
SUBMISSION ON THE MISSION FIELD

Submission is a common biblical concept. The Bible tells us that Christians are to submit primarily to God (James 4:7). It also urges them to submit to their parents (Ephesians 6:1), to ruling authorities (1 Peter 2:13) and last, but not least, to those in church leadership (Hebrews 13:7). Biblical submission is always motivated by love and reverence for Christ. Those who practise it will also benefit from it.

Many evangelical mission organisations hold the idea of submission in high regard. The concept of submission is an important part of their organisational culture. Thus, in a recent article two British mission leaders wrote the following: '[M]issionaries need to be gospel people and church people. A test of whether they are is in their willingness to allow their home church to hold them accountable. Tempting though it may be, wise churches won't send the awkward rebellious ones, but the best ones, the most submissive and loyal.'¹ The ability to submit is undoubtedly important for every missionary. But how do missionaries respond if they find themselves in contexts and situations where submission is either not exercised at all or where it is rather dominant? How do they respond if their own role is not clearly defined? How do they respond if they deal with various groups that expect submission from them?

Challenges for missionaries: The rejection of submission in the western context and the over-emphasis in the Southern African context

In the postmodern western context in which individualism is flourishing and any form of authority is being questioned, submission has almost become a *faux-pas* word. The idea of submitting to someone is not a popular one these days. People know their rights and they are quick to insist on them. That others have the right to make decisions for them leaves them with a feeling of uneasiness. Unfortunately, the church is also affected by this development. One reason for the widespread phenomenon of church-hopping is certainly an unwillingness to accept the authority of church leaders and to submit to them. Whenever church leaders make a decision one does not agree with there is always the option to move on to the church next door. Alternatively, one can 'plant' a new church if there are more people who share one's reservations. The refusal to become a member of the local church where one worships may also be seen in this light.

Instead of leaving the church, members sometimes decide to make life difficult for their leaders. They question everything their leaders do. No suggestion, no plan is good enough. There is constant resistance. This can go as far as character assassination and even legal battles in secular courts. Pastors are often not seen as servants of Christ whose ministry it is to lead but as employees who are to do what some influential members want. As a result the concept of submission is rarely mentioned, let alone taught, in many churches.

¹ Ray Porter & Keith Walker, Mission: no new crisis, *Evangelicals Now* 26(1): (2013), 19.

In the Southern African context the need for church members to submit to their leaders is particularly stressed in Neo-Pentecostal and other African Initiated Churches. Leaders of these churches often demand total submission from their members. They argue that they have been chosen by God to act and speak on his behalf. Therefore, they are not accountable to their churches for anything they say or do. As representatives of God on earth their power is absolute and must not be questioned, so they think. The slightest criticism is silenced by pointing church members to passages such as Matthew 7:1 ('Do not judge, or you too will be judged') and Psalm 105:15 ('Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.'). The problem here is that of proof-texting as these two verses are taken completely out of context. The latter is a warning addressed to pagan kings (Psalm 105:14) and not to fellow believers, while the former does not forbid us to discern God's truth from false teaching and to offer correction in love. It is a warning 'not to assume God's prerogative to condemn the guilty'.²

Both attitudes towards submission present missionaries with challenges. The refusal to submit to spiritual leaders, a lack of commitment to church membership, and the phenomenon of church-hopping can be huge stumbling blocks, for example, to church planters in post-Christian Europe. They might be confronted with people who join their church plant for the wrong motives and who have their own ideas about the development of this new church. As a result church planters are tempted to react to this by trying too hard to exercise authority. In other words, they are in danger of applying a *heavy shepherding* approach. In contrast to this, missionaries who serve in the Southern African context where submission is often over-emphasised may be tempted to reject any form of submission. They are in danger of promoting and practising a *laissez-faire* approach. This, however, can be easily interpreted by indigenous Christians as either weakness or rebelliousness. Both interpretations are not helpful for the missionaries' ministries.

More challenges: the status of missionaries and their relation to sending churches, mission organisations and receiving churches

There are other challenges which missionaries face when it comes to submission. Central here is their position in relation to their sending church, mission organisation, receiving church or para-church organisation.

First, their role as missionaries is not always clearly defined, which makes submission rather complicated in general but especially in conflict situations. Many evangelical missionaries who are involved in teaching, preaching and church planting ministries are not 'formally' recognised as pastors, deacons, or evangelists by their sending churches and in their receiving countries. As a result it is not always clear where they fit in the leadership structure of their home church or the church on the mission field. Furthermore, an increasing number of missionaries lack such recognition by the churches in the receiving countries because they are no longer involved in the core missionary tasks of evangelism, church planting and leadership training. They serve in agricultural projects, hospitals and schools which have no or little church connection.³ For these missionaries the main partners are no longer indigenous churches but government departments and non-government organisations. They are more or less disconnected from the national church.

Secondly, the majority of evangelical cross-cultural missionaries are sent out by one or more local churches through a mission agency, and they are usually seconded to a church or a para-church organisation in a foreign country. The local churches back home stress that they are senders and the mission agency emphasises its role as a facilitator. This implies that the pastoral responsibility for the missionaries lies with the sending churches. It also implies that the missionaries remain accountable to them. However, in reality

² Cf. Craig Keener, *Matthew* (Leicester: IVP, 1997), 157.

³ Cf. Thorsten Prill, Theological controversies on the mission field in southern Africa: reasons, implications, and responses, in *Mission Namibia: challenges and opportunities for the 21st century*. Prill, T (ed.) (München: Grin, 2012), 89.

missionaries find themselves first and foremost under the authority of their mission organisation by which they are often employed. In addition, they are also accountable to the national church or para-church organisation to which they are seconded. In other words, many missionaries do not have one but at least three 'human masters', with the mission organisation usually being the dominant one.

This kind of construct may *work* as long as no conflicts arise. But how are missionaries to react if the leaders of their sending church, which supports them financially, ask them to use evangelistic methods which are culturally not appropriate in their setting? How are missionaries to respond if their mission leaders in the field teach heresies and threaten them with legal consequences (e.g. warnings and even dismissal), if they do not keep quiet? What are missionaries to do if they find out that the leadership of the national church, which acts as a sponsor for their work permits, is corrupt? Are they still to submit in all these cases? There is surely the temptation to do so in order to avoid conflict or even to save one's ministry. In situations like these missionaries are reminded that they are dependent on quite a number of different groups and they can easily feel the pressure to please them.

Thirdly, as mentioned above submission is still an important feature of the organisational culture of many evangelical mission organisations. However, it is not always clear if their understanding and practice of submission is informed by secular culture and traditions or the teachings of the Scriptures. Many missionaries are familiar with rules and regulations which reflect an inflexible, sometimes patronising and slightly authoritarian, leadership style. There is, for example, the well-known *out-of-bed-rule* of a large US mission board, which requires missionaries to seek permission from their superiors every time they intend to stay away from their home for more than three nights. Another mission organisation does not allow married missionaries to be separated from each other for more than four weeks, even if they have been happily married for 40 years. There are many other rules like that which actually can hinder mission work but which missionaries are expected to submit to. To question these rules and regulations is usually seen as a sign of spiritual immaturity and lack of fitness for missionary service. The same is true, for example, if missionaries hesitate to follow some questionable directives of their leaders, such as the one to enter their country of service on a tourist visa and start working without a valid work permit.

Finally, some evangelical mission organisations have become more and more top-down driven in recent years. This can be seen in organisational structures which are increasingly hierarchical and bureaucratic. There are more levels of leadership (team leaders, country leaders, regional leaders, international leaders etc.) and a growing percentage of missionaries who are involved in support ministries (e.g. administrative officers, finance officers, development officers, personnel officers, IT officers, MK teachers, counsellors etc.). However, there is another side to this development. Some mission organisations are actively promoting a new, broader understanding of mission, which considers verbal proclamation of the gospel and the planting of churches no longer as the heartbeat of mission, and they expect all their missionaries to submit to these new ideas.

Knowing what the Bible teaches about submission

In view of such attitudes, practice and challenges missionaries need to ask themselves: What does the Bible really say about submission to spiritual leaders?

The apostle Peter asks young Christian men in the churches of Asia Minor to 'be submissive to those who are older' (1 Peter 5:5a). Most scholars agree that the phrase 'those who are older' is likely to refer to those who

hold the office of elder within the church.⁴ Consequently, the apostle Peter is commanding young people to submit to the governing authority of the church leaders and not to older people in general. But why is he giving this instruction in the first place? The answer is probably a lack of spiritual maturity, or as Andrew Whitman puts it: ‘Perhaps there was a situation where the “generation gap” was widening with the younger people thinking they knew better and should have a greater say in the running of the church, and older people feeling threatened! Young people can often be independent-minded and sometimes rebellious. Therefore, they needed a special reminder.’⁵

In order to tackle the generation gap problem the apostle Peter, however, goes a step further. He decides to deal with all inter-personal relationships in the church, and so he addresses the whole congregation: ‘All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, “God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.”’ (1 Peter 5:5b). Peter charges all believers, without exception, to practice humility. Whether they are church elders or young people, all should demonstrate respect for one another. This is the way of Christ. Howard Marshall writes: ‘Just as Jesus humbly served his disciples, so too each member of the church, whatever his station, must show humility toward each of the other members, whatever their station...Leadership does not mean superiority and the right to domineer. “Fellowship” does not confer the right to undermine.’⁶ Everyone is called to submit to everyone in one way or another. This idea of mutual submission can also be found in the writings of the apostle Paul (e.g. Romans 12:10, Ephesians 5:21, Philippians 2:3-4).

In 1 Corinthians 16:15-16 Paul urges the believers in Corinth to submit not only to Stephanas and his family, who were among the first Christians in the province of Achaia and who have proved themselves to be committed servants of Christ, but also to others like them. The authority the apostle Paul endorses here is an authority that is characterised by humble and faithful service. Leaders who show such an attitude must be supported by their church members. Craig Blomberg comments: ‘[No] New Testament text enjoins blind subservience to authoritarian or incompetent Christian office-holders. While Paul never abolishes hierarchy, he radically redefines its authority in terms of service rather than privilege.’⁷

Another key passage is Hebrews 13:17: ‘Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.’ Here we are given four reasons for submission to church leaders: *First*, church members are to submit to their leaders because of the authority they have. It is not a personal authority which they have earned because of their expert knowledge, charismatic personality, social status or leadership experience in the business world. On the contrary, it is a spiritual one given to them by Christ himself, the head of the Church. *Secondly*, Christians have to submit to their leaders because it is their leaders’ task to care for their spiritual wellbeing. In other words, church leaders carry a heavy responsibility on their shoulders and every Christian believer needs to recognise that. *Thirdly*, submission will make the work of leaders not only easier but also a joyful business. Church members who cooperate with their leaders are an encouragement to them and an antidote to sorrow and frustration. *Fourthly*, Christians will benefit from leaders who are not burdened and who are not fulfilling their tasks with groaning only. Leaders who feel supported and respected are much more effective in caring for their flock.

⁴ E.g. Peter Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 183; Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007), 192; Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson), 141; Andrew Whitman, *1 Peter: Crossway Bible Guide: Free to hope* (Nottingham: Crossway, 1994), 175.

⁵ Whitman, 175.

⁶ I Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), 165.

⁷ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 340.

However, the writer of Hebrews also points us to the flip-side of submission. He reminds us that every Christian leader is accountable to God. Yes, leaders have authority but that authority must not be abused as they serve a higher authority. To confuse authority with authoritarianism is something Christian leaders must avoid at all cost. They have, as Hywel R Jones writes 'to ensure that their decisions are arrived at in accord with Christ's Word, and they are not to think that they are beyond the obligation to explain their decisions to the people, who are to defer to them unless those decisions are manifestly contrary to Scripture'.⁸ Put differently, their authority arises out of God's Word. Where the teachings or actions of Christian leaders go against God's Word, Christians have the obligation to disobey their leaders. Finally, Hebrews 13:7 reminds us that Christian leadership authority is always shared authority. Note that the writer speaks of 'leaders' who are to be obeyed. To have only one leader or several leaders who think of their authority in individual terms is not something which the Bible promotes. Christian leadership is a corporate exercise.

Accountability in the mission field: the biblical pattern

The American missiologist Arthur Glasser sees the apostle Paul as the leader and organiser of para-church mission work. In his article entitled *The Apostle Paul and the Missionary Task* he argues that there is neither proof that Paul was sent out by the church nor that he felt accountable to the church. With regard to Paul and Barnabas' commissioning in Antioch as it is recorded in Acts 13:1-4 he writes: 'When Barnabas and Paul were designated as its charter members, the church merely "let them go" (v.3) because it was essentially the Holy Spirit whose authority and designation were behind "sending them forth" (v.4).'⁹ The majority of scholars do not share Glasser's interpretation. John Stott, for example, points out that the evangelist Luke uses the verb *apoluō* both in the sense of 'release' and 'dismiss'.¹⁰ Consequently, it would be wrong to conclude a totally passive role of the church here. Stott writes: 'Would it not be true to say both that the Spirit sent them out, by instructing the church to do so, and that the church sent them out, having been directed by the Spirit to do so?'¹¹ For F.F Bruce, the fact that the church leaders laid hands on Paul and Barnabas is a clear sign that they were also sent by the church: 'By this means the church of Antioch, through its leaders, expressed its fellowship with Barnabas and Saul and recognized them as its delegates or "apostles". They were sent out by the whole church, and it was to the whole church that they made their report when they returned to Antioch (Acts 14:26f.).'¹² Marshall writes about this report that it 'was natural and right' that the church in Antioch which had sent the two out should receive such a report on their work.¹³ It is surely a biblical pattern that missionaries are sent by local churches and are held accountable to these churches.¹⁴ The idea of freelance missionaries cannot be found in Scripture, or as Eric Wright puts it: 'Missionaries are neither adventurers who love to travel nor eccentric individualists who find local church life too confining. They are visionaries who develop within a local-church setting and whose calling and missionary gifts are recognized by church leaders.'¹⁵

However, Glasser is right when he argues that Paul's ministry team operated very independently: 'It was economically self-sufficient, although not unwilling to receive funds from local congregations. It recruited,

⁸ Hywel R Jones, *Let's study Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 155.

⁹ Arthur Glasser, *The apostle Paul and the missionary task*, in *Perspectives on the world Christian movement*. Winter, RD & Hawthorne, SC (eds.) (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009) (149-158), 150.

¹⁰ John Stott, *The message of Acts* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), 217.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 217-218.

¹² FF Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 261.

¹³ I Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Leicester: IVP, 1986), 242.

¹⁴ Of course missionaries are not apostles in the narrower sense. The authority of the apostle Paul and the twelve apostles was unique. Their exclusive office does no longer exist today. In that sense missionaries are not apostles. However, the apostolic ministries of evangelism, church planting and leadership training continue wherever missionaries are involved in these activities. Cf. EE Wright, *A practical theology of missions* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2010), 169.

¹⁵ Wright, 169.

trained, and on occasion disciplined its members. The Holy Spirit provided for its direction.’¹⁶ Paul and his co-workers were certainly not micro-managed by the church in Antioch as is the case with some missionaries and their sending churches or mission agencies today. When missionaries have to write weekly up-dates for their sending churches, attend regular one-to-one coaching sessions with their team leaders, look after frequent visitors from their sending churches who come to review the work and provide ‘help’ and when they have to answer questions in their appraisals which do not respect their privacy, one begins to wonder if there is something missing that the church in Antioch seemed to have: trust. Luke tells us in Acts 15 that Paul and his co-workers were at the centre of some major controversies, but this did not keep the church in Antioch from commending Paul and his new associate Silas ‘to the grace of the Lord’ (15:40).¹⁷ Luke leaves us with no doubt that this was a good decision by the church as he continues in the next verse: ‘He [Paul] went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches.’ The church in Antioch knew Paul well, they knew his teaching and preaching (Acts 11:25; 15:35) and they must have trusted him. They must have trusted him as an apostle, as a brother in Christ. They had trust in his calling and his spiritual maturity. The same is true for Silas. When Silas first came to Antioch they did not know him. However, they knew that he was not only a trusted leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22) but also a prophet who spoke encouraging and strengthening words to them (v.32). Trust played an essential part in the relationship between Paul’s missionary team and the church in Antioch.

Applying the biblical teaching on submission

For missionaries to know what the Bible teaches about submission is good, but it is not enough. If they have the chance to teach this biblical concept to others they should not keep quiet. They also need to apply it on a daily basis. Right doctrine must lead to right practice; and that means neither the authoritarian *heavy shepherding* nor the non-committal *laissez-faire* approach is an option for them. Where missionaries are in leadership positions they are called to exercise authority in a way that gives glory to God. Where they are working under the authority of national leaders or other missionaries they are called to submit in a way that also glorifies God. In both cases, they recognise that submission is God’s idea and that it is beneficial to them and others. Consequently, their ministries are marked by humility, respect and servanthood. As humble cross-cultural servants they do not view their own culture as superior to their host culture or the cultures of their fellow missionaries from other countries, as such an attitude can easily lead to conflicts. On the contrary, they respect other cultures and are willing to submit to cultural norms and customs different from their own if it serves the cause of the gospel. For a missionary in Namibia, for example, this might mean to eat a goat’s head as the guest of honour at a church dinner, sitting through a six hour long memorial service, or singing 17th century Lutheran hymns rather than Keith Getty or Stuart Townend songs.

However, this also means that missionaries should not put up with an authoritarian *heavy shepherding* approach by national church leaders. If they did that it would be a bad witness for the gospel. When the apostle Paul was confronted with church members in Corinth who were ‘arrogant’ (1 Cor. 4:18) and behaved like ‘kings’ (v.8) he did not hesitate to point them to himself as a role model: ‘Therefore I urge you to imitate me’ (v.16). Paul did not want them to become supporters of Paul – Pauline Christians. He wanted them to imitate him so that they might learn to imitate Jesus.¹⁸ As the Corinthians became more like Paul, they would be more like Christ. Missionaries need to do the same. In Southern Africa there are many older pastors who do not want to share any responsibilities with young theology students or young pastors. Like a lioness that watches over her lion cubs they watch over ‘their’ church. They do not allow young, gifted people to preach or to lead in any way. They want to keep it all to themselves, because they are afraid that these young ones

¹⁶ Glasser, 150.

¹⁷ David J Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in conflict: 10 key questions in Christian missions today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 156.

¹⁸ Cf. Leon Morris, *The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: an introduction and commentary* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 83.

might do better and become more popular than they are. This is the chance for missionary pastor-teachers to say to national pastors 'Therefore I urge you to imitate me'.

Missionaries are also under an obligation to refuse submission if they are confronted with views and decisions which are contrary to God's truth. Missionaries are first and foremost accountable to the Lord and not to their mission agency, sending or receiving church. In many Southern African countries the so-called prosperity gospel is widespread. Sometimes the preaching of such a wrong gospel happens very openly, at other times the approach is more subtle. Kasera speaks of the militant form and the diffused form 'which overlap each other in many ways'.¹⁹ The message, however, is always the same: the more money you give to the church the more God will bless you materially and heal you from any diseases. Prosperity Gospel theology, as Dickson Chilogani²⁰ has pointed out, is based on two assumptions: sin and a lack of faith will lead to poverty and suffering, while faith and a righteous life will lead to prosperity and good health. This doctrine is problematic as it not only misinterprets biblical texts but also adds more pain to those who already suffer from exploitation, poverty, or physical and emotional illness. Missionaries must not submit to such teaching even if the refusal to do so will put their ministries at risk. In these cases the *clausula Petri* of Acts 5:29 applies ('We must obey God rather than men!'). Especially missionaries with a preaching and teaching ministry have a duty to warn against such false teachings which 'promote controversies rather than God's work' (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3-4). This can happen through the preaching of sermons, the teaching of workshops in theological colleges and churches or the publication of books or articles. To keep quiet is not an option. The apostle Paul and his fellow apostles did not keep quiet but dealt with false teachers and false teachings in their letters (e.g. Romans 16:17; Galatians 1:8; 1 Tim 1:3-11; 2 Tim 3:1-9; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 2:18-27). They knew that there was too much at stake.

The same is true when missionaries are confronted with doctrinal errors within their own mission organisations. In recent years so-called *Transformational Theology* has become very popular in evangelical mission circles. The problem with this theology is that it promotes a very broad view of mission which is in danger of replacing 'eternal salvation with temporal social wellbeing and [which] forgets that the Kingly rule of Christ is not of this world (John 18:36).'²¹

One evangelical mission organisation, for example, redefines mission in terms of *Transformation Development*. At the heart of this new understanding lies the idea that there are four kinds of relationships that need healing. In one of their publications we can read the following: '2 Corinthians 5:18-19 calls us to be ministers of reconciliation. We have a role to help people restore the relationships in their life; with God, others, themselves and the rest of creation.'²² While it is true that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross already 'reorganized the cosmos in some unexplained mysterious way'²³ (Col. 1:19-20) and that all of creation will be delivered at the second coming of Christ (Rom. 8 18-23) nowhere in the New Testament is the church commissioned to preach reconciliation between human beings and nature, including the animal world. Also, the idea that Christ died on the cross in order to reconcile us to ourselves has no Scriptural warrant. In his book *The Cross of Christ* John Stott puts it this way: 'The first thing that has to be said about the biblical gospel of reconciliation, however, is that it begins with reconciliation to God, and continues with a reconciled community in Christ. Reconciliation is not a term the Bible uses to describe 'coming to terms with oneself'...'²⁴

¹⁹ BM Kasera, The dangers of prosperity gospel in Namibia, *The Namibian*, 14 June 2007, 7.

²⁰ Dickson Chilogani, Prosperity gospel in Africa: a response from the Book of Job, *AICMAR Bulletin* (6:51-75, 2007), 51.

²¹ Aufruf Tübingen, World evangelism or world change? A call to revive the biblical understanding of missions - Tübingen - Pentecost 2013.

²² Z Whitehouse, People not projects, *The African connection*, 2012, 2:7.

²³ Robert D Culver, *Systematic theology: biblical and historical* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2005), 583.

²⁴ John Stott, *The cross of Christ* (Nottingham: IVP, 2009), 225.

Where missionaries are expected to subscribe to or even teach such views they have to refuse to do so if they want to stay loyal to Jesus and the Gospel. They should seize opportunities to raise their concerns not only with their mission leaders but also with their sending and receiving churches. When Paul and Barnabas, for example, were confronted with a new teaching which insisted that male Christians had to be circumcised they had a 'sharp dispute and debate' with those who promoted this view (Acts 15:2). Obviously the debate was not very successful and so the two, together with others, were appointed by the church in Antioch 'to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question'.

Missionaries who act in such ways serve as role models who help to regain a biblical understanding of submission, whether they work in Africa or Europe. They help to regain what seems to be lost ground on both continents.

Finally, it is not only the missionaries but also the sending churches and mission organisations which need to have a biblical view of submission. What did the two British mission leaders quoted at the beginning write?

'[M]issionaries need to be gospel people and church people. A test of whether they are is in their willingness to allow their home church to hold them accountable. Tempting though it may be, wise churches won't send the awkward rebellious ones, but the best ones, the most submissive and loyal.' How very true! But who are the best? Well, in the New Testament the first missionaries like Paul and Silas were spiritually mature and gifted preachers, pastor-teachers and leaders who had the trust of their Antiochian sending church and the apostles. They were set apart, i.e. officially recognised for their service, and worked together in a team. They certainly felt loyal and accountable to their fellow believers in Antioch but their first loyalty was to their Lord and his gospel of salvation. They knew that they served a higher authority.

Who are the best missionaries? Team-oriented, mature and humble Christians with a servant heart who are driven by a passion for God and for lost people, who feel directly accountable to their Lord and who possess the gifts that have special relevance for mission work, i.e. the gifts of evangelism, pastoral care, preaching, teaching and leadership.²⁵ Missionaries like that do not need to be micro-managed. Of course there have been cases of missionaries who lost their ministry focus or their theological convictions while on the mission field and probably there will always be cases like that. But that does not mean that missionaries cannot be trusted and have to be closely monitored.

The apostle Paul and his team were unable to be in constant communication with the brothers and sisters in Antioch because of the great distances between the team and the church. Today modern technology makes communication between missionaries and sending churches much easier than two thousand years ago. However, the principle that the mission team must be field-led still applies. Errol Hale writes: 'It is impossible for the sending church to direct every aspect of the missionary enterprise. The Holy Spirit will guide and direct the missionary while on the field as to the daily details of the work. This is another reason that missionaries must be mature Christians whose relationship with the Lord and ability to hear and follow His leading must be without question.'²⁶

When the apostle Paul, for example, decided to go to Philippi he did not consult the leaders in Antioch or the other apostles in Jerusalem but followed the call he had received from the Lord. The evangelist Luke reports: 'During the night Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia,

²⁵ Cf. Wright, 176.

²⁶ E Hale, undated, The role of the local church in sending missionaries.

<http://www.gbcpk.org/site/cpage.asp?page_id=180049824&sec_id=180008954> date of access: 24.8.2013

concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them' (Acts 16:9-10). Paul and his co-workers submitted to the Lord and the result was the formation of the church in Philippi, the first Christian congregation on the European continent.

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