

Biblical Roles in the Missionary Call

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Introduction

Sometimes evangelical faith missions compares to the Wild West of early America. Many mission fields are as untamed frontiers and the missionaries are like the American cowboys. The cowboys had to make quick, difficult decisions and live with the consequences or rewards. They were far from family and friends, alone and dependent on their self-reliance and ability to make individual choices and decisions. Modern evangelical faith missions often follows this same pattern. In spite of the similarities between the Wild West and mission fields, I doubt this is the pattern that God intended for missions. I think the Bible has something to say regarding a pattern for missions in the twenty-first century.

Presuppositions and Definitions

I approach this subject with several presuppositions and narrow uses of some key terms. I also recognize that there are good people in the evangelical community who will disagree with the views presented here. Since my purpose is not to prove my presuppositions I will simply state them here and define my narrow use of some key terms.

1. Each local church is an autonomous body of believers who is accountable to Christ, whether part of a larger denomination or independent of any denominational hierarchy.
2. Christ has authorized the church to carry out the work of God in the world in this age and this authority resides primarily in each local church as an autonomous body.
3. Though the term missions can have a much broader definition, I use it here to refer to the ministries of the church that involve cross cultural and geographic boundaries and often linguistic boundaries to make disciples and strengthen the disciples of Christ to the end that churches are planted, enlarged or strengthened in the culture and region of ministry.
4. Faith missions refers to missions work in which the missionaries are generally not supported by a fixed salary from a church or parachurch organization, but they raise their own support and trust God to provide the necessary resources through like-minded, compassionate donors.

Authority Challenges in Evangelical Faith Missions

On more than one occasion I have had evangelical faith missionaries tell me that they do not work for a church or for a mission board, often proudly proclaiming that the Holy Spirit is their boss and they answer only to God. They say they were called by God, sent by God and are directed by God. I have known a good number of missionaries who said that God had called them to a particular ministry. When church leadership communicated disagreement with the missionaries' claims, the response was to look for a church that would

sponsor or commission them based, sometimes, solely on their testimony that God had called them to the specified work. The new church often had little knowledge of the missionaries' spiritual maturity, spiritual qualifications, or their aptitudes, gifts and abilities.

In one particular case, a church commissioned a missionary for service and after several years, he adopted a doctrinal position that was in disagreement with his commissioning church. The doctrinal shift also put him at odds with the mission agency with which he was aligned. To complicate matters, he publically announced his change in beliefs, without first communicating with either his church or his mission agency. After his public announcement, he refused to hear his church leadership regarding the possibility of his error or discuss his decision to the end that they might find common ground. He chose instead to adopt the new position entirely on his own, having concluded in his mind that he had discovered the truth and was merely informing his church of his conclusions. Ultimately the church withdrew its commission of the missionary and the mission agency dismissed him. However, the main reason for the withdrawal of the missionary's commission was not the doctrinal difference. It was the missionary's proud attitude, claiming that the Holy Spirit was directing him and therefore, overriding the need to submit to the church that had authorized him to go forth and preach the gospel.

Within a month or so, one of his supporting churches decided that they would commission him to represent them. There is nothing inherently wrong with the decision that church made. They are an autonomous church and have the right and the responsibility before God to make such decisions. However, I find it disturbing that they did not inquire of the church or the mission agency that had dismissed the missionary to learn the reasons for the church's withdrawal of the missionary's commission. They made their decision based only on the claim of the missionary that he was following the guidance of the Holy Spirit and his claim that the only reason for the separation was his view of a particular doctrine.

Questions Raised

This scenario is repeated in various fashions many times over in evangelical faith missions. This should cause us to ask several questions. Is this the way God intended missions to work? Is a missionary only accountable to God and not to any man? How does God call people to serve as missionaries? Are there biblical qualifications for missionaries? If a man claims that the Holy Spirit has called him to serve in a particular way in a particular place, does anyone have the responsibility or authority to challenge or confirm that call? Is serving as a missionary a spiritual call of God or is it simply a professional occupation? What is the role of the church in missions? In an effort to answer these questions I will attempt to describe what I believe to be a biblical example of a call to missions, the biblical qualifications of a missionary and the roles of the Holy Spirit and the church in the missionary call.

These questions are important for the church in America today. The United States is arguably the most individualistic country in the world and Americans are the most individual centered of all the people on earth. (Hofstede 2005, 73-113) According to Geert Hofstede, “The high Individualism [*sic*] (IDV) ranking for the United States indicates a society with a more individualistic attitude and relatively loose bonds with others” (Hofstede n. d.). This individualism is fed by the popular American philosophy that says, “Just follow your heart,” which is contra-biblical. A Christian is, by definition, a follower of Christ. Our deceitful, sinful hearts do not generally comply with the commands of Christ.

The Way Forward

If we want answers to questions regarding the calling of God to missionary service and the role of the local church, we should look to God’s word for the answers. Since the book of Acts is a historical record of the inception and early development of the church and presents the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we will look to Luke’s record of the early church and the ministry of the Holy Spirit for answers to these questions. In the historical account of the development of the church we find the question of mission “dominates the book of Acts (Senior and StuhlmueLLer 1983, 271).” It reveals how the gospels’ mandated mission of taking the message of Christ and His salvation to the world is to be accomplished. The rest of the New Testament fills in details of how the believers are to function in the world and the church.

Heart of the Matter

The Bible does not give us precise rules and procedures for the selecting and sending of missionaries, nor does it tell us precisely what comprises missionary work. The term missionary does not even appear in the Scriptures. Furthermore, there is no clearly established normative practice of the church in the New Testament regarding missionary work. However, we find a concise, clear example in Acts 13:1-4 of the calling and sending of men in a role that today we call “missionary.” Since this is the only example of its kind in the New Testament, let’s glean what we can from the narrative. Lacking specific commands and directions in the Scriptures, I believe it is valid to extrapolate the principles in this example to the church today.

This passage accounts the Holy Spirit’s calling of Barnabas and Saul to ministry and it reveals the role of the one calling (the Holy Spirit), the role of the ones being called (Barnabas and Saul) and the role of the local church in the call to ministry. Luke has recorded here for us the calling and commissioning of people to go out as missionaries from the local church at Antioch. There is no indication that the church in Antioch consulted with any other churches or church leaders from other locations, even the church at Jerusalem,

regarding the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas for missionary service. It appears from the passage that this was a decision that took place at a local level from beginning to end. Since this was apparently a local process and decision, it might be helpful to consider some of the background details of the city and church.

Antioch Background

Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria with a population estimated as high as 600,000 people. It was a multi-ethnic culture with people from many parts of the Empire, each bringing their own cultural influences to the society of Antioch. The local church was well established and representative of the ethnic diversity of the city (Acts 11:19-20). The growth and ministry of the Antioch church was significant enough that it received the attention of the church in Jerusalem some 300 miles away and Barnabas' ministry there resulted in significant numerical growth (Acts 11:21-24). The church in Antioch was probably 8-10 years old in Acts 13. (Schnabel 2004, 781-797)

The ethnic and cultural diversity of the society and the church was represented even among the church leadership (Acts 13:1). As these diverse leaders were ministering to the Lord, He called Saul and Barnabas to serve Him as missionaries. Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us an example of God's call to missionary work, in Acts 13:1-4. In this passage he tells us who does the calling, something of the candidates' qualifications and who does the sending.

The Holy Spirit Calls

Luke tells us that it is God the Holy Spirit who issues the missionary call (Acts 13:2). It is more than a simple career choice. It is a divine calling, "sovereignly exercised by the Holy Spirit" (Peters 1972, 272), inviting a particular person to serve Him in a particular manner and time. The call to ministry is unique. God does not call to other professions and careers, only to ministry. (Peters 1972, 274)

Barnabas and Saul were called by the Holy Spirit to be "sanctified" or set apart not just for any ministry, but for the ministry to which God was calling them. They were to be separated from the rest of the local church ministry to a particular task. Notice that the call is not to a particular place, but to a particular work. The Holy Spirit later leads them to various areas, but the call is to a work. In the book of Acts there are other examples of the direction and leading of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these two men but this is a special call to ministry. (Acts 9:4ff; 11:24; 16:6ff; 22:17ff)

The person of the Holy Spirit is "the catalyst and guiding force" (Senior and Stuhlmüller 1983, 275) for the church. His active involvement with the church began with

its inception at Pentecost (Acts 2:4-12). He guided Philip to preach to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:29, 39) and sent Peter to preach to Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:19ff; 11:12). He directed the church at Jerusalem regarding doctrine (Acts 15:28; cf. 15:8) and He directed people geographically (Acts 16:6-10; 19:21; 20:22; 21:11; 11:24; 13:2-4; 19:6). He also enabled boldness in witnessing for Christ (Acts 4:31; 6:5, 10, 55).

The text does not give details of how the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul. Stott (1990, 216-217) presents several possible scenarios, but suggests that the most likely is that the Holy Spirit burdened Barnabas' and Saul's hearts and subsequently guided the congregation to confirm the call. Bruce agrees. (1981, 261) The Holy Spirit may use different ways to call different people, but His primary way of communicating with His children is through His word.

Trusting that His word is inspired, infallible, applicable and sufficient should cause us to examine every possible leading under the spotlight of the Holy Scriptures. Peters suggests that God also uses several ways to reveal His will to man. Human instruments (Acts 11:25-26; 26:16-19), missionary reports and testimonies (Acts 14:27), sound logical thought, and even crisis experiences brought about by God may stir a believer's heart and may lead a believer to a particular ministry strategy and action. (1972, 279-280) Ultimately, God the Holy Spirit uses His word to guide His people.

The Holy Spirit actively worked in a special way among the apostles during the inception of the church. After all, they did not have the written New Testament which gives us guidance today. He often provided direct and specific revelation to individuals. Today, with the completed canon of Scripture, direct revelation is finished and the leading of the Holy Spirit can be more subjective. We do not hear, see or touch Him with our physical senses so we do not physically sense His guidance. Nonetheless, God has provided us with some criteria for verifying His calling to ministry, especially in the area of missions. The criteria and the pattern given in this example may be extrapolated to apply to the call of the Holy Spirit in other areas of ministry as well.

Though identifying the leading of the Holy Spirit can be subjective and is therefore subject to human error, we know that He would never lead us to do anything that would violate or contradict God's word. We may compare the possible calling of God to the teachings of the principles of His word and to the qualifications that are presented or implied in His word.

A person claiming to have been called by the Holy Spirit must meet certain biblical qualifications and criteria. We can see some specific characteristics in this passage in Acts and Paul gives us more in other passages that he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit such as the leadership qualifications described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. An important factor in identifying the call of the Holy Spirit in a person's life is the observation of the candidate by the local community of believers, the local church. God has provided the local church as a means for evaluating a person in regard to their qualifications for ministry

and the calling of the Holy Spirit in a his/her life. This may have been part of the process in Acts 13:1-4.

The Local Church Confirms the Call

The Holy Spirit's call to missions is denied or confirmed through the local church. Sommer erroneously suggests that "the call of a missionary is confirmed through the financial gifts of God's people" (Sommer 1999, 69). He also suggests that anyone who senses the call to missions should find a church that will "encourage your missionary call" (Sommer 1999, 69) rather than asking the church that knows the candidate best to evaluate the call. While the Holy Spirit indeed calls individuals, that call should be confirmed or denied by the local church. Schnabel says, "The church united in prayer is the place where God answers the prayer for strength to engage in courageous missionary work" (2004, 416). In Acts 13:1-4 we find a well established church and the Holy Spirit is setting apart believers to minister the Word throughout the world in an orderly organized fashion.

A local church is, most simply stated, a locally organized community of believers in Jesus Christ. This imperfect community has a responsibility to do its best to recognize the call of God in the lives of its members. There should be a level of accountability and fellowship that results in a familiarity that allows us to judge the abilities, spiritual gifts and spiritual maturity of our members. Before we commission someone to missionary service, we should verify the call of the Holy Spirit and their spiritual qualifications to the best of our abilities. This crucial step in the missionary process helps protect the integrity of the church and evangelical missions. When a missionary candidate contacts a church for possible support, that church does not have sufficient exposure to properly evaluate the candidate's qualifications for ministry or the call of the Holy Spirit in the candidate's life. Written testimonies and doctrinal questionnaires are good tools, but they are not enough. Prospective supporters and mission agencies alike are highly dependent on the screening and qualifying process of the commissioning or sending church.

If we simply accept the candidate's claim that God has called him, the result is every man doing that which is right in his own eyes. The candidate's claim to be heeding the leading of God in his heart is very subjective. The church, though imperfect, was established by Christ to carry out the work of God in the world. We need to trust that the plan that our sovereign, loving God has given us will accomplish His will. The church is to live in the Word of God striving to keep His precepts and diligently seeking the will of God in the light of His word. Ultimately, the church is responsible for placing its seal of approval on those who minister the gospel whether at home or abroad.

We need not only the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to determine the call of God, but the input and godly discernment of the body of Christ. Three key things that the local church can do to maintain the integrity of this biblical process are 1) train its members

regarding biblical qualifications for leadership, 2) train its members how to identify the calling of the Holy Spirit, and 3) seek to identify people who are qualified or could be qualified for leadership and who might be used by God in ministry.

Those Who Are Called

In the narrative of Acts 13:1-4 we see the Holy Spirit calling those who are already serving in a local church. In the New Testament, He did not call people into missions who are not already serving. Not only were Barnabas and Saul already ministering in the church at Antioch, they were among the most gifted ministers. Before their calling, at the time of their calling and after their calling, we find a record of significant service and ministry to the cause of Christ, nearly always connected to a local church in some way, either by way of planting or strengthening. Barnabas was serving in the church in Jerusalem when that church heard stories of what God was doing in the church in Antioch. The church in Jerusalem decided to send Barnabas to investigate what was happening in Antioch. He went to Antioch, as instructed by his local church in Jerusalem, and he preached the word and many were saved. Luke tells us that Barnabas was a “good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24). The work in Antioch was so fruitful that Barnabas sent for Saul to help him. Saul was serving and earning a good reputation for preaching the gospel, even before he was known by sight among the Judean churches, prior to his going to Antioch (Gal. 1:21-23). At Barnabas’ invitation, Saul went from Tarsus to join him in Antioch and they taught together there for a full year. After a period of time, perhaps at the end of the year, Saul and Barnabas, recognized as trustworthy leaders, were appointed to take a special offering to the church at Jerusalem to help the believers suffering there (Acts 11:22-30). These ministries were in the context of expanding the church and more specifically, the local church in Antioch. At the time of the call, both had been serving or ministering in that local church for at least a year.

It is not enough for a person to desire to be a missionary. They should already be serving in their local church’s ministry. If one is not serving in one’s local church where there is ample supervision and accountability, there is little chance that they will serve well on the mission field with little or no supervision and accountability. “The church is called upon to send its best, its brightest” (Larkin, 1995).

God also calls those who know His word and are proven in ministry of the Scriptures to serve as missionaries. Missionaries must be able to minister the Word of God. God could have said that there were certain men in Antioch without indicating any specific qualifications, but He named 5 individual men who were gifted and serving in specific ways, as prophets and teachers. “A clear delineation between these two terms is not possible” (Schnabel 2004, 659), but we know the word “prophet” means “proclaimer,” i.e. one who proclaims the message of God. These were ministries that involved preaching and teaching

the word of God, pulpit ministries such as would be the responsibility of a pastor or elder. Barnabas and Saul were named among those who were preaching and teaching the Word of God. They were experienced proven ministers of God's word. This may indicate that those called to missions must be able to teach, a requirement for the office of pastor or elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. So a follower of Christ who claims to have been called by the Holy Spirit should be a person who is not only a student of the word of God but also an experienced teacher of God's word, whether a pastor or medical worker.

God calls on the church to send its best, the gifted and the serving from among the congregation. Both Barnabas and Saul were experienced in cross cultural ministry and were spiritually gifted. Rightfully handling the Word of Truth does not necessarily require formal theological training, but it does require a certain level of spiritual maturity, Scriptural knowledge, a solid hermeneutic and the ability to properly exegete and teach the Scriptures.

God calls those who are spiritually mature to serve as missionaries. A spiritually mature person is not necessarily someone who keeps a certain list of rules. Rather it is someone with biblical motives and goals, a servant attitude, a good understanding of the Word of God and ministry involvement. A spiritually mature person is also a good example for others to follow. Barnabas and Saul were spiritually mature, not novices. They were not doing things in ministry for the sake of "serving" so they could fulfill a requirement. In this context they were ministering "to" the Lord rather than "for" the Lord. They were engaged in devotion to God and their relationship to him. They were not ministering to others or seeking the approval of men. "Everything about the event argues that mission is grounded in God's command and the response of a church engaged in devotion" (Block 2007, 438).

Many believers are busy doing good things on behalf of God, or so they think. Fewer are busy serving out of their love for God and a desire to bring Him glory. Christians can become so busy in the activity of serving that they forget the purpose for which they are to serve, namely to please God and to bring glory to Him. Barnabas and Saul were not so busy that they did not have time to seek the face of God. The fact that they were fasting indicates that they were attempting to remove the distractions of the world and the flesh in order to focus more on God. These were men serious about their relationship with their Lord and about their own holiness. Perhaps if they had not been fasting and praying (focusing on God) they would not have sensed the call of the Holy Spirit.

God calls those who are spiritually qualified. Though it may seem that spiritual maturity and spiritual qualifications go hand in hand, let's consider them separately. The Holy Spirit included information in these verses and throughout the book of Acts that clearly indicate that Barnabas and Saul were spiritually qualified for leadership in the church. The teacher should be more qualified than his students. Barnabas and Saul were being called by the Holy Spirit to go forth to preach the gospel, make disciples and establish churches (Acts 14:21-23). Therefore, it follows that they should have been at least as spiritually qualified as those they would train. Paul set up leaders in each church and he wrote to

Timothy and Titus giving specific requirements for the pastors or elders and also for deacons in the local churches.

After all, Paul instructed several of the churches he planted to follow his example and he commended Timothy for following his example, (1 Cor. 4:16; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9; 2 Tim. 3:10) so he certainly must have met the spiritual qualifications that he laid down for church leadership in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Since missionaries work on a level comparable to pastors and deacons, it follows that those who receive a call from the Holy Spirit for missionary service would meet those qualifications as well.

The Church and the Holy Spirit Send

Luke never refers to the church as an institution that is sent, but shows us that it is the local church that sends out missionaries to various regions under the authority and direction of the Holy Spirit. (Schnabel 2004, 1580) The text clearly tells us that the church sent them out in Acts 13:3 and that the Holy Spirit sent them out in Acts 13:4. This is not a contradiction, but an explanation. The Holy Spirit calls missionaries and sends them out, but not apart from the local church. This biblical example seems to indicate that the local church confirms the call and commission of missionaries for service.

The local church is the entity by which God accomplishes His work in the world today. Clearly in Acts 13:3 we find the congregation of the local church in which the candidates were serving sending out the missionaries, literally, “releasing” them for the ministry to which the Holy Spirit had called them. The fact that the church released them for ministry indicates that the church had the authority to grant or deny permission for the two men to go forth to minister. The authority to preach the gospel, to conduct ministry in the name of God comes from Christ through the church.

Even though it was apparently up to the church to release or keep these gifted leaders, there is not even a hint in this text of any hesitation on the part of the church to release them for missionary service. God is sovereign and will accomplish all He wills, but imagine what the New Testament might be like if the church at Antioch would have jealously held onto these two key preachers and teachers and the apostle Paul had never gone on a missionary journey. Much of the New Testament is made up of letters to churches he planted and people with whom he developed relationships in his missionary ministry.

The Antioch example demonstrates the importance of the church’s role in the ministry of its missionaries. The fasting, prayer and laying on of hands demonstrate the seriousness of the process (Acts 13:3). Fasting and praying indicates fervent, focused prayer, a sincere and ardent seeking of the will of God, a process of worship. If the Holy Spirit was not calling Barnabas and Saul, the church did not want to make the mistake of sending them out. On the other hand they did not want to hold them back, if the Holy Spirit was indeed calling them to this special work.

After fasting and praying the congregation ultimately determined that God was willing that Barnabas and Saul were to go out as missionaries. The result was unity and agreement, not division. Tippett discusses other church group decisions in the book of Acts and the responsibilities of individuals in such group decisions (1970, 32).

The fasting and praying revealed that they were focused on seeking God's face and the direction of the Holy Spirit. Once the church determined that it was God's will for the men to go out, they laid hands on them. In other biblical instances of laying on of hands, there was a transfer of power or a filling of the Holy Spirit (Num. 8:10; 27:18; Deut. 34:9; Mark 5:23; Acts 8:17ff; 9:17; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; Heb. 6:2). "By the laying on of hands, the church and the individual missionary become bound in a bond of common purpose and mutual responsibility" (Peters 1972, 221). At the very least, this ceremony indicates a transfer or sharing of authority but likely indicates a transfer of power as well. The church has the authority and the power to do the work of God in the world and therefore, the authority to commission men for the gospel ministry which includes missionaries. Barnabas and Saul did not receive authority to serve as missionaries on their own, from a school, from a mission agency, from a parachurch organization or even from a church in which they were not ministering at the time of the call. They received their authority from the local church in which they had been ministering and serving. This includes the authority to baptize and serve communion. Peters (1972) says, "the local congregation of believers stands in a unique relationship to Christ and that the local assembly becomes the mediating and authoritative sending body of the New Testament missionary. This is a vital, biblical principle and we dare not weaken, minimize or disregard it" (219).

If the church has authority over its missionaries and is responsible for commissioning them it makes sense that there would be some level of responsibility to keep the missionaries accountable for their teaching and ministry. In spite of the church's responsibility, Barnabas and Saul had a great deal of flexibility in their ministry. We do not find the church at Antioch directing the details of the missionaries' ministry, but we do find Saul and Barnabas returning to report on what God did through them (Acts 14:26-28; 21:19). The missionary receives the authority to minister from their local church so he is, in effect, working as an extension of that local church ministry and should be accountable to his commissioning church. Reports back to the commissioning church would be following this biblical example. Oversight is also provided by the commissioning church in the area of doctrine and practice.

If the missionary is given authority by the church and is considered as an extension of the staff or as a "delegate" (Bruce 1981, 261), in addition to holding the missionary accountable for his teaching and ministry, they would have a responsibility for that missionary's material and physical needs. Few local churches can afford to supply 100% of the financial needs of a missionary on the field but that does not relieve the church of its responsibility to make sure that the missionary's material and physical needs are

fulfilled. In writing to the Phil., Paul mentioned his appreciation for their monetary gifts that sustained him (Phil. 1:5; 4:10-19). In writing to the Cor., he makes a defense for earning his living from the ministry of the gospel and challenges the Cor. with their financial responsibility toward him (1 Cor. 9:1-14) and he tells Timothy that those in ministry are worthy of their wage (1 Tim. 5:17-18), thus indicating that churches have a financial responsibility toward those who are commissioned to preach the gospel. This would include missionaries as well as pastoral staff.

Responsibilities of Missionary Candidate

Missionary candidates and local churches both have responsibilities in the missionary process. Missionary candidates should be careful to exercise the following.

1. Candidates should have a deep conviction regarding the great commission, that God has commanded us to share the gospel with all people everywhere. This conviction should be evidenced by regular and natural sharing of their faith with those with whom they have contact before ever considering missionary service. (Acts 1:8; Mat. 28:19-20)
2. Candidates should have a deep conviction that God the Holy Spirit has called them to missionary service, not just a desire for a professional career. (Acts 13:2; Heb.11:26)
3. Candidates should have a profound sense of personal inadequacy and unworthiness coupled with a strong desire to grow more in grace and ability. He will not think too highly of himself/herself, but will find confidence in his/her dependence on the Holy Spirit, recognizing that He determines the success of ministry endeavors. (Acts 1:8; Phil. 4:13)
4. Candidates should realize that inadequate as they are, they possess the ability to become qualified to serve in the ministry to which God has called them. They have the Holy Spirit to empower them to do the work of the ministry. (Rom. 6-8; Rom. 12:3)
5. Candidates should be wholeheartedly committed to proclaiming the gospel to the world. There are many helpful ministries that assist people, such as feeding the hungry, but the primary mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ and equip them to do the work of the ministry. (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Rom. 10:14-15)
6. Candidates should have a deep conviction that God has placed them in a local church to direct them and help them identify God's will for their lives. They should recognize that God has provided leadership and accountability through the local church for the effective ministry of the gospel as well as the protection of those ministering. (Acts 20:28-31; Heb.13:17)
7. Candidates should have a dedication that will not wane when the adventure and sense of heroism is gone. Missionary service is hard, sacrificial work. Effective, successful missionary service requires selfless dedication to accomplishing the ministry of God. "The call to ministry is a call to sacrifice, a call to lay down your life and take up the

cross of Christ. The principle of sacrifice pervades Christ's ministry" (Peters 1972, 286). (Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 11:23-12:10; Col. 3:23)

Responsibilities of the Church

Local churches have responsibilities in the process, too. Churches can contribute positively to the missions process by exercising the following, especially if they are considering commissioning missionary candidates for service.

1. Verify the Christian character of missionary candidates and only approve candidates that meet the leadership standards of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.
2. Verify the gifts and abilities of missionary candidates, observing the ministry of the candidates over time to verify they have the appropriate gifts and abilities to carry out the ministry to which they believe God has called them. (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 3:1-7)
3. Examine missionary candidates for proper theology. As an extension of the church staff, the missionary should not be teaching any major contradictions to the doctrines held by their commissioning church. (Gal. 1:8-9)
4. Verify the spiritual maturity of missionary candidates. The candidate should be expected to have the same minimum level of spiritual maturity that the church would require of a pastor or deacon. The mission field is often like a pressure cooker and small flaws can be magnified, resulting in harm to the cause of Christ. (1 Tim. 3:6)
5. Verify the ability of missionary candidates to minister cross-culturally. This requires flexibility, adaptability and open-mindedness. He must be able to distinguish between biblical mandates and cultural preferences and traditions. (Acts 17:22ff)
6. Take on responsibility for the missionaries' spiritual and financial well-being just as they would a fellow staff member. The church may not provide all the financial needs and may delegate some of the oversight to a mission agency or others, but the commissioning church needs to provide guidance, direction and accountability to the missionaries it commissions. (1 Cor. 9:1-14; 11:8; Phil. 4:15, 18)

I hesitate to say with certainty and authority that the Bible commands missions to be done this way, but I think we can say that it is a good example of how God has worked in the church to call and send missionaries and is a likely model. Surely this example in Acts 13:1-4 is closer to what God would want to happen in the church today than the model of the "cowboy" missionary functioning apart from the guidance of the local church.

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