

OVERSEAS WORK AND WORLD OUTREACH

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Consideration of the presentation of the gospel to those in other lands is our last topic for this conference. This subject deserves final consideration on at least two bases:

1. The worldwide proclamation of the gospel of Christ is the ultimate goal of the Church.
2. An effective, and Christ honoring, overseas ministry will only result from having grappled successfully with the topics previously discussed.

Perhaps it would be good at this time to elaborate on the meaning of these assertions, and their practical importance to the Church. We need but to read the great commission (Matthew 28:19,20), which states, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel," and Acts 1:8, where Christ says, "Ye shall be witnesses... unto the uttermost parts of the earth," to realize that the ultimate goal of the Church is the evangelization of the world. Overseas ministry deserves final consideration in a study of World outreach, because it is the last step in fulfilling the command of our Lord. Besides being the last step in obedience, the development of a Christ honoring and effective overseas ministry can only take place within the Church when the Church has been faithful in fulfilling the directives of Christ in reference to personal discipleship has developed a sound and mature appreciation for, and application of, the New Testament Church principles in the homeland, has proceeded from a sound theological base, and has shown spiritual wisdom and boldness in implementing New Testament principles to the facing of challenges in those enterprises which have faced her in local situations. It is difficult to conceive of an effective overseas ministry being developed by an immature home Church. It was no accident that Christ mentioned the uttermost parts of the world lastly in his final words to his disciples, for only those who have grappled successfully with the lesser contests need hope for success at this level of endeavor.

If, as we have stated, an adequate overseas ministry can proceed only from a mature body, and if, a corollary truth is valid, namely, that a mature and balanced body can produce an effective overseas ministry, then we can hope, as we develop our theme to be able to make some rather pointed observations about our own overseas program, and to relate our findings to our presuppositions.

Perhaps the subject of overseas ministry can be more carefully analyzed and more profitably considered if we first consider the foundation for widely held views of this ministry. If we find that those views which have been responsible for shaping the modern overseas program have developed from application of Biblical principles of evangelism, then we will be reluctant to suggest any radical changes; however, if we find that erroneous opinions have had a large place in the development of the present program, we will feel obligated to suggest alternate possibilities.

It has been widely believed that overseas ministry, rather than being the final step in a strategic program, is a unique ministry, with a unique authority, with a unique set of principles. There is no Biblical support for the idea that overseas ministry is different in nature than any other service for Christ.

The principles which stand us in good stead in reaching our neighbors will find application in overseas work. The great pioneers of the modern missions effort (such as Judson and Taylor) were unique men called for a unique task by our Lord, namely to awaken the Church to the universality of the great commission. The approaches which these men used were valid for an individual strategy of missions. They fulfilled their commission in a most admirable way. One would expect that the awakened Church would understand the purpose of God in thrusting these men forth, and that the Church would proceed to develop a program of overseas outreach that would transcend the personal level of approach. What we see, however, is a carryover of these effective principles for a personalized ministry into the planning and organization of the ministry of the total Church. Rather than sensing that God's purpose in these men was the awakening of the Church, we have felt compelled to institutionalize their methods. We have glamorized the trek through the jungles into the obscure village to the point where in the mind of some, when a jeep can enter an area it is time for the missionary to leave.

Perhaps the reason that the Church has been unwilling to take a hard look at overseas ministry is because of the shame which she felt when she realized the blindness of her eyes toward this ministry in years goneby. It is without joy that we comment that those who have labored on foreign soil up until the recent past, have often helped to perpetuate the idea that they and their ministry were unique.

I am convinced of better things of you missionary brethren who participate in our conference this week. We have seen in the missionary movement the development of the attitude that being a missionary made ones individual judgment superior to that of the body of Christ. We have seen the development of a church on foreign soil that was totally dependent on the missionary enterprises. We have even heard missionaries react how much they have given up to serve our Lord, with not too obscure implication that those who labored at home were in a spiritual and moral stupor when compared with the overseas worker; all of these attitudes have helped to develop in the minds of our people a dicotomy of thought when thinking of foreign missions. This type of attitude has made people ashamed to voice their opinions as to more effective overseas ministry. Perhaps even too ashamed to think upon the subject.

When we should have developed a picture of the missionary as a man of God who was happily performing the will of God, we have made the missionary seem far estranged from reality, as our average layman experiences it, and thus with little positive impact upon many promising prospects for overseas ministry.

Could it be that an approach which for many years glamorized the austere elements, emphasized the esoteric nature of the calling, perhaps even developed the conception of the missionary occupying a higher spiritual plateau, has kept many worthy Christian young people from considering overseas ministry, and on the other hand, caused many with distorted views of the work and the Lord, and many whose emotional problems and needs answered to such an emphasis to offer themselves for service. It can be safely predicted that our hopes for the development of the best possible overseas ministry will never be realized until we become willing to critically assess the prospective missionary, the attitude of the mission board to overseas work, and become convinced of Biblical principles which we consider imperative in every sphere of service, including the overseas ministry.

Another widespread idea within the Church today is the belief that overseas ministry is the basic task of the Church, and that if this basic task is pursued, a mature Church will result. It is easy to see that this is an important divergence from our proposition that overseas work at its best will be an outgrowth of maturity in other areas of thought and work. We have been caught up in evaluating the maturity of our Churches by ascertaining the percentage of their monies donated to overseas projects. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find support for the idea that anything except obedience to and love for the Word of God will produce a mature Church. Overseas ministry can be the crowning glory of a vital Church, but, we have attempted to show forth vitality, and induce vitality, by pushing overseas projects. We must remember that there are no short cuts to blessing for the Church. While we reject the idea that giving to overseas projects can be expected to produce maturity within the Church, we repeat our assertion that a lack of overseas emphasis will in many cases show up immaturity in other areas of ministry.

In evaluating our own overseas program it is necessary for us to admit that many other groups with which we feel close spiritual affinity have devoted a greater percentage of their finances to the overseas ministry. Neither can we afford to overlook the fact that the latest figures for our conference giving to overseas ministry have shown a decrease during the past year. I am aware of the reasoning which suggests that the many building projects which we have undertaken on the homefront have taken away from the overseas ministry; however, in view of the rising wages in our economy it is difficult to ignore the implications of a decrease in overseas giving.

In looking at our present overseas ministry, it is difficult to perceive a strategy. If we were laboring with great clarity of purpose and full assurance of Biblical support in our local endeavors, it is a surity that our outlook on overseas ministry would be more highly defined, and that we would be attempting, even with our relatively small constituency to effect the policies and approaches of those organizations which labor overseas. I have come to the conclusion that our rather ordinary financial support of overseas work, coupled with a lack of clearly defined priorities in support of overseas ministries, are indications, not of the need for a greater missionary emphasis, but a need for deep soul searching in reference to the life and vitality of our work here at home. A far broader question that comes to mind in reference to the American brand of evangelicalism and its hopes for producing a vital overseas ministry seems to be: Can a basically immature evangelical Christianity hope to send from her midst the mature people necessary to carry on an effective world outreach program; and, can a Church which has not been able to cope with the rather orderly and modest changes which are occurring in the homeland, hope to develop a strategy that will be of much use in areas of the world in the midst of revolution.

When we consider the bold fact that we are losing ground in our battle to evangelize the world, and when the stark reality of the damaging implications of such an admission come fully upon us, there will be nothing in this world capable of keeping us from developing a strategy to reverse the trend. The total impact of these truths can only be ministered to us by the blessed Holy Spirit.

One of the tragic possibilities that faces us in our consideration of the ministry of the church is the belief that a church might be mature enough in other areas of life to produce a significant overseas ministry - yet might fail to do so because of a failure to teach its people in this area of Biblical truth. Poor methods of promotion would also effect the ministry of the church in this

area. Perhaps Bible Fellowship Churches are in a spiritual position to respond to a Biblical emphasis along these lines. Perhaps better promotion of overseas ministry would produce better results.

A question that comes before us is this: What shall we look for in a given Church that will encourage us to believe that this Church will have something to teach us in reference to overseas ministry? We shall first look for a Church whose program is geared to the development and training of its people along spiritual lines. This does not imply that we are speaking of a Church that is program centered, it does mean however, that we believe that growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ can and must be fostered by more than the teaching and preaching of the Word of God.

Along this line, we will look for a Church where the elders are more than figureheads, a Church where the Pastor is risking the problems attendant with delegating responsibility and authority to those without proven ability, a Church where the young in Christ will not be afraid to express their immature views, because those of maturity have proven that they are not easily shocked by the immaturities of the young in Christ. A Church where sin is dealt with in a firm yet loving way, and, in which we see a goodly number of those who fall into error restored to the faith through New Testament principles. We will look for a Church that has a proven concern for the spiritual needs of those in its immediate vicinity. A Church that has used various means to attempt to meet that need. This will be a Church where bearing witness for Christ is a thing of joy and satisfaction. New members in the community will be contacted in a systematic way. A door-to-door program will have a part in the total outreach program.

There will be a longsighted view in reference to the use and need for facilities of worship. This Church will not be taken by surprise. There will be an enlightened concern for surrounding communities, and if possible, ministries will be developed in these places of need. I believe that the members of this Church will show stability, few will be those in her midst that wander from Church to Church, the choice of a Church in which to labor will be no small concern to those who have been trained in her midst.

What would be the overseas policies of this ideal Church?

1. A very high priority should be placed on the ministry of Church planting. This attitude would be the outgrowth of a deep belief that God ministers His grace and wisdom through the Church.
2. Specialized ministries such as the use of communications, literature, education, medicine, agriculture, etc., would be conceived of as having great value and validity only in conjunction with a good program of Church planting. This would mean that such a Church would be very reluctant to lend itself to a great expenditure of manpower, time, and money on any specialized project which ignored the planting of Churches.
3. Such a Church would foster the type of missionary program that would keep its people informed of the importance of overseas ministry. By so doing, along with its regular emphasis of stimulating the growth of Christians, this Church would see its overseas interest increase through the fact that those from its own congregation would be thrust forth of God to carry on the work.

4. Such a Church would be knowledgeable and opinionated concerning the performance and present policies of the various mission boards. This Church would become aware of the varying emphases of the mission boards and would develop definite preferences in reference to supporting the various mission boards. This Church would attempt to influence the selection of a Board by the applicant.

COMMENTS ON OUR PRESENT SITUATION

1. Some word, perhaps, should be said in commendation to the policy of our churches to support in full (in most cases) our missionaries.

2. Some word, perhaps, should be said about the local church who is mature enough to produce men qualified to do missionary work and called of God, also, taking responsibility for its own sons.

3. Some word, perhaps, about the use of missionaries at home on furlough. Should they not minister in the local Church (their own) as missionaries - and would not the local church have greater reason to support them on the field if they were real missionaries at home during this time rather than running around showing travel pictures.

4. A Word should be said about the natural relationship between a vital soul winning program at home and the world outreach.

PROPOSALS

1. The Bible Fellowship Church should send representatives to gatherings such as the Wheaton Congress on World Missions and the Congress on World Evangelism now in progress in Berlin, Germany.

2. The Foreign Missions Board of the Bible Fellowship Church should make a concerted effort to stimulate missionary interest amongst the young people of the Bible Fellowship Church. This effort should include the provision of a planning service for presentation of a missionary emphasis in the local Church, a presentation of strategic developments and projects in our Fellowship News, the cataloging of speakers, visual aids and periodicals which will best help in the development of a well rounded understanding of the ministries of today - Missionary Conference Service.

3. The Foreign Missions Board of the Bible Fellowship Church should encourage our local Churches to plan for the housing of those missionaries which they support in such a way that our missionaries can live in the community of the supporting Church for at least a portion of the time of furlough. An attempt should be made to incorporate this missionary family into the life of the local Church during that time - James Bigley.

4. We should attempt to exercise stronger guidance over our prospective missionaries by making it clear that we prefer to be consulted by each applicant prior to any contact with other boards. We should decide upon the types of ministry which will receive priority in our consideration for support. Whenever possible we should stand ready and eager to influence the applicants choice of field, ministry, and board.

5. The Foreign Missions Board should make an appraisal of our present overseas commitments in reference to balance between the various ministries, emphasis on the various areas of the world, lasting value of present enterprises, and should pass a judgment as to the adequacy or inadequacy of our financial support of overseas ministries. Recommendations should follow such an appraisal.

6. The Bible Fellowship Church should consider the possibility of allowing all missionaries to exercise a choice as to whether their support will remain guaranteed by Conference, or whether they prefer to agree to accept the amount which their local supporting Church raises. This would make the local Church more directly responsible for the welfare of their missionary and could result in a deeper concern for the missionaries' welfare.

7. We should allow our missionaries greater freedom to solicit funds within our Churches for special projects. This solicitation should take the form of presentation to an interested Official Board, not a public solicitation.

8. We should encourage each of our Churches to make every effort to support in full those who enter overseas ministry from that congregation.

9. We should consider making arrangements for summer seminars for students. These seminars would take place on a mission station. At very least we should make students aware that if they should wish to travel abroad we will make every effort to have their trip include a visit to missionary work in action. Trips to South or Central America are not unusual for students in our day.

In closing I would like to commend our Board of Foreign Missions for its policy of supporting our missionaries in full in most cases. It is also my opinion that the missionaries which we support are as fine a group of missionaries as we know of. It is our prayer that in the years to come we may be worthy of its privilege of supporting many more like them.