

3 JOHN 5-8

GOING OUT FOR THE SAKE OF THE NAME

“Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.”¹

Missions have fallen on hard times in this day; actually, mission has fallen on hard times. There will be no *missions* if Christians fail to embrace *the mission* that is assigned. This is not theological double-talk; it points out a vital truth that is frequently neglected. Contemporary theology trains us to think of missions as the work that specially trained individuals do at a distance from our assemblies. However, if there is no understanding of the mission assigned as individual believers in the Risen Son of God, we have no reason to either participate in or to support missions. If we do not each accept responsibility to fulfil the charge of the Master where we live, we will not be concerned to support His mission at a distance.

Charles Spurgeon, the Baptist divine who ministered in London during the nineteenth century, illustrates the importance of understanding our mission in order to engage in missions. In a sermon preached in 1863 Spurgeon said, “I regard Christ’s commission to his disciples as binding upon us to-day: ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’ I cannot tell whether every creature to whom I preach is elect or not, but it is my business to preach the gospel to all whom I can reach, resting assured that all of them whom God has chosen unto eternal life will certainly accept it. When a certain clergyman asked the Duke of Wellington, ‘Does your grace think it is any use preaching the gospel to the Hindoos?’ he simply replied, ‘What are your marching orders?’ As a soldier, he believed in obeying orders; and when the clergyman answered that, the orders were, ‘Preach the gospel to every creature,’ the duke said. ‘Then your duty is quite clear; obey your Master’s orders, and don’t you trouble, about anybody else’s opinions.’”² What are our marching orders? They are indeed clear. As a congregation, as individuals, we have no excuse for disobedience.

Perhaps our failure to vigorously support missionary advance in this day is in part because as Christians we are no longer taught the necessity of missions; but more likely the reason is that we are no longer trained to understand the responsibility for each one to be on mission. Perhaps we have become so focused on assigning the work of missionary advance to a few specialised workers, forgetting our individual responsibility that we are no longer capable of thinking of individual responsibility to advance of the cause of Christ.

Such thoughts prompt me to ask, “Who is a missionary? What does a missionary do?” The question is pertinent in great measure because of a paradigm shift in Christian attitudes toward missions in this generation. The stories of missionary sacrifice to advance the cause of Christ that excited previous generations seem dated to modern churches, and are thus ignored. Contemporary congregations are ignorant of the ideal of sacrifice for the sake of the Name.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² C. H. Spurgeon, “Preaching Christ Crucified,” **Spurgeon’s Sermons: Volume 56**, (electronic ed., Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1998)

Not that many years ago, the vast majority of missionaries served on a particular field for the duration of their life. Today, overwhelmingly missionaries serve for a matter of months, or more likely, for a matter of weeks or even days. I became aware of the changing nature of “missions” some years ago while pastoring in the city of New Westminster. The congregation I pastored was reputed to be a mission-minded church. For years, the congregation was reputed to be one of the leading mission-supporting churches in the Lower Mainland. The congregation boasted that it supported over one hundred missionaries; however, most of the missionaries supported were supported with a few dollars each month. Rather than developing a strategy that would provide congregational connection with the missionary supported and investing in missionaries to accomplish that goal, the church had drifted into a model that permitted boasting of their missionary outreach without requiring oversight. They were literally impoverishing the congregation without accomplishing much.

At that time I noted that the demographics of missionaries supported were changing dramatically. Reflecting the changing attitudes witnessed throughout the church world, the congregation was increasingly sponsoring “short-term” missionaries. Ostensibly, this was because fewer Christians were committing themselves to a life of mission service. Though there were several retired missionaries in the membership of the congregation, there had not been a lifer—a long-term missionary—sent out from that congregation in many years.

Inquiring about the missionary policy of the church, I was informed that there was none. My assessment of the congregation undoubtedly appeared harsh to people who had grown complacent. While the mission map with pins on every continent that was located in the foyer of the building looked impressive, and while there were flags on the platform representing the countries in which “their missionaries” served, and though there was a sign over the rear exit from the auditorium that declared, “You are now entering the mission field,” few in the assembly were able to tell what was being done by any of those missionaries whom they supported.

One “missionary” whom the congregation supported—more heavily than many—raised multiple red flags in my mind. The deficit represented by this man was not unique to him, but he did stand out because of the lack of accountability, the lack of a plan for mission, and his failure to accomplish even part of the Great Commission. This particular man was building a yacht in southern California, and he planned to sail through the Polynesian Islands to preach ... someday. The congregation was supporting him with a greater amount than most other missionaries. When I asked for the rationale behind this support, I was told that he was an exciting speaker and the young people (all five of them) like his delivery. The leading lights wanted their youth to be excited about missions, and so they initiated support for this man who had appeared in the church one time. He had no sponsoring church and he had no concrete plan for missionary work. However, the congregation was quite proud of their support for this particular man.

I was especially concerned by the fact that the erstwhile missionary had neither a sponsoring church nor a missionary organisation overseeing his proposed missionary efforts. Surprisingly, I was unable to find a home congregation for this man. Perhaps he was attending a congregation, but there was no accountability to a congregation that could be demonstrated. I phoned him and obtained enough information to cause even greater reservation about his character and proposed labour. Upon making discrete inquiries, I discovered that he had briefly served under a respected mission board in ... the Polynesian Islands. I wondered what would have led him to cease serving under that board and why he had made no mention of his previous relationship in the literature he had presented the church. Moreover, no one in the congregation could remember him mentioning a home church during a past visit to the church.

Phoning the board under which he had previously served, I was able to speak with the president who informed me of some unwise decisions this man had made that had resulted in disgrace to the cause of Christ and threat of death for a young convert to the Christian Faith. Because of his arrogant and self-promoting actions, the work of the mission was hindered in Polynesia. His arrogance toward his colleagues and his refusal to submit to those appointed to superintend his missionary work, gave sufficient cause for the mission board to question his suitability for missionary service, and ultimately compelled them to dismiss him.

The cause of Christ is bigger than any one church. For the Kingdom to advance, all who are called by the Name of the Master must see that they are called to participate in that advance. This means that this congregation is responsible to have a missionary purpose, to understand our mission, and to formulate a plan for participation in the advance of Christ's Kingdom. This is the message today—a call for us to find our place in the work of the Kingdom and to do what we should be doing. The message is nothing less than a call to mission for this congregation.

MISSIONS BEGIN WITH MISSION — “Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God.” Let's return to consideration of a point that I made during my introductory remarks: *missions begin with mission*.

Let's distinguish once more between missions and mission. “Missions” speak of the ongoing efforts conducted by and sponsored by churches as they extend the cause of Christ. “Mission” is the particular responsibility that is imposed upon each Christian by the Great Commission. It will be beneficial to review that Great Commission firmly fixing it in our minds. The charge is given in various places throughout the New Testament; perhaps the best-known statement of the Great Commission is that which is found at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

When John Mark wrote Peter's account of the Good News, it came to us in this fashion, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” [MARK 16:15, 16].

Doctor Luke, having learned the Gospel from Mary and others who were witnesses to the life of Jesus the Messiah, he recounted how Jesus appeared to the disciples and charged them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” [LUKE 24:46-48].

Writing the account of the growth of the apostolic missionary thrust, Luke told of Jesus' ascension, at which time the Master said to the disciples assembled on a mountain outside of Jerusalem, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” [ACTS 1:8].

The mission of every Christian, the mission of every congregation, is to make disciples. This is so fundamental to the Faith, and perhaps heard so often, that we tend to take the charge for granted. However, let's admit an uncomfortable truth: few churches are making disciples! Perhaps there are some few churches that are gathering a crowd, but a crowd is not a church. Many churches attempt to generate attendance through using musical innovation, attempting to provide entertainment and avoiding controversy. Certainly, many church leaders avoid saying anything that will make attendees uncomfortable. However, none of this makes disciples!

The mission assigned to each Christian is to unite in discipling others. Discipleship begins with ourselves—each of us accepting responsibility for our own families, and then accepting responsibility to disciple the influx of people brought into the congregation. Listen to Matthew’s presentation of the Great Commission as translated by Doctor Kenneth Wuest. “Having gone on your way therefore, teach all the nations, making them your pupils, baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to be attending to carefully, holding firmly to, and observing all, whatever things I enjoined upon you. And behold, as for myself, with you I am all the days until the consummation of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].³

Doctor Wuest was not attempting a smooth translation, but rather he endeavoured to bring out the force of the Greek so that we could capture the emphasis provided in that original language. Notice several matters of significance for us if we will understand the mission assigned by our Great Commander. First, it is assumed that we who follow Him will go beyond the walls of the church. It is assumed that we will be interacting with people living in the world, and that as we interact with them we will be discipling people.

The scope of our assignment is “all the nations.” How else shall we account for the scene that John describes before the Throne of God and in the presence of the Lamb of God? “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen’” [REVELATION 7:9-12].

Certainly, there is a basis for missionary outreach, and it begins with the mission we have been assigned—discipling. Discipleship entails more than merely preaching the Good News, though that is the starting point. Those who believe are to be baptised and instructed. Let me pause to point out that the order of discipleship always is believe and then identify, rather than identify and then believe. The New Testament model is to baptise believers, not to make believers through baptising. Then, having brought those who believe to open identification with the Master, they are to be instructed in the truths of God’s Word.

Discipleship imposes the responsibility of reaching all mankind with the message of life. Having declared the Good News, we are responsible to call all who hear to faith in this Living Son of God. Those who believe are to be taught to identify with Him in baptism as He commanded in His Word. Having been baptised, these who believe are to be instructed through personal study of the Word, through instruction provided during personal studies of the Word, and through instruction from the pulpit. This model is incumbent upon all Christians—none are exempted. As a congregation, we are responsible to fulfil this mandate; and each of us is individually responsible to be discipling others, beginning with our own families.

Each individual is responsible to train himself or herself in the Word of God. We are to discipline ourselves to read the Word of God and to know the will of God. Each father is responsible to train his children in the will of God. Each mother is responsible to train her children to know God. Each wife is responsible to encourage her husband to know the Lord, and each husband is responsible to encourage his wife to walk in the Faith.

³ Kenneth S. Wuest, **The New Testament: An Expanded Translation** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1997)

Let's walk through the mission that has been assigned, carefully noting the particular elements of the mission. We who are Christians—followers of the Risen Son of God—are to be moving throughout our world. Our world is the sphere in which any of us interact on a daily basis. It will include the workplace; it certainly includes our home. It will encompass the stores at which we shop, the neighbourhood in which we live and the people with whom we interact.

Each Christian is responsible to teach, both by word and by precept. Your life is an instrument of instruction because others watch you. Whether you live according to the rules of this dying world, or whether you live by the Words of the Master is obvious to those who watch you as you conduct yourself throughout the daily routine. Underscore this truth in your mind—we are teaching others, and our words are judged by the way in which we live. The Master cautioned, “By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” [MATTHEW 12:37]. Paul would warn, “Be conscientious about how you live and what you teach” [1 TIMOTHY 4:16].⁴ Each Christian is discipling others, for good or for evil.

Discipleship is a process by which we are enjoined to teach others the message of grace in Christ the Lord, enlisting them in learning of Him, urging identification with Him through baptism as believers for those who believe, and then ensuring that they embark on a lifelong journey of learning. We broadcast the message of life—witnessing by every means available. As a congregation, we produce television and radio broadcasts that teach the Word of Christ. We publish the message of grace so that others may read it—via the Internet, via newspapers, books and every available print medium. We hold services of worship at which the message of life is declared. But primarily, we are each to witness to others of the grace of God. Each Christian is responsible to tell others of the life that is found in the Master. We are to tell our children, praying for them and instructing them in righteousness. We are to tell our family, our friends and our neighbours. We are to speak of His goodness and His grace at every opportunity.

As people come to faith—and people will ask for “the reason for the hope that is in you” [see 1 PETER 3:15]—we teach them the will of the Master, encouraging them to openly identify with Him in baptism as He has taught us. Those who are baptised in obedience to the Master are brought into the fellowship of the assembly where they are to be instructed in righteousness.

Perhaps Christians today are confused as to the reason churches exist. According to the principles given in the Word of God, churches exist for *worship*, for *instruction*, for *fellowship*, for *service* and for *evangelism*. Most churches will claim to worship, but if we fail to meet the Living Saviour in our services, we have not worshipped. Contemporary churches labour to offer praise to the Son of God, but often the praise degenerates into a performance as musicians, singers and dancers lose themselves in their efforts. If through our songs and ecstasy we fail to know the awe that comes from being the presence of the Risen Saviour, we have not worshipped. We meet the Master in His Word and as we seek His presence in prayerful anticipation.

Without sound instruction in the Word, there is no possibility that we can know either the Master or His will; this is by God's design. We will not edify those gathered to meet the Son of God if we fail to teach His Word. If there is no ongoing programme of instruction in the Word—from the pulpit, through Bible studies, through Sunday school—we will know neither the Master nor His will for our lives.

Fellowship—real fellowship—is demanding. It will lead us to get our hands dirty intervening when a fellow worshipper strays from pursuing righteousness. It will compel us to admonish the errant, even though we know our words will hurt their feelings. Fellowship will make our concern so great that it will at times break our hearts—if that fellowship is real.

⁴ The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

Members of the congregations of our Lord who understand their responsibility to serve one another are united in forming an incredibly powerful entity. There is nothing in this dying world that can compare to the excitement of a congregation that has been spiritually unleashed. When we are saved, the Spirit of God takes up residence in each believer's life, gifting that one with spiritual endowment(s) that equip the newborn saint to serve others. We are saved to serve. If we are not serving one another in love, we are disobedient to the heavenly presence of Christ. The gift entrusted to you was given precisely so that you might labour together with other Christians united in the assembly wherein the Spirit of God placed you, so that the beauty of the Risen Son of God would be seen through our united service.

Together, as congregations, we focus our evangelistic efforts to fulfil the mission the Master assigned. Evangelism means that we shed His light abroad, beginning where we live and labour, and seeking every opportunity to shine that light to the farthest, darkest reaches of this dying world. Too often we are prepared to make pious suggestions concerning faith in Christ, but we dare not jeopardise our tenuous relationship with outsiders by speaking to them of faith in the Living Son of God. We are not overly excited about edifying one another through speaking of what we have discovered through reading the Word or during times of meditation. Too often in modern congregations, speaking to one another of the Lord's mercies is virtually verboten. Actually ministering with the goal of building one another is seldom done as it may make demands upon our personal time. In far too many churches, expository preaching of the Word has been jettisoned in favour of entertainment disguised as interpretive dance, congregations led by "worship teams" that endlessly repeat pious pabulum disguised as praise choruses—the teams being more focused on melody and rhythm than on theology. Brothers and sisters, if we knew our mission, we would advance missions.

MISSIONS FOCUS ON CHRIST — "They have gone out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles." Missionaries deserve our respect. They are not cultural imperialists, though they do indeed confront culture. We must understand that the Christian who lives to please God is always in conflict with culture. In our own beloved nation, the believer who honours Christ will be in constant disagreement with the prevailing culture.

No child of God can agree that abortion is justified; and especially is one incapable of justifying abortion when it is performed for the convenience of the mother, or more likely, for the convenience of the father. Nevertheless, abortion is the law of the land. I grieve for the women who feel so desperate that they believe they have no choice but to kill their unborn child. I grieve for my nation that believes it shows respect for life by taking life. I grieve for generations that follow ours that have never known anything except encouragement to destroy life should bringing that life to full term be thought inconvenient. Thus it is that the conscientious Christian who lives to honour Christ stands in opposition to contemporary culture.

Similarly, the individual who seeks to follow hard after Christ cannot approve of divorce. However, ours is a culture of divorce in which divorce is so common that even within the churches a significant minority, perhaps even a majority of members and adherents are in their second, third and even fourth marriage. In fact, the matter of multiple marriages has become so prevalent that we are prone to speak of relationships rather than marriages in many instances. I sorrow at the thought that we live in a fallen world in which divorce is necessary; but I am even more sorrowful at the thought that so many young men and women are growing to adulthood without having witnessed the stability and joy of homes with parents who love one another and who consider the sacred vows they made before the Living God to have eternal significance.

Let me touch on one other area in which Christians confront culture when following the Master. Sexual themes have become so common as a necessary means of entertainment that the professed people of God are no longer shocked at ribald jokes, no longer mortified when the rawest display of sexuality is presented as a means of entertainment, and no longer conscious of the offence presented to men and women created in the image of God when suggestive language is used to advance a plot on a television show.

We have been trained so long in the deceptive mindset of tolerance that we no longer exert the effort to register disappointment and disagreement with our culture. We cower in the face of censure from the world rather than speak as children of the Living God to state our dissent from what has become the commonly accepted condition. We have fear that if we disagree with wickedness we will be branded as hateful and hurtful. No more can one say that a physician is hateful who warns a patient that overeating has severe consequences than we can permit someone to say that our opposition to godless and wicked lifestyles is hateful. If we are unwilling to say that a surgeon is mean and hateful when she says she wants to remove a cancer, then we must not permit anyone to be left unchallenged who says that we are mean and hateful if we say that we want to see wicked people receive the forgiveness of sin and live a righteous life.

We are on mission with the True and Living God, and thus we focus on our Great Leader. In the Letter to Hebrew Christians is found a glorious word of encouragement for weary saints. The author writes, “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” [HEBREWS 12:1, 2]. We Christians live, then, not to please the world about us, but Christ who calls us to join in His mission.

We are given a great mission, and we must walk with Him. As we spend time in His presence, we become more like Him. We see with His eyes, and we grieve over the death and decay about us. We hear with His ears, and we are astounded by the lack of grace in this fallen world. We speak as He would speak, and our words will not be welcomed by much of the world. Nevertheless, we declare His mercy and His grace and we make every effort to honour Him through serving hurting and dying mankind.

When Jesus dispatched the Twelve, He gave them instructions that are not so terribly different from the mandate that we have received. Jesus instructed His disciples, “Proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay” [MATTHEW 10:5-15]. The first responsibility of the Twelve was to proclaim the proximity of the Kingdom of Heaven. Doctor Luke describes their message as “The Kingdom of God has come near to you” [LUKE 10:9]. Thus, before ever they were moved with compassion to care for the injuries of that hurting world, they were first to announcement the Kingdom of God. In the same way, though we are concerned for the health and welfare of mankind, we know that the first need of all mankind is to hear the Master’s call to turn from their own sinful way to receive the life that is found only in Him. If people do not hear the message of life in God’s Son, will it really matter if they are healed, or if they are fed, or if they are clothed? Such actions are incidental to our mission, and not central.

Let me affirm: Christians are compassionate. There are no hospitals founded by atheists. Muslims do not found orphanages. Buddhists do not fund hospices for the dying. Charitable institutions are so commonly associated with Christians that we take their existence for granted. These institutions grew out of Christian missions and not from secular states.

Focused on Christ, Christians will diligently seek the welfare of the soul of lost humanity. When we take our eyes off the Master, love for the lost becomes maudlin sentimentality that ceases to be concerned for the souls of lost people. If we no longer believe people are lost, we will no longer do the works of charity that flow so naturally from the compassion that floods the lives of believers. We will hire experts to do our work or leave it to the tender mercies of government bureaucrats. Shortly, we will find that we justify hastening the death of the elderly as an act of compassion, telling ourselves that we are making room for the young; or we will begin to condone the slaughter of the innocent because we will convince ourselves that the convenience of mothers and fathers is paramount; and we will approve of every imaginable form of wicked perversion as normal. Of course, you realise that I am actually describing this present world—a world in which we who name the Name of Christ have taken our eyes off Him. If missionary fervour is lacking among the churches in this day, it must be because we no longer see Christ among us—we have taken our eyes off Him and focused on our own desires. Above all else, we who are believers desperately need to refocus on Christ and on His will for our lives.

There is one further significant issue before we pass on to the final issue in the message. The missionaries whom John commends and who had received hospitality and support from Gaius had “gone out” for the sake of the Name. The words indicate that they had been sent out—commissioned—by their home church. As servants of their home congregation, they had received appointment to serve in a field removed from their home. Perhaps they were itinerating, but in every instance they were proclaiming the Name of Christ the Lord.

I want to stress a point that is often overlooked in this day. People look to mission boards to do the work of the churches. Often, well-meaning individuals will claim that they are “a wing of the church.” However, the congregation is not some cosmic bird that requires a wing. Churches commission their people, sending them out to do the tasks which the Spirit assigned. We see this principle in action when we witness the commissioning of the first missionaries. “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” [ACTS 13:1-3].

While engaged in worship, the Spirit of God commanded that the church set apart to God Barnabas and Saul for the specific work to which He had called them. The response of the congregation was to fast and pray before they laid hands on them and sent them off. This is the identical concept that we witness in the lives of the missionaries of whom John writes—for the sake of the Name they were sent out. Who fasted and prayed? The church. Who laid hands on them? The church. Who commissioned them to labour in their stead? The church. When their missionary labours were completed on the first tour, “they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled” [ACTS 14:26]. The Antioch Church was their home church, and they reported to it when their work was completed.

I am concerned whenever any entity—regardless of how well meaning that entity may appear—stands between the congregation of the Lord and those whom the congregation has commissioned to perform the work God has assigned. It can only result in confusion and inefficiency for us to attempt to change the manner in which God has called us to work. Churches raise up missionaries. Churches appoint missionaries. Churches support missionaries. And the missionaries appointed and supported by the churches are accountable to those same churches that appointed them.

MISSIONS ARE GOD’S APPOINTED MEANS OF REACHING THE WORLD — “Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.” The old saying informs us, “Anytime you see a ‘therefore,’ ask what it is there for.” “Therefore,” says the Apostle of love, “we ought to support people like these” points to people who “have gone forth on behalf of The Name, accepting nothing from the pagans,”⁵ and our support should be because we are deliberate in choosing to be “coworkers in co-operation with the truth.”⁶

Note the way in which John unites our mission to missions. We are fellow workers for the truth with those who go out for the sake of the Name. There is an aspect of church labour here that is often neglected in this day. Why do we not hold garage sales and bean bakes to underwrite our missionary endeavours? Why do we not have fish fries or bake sales to pay for outreach ministries? The reason is quite simply because we have no mandate to ask the Gentiles—outsiders to the Faith—to pay for their own conversion. The Master gave a standard that must not be violated for convenience: “You received without paying; give without pay” [MATTHEW 10:8]. If we accept support from the pagans, we open ourselves to the charge that we preach for financial gain, which must not ever be done.

Let me step aside from the text for a brief moment to make a significant statement. Pastors are not hired, just as missionaries are not hired. Churches provide support for those who give themselves to full-time service for the congregation. A congregation is responsible to be generous to those who faithfully proclaim the Word of God, just as is written: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The labourer deserves his wages’” [1 TIMOTHY 5:17, 18]. No servant of Christ serves to enrich himself, but churches must never permit themselves to be seen to be stinting or penurious toward those who labour on their behalf. In the same way, congregations must train themselves to be generous toward those who serve to advance the cause of Christ as missionaries.

The Apostle could say of himself and Apollos who were each engaged in missionary advance, “We are God’s fellow workers” [1 CORINTHIANS 3:8]. In the same manner, each of us, as we are labouring to fulfil the commission we received from the Risen Christ, serve at the moment as “God’s fellow workers.” Likewise, as we enter into the labours of those who are advancing the cause of Christ in locales removed from our immediate location, we share in the advance of His Kingdom and through those efforts we are “God’s fellow workers.”

Though a missionary may have been appointed by a sister congregation, we are privileged to enter into fellowship with that congregation and with the labours conducted in their name when we support those whom they have appointed. We are not precluded from participating in the advance of the Kingdom work of the Master because we don’t send out a particular missionary. We understand that we are fulfilling the mission we have received as we support missionaries. Those whom Gaius had supported appear not to have been from his own congregation. Perhaps they were not even from John’s home church. However, they each shared in the blessings of service through participating in this work through providing support. Remember Jesus’ teaching concerning sharing in labours such as those of which we now speak. “The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward” [MATTHEW 10:41].

⁵ NET Bible

⁶ Ibid.

As individual Christians, we are called to be on mission with God. Our mission is to disciple others, incorporating them into the fellowship of the assembly as they come to faith in the Living Son of God. Having told others of the grace of God that saves all who believe, we are each responsible to teach those coming into the Faith the truths of God's Word. Corporately, we extend the Kingdom of God through evangelising, through teaching and through preaching. We are charged with the responsibility to fulfil this mission individually and especially as a congregation united in faith and fellowship with the Risen Son of God. We are appointed to be a missionary congregation, praying for God to thrust forth labourers into His harvest, encouraging and underwriting those labourers so that the work will advance unabated.

I am unapologetic in stating that each member of this congregation stands accountable before God to embrace the mission He has assigned. This divine commission is more than mere words—it defines why we have been left here awaiting His return. However, it is reasonable to anticipate that we should anticipate that our mission will lead us to encourage missions—to make every effort to extend the Kingdom of God not only throughout this Peace Region, but extending the message of life throughout our nation and ultimately to the farthest reaches of our world.

Are you on mission with God? Have you received the life of Christ the Master? If you have, you are appointed to be on mission with the Living God. If you have never received that life, you must hear this message of life and be saved. The Word of God is quite clear in declaring, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." The simplicity of the Good News of Jesus is that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

Believe this message and be saved. This is our prayer. This is the message of life.
Amen.