

Missionary Accountability

Mission boards will often tout accountability as one of the chief reasons for their existence. While they may require some sort of accountability, it often degenerates into totalitarianism, a lack of soul liberty, and a complete indifference toward any accountability to the local churches that are sending out the missionary.

Many times the missionary's supporting churches are happy for this kind of a situation, since they do not want to be bothered with the details of missionary support. Small churches are often led to believe that they cannot handle all the "complicated and difficult" areas of missionary service, but is not the Fundamental Baptist position that the Bible is our only authority in all matters of which it speaks, and in all matters which it addresses? If we really believe it, then what area of the missionary enterprise cannot be understood and counseled from the Bible by a godly pastor, deacons, and congregation which is "the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15)."

Perhaps we have bought the lie that the Devil has tried to sell us, namely that the church is insufficient for the job that God has given her. If this is true, as the reasoning goes, she needs outside interference to accomplish her job, someone to usurp her authority over her members and over the expenditure of her finances.

So how does the missionary demonstrate accountability to a local church, especially his home church? Let me state first of all that if there is no confidence whatsoever in the missionary to account for his labors accurately, then the church should not support him at all. An untrustworthy or unscrupulous man is never made trustworthy by rules, mission board administrators, or denominational bosses. The truth is that this type of person usually becomes a denominational boss or a mission board administrator.

As I see it, there are several areas where accountability is necessary in missions. They could be listed, with a short definition, as follows:

- 1. Doctrinal accountability:** The missionary is accountable to his church to maintain the same doctrinal purity that he had when sent out to plant churches.

The missionary must give a signed copy of his doctrinal statement to his sending church and to all supporting churches. The sending church should require the missionary to yearly sign agreement with this doctrinal statement, as well as with the church's doctrinal statement. His other supporting churches may also ask for his agreement with their doctrinal statements. I have been a missionary for more than thirty years, and while many missions have changed their doctrinal position in those thirty years, I have not. Churches need to take this responsibility whether the missionary is with a mission board or not.

If the missionary's position changes, he is duty-bound to inform his home church, supporting churches, and his ordaining church. Some missionaries do change their doctrine, whether they are associated with a mission board or not. The supporting churches need to know about these changes so that the missionary is Biblically accountable to the source of his income, not to a third party which only benefits from "being in the middle" of a relationship between the church and its missionary.

2. Financial accountability: All moneys that are being sent to the missionary must be used for the purpose for which they were designated. Financial books should be kept, and be available to all supporters at their request. The sending church pastor should approve the support level for the missionary.

The missionary's salary, housing, and work funds should be established in consultation with the sending church pastor and with the approval of the church. Regular and systematic accounting of all ministry funds should be supplied to the missionary's home church and be available to any supporting churches or others who are interested.

3. Informational accountability: The missionary informs his supporting churches regularly of all of his activities.

The missionary must regularly report to all of his supporting churches all the details of his involvement in the ministry. It is to his benefit to encourage both announced and unannounced visits from his pastor and other leadership of his sending church and from anyone in any of his supporting churches. He should make himself available to report in missionary conferences of any of his supporting churches.

4. Cooperational accountability: The missionary's cooperation with others must fall into the area of what is acceptable to his sending church and in line with his stated position on separation.

The missionary should be known for his stand as a Fundamentalist, a Separatist, and a Baptist. He should cooperate only with those who hold these same truths. He must not seek support in churches that are not Fundamentalist and Separatist. His home church should know where he is speaking and with whom he is cooperating. There must be accountability for any cooperation that is not deemed appropriate.

5. Directional accountability: No major changes in ministry can be undertaken without the knowledge of all supporters, and without the permission of the sending church.

The missionary's sending church should approve new ministries, major changes in ministry, or the discontinuance of any ministry. Information on any such changes must be published in his correspondence to his supporting churches as well.

I know that some churches are feeling reluctance after two centuries of hearing that they cannot do the work that God has called them to do. I understand that reluctance, and it is the same problem that we face as a nation when we try to discontinue welfare. Even if it is destroying us, we have a hard time finding the will power to turn back to something better. When we try to "wean" people off of welfare, they cry and protest. They do not seem to understand that this is for their own good. They prefer that which is familiar.

Churches often do the same thing. You can see that in the number of churches that stayed in the American Baptist Convention and other groups which went bad. The familiar, even though it may be wrong and destructive, is easier to deal with than a new course. The same is true of our attitude toward mission agencies.

Now that we have discussed missionary accountability in these areas, let me state a few things about mission agency accountability in these areas. Para-church missions are notoriously weak in *these* areas of missionary accountability. The mission generally does not want to act on these things, since it will inevitably cost money. If the mission agency were to "discipline" a missionary, it would lose

the funding of that missionary's support of the mission, as well as some support of the churches which may stand with the missionary. Missions generally take this position only when they stand to lose more by keeping the missionary than by his dismissal. In the cases of sin, this often means that a missionary is dismissed only if his sin cannot be covered up by the agency and kept from the missionary's supporting churches. Accountability is not really a big worry to mission boards.

"**F**undamental Baptist" boards have dismissed many missionaries in recent years. But the missionaries who got the worst treatment were the missionaries who were taking a stand on the issues of separation and soul liberty, not for failing to be accountable. Missionaries are, by and large, more conservative than the mission. Missions tend to change for the worse quicker than the missionaries who work with them.

Originally missions were not started by churches to provide accountability, but rather by missionaries to provide a conduit for moneys to be sent to them on the foreign fields. This is evident in the history of the Northern Baptists, begun by Luther Rice in his desire to help Adoniram Judson after they had changed from being Congregationalists to being a Baptists on their way to India. Because of the difficulty in raising support and getting it to the Judsons, a denomination and a mission were born. There was a desire to have representation for the Judsons in the United States. The issues of providing a conduit for moneys and representation of the missionaries in the churches in the United States were the basis for the creation of most modern missions. No thought was really given to accountability. Only the local church *really* cares about accountability. Only local churches can properly deal with the issues of accountability, since they do not stand to make money as a result of the decision. Remember that missions exist to represent missionaries and to protect their own futures.

Increasingly missionaries that want to remain true to their Lord, their consciences, and their churches are having problems with missions that want to strip the missionary of his soul liberty with an administration that demands the missionary's obedience in areas that have nothing to do with his accountability. Missions tend to be more concerned with their own income than with the work of the missionary.

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