful public beating. He declared that they had beaten Roman citizens uncondemned and imprisoned them, and he required the magistrates to acknowledge the matter properly. Acts 22:25 likewise records Paul questioning the legality of scourging a Roman who had not been condemned. These accounts demonstrate that accepting suffering for Christ does not require surrendering every lawful protection or refusing available assistance. Christian submission to legitimate authority does not mean every official action is beyond examination. Nor does the missionary's courage increase merely

because he refuses medical treatment, ignores credible threats, or unnecessarily exposes others to danger. The Bible never teaches that a missionary becomes more spiritual by leaving his common sense at the airport. Faith is confidence in God and obedience to His word, not a determination to make the most irresponsible decision available.

Missionaries serving in difficult circumstances should therefore distinguish unavoidable hardship from preventable danger. Hostile religious environments, political restrictions, disease, crime, and practical instability may require careful planning, trustworthy communication, lawful arrangements, and responsible consideration of family needs. James 4:13–15 reminds believers to acknowledge the Lord's will when planning future movements, while Proverbs 22:3 declares, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." The proverb provides a principle of prudence, not a command to avoid every difficult assignment. Faithfulness may require entering dangerous circumstances when a legitimate duty cannot otherwise be performed, but unnecessary exposure is not automatically obedience. There is no crown promised for ignoring obvious danger merely to produce a more dramatic missionary newsletter. The Lord calls His servants to be faithful, not to manufacture emergencies that better judgment could have prevented.

6. The Care of the Churches: Missionary Families, Discouragement, and Honest Reporting

Second Corinthians 11:28 identifies a burden that cannot be measured by counting physical injuries: "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." Paul was deeply concerned about the congregations associated with his ministry. He understood that believers required instruction, correction, encouragement, and protection against false doctrine. Second Corinthians 7:5–6 also records a period in which he experienced conflicts without and fears within, followed by comfort through the coming of Titus. The apostle was not an emotionless religious machine incapable of experiencing pressure or appreciating encouragement. Nevertheless, his difficulties did not become an excuse to abandon biblical responsibility. This distinction is important for missionaries facing exhausting circumstances and discouraging opposition. Acknowledging genuine weariness is not the same thing as surrendering to unbelief. The man who insists that faithful servants must never experience discouragement has apparently read the biographies of religious celebrities more carefully than the epistles of the apostle Paul.

Missionary families deserve serious consideration because Christian service does not erase responsibilities established elsewhere in Scripture. First Timothy 5:8 warns against neglecting one's own household, while Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their

wives and Ephesians 6:4 instructs fathers concerning the upbringing of their children. Those obligations do not disappear when a man accepts a missionary assignment. Families may face separation from relatives, interrupted schooling, unfamiliar languages, health concerns, limited resources, and circumstances in which ordinary services are difficult to obtain. A missionary should consider these matters responsibly rather than using spiritual language to justify neglect. Supporting churches should likewise recognize legitimate family expenses without assuming every request represents personal indulgence. A preacher who can describe the spiritual needs of an entire foreign country but refuses to consider the welfare of his own wife and children has overlooked a mission field that God placed directly inside his household. Ministry does not provide a divine exemption from family responsibility.

Philippians 2:25–30 describes Epaphroditus, whom Paul identified as his brother, companion in labor, fellowsoldier, and the Philippians' messenger who ministered to his wants. Epaphroditus had been seriously ill, nearly unto death, and Paul acknowledged both the danger and the mercy associated with his recovery. The passage demonstrates that faithful workers may experience genuine physical weakness and require practical care. Philippians 4:15–18 likewise shows that financial assistance formed part of Paul's missionary fellowship. Supporting churches should therefore maintain meaningful communication, pray intelligently, respond to legitimate emergencies, and expect truthful reports concerning the work. Second Corinthians 8:20–21 establishes the importance of honest financial administration. Reports should distinguish actual conversions from interested hearers, genuine persecution from ordinary inconvenience, and verified events from rumors. A missionary should not exaggerate suffering to increase donations, and a church should not demand spectacular stories before offering reasonable assistance. Truthful reporting honors Christ; religious theater merely keeps the fundraising department entertained.

7. Finishing the Course: Persecution, Faithfulness, and the Judgment Seat of Christ

Second Timothy 3:10–12 records Paul's reminder to Timothy concerning his doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, and persecutions. He specifically mentions the afflictions he endured at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, declaring, "but out of them all the Lord delivered me." Verse 12 continues, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The passage establishes that godly living in a hostile world brings opposition, but it does not promise that every believer will suffer identical physical punishment or that every difficulty constitutes persecution. A Christian may lose favor because he speaks the truth, but he may also lose favor because he behaves dishonestly or foolishly. First Peter 4:15–16 makes that distinction clear, warning

against suffering as an evildoer while acknowledging suffering as a Christian. A preacher arrested for dishonesty is not automatically suffering for righteousness. Calling misconduct persecution does not transform the police report into a missionary testimony.

Second Timothy 4:6–7 reveals Paul's final assessment of his earthly service: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Those words do not describe a man who achieved every personal ambition or escaped every enemy. They describe a servant who remained faithful to the ministry entrusted to him. Paul's extraordinary apostolic course belonged to his divine commission, but the principle of responsible stewardship extends to all believers. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." The missionary is responsible for proclaiming the truth, conducting himself honestly, and fulfilling legitimate obligations. God gives the increase, as 1 Corinthians 3:6–7 establishes. The Lord will not measure faithfulness by how many dramatic stories a preacher can tell. He knows whether the servant obeyed His word when nobody was applauding and whether the gospel remained unchanged when compromise offered an easier road.

Second Timothy 4:8 completes Paul's testimony with the expectation of "a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day," extending the promise to those who love Christ's appearing. The passage concerns reward from the righteous Judge, not salvation purchased through missionary suffering. Second Corinthians 5:10 likewise establishes that believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where their works are examined. This must be distinguished from the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation 20:11–15, where the dead are judged and those not found written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire. Salvation remains by grace through faith, and Christian service concerns obedience flowing from salvation. The missionary does not suffer to purchase a place in heaven. Christ accomplished redemption through His blood. The servant labors because he belongs to the Lord, and the Lord will judge the quality of that labor without consulting the missionary's advertising department.

Conclusion

The missionary testimony of Paul stands as a permanent rebuke to the comfortable religion that measures spiritual success by popularity, prosperity, and favorable circumstances. Five times he received thirty-nine stripes, three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, and three times he suffered shipwreck. He endured hunger, exhaustion, danger, opposition, imprisonment, and continuing concern for the churches. Yet those sufferings did not become the gospel he preached. They were consequences encountered while proclaiming the gospel entrusted to him. Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and

His resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures remained the saving message, as 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 declares. The blood that saves sinners is the blood of Jesus Christ, not the blood shed by missionaries during persecution. The suffering servant points people toward the crucified and risen Saviour; he does not become another saviour through his own afflictions.

Every missionary, sending church, and supporting believer should recognize both the cost and the responsibility of gospel labor. Faithful service may involve hardship, but hardship does not excuse doctrinal compromise, financial dishonesty, family neglect, exaggerated reports, or reckless decisions. Churches should support sound workers with prayer, encouragement, reasonable provision, and biblical accountability. Missionaries should communicate honestly, exercise prudence, and remain faithful to the Scriptures even when circumstances become difficult. Second Corinthians 4:8–9 describes believers as troubled yet not distressed, perplexed yet not in despair, persecuted yet not forsaken, and cast down yet not destroyed. These statements testify to God's sustaining grace amid real affliction, not to the elimination of every earthly difficulty. A missionary does not need to pretend his circumstances are comfortable to demonstrate faith in God. He needs to remain faithful when comfort disappears, and he needs churches that understand the difference between supporting a servant and purchasing a religious success story.

The final question is not whether missionary service produces applause, impressive attendance figures, financial prosperity, or a comfortable retirement. The question is whether the gospel has been faithfully proclaimed and the responsibilities entrusted to the servant have been honored. Paul could face the conclusion of his earthly ministry with the testimony that he had fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith. That is a far greater accomplishment than acquiring religious fame. Let missionaries preach Christ without compromise, endure unavoidable hardship without manufacturing unnecessary danger, and care faithfully for those dependent upon them. Let churches recognize the burdens carried by gospel workers and support them without surrendering biblical discernment. Let every servant remember that the Lord who calls His people to faithfulness also knows their labor, their tears, and their trials. The same gospel that can open a prisoner's heart can put the preacher behind prison doors. The same message that saves a sinner may provoke the hatred of those profiting from his spiritual bondage. But chains cannot change the truth, stripes cannot erase the resurrection, and shipwrecks cannot overthrow the finished work of Calvary. Faithfulness is measured by obedience to the Lord, not by the softness of the missionary's mattress.

10 of 10 — Missions — A Full Stomach Cannot Save an Empty Soul: Why the Gospel Must Come First

Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 (KJV)

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand." Those opening words of 1 Corinthians 15:1 ought to bring the entire missionary enterprise to a screeching halt long enough for everybody involved to examine whether the message being carried is still the message God commanded His servants to proclaim. Paul did not begin by announcing an international food distribution program, an educational improvement campaign, a political reform movement, or a collection of humanitarian achievements impressive enough to qualify for an award from the United Nations. He declared the gospel. Verse 3 identifies its foundation: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." Verse 4 continues, "And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." There stands the saving message, plain enough for a sinner to understand and powerful enough to accomplish what human charity never could. You can feed a man's body, educate his mind, improve his circumstances, and extend his earthly life, but none of those accomplishments can remove one sin from his record before Almighty God.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with feeding hungry children, providing clean drinking water, assisting struggling families, treating the sick, or helping people escape miserable conditions. Christians who possess the means to relieve genuine suffering ought not become so occupied discussing heavenly matters that they refuse to recognize earthly needs. Galatians 6:10 instructs believers to do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith. James 2:15–16 rebukes the uselessness of offering religious words to a destitute brother or sister while refusing necessary physical assistance. Yet the distinction between genuine Christian compassion and the saving gospel must never disappear. A hospital can treat disease without justifying the ungodly. A school can teach a child to read without regenerating his spirit. A water well can supply an entire village without reconciling one sinner to God. Humanitarian assistance may improve the journey through this present world, but only the Lord Jesus Christ can provide eternal life beyond it. When missions becomes everything except the preaching of Christ, the most important part of the mission has been abandoned.

The great danger confronting modern missionary work is not compassion itself but the substitution of compassion for redemption. Religious organizations can become so absorbed in measuring meals distributed, buildings constructed, students enrolled, medical treatments administered, and public recognition received that the gospel gradually disappears beneath a mountain of respectable accomplishments. The world will

frequently applaud a religious organization that improves society while saying little about sin, the blood of Christ, eternal judgment, or salvation by grace through faith. But approval from an unbelieving world is a miserable substitute for faithfulness to the word of God. Romans 1:16 declares, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." The power is in the gospel, not in the missionary's reputation or the organization's impressive record of public service. The greatest tragedy is not that a missionary might fail to make sinners comfortable before they die. It is that he might spend his entire ministry making them comfortable while neglecting to tell them how to be saved.

1. Christ Died for Our Sins: The Message Heaven Actually Authorized

First Corinthians 15:1–4 does not leave the content of the saving gospel to the imagination of missionary committees. Paul declares what he preached, what the Corinthians received, and the message by which they were saved. The foundation is Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection the third day according to the Scriptures. Notice the repeated expression "according to the scriptures." The gospel is grounded in divine revelation rather than the religious creativity of men. The death of Christ was not simply an inspiring example of sacrificial love, nor was His resurrection merely a poetic illustration of fresh beginnings. Romans 5:8 declares that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. First Peter 2:24 states that He "bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Calvary was not a motivational seminar designed to improve human behavior. It was the place where the sinless Saviour bore the sins of guilty men, accomplishing what all the charitable organizations in human history could never accomplish.

The burial and resurrection are equally indispensable. A missionary who proclaims a compassionate Jesus while neglecting the bodily resurrection has not presented Paul's gospel faithfully. First Corinthians 15:14 declares, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." Verse 17 adds that without Christ's resurrection believers would remain in their sins. The resurrection establishes the victory of the crucified Saviour and the foundation of the believer's hope beyond the grave. No educational program can accomplish that. No medical procedure can reverse the judgment awaiting unredeemed sinners. No economic development initiative can furnish resurrection life. Paul understood that eternity rested upon something infinitely greater than temporary improvement in earthly conditions. A missionary who removes the resurrection from his message in order to appeal to an unbelieving audience has not made the gospel easier to accept. He has removed the very foundation upon which Christian hope stands.

The message must also identify the correct Saviour. Jesus Christ is not merely one religious leader among many or a respected teacher whose moral principles can be incorporated into any existing belief system. Colossians 1:14 declares, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Acts 4:12 announces that salvation is found in no other name. These passages cannot be reconciled with the fashionable doctrine that all religions are equally effective roads to heaven. The missionary must not manufacture religious harmony by presenting Christ as an optional addition to idolatry, human righteousness, or sacramental systems. The truth is exclusive because the Saviour's finished work is sufficient. God did not send His Son to Calvary because mankind needed another religious opinion. He sent Him because sinners needed redemption, and no human institution possessed the power to provide it.

2. Salvation by Grace: The Social Gospel Cannot Justify the Ungodly

Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes the unmistakable foundation of salvation during the present dispensation: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Those words are addressed to believers who had been quickened together with Christ, as the preceding verses explain. Ephesians 2:1 describes their former condition as dead in trespasses and sins. That is the real spiritual problem confronting mankind. The sinner does not merely require improved surroundings, better opportunities, or additional instruction in respectable conduct. He needs life from God. Romans 4:5 declares that God justifies the ungodly who believe on Him. A religious organization may teach a man to earn a living, but it cannot teach him to earn eternal life. Grace and human merit do not become compatible simply because somebody places them together beneath an attractive missionary logo.

The so-called social gospel reverses the biblical order by making the improvement of earthly society the central accomplishment of Christian ministry. It treats poverty, inequality, inadequate education, political injustice, or social instability as though correcting these conditions could satisfy the sinner's deepest need. Those problems may be real, and Christians may legitimately work to relieve suffering. But none is identical to the guilt of sin before a holy God. Romans 3:23 declares, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Verse 24 speaks of being "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The answer to man's condemnation is redemption, not merely reform. You can take a drunkard out of the gutter, teach him a trade, dress him in respectable clothing, and place him in a comfortable home. Those changes may benefit his life tremendously, but unless he believes on Jesus Christ, you have improved his circumstances without settling his eternal condition.

Ephesians 2:10 gives good works their proper place: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Notice the sequence. Verses 8–9 establish salvation apart from works, and verse 10 identifies good works as the intended fruit of the believer's new life. A Christian should do good because he belongs to Christ, not because good works purchase acceptance before God. Neither should a missionary make humanitarian service a substitute for proclaiming the finished work of Christ. The Bible does not teach salvation by feeding the hungry, establishing hospitals, maintaining schools, or improving national economic conditions. A man may build a thousand hospitals and still need the Great Physician for his soul. The hospitals may accomplish genuine good, but they cannot accomplish what the blood of Jesus Christ accomplished at Calvary.

3. Compassion Without Compromise: Feed the Hungry, but Do Not Hide the Saviour

John 6 provides a striking example of the difference between physical provision and spiritual necessity. The Lord Jesus fed a multitude through the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fishes, demonstrating genuine compassion and divine power. Yet when the crowd sought Him afterward, He declared in John 6:26, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." The people had received a remarkable physical benefit, but their interest had not necessarily progressed to saving faith. Verse 27 directs attention toward meat enduring unto everlasting life, and verse 35 records Christ's declaration, "I am the bread of life." The miracle was real, and the hunger had been relieved, but the Lord refused to let the physical provision conceal the greater spiritual issue. A full stomach may satisfy a man until his next meal, but it cannot satisfy the judgment of God against sin. Christ did not confuse providing bread with being the Bread of Life.

James 2:15–16 presents the opposite danger: religious speech unaccompanied by practical concern for a brother or sister lacking food and clothing. The passage rebukes the person who sends the needy away with pleasant words while refusing assistance despite having the means to help. Its immediate setting concerns the relationship between professed faith and corresponding conduct; it must not be twisted into teaching that charitable contributions purchase justification before God. Romans 4:5 and Ephesians 2:8–9 settle salvation by grace through faith. Nevertheless, a believer who can relieve genuine suffering should not hide behind doctrinal arguments as an excuse for hardheartedness. First John 3:17 asks how the love of God dwells in one who possesses this world's good, sees his brother in need, and closes his compassion against him. A Christian who refuses to give a hungry child bread while delivering a lengthy speech about

the superiority of spiritual things has misunderstood compassion just as badly as the missionary who gives bread but deliberately conceals the gospel.

Acts 10 provides another important distinction through Cornelius. He was a devout man, feared God, gave much alms, and prayed continually. Yet Acts 11:14 explains that Peter would speak words whereby Cornelius and his house would be saved. His generosity and religious sincerity did not eliminate the necessity of receiving the message concerning Jesus Christ. Peter proclaimed Christ's death and resurrection and declared in Acts 10:43 that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. The historical setting belongs to the significant opening of the Gentile mission during the transitional period of Acts, but the distinction remains instructive. Good deeds cannot replace the saving message. Cornelius had prayers, charity, generosity, and an excellent religious reputation, yet God still sent him a preacher. Evidently heaven did not consider an impressive record of humanitarian service an adequate substitute for hearing about Jesus Christ.

4. The Ministry of Reconciliation: Ambassadors Carry a Message, Not a Substitute

Second Corinthians 5:18 declares, "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." Paul does not identify reconciliation as the establishment of peaceful international relations, the elimination of social disagreements, or the development of programs designed to improve human cooperation. The reconciliation described concerns sinners being brought into a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Verse 19 explains that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, and had committed the word of reconciliation to His servants. That word must be communicated faithfully. Humanitarian projects may encourage goodwill between communities, but goodwill between men cannot substitute for peace with God. Romans 5:1 establishes that believers are justified by faith and possess peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. A missionary who reconciles two hostile villages while neglecting to preach reconciliation with God has accomplished something useful, but he has left the greatest hostility unresolved.

Second Corinthians 5:20 continues, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." An ambassador is a representative entrusted with a message from the authority that sent him. He does not acquire permission to rewrite the message because the receiving country finds it offensive. Nor is he authorized to replace it with gifts, entertainment, or promises of economic improvement. Paul's apostolic ministry possessed distinctive authority, but the message of reconciliation remains essential to Christian gospel witness. The missionary represents Christ by proclaiming the truth God has revealed, not by inventing a more

fashionable religious arrangement. If an ambassador spends all his time distributing refreshments while refusing to deliver his government's message, he may become popular with the guests, but he has failed the responsibility for which he was sent.

Verse 21 establishes the magnificent foundation of reconciliation: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Christ was sinless, yet He bore the judgment associated with our sins so that believers might possess righteousness in Him. There is no room here for salvation through community improvement, religious ritual, or personal achievement. Romans 5:9 declares believers are justified by His blood and saved from wrath through Him. The missionary must therefore explain both the sinner's guilt and the Saviour's provision. The cross cannot be reduced to an illustration of humanitarian sacrifice. Christ did not leave heaven, suffer beneath the judgment of sin, and rise triumphantly from the grave merely to teach mankind how to establish better community organizations. He accomplished redemption, and redemption is the truth every missionary must faithfully proclaim.

5. The Eternal Stakes: Salvation, Judgment, and the Danger of Counting Decisions

Romans 10:9–10 identifies belief in the risen Christ and confession of Him as Lord in the setting of Paul's explanation of righteousness by faith. Verse 9 declares, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Verse 10 distinguishes believing unto righteousness from confession unto salvation. These words must be interpreted alongside Romans 4:5, Ephesians 2:8–9, and the gospel identified in 1 Corinthians 15. Public confession is not an additional meritorious work by which a sinner purchases justification. Neither is salvation obtained by mechanically repeating a religious formula while refusing to believe the truth being spoken. The object of faith is Jesus Christ. A missionary cannot save somebody by persuading him to repeat words he does not understand, any more than a pharmacist can cure an illness by persuading the patient to pronounce the medicine's name without receiving the treatment.

Romans 10:13–17 then explains the importance of preaching and hearing. Paul asks how sinners can believe in One of whom they have not heard and how they can hear without a preacher. Verse 17 concludes, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That raises a serious question about missionary reports filled with extraordinary conversion statistics. Were the people actually taught the gospel? Did they understand the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ? Were they told that salvation is by grace through faith, or were they persuaded to join a religious program because gifts, food, or assistance depended upon participation? Genuine charitable assistance should never be used to manufacture professions of faith. A missionary who counts every person receiving a meal

as a potential conversion and every raised hand as unquestionable proof of regeneration has substituted religious arithmetic for biblical discernment. God knows those who have believed; an impressive spreadsheet cannot read the human heart.

The eternal consequences make doctrinal clarity indispensable. Hebrews 9:27 declares, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Revelation 20:11–15 describes the Great White Throne judgment and the lake of fire for those not found written in the book of life. That judgment must be distinguished from the judgment seat of Christ, where believers' service is examined according to 2 Corinthians 5:10 and 1 Corinthians 3:11–15. The lost sinner's greatest danger is not merely dying in poverty but dying without Christ. The believer's eternal security rests upon the Saviour, not upon humanitarian achievements or religious performance. A man may leave this world surrounded by every comfort modern civilization can provide and still face eternal judgment. Another may depart this life with few earthly possessions yet possess eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. The difference is not wealth, education, or social standing. The difference is the Saviour.

6. Gentle Among You: Gospel Truth Must Be Carried With Genuine Love

First Thessalonians 2:4 establishes the missionary responsibility with remarkable precision: "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts." Paul understood that the gospel was a trust committed to his stewardship. He therefore refused to govern his message according to the preferences of those hearing it. Verse 5 adds that the missionaries did not use flattering words or a cloak of covetousness. That is an important warning in an age when some religious organizations carefully construct messages designed to keep financial contributors comfortable. The truth must not be concealed merely because speaking it may offend those who reject its authority. A preacher who changes his message every time the audience changes has not demonstrated missionary flexibility. He has demonstrated that the approval of men occupies a higher position than the word of God.

Yet Paul's firmness did not produce indifference toward those receiving his ministry. First Thessalonians 2:7 declares, "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." Verse 8 continues, "So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." There is the balance missing from both cold religious formalism and sentimental humanitarian substitution. Paul proclaimed the truth without manipulation, but he also cared deeply for the people. His love was neither a marketing device nor an excuse for doctrinal compromise. Missionaries should treat people as human beings

possessing dignity, responsibilities, and eternal significance, not as statistics collected to impress supporters. A missionary who speaks of loving the lost but treats them as advertising material has misunderstood love. And a preacher who boasts of doctrinal accuracy while displaying contempt for the people he addresses has forgotten the tenderness demonstrated by the apostle whose doctrine he claims to defend.

Philippians 1:27 supplies the corresponding responsibility concerning Christian conduct: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ." The word "conversation" concerns the believer's manner of life, not merely the sentences spoken during public meetings. A missionary's conduct should support the truth he proclaims. Dishonesty, personal arrogance, financial manipulation, family neglect, and contempt toward local people can bring reproach upon gospel ministry. Yet respectable behavior cannot replace verbal witness. First Thessalonians 2:9–12 records Paul's labor and his fatherly exhortation toward believers, demonstrating that practical example accompanied doctrinal instruction. The missionary's life should never contradict his message, but neither should his message disappear behind his life. A clean reputation is valuable; it is not the gospel. A charitable disposition is commendable; it cannot explain the blood atonement unless the missionary opens his mouth and tells sinners what Jesus Christ accomplished.

7. Beyond the Parking Lot: Restoring the Biblical Priority of Missions

The biblical missionary enterprise involves going, preaching, teaching, supporting, and strengthening believers according to the responsibilities God has revealed. Acts 13:1–4 records the church at Antioch participating in the sending of Barnabas and Saul, while Acts 14:21–23 describes evangelism, instruction, strengthening disciples, and appointing elders. These events occurred within Paul's extraordinary apostolic ministry, but they demonstrate that missionary work involves more than collecting professions of faith. A congregation should be concerned about whether people are hearing the gospel and whether believers are receiving sound instruction. Scripture distribution, faithful translation, language education, financial assistance, and necessary humanitarian service may help that work advance. The church building is a place where believers gather for worship, teaching, and fellowship. It was never intended to become the outer boundary of their concern for sinners who need Jesus Christ.

Missionary support also requires spiritual discernment. Philippians 4:15–18 records the Philippians' participation in Paul's gospel ministry, while 3 John 5–8 commends those who assisted faithful workers going forth for the Lord's name. These passages establish the value of supporting sound ministry without turning donations into a method of purchasing salvation or acquiring spiritual superiority. Missionary organizations should demonstrate doctrinal integrity, honest stewardship, and genuine concern for the people they serve.

Supporting churches should examine the message, not merely the photographs. They should encourage faithful workers, assist with legitimate needs, and refuse to finance religious machinery whose principal achievement is preserving itself. A church that spends lavishly entertaining its own members while regarding the preaching of the gospel as an inconvenient expense has confused the responsibilities of a Christian congregation with the attractions of a private social club.

The responsibility also reaches individual Christians who may never travel beyond their own communities. Colossians 4:5–6 instructs believers concerning wise conduct toward those without and speech seasoned with grace. Second Corinthians 5 identifies the ministry of reconciliation entrusted through the gospel, while Romans 10 establishes the necessity of hearing the word of God. Some believers will serve in foreign fields, others will provide necessary resources, and others will teach, distribute Scripture, translate material, or witness personally. Different responsibilities do not imply different saving gospels. The message remains Christ crucified, buried, and risen according to the Scriptures. Not every believer must become a foreign missionary, but no believer should imagine that the eternal condition of lost sinners is somebody else's concern. A Christian does not need a passport to tell a neighbor about Christ, and a missionary does not become more spiritual simply because he tells the same truth several thousand miles from home.

Conclusion

The ten studies in this series have established a biblical foundation for missionary work that modern religious machinery cannot improve upon. The Lord's commands concerning gospel proclamation must be understood in their proper doctrinal settings. Paul's distinctive calling demonstrates the grace of God in saving a persecutor and sending him among the Gentiles. The church at Antioch illustrates responsible sending, while the missionary teams recorded in Acts reveal the importance of cooperation, teaching, and accountability. The regions beyond remind us that millions need the truth, and faithful translation helps communicate that truth across language barriers. Financial support must advance the gospel rather than finance religious empires. Established congregations need qualified leadership, and missionaries must recognize the cost of faithful service. Yet all these responsibilities lead to one supreme consideration: the saving message of Jesus Christ. Without the gospel, missionary methods become religious machinery, missionary organizations become charitable corporations, and missionary accomplishments become earthly achievements incapable of settling one sinner's eternal destiny.

The message is not complicated, although religious men have spent centuries complicating it. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose

again the third day according to the Scriptures. Romans 6:23 declares, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works. Romans 10:13 declares, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The sinner must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, not trust religious ceremonies, charitable accomplishments, personal righteousness, or promises of future improvement. A missionary can never offer a greater gift than the knowledge of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Food will eventually be consumed, buildings will deteriorate, and earthly accomplishments will pass away, but the salvation purchased through Christ's blood provides a possession that death cannot destroy.

The Church must therefore recover the proper order of its responsibilities. Feed the hungry when you can. Assist the sick when you are able. Help struggling families, encourage the afflicted, provide trustworthy instruction, and demonstrate genuine Christian compassion. But do not allow any of those worthy activities to silence the saving message entrusted to believers. Let the gospel govern the mission rather than become a minor religious addition to an otherwise humanitarian enterprise. Let churches support faithful workers, let missionaries proclaim Christ without compromise, and let believers remember that eternity is vastly more important than earthly reputation. The Lord Jesus Christ did not command His servants to build impressive organizations while neglecting the souls of men. You can feed a man for a lifetime, provide him with clean water, educate his children, improve his circumstances, and make his remaining years more comfortable, but if you never tell him how to be saved, you have left his greatest problem untouched. A full stomach cannot save a lost soul. A comfortable home cannot purchase eternal life. A respectable education cannot wash away sin. Only Jesus Christ saves. The greatest missionary work is not merely helping people live better before they die. It is telling them how they can receive eternal life through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion — Missions — Taking the Gospel Beyond the Church Parking Lot

After ten thorough examinations of biblical missions, one conclusion ought to be unmistakably clear to anybody willing to open a King James Bible and believe what God has written: **the Church was never established to become a comfortable religious institution that spends its entire existence entertaining the saved while neglecting the lost.** The Lord Jesus Christ did not shed His precious blood at Calvary so that Christianity could eventually be reduced to beautiful buildings, impressive financial statements,

crowded fellowship halls, denominational conventions, and enough religious committees to keep a small government occupied for the next fifty years. The gospel was entrusted to believers because sinners need to hear how they can be reconciled to God. Romans 1:16 declares, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." That settles the question of where the power resides. It is not in the preacher's personality, the missionary board's reputation, the church's bank account, or the professional quality of its promotional materials. **You can build a religious organization large enough to require its own transportation department, accounting division, and executive headquarters, but if the gospel of Jesus Christ has disappeared from its central purpose, you have built an expensive machine that cannot save a single soul.** The purpose of missions is not to make Christianity appear successful before the world. It is to make Jesus Christ known to sinners who desperately need His salvation.

We began by examining the Great Commission, and we established that biblical accuracy must govern missionary enthusiasm. Matthew 10:5–6 records the Lord sending the twelve specifically to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Matthew 28:18–20 records the risen Christ instructing the eleven concerning the nations. Mark 16:15–20 includes supernatural signs associated with the apostolic ministry, while Luke 24:46–49 and Acts 1:8 describe the proclamation of the Lord's death and resurrection and the expanding testimony beginning at Jerusalem. These passages belong to identifiable historical and doctrinal settings. A Bible believer cannot throw them together indiscriminately, eliminate the distinctions between Israel and the Church, and claim to have produced sound missionary doctrine. Second Timothy 2:15 commands us to rightly divide the word of truth. Yet neither can the Christian use dispensational distinctions as an excuse to become a professional spectator. Second Corinthians 5:18–20 establishes the ministry and word of reconciliation entrusted through the gospel. **Rightly dividing the Bible is not an invitation to divide yourself away from every responsibility that requires personal sacrifice. A man who can explain Daniel's seventy weeks, distinguish the Rapture from the Second Advent, and identify the difference between Israel and the Church, yet cannot be bothered to tell a lost sinner how to be saved, possesses knowledge that ought to produce considerably more obedience than it presently does.**

The apostle Paul demonstrated what genuine missionary responsibility looks like when grace takes hold of a man and directs his life toward the furtherance of the gospel. Saul of Tarsus began as a persecutor, armed with religious authority, convinced of his own righteousness, and determined to destroy those who believed on Jesus Christ. Acts 9 records the extraordinary encounter in which the risen Lord confronted him, while Galatians 1:15–16 explains the distinctive calling by which he would preach among the heathen. Paul did not inherit his apostleship from an ecclesiastical organization, and no

modern missionary possesses the authority to reproduce his unique revelations merely by announcing that he has received a special calling. Nevertheless, his life demonstrates the transforming grace of God and the responsibility of faithful service. First Timothy 1:15 records his confession: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." The man who had persecuted Christians became a tireless preacher of the Christ he once opposed. **Paul did not exchange his Pharisaical credentials for a more profitable religious career. He discovered that all his former religious accomplishments could not save him, and he spent the remainder of his ministry proclaiming the Saviour who could.** His example ought to embarrass any preacher who desires the reputation of an apostle without the responsibilities, hardships, and sacrifice associated with his service.

We also discovered that missionary work belongs within the responsibilities of faithful congregations, not the personal empires of ambitious religious personalities. Acts 13:1–4 records the church at Antioch participating in the separation and sending of Barnabas and Saul under the direction of the Holy Ghost. The believers fasted, prayed, laid hands upon them, and sent them away. Acts 14:27 subsequently records the missionaries returning and rehearsing what God had accomplished. There was fellowship, communication, responsibility, and recognition of the Lord's work. There was no biblical authorization for a distant denominational corporation to become the supreme authority over every congregation established through missionary labor. Neither was there permission for an independent missionary to declare himself accountable to nobody. Philippians 1:5 identifies genuine participation as "your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." **The sending church is not a religious employment agency, the missionary is not a traveling salesman, and the gospel is not a commercial product awaiting distribution through an international franchise system.** God uses congregations and faithful servants, but the authority remains His. A church that financially supports a missionary without examining his doctrine is being careless, while a missionary who resents every legitimate question concerning his conduct or stewardship has confused biblical accountability with personal inconvenience.

The missionary teams recorded in Acts further expose the foolishness of making Christian ministry a one-man performance. Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Aquila, Priscilla, John Mark, and numerous other faithful workers contributed to the advancement of the gospel. Their responsibilities differed, and some disagreements arose, but the work continued because it belonged to Jesus Christ rather than to the personalities involved. First Corinthians 3:6 declares, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." That verse ought to be displayed prominently wherever religious celebrities begin competing over who deserves the greatest portion of the credit. Paul planted, Apollos watered, and neither possessed the power to give eternal life. The Lord supplied the

increase. The dispute between Paul and Barnabas concerning John Mark in Acts 15 demonstrates that faithful servants can experience sharp differences of judgment, while 2 Timothy 4:11 reveals Paul's later acknowledgment that Mark was profitable for the ministry. **The Church does not need another generation of preachers who can cooperate with nobody unless everybody agrees to stand behind them and applaud. The gospel is not a one-man circus, and the missionary field is not a stage upon which religious celebrities perform for an audience of financial supporters.** It is a field of spiritual labor where faithful servants must remember that the harvest belongs to God.

Then there are the regions beyond, those places where the gospel remains unknown, neglected, misunderstood, or buried beneath generations of religious tradition. Romans 15:20 records Paul's determination to preach Christ where He had not been named, while 2 Corinthians 10:16 speaks of preaching the gospel "in the regions beyond you." This is not an invitation to collect foreign destinations for an impressive missionary résumé. It is an expression of concern for people who have not heard the saving truth. Some live in remote villages, others in enormous cities, and still others in communities crowded with religious institutions that have obscured the gospel through ceremonies, human traditions, and false teaching. A country does not become spiritually enlightened merely because its population recognizes the name of Jesus. A magnificent cathedral cannot regenerate a sinner, and an ancient religious tradition cannot justify the ungodly. Romans 10:14 asks, "and how shall they hear without a preacher?" **The question is not whether a missionary can locate an interesting destination, obtain a passport, or discover a culture different from his own. The question is whether lost sinners are hearing that Jesus Christ died for their sins and rose again from the dead.** A missionary who travels around the world without communicating that message has merely become a religious tourist with financial sponsors.

And that gospel must be communicated faithfully in languages people can understand. Acts 2:6 records that people heard the apostles speak in their own languages, and Acts 2:11 declares, "we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." Those supernatural events belonged to the opening apostolic period, but the importance of understandable communication remains unmistakable. Nehemiah 8:8 describes reading God's law distinctly, giving the sense, and causing the people to understand. First Corinthians 14:19 establishes the superiority of five understandable words over ten thousand words that fail to instruct the hearer. Faithful Bible translation, sound literature, responsible teaching, literacy, and Scripture distribution are therefore valuable instruments of missionary service. But communication must never become corruption. Second Corinthians 2:17 warns against those who corrupt the word of God. The King James Bible remains our dependable English foundation, and its biblical doctrines must not be

surrendered because another culture finds them uncomfortable. **A sinner does not need to learn English to be saved, but he does need the saving truth of Jesus Christ. Translation is supposed to remove the language barrier, not remove the blood atonement, the resurrection, eternal judgment, or salvation by grace through faith.** Changing the language is legitimate; changing the gospel is betrayal.

Financial support also belongs to biblical missionary work, but the New Testament provides no permission to transform Christian generosity into an elaborate system of religious profiteering. Philippians 4:15–18 records the faithful assistance Paul received from the Philippian believers, while 1 Corinthians 9:14 declares that those preaching the gospel may legitimately live of the gospel. Missionaries require ordinary necessities, and believers should not pretend that workers can purchase food, maintain transportation, provide for their families, and distribute Scripture with nothing but good intentions. Nevertheless, 2 Corinthians 8:21 establishes the importance of honest financial administration, and 1 Timothy 6:10 warns against the love of money. Supporting the gospel is not the same thing as financing another religious empire. **When the missionary board's executive comforts, administrative expansion, fundraising machinery, and promotional expenses become more important than the actual preaching of Jesus Christ, the organization has begun feeding itself instead of advancing the message it claims to represent.** Christian giving is not a method of purchasing salvation, earning divine favor, or obtaining guaranteed financial prosperity. It is an opportunity to participate in the work of communicating the truth. The church must give responsibly, the missionary must spend honestly, and the administrators must remember that they are servants rather than owners of the ministry.

Nor does the missionary responsibility end when a preacher has distributed literature, held several meetings, gathered a collection of professions of faith, and returned home with enough photographs to produce an attractive presentation. Acts 14:21–23 records Paul and Barnabas preaching the gospel, teaching converts, strengthening disciples, and appointing elders in the churches. Second Timothy 2:2 instructs Timothy to commit sound teaching to faithful men who would be able to teach others also. That is the biblical direction of spiritual growth and continued ministry. The objective is not to establish permanent foreign dependencies controlled by distant religious headquarters. It is to see believers grounded in Scripture, qualified leaders recognized, and congregations established under the authority of Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:18 declares that Christ is the Head of the Church. **The missionary who plants a congregation that knows more about his organization's regulations than the doctrines of the Bible has planted the wrong kind of institution. The goal is not to export American religious furniture, cultural preferences, and denominational traditions until every foreign congregation resembles a miniature**

branch office. The goal is to establish believers in the word of God so they can stand faithfully, teach others, and carry the gospel into their own communities.

Then we confronted the cost of carrying that message. Second Corinthians 11:23–28 records Paul's beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonment, hunger, exhaustion, danger, and continuing concern for the churches. Acts 14:19 describes his stoning at Lystra, while Acts 16 records his imprisonment with Silas at Philippi. Yet the gospel continued. In Philippians 1:12, Paul testified that the things which happened to him had fallen out "rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." None of these passages promises that every missionary will experience the same hardships, nor do they authorize reckless behavior under the respectable name of faith. Paul escaped Damascus in a basket when enemies sought his life. He exercised lawful protections when appropriate and recognized the responsibilities of Christian service. **A missionary who deliberately manufactures danger to obtain a more dramatic testimony has not demonstrated spiritual courage. He has demonstrated that he enjoys the appearance of martyrdom more than the exercise of biblical wisdom.** Faithful missionaries may suffer, but suffering does not purchase salvation or automatically prove sound doctrine. The responsibility is to remain obedient when circumstances become difficult, communicate honestly with supporting churches, care for legitimate family needs, and trust the Lord without pretending that spiritual faithfulness requires abandoning common sense.

But the most serious danger of all is not a difficult missionary journey, an inadequate financial budget, a language barrier, or opposition from false religion. It is the possibility that the gospel itself will gradually disappear beneath the respectable accomplishments of humanitarian activity. Feeding hungry children is good. Providing clean water is good. Helping the sick, educating the unlearned, assisting struggling families, and relieving genuine suffering are worthy acts of compassion. Galatians 6:10 instructs believers to do good unto all men, especially those of the household of faith. Yet none of these activities can justify a sinner before God. John 6 records the Lord feeding the multitude, but He subsequently declared in verse 35, "I am the bread of life." He understood the difference between satisfying physical hunger and providing eternal life. **You can feed a man three meals a day, provide him with a comfortable home, educate every one of his children, and improve his earthly circumstances beyond anything he previously imagined, but unless he believes on Jesus Christ, you have not settled the question of where he will spend eternity.** The social gospel becomes spiritually disastrous when it treats the improvement of human society as though it were equivalent to reconciliation with Almighty God. Good works may accompany the missionary's service, but they must never replace the saving message.

And what is that saving message? First Corinthians 15:3–4 answers without ambiguity: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." There is the gospel of the grace of God. The sinner's problem is sin, not merely unfortunate circumstances or inadequate opportunities. Romans 3:23 declares, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 announces that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works, while Romans 4:5 speaks of God justifying the ungodly who believe. **The Lord Jesus Christ did not die to provide the first installment upon a salvation plan that sinners must finish purchasing through baptism, church membership, religious perseverance, charitable service, or promises of improved behavior.** He accomplished redemption through His own blood. The sinner receives eternal life through faith in the Saviour, not through participation in a missionary organization's religious program. Any missionary message that obscures the sufficiency of Christ's finished work has failed at the point where biblical missions matter most.

That salvation concerns eternity, and eternity is precisely what makes the missionary responsibility so serious. Hebrews 9:27 declares, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Revelation 20:11–15 describes the Great White Throne judgment and the lake of fire, while 2 Corinthians 5:10 concerns the judgment seat of Christ, where believers' service will be examined. Those judgments must not be confused, nor should the believer's eternal security in Jesus Christ be compromised by importing works-based conditions into the gospel of grace. Nevertheless, the lost sinner faces a judgment from which humanitarian improvement cannot deliver him. **The world's greatest problem is not that people possess unequal amounts of money, education, comfort, or opportunity, serious as some of those conditions may be. Its greatest problem is that sinners stand guilty before a holy God and cannot save themselves.** A man may die wealthy, educated, respected, and surrounded by every luxury available to human civilization while remaining without Christ. Another may die possessing very little of this world's goods yet possess eternal life because he believed the gospel. The difference is not social standing. It is salvation through Jesus Christ.

There is therefore a responsibility resting upon the local church that cannot be discharged merely by maintaining an attractive missionary display near the entrance. Churches should examine the doctrine of the workers they support, provide assistance where possible, maintain genuine fellowship, encourage faithful service, and remember those carrying the gospel into difficult circumstances. But believers must also recognize the opportunities directly before them. Not everybody is called to cross an ocean, establish a foreign congregation, or devote his life to international travel. First Corinthians 12 teaches that the

body of Christ contains different members with different functions. Some preach, some teach, some support the work financially, some translate biblical literature, and others communicate the gospel through personal witness. All should recognize the significance of the saving message. **A church member who complains that he cannot participate in missions because he has never traveled overseas ought to consider whether he has ever crossed the street to speak with a lost neighbor. There is no requirement to possess a passport before becoming concerned about eternal souls.** Nor does giving money eliminate every personal responsibility to speak when an opportunity arises. The missionary field may begin much closer to home than religious imagination prefers to admit.

As this series closes, the responsibility before every believer is to examine what place the gospel actually occupies in his life, his congregation, and the ministries he supports. Is Jesus Christ being preached clearly, or has the message been buried beneath religious programs and institutional ambitions? Are people being taught salvation by grace through faith, or are human works being added to the finished sacrifice of Calvary? Are missionaries being supported because they faithfully communicate biblical truth, or because their presentations are impressive and their organizational reputation appears respectable? Are local congregations being strengthened through sound doctrine, or merely counted as another accomplishment belonging to a denominational empire? Second Corinthians 5:20 declares, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ." An ambassador does not possess authority to change the message entrusted to him. **We have no permission to replace the blood of Christ with humanitarian achievement, the resurrection with religious symbolism, salvation by grace with sacramental bondage, or biblical preaching with entertainment designed to keep everybody comfortable. The world does not need Christianity made fashionable. It needs the truth of Jesus Christ made known.**

And so we finish where genuine missions must always begin and end: with the Lord Jesus Christ, His finished work at Calvary, His bodily resurrection, and the saving gospel entrusted to His servants. Let the religious world build its empires, organize its ceremonies, expand its headquarters, and congratulate itself over accomplishments that produce impressive earthly recognition. Let the Bible-believing Church concern itself with something infinitely greater. Let the preacher preach Christ. Let the teacher establish believers in Scripture. Let the missionary carry the gospel beyond familiar surroundings. Let the supporting congregation give responsibly and pray faithfully. Let the worker endure hardship without surrendering doctrine. Let the translator communicate the truth without corrupting it. And let every Christian remember that the greatest gift he can communicate to a lost sinner is the knowledge of eternal life through Jesus Christ. **A church parking lot**

may be filled with automobiles, but that does not prove the gospel is reaching anybody beyond the property line. A missionary organization may possess a worldwide network, but that does not prove the saving message is being faithfully proclaimed. A humanitarian ministry may accomplish extraordinary earthly good, but no amount of earthly improvement can wash away sin. The Church was never commissioned merely to make sinners more comfortable on their journey toward judgment. It was entrusted with the gospel that tells them how to escape that judgment through Jesus Christ. The greatest missionary accomplishment is not building an empire, making a preacher famous, or improving the world's opinion of Christianity. It is faithfully telling lost sinners that Christ died for their sins, was buried, rose again the third day, and offers eternal life to those who believe on Him. Get the gospel out of the parking lot, beyond the church walls, across the street, into the next community, and into the regions beyond. The message is too important to remain imprisoned inside a religious building. The Saviour has already accomplished the work of redemption. Now the world needs to hear about Him.

