

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

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**CHAPTER EIGHT
WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?**

UPON WHOM does the responsibility for missionary work rest? Up to this point we have not considered such a question. We have not differentiated between the obligation of the individual and the obligation of the Church.

But just who is responsible? Is missions the responsibility only of those individuals who feel a special interest in such a cause? Or should missions be considered the responsibility of the Church as a whole? Sometimes we have acted as if it were the enterprise of just a select few, some of whom have gone as missionaries, while the others volunteered to support them in their work. Is this as it should be?

This individualistic attitude is perhaps more prominent today than ever before. You can see it in the large number of independent missionaries who try to start and carry on a work unconnected with any denomination or Church group. You can see it in the rapidly growing number of independent missions. They get their support from interested individuals in a large number of churches, but they are not in any way subject to the control of those churches.

You can see it, too, in the attitude of many young people who offer themselves for missionary service. They look on it only as the fulfilling of a personal obligation. They have no thought that they might be called to represent a larger fellowship, the Church. In modern political terminology, they think of themselves as "personal representatives" of CHRIST rather than "ambassadors" of CHRIST and His Church. Are they right?

When we look to the New Testament for the answer, we find two answers. Rather, we should say that the Scriptures teach that both the individual and the Church are responsible. And there is no clear marking out of the responsibility of each one. In a way, it is like the responsibility of several men who have signed a note for a mutual friend. When the note is due, if the man can't pay it himself, the creditor can demand payment of all the signers jointly, or of anyone of them individually. That is, they may all get together and pay the note, each one giving his share; or anyone of them may be made to pay the full amount. Each one who signs the note makes himself responsible for it all; though if they are all honest and able, each one will give his part.

Now when CHRIST gave His great commission, He didn't indicate exactly how it was to be carried out. He gave it to the group of disciples who met with Him after His resurrection, and it seems clear that He expected each one to feel his responsibility to witness for his Lord. Yet from the beginning the Church as a body looked upon the extension of the work as a part of its corporate responsibility. So Philip preached first in Samaria on his own initiative; but the Church sent its representatives to confirm and establish the work. In Antioch the SPIRIT had already called Barnabas and Saul to missionary service; but the Church was told to send them forth, and they reported to it on their return.

As Christians, we all have been given a great task to perform by our Lord and Saviour. So long as that task has not been completed, it is a lien against each one of us for which He may hold us personally accountable. Yet it is also a lien against the Church. It is the Church's task; but it is also yours and mine. We are all responsible.

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY

In speaking of the Church's responsibility, we are thinking particularly of the local congregation. Under present conditions of missionary work, the local Church, whether it is denominational or not, has certain rather definite obligations to fulfill.

It is just here that a very basic weakness in the missionary enterprise shows up. It is that the local Church often is not aware of any such missionary obligations. Or if it is aware of such obligations it chooses to give them very little attention.

In the denominational Church a quota may be assigned for the support of missions of that denomination. But small as the quota may be, it often is not met. In the independent Church there is no official mission board to assign a quota. So the individual congregation may choose to do something about missions or not, just as it sees fit.

In either case, what the Church does will depend largely on its leadership. It is characteristic of American Protestant churches that their affairs are generally managed by a handful of people. This is true even where they are most democratically organized. The average Church member seldom does more than attend some of the Church services and make a small contribution. Only an inspiring and constructive leadership can get him to take a larger share in the Church's business.

But Church leaders are not often well informed in missionary matters. Neither do they have much of an interest in affairs that are not under their own control. The pastor himself has usually had little training in the line of missions, even in those of his own denomination. They don't usually present it to him in the seminary as a part of his essential ministry. It is one of the extras, something you can engage in after the local needs are fully met. Even the Ladies' Missionary Society is often busy with other things besides missions because it doesn't have strong missionary leadership.

Yet the world mission of witnessing to CHRIST among all people is the one great charge that the Saviour gave to His Church after His resurrection. The Church really exists for two purposes: witnessing and fellowship. And all too often we forget the first.

Let us present here four definite responsibilities that pertain to the local Church.

First is the responsibility to recognize that missions is a part of the Church's essential ministry. It is not a question of whether we should have home missions or foreign missions. That doesn't enter into it. Instead, it is a question of whether the Church is going to minister to its own little group or extend its ministry to those who are outside. It is a question of a self-centered ministry or a ministry that looks beyond self to the needs of others.

We don't need to worry about the artificial distinction between home missions and foreign missions. The Church that feels keenly the need to reach out and minister to lost souls in its own community can never stop there. A compassionate interest in others isn't even stopped by national boundaries. Once we turn our look outward, **"the field is the world."**

The same thing is true about the Church that is deeply concerned for foreign missions. It can't be blind to the needs on its own doorstep. That is, if it really is concerned for the souls of men and is not merely attracted to missions by the romance of strange lands and people.

This first responsibility is basic. It is the acknowledgment that the Church doesn't exist for itself. It is not a social club. It is not a haven of rest. If it is to fulfill its divine purpose it must be missionary. And the first step in fulfilling that purpose is to acknowledge it - to look at it as a duty that must be carried out.

Now when a Church recognizes that missions is a part of its essential ministry, it is responsible to give to missions the same careful, prayerful attention that it gives to any other part of its work. It shouldn't relegate missions to some missionary society within the Church as if it didn't concern the whole body of believers. It should plan for missions. It should bring missionary problems to the Church prayer meeting and to the governing board. It should give missions a definite place in the Church budget.

Too many churches don't have any definite missionary program, even where they are "missionary-minded." One such Church comes to mind, which often opened its doors to missionary speakers. The Church always made a generous donation to every missionary speaker, at the time he spoke. But in the several years of my acquaintance with it, the Church never took on the regular support of any missionary or mission work. Under such circumstances missions comes to be looked at not as a responsibility but as a pleasurable pastime.

We need to get down to business in missions. Our churches need to stop dabbling and start working. Only so can we meet our God-given responsibility.

Perhaps we ought to say another word about praying for missions. "Prayerful attention" means more than just praying about how much to give. It means more than praying, "GOD bless the missionaries." It means praying for the work that is going on. It means praying for those who do the work. It means having such a real concern for it all that our concern will express itself in intercessory prayer.

We don't need to go into the values of intercessory prayer. It is enough to know that missionaries themselves count heavily on it. They know that their work alone can never accomplish its

purpose. GOD must work. They know, too, that GOD is not reluctant to hear their requests. But they know at the same time that GOD wants Church and missionaries to be united in this task. In prayer they can express some of that spiritual union.

The third responsibility of the local Church is one that most people think of first. Unfortunately too many of them seem to think it is the only responsibility. It is the task of providing money and other material support for missions. It is an important task, but in carrying it out there are several errors that ought to be avoided.

First, spend the Lord's money for missions as carefully as you would for redecorating the Church or for a new Church organ. Many a Church pays less attention to the distributing of its missionary funds than it does to the choice of a new hymnal. The Church should know as much about the causes for which its missionary money goes as if each member were investing his personal funds. We should never be less careful of the Lord's money than of our own.

Second, don't give only for the support of individual missionaries or special projects. It is good to have personal contact with individual missionaries, especially if they have come from your Church. It is good, also, to have at least a share in their personal support. The same thing is true of special projects, which do have a way of stimulating people to give. But don't stop there.

The reason is this. Who is going to pay the many other expenses of carrying on the work? Who will pay for the house the missionary lives in? Who will provide him with the literature and other supplies he needs? Who will pay for his travel, or even for the cost of getting his salary to him at his remote post? Who will pay for the scores of other expenses that are necessary for the carrying on of this mission? Don't forget these needs.

Third, when you do support a missionary, don't feel that your support entitles you to dictate his private life. Support him because you believe he is a faithful representative of the Lord, and do it as unto the Lord. Your stewardship ended when you gave the gift; his began. He is responsible to the Lord, not to you, for using the money wisely. Just as you were responsible to the Lord while it was in your hands.

Finally, a fourth and very important responsibility of the local Church to missions is the provision of missionary candidates. Missionaries must come from the local churches. Actually, missionary work in a foreign land is to a large degree a reflection of the spiritual life of the churches at home. To a large degree, we say, but not entirely. It sometimes happens that our missionaries got their deepest spiritual impressions away from the home Church. It may have been in a Bible camp, a Christian youth group, a campus Christian organization, or in a Bible training school. But in a general way our foreign missions reflect our Christianity at home.

For this reason it is important for the local Church to have a definite program of missionary education. In many of our churches there are untapped resources of manpower for the mission fields, simply because the young people know nothing of the work, have never been faced with the challenge of missions. It is the Church's business to challenge them, to turn their hearts in that direction.

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