

The Existence of Missions

By

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I am a missionary. I have spent over thirty years of my life in Christian Service, serving the Lord as a missionary. I am a Fundamental, Separatist Baptist. I am convinced that the points that distinguish me as a Fundamentalist and Baptist are Biblical, and therefore, God's will for me.

We must never think, however that all practices that are called Baptist must necessarily be Biblically correct. Catholicism and other false cults gave us some of our modern-day practices. The emphasis should not be weighed on how rich our history is in a given area, or how well entrenched something has become, to lead us to the conclusion that it is right. Only careful examination in the light of the Scriptures can convince the true Baptist that something is Biblical. So when a Baptist Missionary raises warning flags about missions and missionaries, our discussion should be based solely on the Word of God. Unfortunately, many will base their arguments on emotion, or our long Baptist heritage.

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To determine the proper role of the missionary and his mission, we must first define his role from the Scriptures. This is where we face our biggest challenge. Our problem is that neither the word missionary nor the word missions occurs in the Bible at all. How can we define the Biblical office of a missionary with his qualifications and job description if we do not know where to look in the Scriptures? Some try to use human reasoning and say that the missionary is anything that his local church wants him to be. Using this reasoning we have missionaries that are

schoolteachers, social workers, institute and college directors, mission presidents, aviators, supply personnel, radio repairmen, church planters, medical personnel, and secretaries. We have missionaries for the military and the professional athletes. Not that I mind all of this. I would like to apply to be a missionary to the professional athletes in Hawaii. I am just waiting for a professional team such as the Honolulu Hula-Hoops Basketball team to form. Honestly, if we as Baptists are not concerned that our church offices be Biblical, then who is going to care? We are the ones who say that ***Biblical Authority*** is our paramount distinctive.

By and large Baptists brag about the amount of money that our churches give to missions. Some churches talk about giving 10 percent of their monthly budget, and I have personally seen a church that claimed 90 percent of their entire annual budget went to missions. Granted that this church called their busses a mission outreach, their Christian school a mission outreach, their Sunday school a mission outreach, and their assistant pastor of evangelism a mission outreach. My problem is not that a church may spend its money on such things, but it is difficult to be Biblical as a Baptist when we are so cumbered with so many notions about what a missionary really is. Of course the Devil takes advantage of our ambiguity, and while many good and noble things are being supported, increasingly social programs have become the bulk of our mission's support. Again, the problem that we are facing is one of Biblically defining the role of the missionary.

The Bible has several passages that delineate the various officers of the local church. The first passage we will look at will be Ephesians 4:7-16.

Ephesians 4:7-16

7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)

10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4 lists four officers that were given by Christ to the local Church. These four are found in verse 11. The word "some" separates each of these four from each other. Christ gave some apostles, and some prophets. He gave some evangelists and some pastor-teachers. Notice that it does not say some pastors and some teachers as if teachers were a separate position. Teachers is a description of what the pastor is in his job. I Timothy 3: says that the pastor is to be "apt to teach." Teaching is the one indispensable part of his job description.

The ultimate objectives of all four offices is found in verses 12-16. The objectives are expressed as:

1. The maturing of the saints to do . . .
2. The work of the ministry to . . .
3. Build the Body of Christ.

These were the objectives of *all four officials of the local church*. To do this job each member of the church must supply that part of the ministry that God has entrusted to him.

Two of these offices were mentioned earlier in the Epistle to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:19-22

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Here the two offices, apostles and prophets, are called foundational. The foundation of the Church is the Bible, and Jesus Christ is the Chief Corner Stone. In saying that the church is built upon the "foundation of the apostles and prophets," the Holy Spirit is laying out the ministry of the writing of the Bible as the work of the "apostles and prophets." That is why God continues emphasizing this as chapter three begins:

Ephesians 3:1-5

1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

The Holy Spirit revealed truth to the "holy apostles and prophets" for the purpose of writing "in few words" to the churches.

As the Holy Spirit continued to explain the foundational ministry of the apostles and prophets, He talked about their job as being that of receiving "revelation." The Holy Spirit revealed truth to

the "holy apostles and prophets" for the purpose of writing "in few words" to the churches, so that "when ye read, ye may understand." Having finished the New Testament, the job of the apostles and prophets was finished.

There were two foundational and two building offices in the gifts that Christ gave to the church. The two foundational offices were those of apostle and prophet. The two building offices were those of evangelist and pastor-teacher. The Holy Spirit needed to have a foundation in His Temple, but He is using evangelists and pastor-teachers today to place the "lively stones" (I Peter 2:4) into the walls. The foundation was laid once for all, and will never be laid again. Paul wrote the Corinthians stating that the apostles laid that foundation, and what we are doing today is building "thereon."

I Corinthians 3:10-12

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

Another place that would give us local church offices would be Philippians 1:1. The Bible says here: "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:" Here only two offices are listed: that of bishops (also called elders and pastors) and deacons. Paul wrote to Timothy in I Timothy and to Titus and gave them the qualifications of a pastor and a deacon. We can find these qualifications in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. It is obvious, however that these epistles were not intended to be instructions *to* pastors, but *to* those who were training and ordaining pastors. These men were given the responsibility of organizing a church and bringing it to self-government.

When Paul wrote to Titus about his reason for being left in Crete he said:

Titus 1:5

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:

Titus obviously did not want to be left in Crete. Paul was to write of him later that Titus had departed "unto Dalmatia" (II Timothy 4:10). Paul did not say that Titus was left in Crete to pastor the church. He was not left there to be the elder, but to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." This was the kind of job that demanded a thorough knowledge of the qualifications, and so Paul continued by giving him a list of the qualifications of an elder, as he did likewise to Timothy, in I Timothy 3. What was the name of this one who evangelized, and then organized the believers into a local church, ordaining the leadership and installing deacons?

II Timothy 4:5

But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Paul says that Timothy was an evangelist. This was his ministry and the work that he was to carry out. He was to stay in a certain place until there was a nucleus of people who were evangelized, who had been brought together in an organized church with their own leadership. Those missionaries today who are evangelizing people, and bringing them together into a local church, and then training and ordaining leadership are really evangelists according to the Scriptures.

Paul told Timothy to "Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

When we call upon Baptists to be Biblical in their terminology, we would expect them to immediately jump to the defense of the Biblical term, and desert the unbiblical one. But that has not happened. Instead we continue to hear defenses of the use of unbiblical terms. These defenses somehow show our reluctance to truly follow the Bible. But our job is not to reason, but to obey,

even as John Quincy Adams said, "Duty is ours; results are God's."

We have been told, "This is a historic Baptist position that traces its roots back through William Carey, and Adoniriam Judson." We are told that what we must really do is not to change terms, but to associate a Biblical definition upon the term. If we find that an evangelist is what we today call a church-planting missionary, then just state that "church-planting missionary" means "evangelist." We can accomplish the same thing, we are told, without changing the entire system. We are reminded that this system has brought about the greatest missionary effort in the history of the church.

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There are actually two errors that I find in this logic. In the first place, could there have been any missionary effort in the history of the church in the absence of missionaries? Of course not, for by definition you could not have missions without missionaries, and you could not have "missionary effort" either without missionaries. So, what do we mean by missionary effort? Are we talking about the evangelization of the lost, and the organizing of churches? If that is what we are talking about, and not the establishment of Bible colleges, health clinics and hospitals, printing ministries and bookstores, etc. then the greatest time for this was certainly the first and second centuries, A. D.

The church does not have a responsibility to missions, it has a responsibility to evangelize the world.

The second error is to suppose that a well known, but unbiblical term is somehow preferable to a Biblical one, as long as we correct the erroneous doctrines and misunderstandings that surround the term. This sounds logical to many. It is the easiest solution to a difficult problem. So what if the word missionary is not found in the Bible? We can use another term that has been

passed down to us by unbelievers. Following that logic, we should call our churches "cathedrals," and our pastors "priests" (a term that at least has Biblical roots). We should call the chairmen of our local fellowships "archbishops," while we refer to the heads of our national and international fellowships as "pope." I see no reason for calling an old retired pastor a "real pastor's pastor" when the term "Holy See" would seem to fit just fine the new role we have for him. Where will this logic end? Or are we going to say that these other terms which we have mentioned are wrong because they are not Biblical, while still holding to *our own* unbiblical term?

Some have objected to calling missionaries "evangelists," saying that it would do away with "missions" if we had no "missionaries." These same men will then reason, "And who would help the churches fulfill their responsibility to missions?" This is circular reasoning. The church does not have a responsibility to missions, it has a responsibility to evangelize the world. The God who gave us this responsibility never allowed us to shift that responsibility to another body. His plan was, and is, for the church to do the job He charged it with. In the Spring, 2000 issue of the *Message*, the official publication of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism (ABWE) there is an article entitled, "What Does a Mission Agency Do?" This question was answered by saying, "We will follow Christ's command to preach the Gospel throughout the world. As representatives of our sending churches, we boldly evangelize, disciple, train leadership and establish reproducing Baptist churches in agreement with our doctrinal statement." The article goes on to say, "This corporate purpose is sometimes stated in an abbreviated way as '**Serving local churches in world evangelism.**'"

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The theory is that the one organization that God created for the evangelization of the world cannot do the job that God has entrusted to it as well as an organization that is created by man

to "help" it. On that theory we have built an entire structure, independent of the church and the Scriptures that defines the role, government and practices of the church. That is why ABWE continues in its article, saying, "ABWE administration is made of many parts, some of which may seem distant from world evangelism: Enlistment, Field Administration, Mission Relations, Publications, media, and Finance. Each of these departments, like gears of a machine, play a vital role in assisting missionaries." These areas mentioned are the "gears of a machine" which carries the job of world evangelism away from the church and entrusts it to the "administration." The article first stated that the objective of a mission agency is "serving local churches," and within a few sentences it became "assisting missionaries." Missions have no organizational structure in the New Testament, and therefore can establish any kind of a structure that their own human wisdom would dictate.

Having "field directors" and "field administrators" has become universal in our Baptist missions. We would never think of creating such titles in our associations or local churches, but everyone says that missions must be run in a business-like fashion. Churches cannot do that, we are told, because they must be run on a Biblical standard, not a business standard. But even one local-church mission has changed the title of one of its office personnel to "Executive Director," something akin to someone taking the title of "Archbishop" when speaking to the pastor of the church. No, a mission being controlled by a local church does not insure that worldly tactics and methods cannot be used. But when we start out with a wholesale defection from Biblical standards as in the creation of missions in the first place, we are bound to end even worse.

How can we so easily desert the Biblical structures that God established? We could only do it by convincing Baptists that they could not do the job of world evangelism without the aid of "professionals." First we accepted unbiblical terms, and then we created unbiblical organizations. The early church sent out men to start new churches. Early Christians, fleeing from persecution, started churches everywhere they went. Today a Christian moves into an area where there is no church, and typically writes to the

mission agency asking for a professional to come and start a church in his area. Is it any wonder that we are not establishing churches the way we did in the first century?

So, what would actually be accomplished by turning back to the Bible and the Biblical terms? First of all our debate then will be one of Biblical standards and qualifications, instead of human reasoning and ideas. As Baptists we should all be happier debating Biblical standards and qualifications.

Secondly, we would actually be able to do a better job of financing world evangelism by not having to finance extra-Biblical structures such as mission agencies. The church actually produces money through its tithes and offerings. The mission agency only consumes money through its staff and administration.

Thirdly, we could start teaching by example as well as word that all Christians are to be serving the Lord. We could emphasize that the believer in Christ does not exist to pay a professional to serve the Lord in his place. We would be able to teach every believer that we are all responsible for world evangelism.

Lastly, we could quit being hypocrites when we talk about Catholicism's use of unbiblical terms. Let's clean our own house of unbiblical terms and structures. Let's get rid of our Presbyterian structures in our "missionary field councils," our Congregationalist's ideas on the existence of mission boards, and unbiblical terminology. President Ronald Reagan said in a speech on October 29, 1972, "You may be weary of me sounding the same alarms. You might think, well, we have heard all this before, but somehow we muddled through. Well, that is like the window-washer who fell from the Empire State Building. When he passed the 20th floor, he said, 'so far, so good.'"

Do I actually think that we can get rid of missions? No, but I also didn't think that I would ever live to see the destruction of the Berlin Wall. Compromise always counts the cost to see if an option is viable or not. Obedience just does what is right, even if it needs to bear the cost alone.

I would appreciate hearing from you about your opinion on this.
You can write me at: opinions@truth4u.org.