

Sharing Together in Reaching the Lost

Robert Martin

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. (Phil. 4:15-18) [All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

In the early church it is easy to see that there was a close relationship between the missionary and those who supported him in reaching the lost. I would also suggest that there is a close relationship between those who can go out and teach the lost and those who do many things to assist those who go out to teach the lost. There was a partnership in which the fruit of His labors was shared by all.

THIS PRINCIPLE IS SEEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

But David said, "My brethren, you shall not do so with what the Lord has given us, who has

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preserved us and delivered into our hand the troop that came against us. For who will heed you in this matter? But as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike." So it was, from that day forward; he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day. (1 Sam. 30:23-25)

David said to those who went into battle that not only would they share in the spoils of the battle, but also those who stood by the supplies. They both would share alike in the spoils of the battle. This was an ordinance for Israel in future battles that this would be the rule. In Romans 15:4, Paul says, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." What a great lesson for us to learn from the Old Testament that we are to share in the Lord's work, and especially in reaching the lost at home and in foreign work.

THIS PRINCIPLE IS TAUGHT IN MANY PASSAGES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT TO GUIDE US IN DOING MISSION WORK SUCCESSFULLY.

Look at the beginning in that great history of the Lord's church and see her doing mission work.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having

fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 13:1-3)

Here we see the evangelistic church at Antioch sharing with Barnabas and Paul in their missionary journey that would take them to Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and Attalia. The church at Antioch sent men out from among themselves. The congregation was serious about the joy of saving souls: they fasted, prayed, laid hands on them and sent them away. Fasting shows they were dedicated and committed to this work. Praying shows that they depended on the Lord for help. Laying hands on them shows that they commissioned them to this work of reaching the lost. This was a congregational effort together with the missionaries they were sending out. In Acts 14:26-27 we read, "From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." Here we see the missionaries returning to the congregation that had sent them out to report on their work **TOGETHER** for the Lord. They told how that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

PAUL SHOWS THE SHARING PRINCIPLE IN THOSE WHO GO AND THOSE WHO SEND.

For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless

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they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:13-15)

People cannot be saved without the one who will proclaim or herald the message of the Lord. In verse 15, "how shall they preach unless they are sent" infers there must be those who will SEND and those who will GO. There must be congregations who will send and missionaries who will go. In local outreach there will be those who will go out and those who will assist those who go out. How beautiful are those who proclaim the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things to others. How welcome are those who come proclaiming God's Good News to the lost.

PAUL LAYS OUT SOME IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES IN BEING WORKERS WITH GOD.

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. (1 Cor. 3:5-9)

In verse 5, we must understand, in order to be the most effective in reaching the lost, that we are all servants by which others believe. In verse 6, some plant, some water, but it is God who gives the increase. In verse 7,

“we” are not important, but it is God who gives the increase. In verse 8, we will receive from the Lord the reward for our labor. In verse 9, we are workers together with God in His church. In 2 Corinthians 6:1, Paul reminds the Corinthians and us, “We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” Do we really understand that we are laborers **TOGETHER WITH HIM**? What great honor to be a co-worker with the Lord in His house, the church.

THE LORD’S CHURCH AT PHILIPPI HAD FELLOWSHIP WITH PAUL.

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil. 1:3-5)

The background to the planting of the Lord’s church in the city of Philippi is found in Acts 16, with the man of Macedonia pleading, “Come over to Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). The church of our Lord was planted in the city of Philippi with an unusual background of Jew (Lydia and her household converted) and Gentile (Philippian jailer and his household converted). Paul thanked the Lord for this mission-minded congregation that had fellowship in the gospel from the first day until the time he was writing this letter. The word “fellowship” means, “partnership, participation, communion, fellowship.” Mission work is a partnership between those who are sending and those who are going. New Testament mission work is a participating of those who are sending and those who are going.

PAUL WRITES A MISSIONARY LETTER TO A MISSION-MINDED CHURCH.

Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. (Phil. 4:15-18)

This small church that Paul planted in the city of Philippi was made up of only two families who had fellowship with Paul as a missionary from the beginning. When Paul had left this infant congregation, they had sent aid to Paul again and again. The church in Philippi had become partners with Paul in carrying the gospel to others. Paul appreciated the gifts of the Philippian church, but what really made him happier was the fruit that abounded to their credit. How beautifully Paul tells the church at Philippi that their gifts were a sweet-smelling sacrifice that pleased God well and He would bless them because of their gifts.

THERE ARE WAYS WE CAN SHARE JOY IN MISSION WORK.

For congregations who support the missionaries: knowing about souls being saved on the field, congregations being planted and brought to maturity, standing by the supply line, and going on the field to help in the work. For the missionary on the field: knowing that the overseeing congregation is really overseeing their

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work, knowing that the supporting congregations are really standing by the supply line, being encouraged by those who come on the field to help in the work.

When congregations today are actively involved with their missionary, they will experience joy as they work together in spreading the gospel, planting congregations and bringing them to maturity so that they are indigenous churches. Do not rob yourself of this blessed joy of being workers together with the Lord in doing missionary work.

Robert Martin has worked as a missionary in the Pacific Islands for 35 years.
