

## **Accountability – to Whom?**

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Missionaries serving with assemblies such as those associated with CMML have generally gone forth as the Lord's free men and women with no mission or parachurch organization exercising any control over them. Most other missionaries serve under a mission board that may exercise control in such diverse areas as finances, sphere of service, strategy, furloughs, retirement, etc. In the first case there is an enviable freedom for the Lord's servant to follow what he discerns as the Spirit's leading in his life and service. In the second, there are means for dealing promptly with problems on the field; for instance, missionaries who need shepherding, counseling, correction, or, in extreme cases, recall from the field.

It is a wonderful privilege to be the Lord's free man, to serve unfettered by mission board regulations, to be constantly available to the sovereign Spirit without human interference. But wherever you have this freedom, you have some who will exploit it. Missionaries themselves are the ones who complain most vigorously about abuses. They point to people on the field who may mean well enough but who do not have a clue as to what to do or how to do it. Others who know better do not discipline themselves to put in a productive day of work for the Lord. Still others, operating like loose cannons, busy themselves with projects that don't even faintly resemble evangelism or assembly planting. Finally, there are those few who become so abrasive and cantankerous that they are a positive hindrance to the work.

Because of these abuses, missionaries often ask, "Why did his elders ever commend him? Why don't they call him home? If those who receive his glowing newsletters only knew the true facts! Why doesn't someone do something?"

Of course, there are abuses among home workers as well. But their performance is more visible. They are not serving in remote areas where their elders don't know what, if anything, is happening for God. The unproductive missionary is relatively free from inspection. And even if one of his elders does visit, a garden tour can easily convince him that everything is gloria in excelsis.

Yes, there are abuses. Whenever you have the liberty of the Spirit, abuses are almost inevitable. But it is better to tolerate a few of these rather than abandon the position of being the Lord's free servant. And there is always the hope that elders will take a deeper, more intelligent interest in those they have commended to the field.

Interestingly enough, the whole subject of 'accountability is being raised today, not by elders or Christians in home assemblies or service organizations like CMML, but by missionaries themselves. One writes from South America, "One of the major needs on the mission field is accountability. Effectively we don't have any." Says another, "When a business firm sends a person out to do a job, it expects accountability. In the New Testament, the apostles frequently gave face-to-face reports to their home church. We as missionaries need to be

accountable to our God-given elders and to know that someone is going to be asking questions about what we're doing on the field. I say these things from my heart because we have spent many hours trying to straighten out mistakes which should have been looked after earlier by the commending assembly."

Missionaries should want to be accountable. When a prominent evangelical was asked how he ever allowed himself to be involved in scandal, he answered, "I wasn't accountable to anyone."

That brings us to the question, "To whom are our missionaries accountable?" In answering it, we are going to use the word accountable for relations with the Lord, and the word responsible for all other areas. True, the words are synonymous, and we may be accused of playing games with words. But there is something unique about a person's answerability to the Lord; therefore, why not use a different word?

### **Accountability to the Lord**

Our primary accountability is to the Lord. As bond slaves, we are accountable to our Owner; "as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:6). As household servants we are accountable to our Master. [to our own master we stand or fall (Romans 14:4)]. As stewards, we are accountable to our Lord, "It is required in stewards that one be found faithful (I Corinthians 4:2). As soldiers, we are accountable to our Commander-in-Chief; that we may please Him who enlisted us as soldiers (2 Timothy 2:4). As members of the body, we are accountable to the Head; that calls for obedience and submission.

We will all stand before the Judgment seat of Christ. Our service will be reviewed at that time. Faithfulness will be rewarded with His "Well done." Nothing will make up if that is missed.

Faithfulness involves hard work. It means putting in a full productive day of service for the Lord.

Abraham's servant said. "I will not eat until I have told my errand" (Genesis 24:33).

Paul said, "So naturally, we proclaim Christ! We warn everyone we meet, and we teach everyone we can, all that we know about Him, so that we may bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ. That is what I am working at all the time, and struggling at, with all the strength that God puts in me." (Colossians 1:28,29).

Amy Carmichael wrote. "The vows of God are on me. I may not stay to pay with shadows or pluck earthly flowers till I my work have done and rendered up an account."

Was it Spurgeon who said, "Kill yourself with work and pray yourself alive again?"

Certainly we should work at least harder than we would for any secular employer.

Also we should pursue excellence. God want the best. He deserves the best. "Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord negligently" (Jeremiah 48:10).

Again we should serve with a sense of urgency. The Savior said, "I must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4).

"The work that centuries  
might have done  
Must crowd the hours of setting sun"  
(John R. Mott)

We must not let housekeeping, shopping, and errands consume us. Missionary work can easily devolve into a struggle for existence if we let it. And on rare occasions it can give too much emphasis to sport vacations, and furloughs. One worker spent more time on the tennis court than in the courts of the Lord. Another milked Mark 6:31 dry to justify a cycle of "breaks" and tours.

And we must keep our priorities straight. Evangelism and assembly planting are central. Paul had a twofold ministry: to preach among the unsearchable riches of Christ (that's the Gospel); and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery (that's the assembly) (Ephesians 3:8,9). Other service such as medicine, education, office work, carpentry, garage mechanics, etc. must never be primary. True missionary work involves the exercise of a spiritual gift.

### **Responsibility to our home assembly**

Certainly we are responsible to keep our elders and all prayer partners informed regularly, honestly, and realistically. To pray intelligently, they should know our spiritual needs, our problems, and the progress of the work. Prayer requests are very important.

As representatives of our home assembly, we will presumably teach and practice similarly to the doctrine of that assembly. We should ask ourselves regularly, "Are we doing the work for which we were sent out?" It is hardly ethical to go forth as an assembly-commended worker, then serve with some other kind of church on the field, and have no contact with other assembly workers in the area.

Paul reported back to his commending assembly at the end of his missionary journeys (Acts 14:26-28; 18:22,23). So should we.

### **Responsibilities to those who support us with their gifts**

Friends who pray and give have a right to expect that we will:  
Acknowledge gifts promptly.  
Tell them what's happening for God.  
Never betray their trust by unworthy conduct.  
Seek to minister to them in our letters.  
Pray for them and thank the Lord for them.

### **Responsibility to the assembly on the field**

We have a responsibility to:  
Share the Word.  
Pray together.  
Train leadership.  
Resist any temptation to domineer.  
Be an example to the believers of obedience to the, elders, not rebellion and defiance, this obedience being limited to the extent to which the elders follow Christ (Corinthians 11:1).

(Elders in one country wanted to control all missionary activity and receive all finances sent from the U.S. to the missionaries. This is, of course, was unacceptable.)

Turn the work over to the nationals as soon as possible. Make ourselves expendable.

Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit.

### **Responsibilities to our fellow-workers on the field**

The greatest thing we can do for our fellow-workers is to practice brokenness. After all, interpersonal conflicts are the number one problem. But also we can:

Keep lines of consultation and fellowship open.

Avoid centralized authority.

Avoid undermining the work of others by overt criticism. (There are always other fields needing help if any one can't get along.)

Senior workers should set a good example to younger workers and teach them zeal, integrity, love, etc.

Younger workers should respect older missionaries, and not try to overthrow years of work soon after arriving on the field.

### **Responsibility to family, children**

All the biblical instructions concerning marriage, raising children and home life in general apply here. In one sense, a man's family is his number one mission field. It would be a tragedy to keep other people's vineyards and neglect one's own. The education of missionary children poses a serious problem; some parents (not all) have earned the resentment of their children by shipping them off to boarding school at a time in life when they could not cope with what they considered "desertion."

### **Responsibility to service organizations**

This includes working cooperatively and congenially with them; faithfulness in correspondence; sending fresh news for the magazine; feeling and expressing sincere gratitude for their many services rendered so freely and cheerfully.

### **Responsibility to home government**

Our responsibility to our government is covered in Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13-17. Living in a foreign country does not always exempt a person from paying taxes in his own country. A good conscience requires strict adherence to the law in this as in all other areas.

### **Responsibility to host government**

Laws differ from country to country. Obedience to them insures a good testimony. One, thing that does not differ is that the missionary should not become entangled in politics. His task, under God, is to call out from the nations a people for the Lord's Name (Acts 15:14). He has no right to interfere in national or local politics.

### **Responsibility toward ourselves**

Some feel that they should burn out for God. That is their prerogative; don't condemn them. Others feel that, they should pace themselves, seeking to prolong their lives for usefulness.

Certainly we are all obligated to follow reasonable rules of health and safety. Beyond that we can be confident that we are immortal until our work is done.

We should all avoid the barrenness of a busy life. We must spend time in the Word and in prayer if we are going to be fruitful and preserved from moral or doctrinal disaster.

### **Conclusion**

Sure, the missionary is the Lord's free man or woman. It is a glorious calling, a transcendent privilege. But that freedom is bounded by accountability and responsibility. The supreme accountability is to the Lord. The responsibility is to a variety of other lives that he touches. He is untrammelled by manmade, human restrictions, but at the same time he is not lawless. He is to be an example of personal discipline, of tireless service, and of patient endurance. His is a life of love for the unlovely, of expenditure for the ungrateful, and of tears for the perishing. There is no room wasted time, no excuse for wasted opportunities. He has a Savior to proclaim, a salvation to offer, a heaven to promise. He must not be diverted by the non-essential or distracted by the ephemeral. His heart is held captive by the love of Christ and he is chained with stronger bonds than law. God helping him, he will press on toward the mark for the prize, concerned only to hear the Savior's "Well done."