



Ferguson Report



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“Go ye unto all the world”

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Commitment in Missions (II)

It has often been said that “*everything we do in the church is missions.*” While there is some truth to that statement in the sense that everything the church does should ultimately have salvation of souls as the central focus; nevertheless, it can also become the death knell of a missionary commitment. On page 182 of the book, God’s Call to Mission (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), David W. Shenk writes, “*When everything is mission, nothing is mission. Mission then dies.*” Missions involve sending and being sent with the good news of Jesus Christ. Plush auditoriums, polished sermons, and pleasing aesthetics cannot substitute for going. Taking the youth to have a weekend in the mountains, buying new carpet or paying the electric bill is not missions—not bad causes, but not missions.

“*The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves*” (Luke 10:2-4). Missions is a commitment of extending God’s love beyond ourselves. To offer God’s love to others requires that we give ourselves in the greatest of commitments. The following commitments are a continuation of those offered from last month’s article.

Missionary Commitments

- A commitment to your own spiritual growth as a Christian. In fact, unless this commitment is made *before* he enters the field the very reverse will likely occur—spiritual depletion. Peter charged the early Christians: “*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet. 3:18; cf. 1 Pet. 2:2). What is interesting about this charge is that Peter was writing to a persecuted church. Some people might be led to believe that spiritual weakness is expected when difficulties arise in life; but Peter’s words suggest that life’s struggles afford opportunities to achieve greater spiritual gains (cf. 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). Yes, foreign missions can be a lonely and challenging work full of daily “*unknowns.*” But as with all labors in God’s church at home or abroad, the

focus should not be on the inconveniences but on how to best accomplish God’s will. In the process—all other things being present—you can’t help but to grow.

- A commitment to “*know yourself*” before you go. Of course, no one knows how he or she will react to every given situation. But sometimes the greatest threat to one’s success on the mission field (or anywhere else) is one’s own self. This raises at least three areas of *self* one should consider: emotional, spiritual, and vocational. First, as we think of the **emotional factor**, occasionally a well-intentioned soul hopes that working on a foreign soil will help him alleviate some character flaw or remedy some personal failure. Any “*ghosts*” or “*skeletons*” in the closet need to be put to rest before he enters the field. If anything, the stress put upon the expatriate will only intensify further whatever flaws that may already exist. A God-centered psychological evaluation can be of great assistance not only for one’s self but also for the sake of one’s marriage as well as for the family’s general well-being. Second, there is the **spiritual factor**. In addition to a thorough psychological evaluation, a spiritual evaluation is also a must. The following words of Paul speak to this end: “*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates*” (2 Cor. 13:5)? A mission field can no more turn reprobates into saints than an unclean fountain can put forth clean water (cf. James 3:11, 12). Spiritual immaturity has no place on the mission field. Third, the **vocational factor** must be evaluated. The idiom, “*Jack of all trades, master of none*” is interestingly important in missions. Until the missionary is completely proficient in the host country’s language, thought, culture, and geography he will find himself having to do many things himself. Roy Deaver touched on this point in his description of the late missionary Andrew Connally and his ability to do whatever needed to be done: “*preach the gospel, minister to the sick, talk with government officials, make the bricks, build the building, do the plumbing, put in the sewer system, build the water plant, organize and supervise the labor work, go into the African wilds to find meat for those for whom he is responsible,*

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confer with village chiefs, etc.” (Andrew M. Connally. So You Want A Glorified Holiday? Seagoville, TX: Connally Pub. n.d.). One may be intellectually-gifted in books, but a lack of “*common sense*” and resourcefulness can spell disaster on the foreign field. Occasions will arise demanding that you pull from all of your abilities even discovering skills you never knew you had.

- A commitment not to get involved in “*politics*” of the host country. With proper Biblical teaching any principles that are violated by the local and current political affairs will eventually be recognized by the brethren. By such means they will be in a much better position to effect needed change as citizens. Otherwise, the expatriate risks being kicked out of the host country—or worse. This is not advocating compromise but simply using good judgment and seeking to make use of the most effective means of accomplishing the greatest amount of long term good. Some battles are better-fought by those “*in the know.*” Battles will come. Choose your battles carefully.

- A commitment to learn the language in whose country the missionary labors. With most people this is probably the most difficult challenge the missionary faces. And naturally, the length of time he commits to working in a foreign field will determine the extent to which he needs to learn the language. In a conversation with Elsie Huffard, the wife of the late Everett

Huffard, long-time missionaries in the Middle East, sister Huffard commented that learning the language was in essence deciding whether one wanted the doors “*open or shut.*” From her experiences living in the “*Holy Land*” she said: “*Decide whether you want to be a foreigner and have the door shut or become one of them by learning the language.*” In addition to the benefit of being able to communicate directly with the local people without a translator, learning the language is a key that helps unlock the mystery of their culture and world-view.

Whenever the word “*commitment*” is used it makes some people feel uneasy. Commitment is sometimes called the “*glue*” of marriage. It is equally the “*conviction*” that drives mission work. Commitment to the Great Commission requires a conviction that 1) Jesus Christ is the ***One*** and ***Only*** Lord and Savior of mankind; 2) the gospel of Christ is the ***Only*** power of salvation; 3) the church of Christ is the ***Only*** saved body into which Jesus calls us and of whom He will present gloriously before His Father; and 4) heaven awaits ***Only*** those who hear and obey the gospel call through faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism. Admittedly, this is not a very popular stand in a world of many viewpoints and religions. Our society discourages us from developing such deep convictions. Abroad and at home, however, missions stand or fall upon such convictions. ***Only*** the committed have them.

Howell