

THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITY

IN SUPPORTING MISSIONS:

3 JOHN 5-8

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Divinity in
Grace Theological Seminary
May 1979

Title: THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSIBILITY IN SUPPORTING MISSIONS:
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Degree: Master of Divinity
Date: May, 1979
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People are questioning the efficacy of the deputation-support system as currently practiced by many mission societies in encouraging and maintaining church participation in missions. On the conviction that problems exist within the system as it is commonly practiced, it is the purpose of this author to study 3 John 5-8 in order to make observations about biblical principles concerning the support of Christian workers or missionaries.

In its historical setting, 3 John is a personal letter addressed to an individual believer who welcomes traveling teachers who are recognized as missionaries. The recipient of the letter, Gaius, receives praise for his past generosity to the missionaries and encouragement to continue extending hospitality to such men. Two characteristics of the ministry of these missionaries commend them as worthy of support: 1) their motive of serving Christ; 2) their policy of refusing to accept assistance from unbelieving Gentiles. Although the immediate setting of the letter is first century A. D., the principles set forth in it transcend its historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. The exhortation in 3 John 8 is not limited to Gaius; the plural verb, *οφείλομεν*, includes John as being under the same obligation as Gaius to contribute to the support of Christian workers. The principle is general, extending to all Christians.

Observations as to the right of Christian workers to be supported and the problems which often develop under the system as currently practiced constitute the practical section of this paper. It is the position of this writer that these problems can be eliminated if believers generously support Christian workers whom they know.

The Bible consistently teaches that a worker deserves payment. God has ordained that those who benefit spiritually from the teaching of the minister of God should contribute towards his monetary needs. Paul recognized his right to expect support for his ministry but refused to accept financial assistance in order to avoid the accusation of serving God for profit. The Christian workers in 3 John appear to be working primarily among unbelievers. This, no doubt, explains their adoption of Paul's custom of refusing aid from unbelievers or very young Christians. For these reasons John strongly states that Christians should contribute to those who are serving God as missionaries.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

AV	The Authorized King James Version of the Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
RV	Revised Version
IFRBC	Indiana Fellowship of Regular Baptist Churches
IFMA	Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Mission societies as well as individuals are questioning whether deputation as currently practiced is a proper use of the missionary in encouraging and maintaining church participation in missions.¹ On a personal level this writer has asked the question, "What is the believer's responsibility in supporting missions?" in response to the conviction that a re-evaluation of the present system is in order. This conviction arises for two reasons: (1) the present system fails to conform to New Testament principles; and (2) this system fails to operate efficiently. The second reason naturally results from the first.

The current deputation-support system imposes upon the missionaries a role "which is foreign to their God-given commission."² Requiring the missionary to seek his support forces him to disregard biblical principles. There is little biblical precedent for asking for support. Is it any wonder that such a system does not work effectively? The missionary

¹Michael C. Griffiths, Who Really Sends the Missionary? (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 25.

²David Gotaas, "Let's Banish Missionary Begging," Moody Monthly, March 1973, p. 50.

appointee routinely spends up to a year and a half, or even as long as three years, raising initial support. By this process he accumulates an excessive number of supporting churches, which prohibit him from developing strong personal relationships with those who support him. Because the missionary cannot spend sufficient time with them, the people who support him rarely have more than a superficial knowledge of his work. Consequently, their interest in missions is also superficial.

Statement of Purpose

It is the purpose of this paper to do an exegetical study of 3 John 5-8, then make observations about biblical principles in this and parallel passages. Finally, a discussion of practical considerations will provide suggestions as to some possible ways of altering the present system to decrease the aberration from New Testament practice.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXT

Authorship

3 John is a personal letter written by a man who identifies himself only as "the elder." His identity is the major critical problem of 3 John. Both internal and external evidence support the traditional view that the Apostle John wrote this brief epistle. It is not the purpose of this paper to answer the questions of authorship and canonicity. The view that 3 John is authentically Johannine will be assumed.¹ Granting Johannine authorship, this paper assumes apostolic authority for the epistle. Although the letter contains no direct indication of time or place of writing, attributing it to John assigns it to the apostolic age. This letter is believed to have been written toward the end of John's life, probably from Ephesus.

Personalities

The writer.--The author, the Apostle John, was a companion of the Lord and an eyewitness of His ministry. He lived to be the "sole survivor of those who had been in close

¹For discussion of the author's identity and evidence supportive of Johannine authorship, see Alfred Plummer, The Epistles of St. John, in The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1906), pp. lxvii-lxxiv, 172-75.

contact with Jesus before His death and resurrection."¹ Referring to John as the representative and embodiment of apostolic tradition, F. F. Bruce states that John wrote with conscious authority, authority comparable to that of Paul among the Gentile churches he started.² In the present epistle, even though Diotrephes disregards John's authority, John believes that a personal visit will re-establish his authority.³

The recipient.--The recipient of this letter is named Gaius, one of the most common names in the Roman world. There is no indication that this man is associated with any of the others who bear the name Gaius in the New Testament (Acts 19: 29; 20:4; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14).⁴

The letter gives no indication that Gaius holds any official position of authority in the church. Although he may be a prominent man, nothing in the letter indicates that he is more than an individual believer. (The emphatic "we" of verse 8 should not be thought of as demonstrating that Gaius, like the writer, is an elder.⁵ Rather, John uses the

¹F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1970), pp. 14-15.

²Ibid., p. 17.

³Ibid.

⁴W. E. Vine, *The Epistles of John: Light, Love, Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 121.

⁵Karl Braune, "The Epistles General of John," trans. and ed. by J. Isidor Mombert, in Vol. XII of *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, ed. by John P. Lange (new edition; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 195.

emphatic "we" in order to include himself in the general Christian duty to take part in missions.) The letter reveals that he makes it his practice to welcome itinerant evangelists or missionaries, even though he has faced opposition for his support of such men (3 Jn. 10).

The Christian workers.--The men to whom Gaius has been extending hospitality are described as brothers who are strangers ("The brethren, and especially when they are strangers" 3 Jn. 5, NASB), who have gone out in order to serve Christ, and who act on the principle of refusing support from unbelievers (verse 7). Most commentators refer to these men as "missionaries" or "evangelists." The passage suggests that their primary ministry is among unbelievers. Like Paul, these missionaries strive to avoid the accusation of being in the ministry for personal gain. Their refusal to accept aid from unbelievers corresponds to Paul's practice of preaching the Gospel without charge (1 Cor. 9:18).

The antagonist.--A certain Diotrephes has refused to welcome the brothers and has threatened to excommunicate those who would receive them. John's statements regarding Diotrephes reveal the character of this man. Although he was a dominant personality in that church, the language suggests that this was more likely the result of self-promotion than conferred position.¹ Vine pronounces him guilty in four respects: "(1) an ambition to hold the chief place, (2) refusal to receive

¹Bruce, The Epistles of John, p. 152.

John and his fellow-workers, (3) slanderous attacks upon them, (4) excommunicating those who would receive them."¹

John's Information

The source.--John, writing from another city, has heard some "brethren" report that Gaius is walking in the truth (3 Jn. 3). By calling them "brethren" rather than "the brethren," John leaves their identity in question. The noun without the definite article communicates, not who they are, but the kind of people they are. These men are "brothers" or "fellow believers." The question arises as to whether these brethren in verse 3 are the same as the missionary brethren in verse 5.

Vine suggests that "brethren" without the article communicates the idea that no specially designated brethren were appointed to give the report.² In stating this he allows for the interpretation that Christians in general speak well of Gaius and that he has a reputation for walking in the truth. Vine further adds that the present tense of the participles possibly indicates "that there were occasional visits or visits by more than one company."³ If this is the case, the unidentified believers who keep coming and giving a good report of Gaius could be people who have heard of him

¹Vine, The Epistles of John: Light, Love, Life, p. 125.

²Ibid., p. 122.

³Ibid., pp. 122-23.

but may not have had direct contact with him.

The more accepted view is to understand "brethren" (verse 3) and "the brethren" (verse 5) as referring to the very same people. Braune accurately observes that the participles must be understood in relation to the aorist verb ἐχάρην; therefore, they refer to continuous action, not at the present time, but in the past.¹ This past fact of testifying (by these "brethren") and the repetition of the same verb in verse 5 militate against seeing two different groups of people in close proximity both witnessing to the faithful life of Gaius. Moreover, the use of the article in verse 5 may well be the article of previous mention. There is more reason to think that those who have testified concerning Gaius are the same people whom he has welcomed and assisted, than to think that others who merely may know of him have proclaimed his faithfulness before the church.

The substance.--John has heard of Gaius' truth (verse 3) and love (verse 6). The fact that Gaius is walking in the truth is a source of great joy to the elder. He commends Gaius for what he has done, is doing, and will do in order to help the missionaries who have come to him.

John also knows what Diotrephes has done and is doing to oppose him and Gaius. Diotrephes has refused to accept the elder and those associated with him. John will deal with him in person when that can be arranged.

¹Braune, "The Epistles General of John," p. 197.

Hospitality

The need of the day.--Diotrephes' refusal to extend hospitality to the missionary brethren was a serious social error. Hospitality played an indispensable part in ancient society. The lack of commercial facilities required that some alternate means of provision for travelers be established. The only place of protection and source of food available to a foreigner was generally a private home. Where inns existed, their association with disreputable people prohibited honorable men from seeking shelter there.¹ The vital place of hospitality in the economy of early Christianity is seen in its prominence among Christian virtues. It is commanded of believers in general (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 4:9), expected of widows (1 Tim. 5:10), and required of the overseer (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8).

The common practice.--In the ancient world people welcomed strangers and provided food and lodging for them as a standard practice. The traveler's right to expect such treatment was unquestioned. The host accepted the responsibility of meeting a stranger's needs on the premise that, in the event that he would travel anywhere, others would receive him in the same manner. The general acceptance of hospitality as a duty owed to the traveler characterized ancient society. Barclay views the acceptance of this obligation by "the heathen world" as a factor which constrained Christians to take the

¹George G. Findlay, Fellowship in the Life Eternal (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), p. 15.

responsibility even more seriously.¹

The undisputed right of the traveler to presume that others would supply his needs meant that some travelers could abuse the privilege. The hospitality and respect granted to Christian brothers who went about ministering in the early Church allowed false apostles to take advantage of the hosts' generosity. Paul warns against such "deceitful workers" who disguised themselves as apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11:12-13).

As the dangers related to the misuse of hospitality increased, it became necessary to verify the credentials of those claiming to be Christian workers.² 2 John 7-10 warns of many deceivers and establishes a doctrinal requirement for those who profess to be teachers. The Didaché, which devotes two of its sixteen chapters to the issue, stresses both the virtue of exercising hospitality and the necessity for exercising discernment.

¹William Barclay, The Letters of John and Jude, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 149.

²Findlay, Fellowship in the Life Eternal, pp. 18-19.

CHAPTER III

EXEGESIS

Translation

(3 John 5) "Beloved, you are performing a faithful thing, whatever you accomplish for the brothers even though they are strangers, (6) who have testified to your love before the church, whom you will do well to forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God; (7) because they went out on behalf of the Name [of Christ], receiving nothing from the Gentiles. (8) Therefore, we ought to support such men, in order that we may be fellow-workers with the truth."

Commendation

Verse 5

The paragraph begins with the vocative, "beloved," a common form of address in John's letters. He uses the same masculine singular form in 3 John 2 and 11 and the plural form frequently in 1 John. This is the substantive use of the verbal adjective, ἀγαπητός, "beloved, esteemed, dear, favorite,"¹ and signifies tender address. It refers to Gaius, who may be John's "spiritual offspring."

Verses 5, 6, and 7 form a single sentence. An

¹Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), p. 4.

independent clause begins in verse 5 and is continued by relative clauses in verse 6. Verse 7 forms the dependent clause which concludes the sentence.

The main verb is the present active indicative of ποιέω, "to do, make, accomplish, or perform."¹ In connection with the adjective πιστόν, "faithful" or "trustworthy," Thayer gives the following meaning: "to do something harmonizing (Christian) faith, [R. V. a faithful work], 3 Jn. 5."² This neuter adjective may be understood as signifying "a faithful thing." (The noun "work" does not appear in the Greek text.) This clause literally reads, "you are doing a faithful thing." NASB's translation, "you are acting faithfully," creates a strong parallel with the following clause: Gaius is acting faithfully and he will do well. The verbs are the present and future of a common root, ποιέω.

Both the AV and NASB translate the substantive adjective as if it were an adverb ("faithfully"). The reason for this may be a desire to give the verb its natural meaning in an unusual construction. The adjective, πιστός, generally occurs with a noun and frequently occurs with the copulative verb "is." The verb, ποιέω, communicates, not that Gaius is faithful, but that he is doing something which is

¹William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature (hereinafter referred to as Lexicon) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 687.

²Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 514.

faithful. It is noteworthy that the adverb, πιστῶς, "faithfully," does not occur in the New Testament. This may be the basis on which the translators rendered the adjective, πιστόν, in an adverbial sense. Although that translation seems admissible, it is preferable to give πιστόν its substantive meaning, "a faithful thing."

Lenski refers to the verb, ποιεῖς, as an "epistolary present," a designation which is not found in standard grammars.¹ In its regular use the present tense conveys the idea of continuance.² John's use of it here probably indicates that Gaius constantly acted faithfully so that he was characterized as faithful.

The suggestion of Westcott that the verb phrase may more naturally be rendered, "thou makest sure," which he paraphrases as, "such an act will not be lost, will not fail of its due issue and reward," may suit the context, as he suggests; but does not fit the text.³ Smith rightly objects to this meaning as unsubstantiated elsewhere in the New Testament.⁴

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude (hereinafter referred to as St. John) (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945), p. 582.

²H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 182.

³Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistles of St. John (Cambridge and London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), p. 238.

⁴David Smith, "The Epistles of John," in Vol. V of Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 206.

The second verb is the aorist subjunctive of ἐργάζομαι and stands in apposition to ποιεῖς. This verb explains the first by clarifying what the writer had in mind when he commended Gaius for acting faithfully. Gaius was acting faithfully in whatever he "accomplished for the brethren" (NASB). Generally meaning "to do, accomplish, perform, carry out, or work," the verb as John uses it here has the sense of viewing the action in its entirety; it is referred to as a constative aorist. The relative pronoun, ὃ, and the accompanying conjunction, ἐάν, together indicate indefiniteness or generality.¹ These two words form a single unit. They may indicate that Gaius has been engaging in a variety of services.

The beneficiaries of Gaius' hospitality are the Christian missionary workers, whom Gaius only knows superficially. Plummer correctly declares: "The brethren and the strangers are not two classes, but one and the same."² Although Plummer does not cite Granville Sharp's first rule, he bases his conclusion on it. The rule, as expounded by Richard D. Durham, states that when two nouns of the same case, whether singular or plural, are connected by καί, and the article, in any of its cases, precedes the first of the nouns and is not repeated before the second, the latter always relates to the

¹Dana and Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, pp. 245-46.

²Plummer, The Epistles of St. John, p. 188.

same person(s) or thing(s) that is expressed by the first noun.¹ In this verse, "brothers and strangers" are one and the same group. The reading, "to the brethren, and to strangers" (AV), does not accurately convey the meaning of the Greek construction. There are not two groups, one known and one unknown. Instead, the subject of discussion is a group of Christian brothers who happen to be known only casually by Gaius.

The demonstrative pronoun, τοῦτο, appears here in the same construction as in "brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers" (1 Cor. 6:6, NASB; cf. Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:28).² Some commentators have translated it "withal," which in modern English means "in addition, besides, or notwithstanding."³ The NIV handles this "the brothers, even though they are strangers to you."

When Bruce states, "They were 'strangers,' and he took them in, treating them as his guests (the same word xenos does duty in both senses)," he gives his reader a glimpse of the cultural background of the word ξένος.⁴ This adjective, literally "foreign" or "strange," is used as a substantive

¹Richard D. Durham, "Granville Sharp's Rule" (Post-graduate seminar paper, Grace Theological Seminary, 1972), p. 58.

²Braune, "The Epistles General of John," p. 197.

³Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second College Edition (1970), s.v. "withal."

⁴Bruce, The Epistles of John, p. 149.

for "strangers." The term also means "guests" because oriental culture demanded that all strangers be welcomed. As mentioned in the previous chapter, lack of commercial accommodations required travelers to depend on the hospitality of individuals.

Verse 6

The relative clause, "Who testified to your love before the church" (author's translation), has as its antecedent the brothers who were not personally known to Gaius (3 Jn. 5). The verb, μαρτυρέω, means "to bear witness, be a witness, declare, or confirm."¹ Used in the aorist active indicative form, this verb records a definite occasion when the brothers testified to the love of Gaius.² Presuming that the Ephesian church originally sent them out, Lenski suggests that the testimony of these brothers "before" or "in the presence of" the church refers to the public report of their previous missionary tour to the church at Ephesus.³ As demonstrated above, these brothers are very probably the same who gave the report in verse 3.

Continuing the same sentence, the next clause must also be understood as relative. At this point the AV properly

¹Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, pp. 493-94.

²John R. W. Stott, The Epistles of John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 221.

³Lenski, St. John, pp. 582-83.

conveys the structure of the passage: "Whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well." The relative pronoun, οὓς, agrees in gender and number with the "brothers who are strangers" and the ones "who bore witness" in the two preceding clauses. This chain of relative pronouns strongly identifies the "brothers who are strangers" as the people whom Gaius is now instructed to forward on their journey.

Bruce refers to the words "you will do well" as an idiomatic form of expressing thanks in advance, quoting the NEB: "Please help them on their journey."¹ Lenski calls this an indirect way of expressing a request and a high compliment to Gaius:

Without directly asking him John yet asks Gaius to take care of the missionaries once more. No greater compliment could be paid to Gaius than that John should take for granted that Gaius will do what is not even asked but is only implied. John does better than to ask, he commends what Gaius will do for these missionaries as though Gaius had already started upon the doing.²

This verb, ποιήσεις, is the future form of the first verb in verse 5 and implies a wish which John assumes will be immediately fulfilled.³ The explanation as to what John has in mind for Gaius to do is provided by the complementary participle, προπέμψας.

The verb, προπέμπω, literally means "to send before,"

¹Bruce, The Epistles of John, p. 150.

²Lenski, St. John, pp. 501-02.

³Westcott, The Epistles of St. John, p. 238.

or "set forward." In all nine of its New Testament occurrences it is used in reference to journeys.¹ Arndt and Gingrich give two basic meanings: (1) "accompany" or "escort;" and (2) "help on one's journey with food, money, by arranging for companions, means of travel, etc.," and "send on one's way."² In two places, Acts 20:38 and 21:5, this verb may mean only accompaniment. In all of its other uses, and perhaps even in Acts 21:5, the idea of provision for the journey is present. Dodd affirms, "The word which is translated 'speed them on their journey' is something like a technical term of early Christian missions."³ After listing its occurrences he concludes: "A comparison of these passages shows that while the actual meaning of the verb is no more than 'speed a person on his way' (colloquially, 'to give him a send-off'), it has come to imply the assumption of financial responsibility for the journey."⁴

In the Septuagint the term appears only in the Apocrypha, always in the sense of speeding someone on a journey. In two of the five passages where it appears, it is used of government officials sending letters with travelers commending

¹James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), p. 544.

²Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 716.

³C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles, in The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), p. 160.

⁴Ibid.

them so that provision for their physical needs will be given. The first of these is 1 Esdras 4:47: "Then Darius the king . . . wrote letters for him unto all the treasurers and governors and captains and satraps, that they should safely bring on their way both him, and all those that should go up with him to build Jerusalem."¹ The other, in 1 Maccabees 12:4, similarly speaks of letters addressed to the governors of every place instructing "that they should bring them [the bearers] on their way to the land of Judah in peace."² (See also Jdth. 10:15; Wsd. 19:2; 2 Macc. 6:23.)

Concerning the first New Testament use of προπέμπω, Thayer offers the following meaning: "To set one forward, fit him out with the requisites for his journey."³ The New Scofield Bible's reading of Acts 21:5 may also require the understanding that provision is included ("They all brought us on our way"). The five remaining passages are Pauline. All of them strongly suggest assistance through hospitality or financial support. In three places Paul speaks of his intention to visit, to stay with those of the church, and to have them assist him on his journey or send him on his way (Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6; 2 Cor. 1:16). In two other passages Paul instructs

¹S. A. Cook, "1 Esdras," in Vol. I of The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 33.

²W. O. E. Oesterly, "1 Maccabees," in Vol. I of The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 111.

³Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 541.

a church and an individual to send others on their way. This is said in behalf of Timothy and of Zenos and Apollos (1 Cor. 16:11; Ti. 3:13). In the latter reference Paul makes it clear that Titus should be diligent so that nothing is lacking to these men. The suggestion by Dodd that the use of this word is technical appears to be borne out by its New Testament occurrences. Only in Acts 20:38 does προέμω seem to signify merely escorting or accompanying.

The participle, προέμω, is qualified by the adverb ἁγίως. This word means "worthily, in a manner worthy of, or suitably" and normally occurs with the genitive, as it does here.¹ Not found in the Septuagint, this word occurs only here and in Paul's epistles. In each of its five Pauline uses, the word refers to believers. Paul employs it when commanding or entreating Christians to do something, always with some sense of obligation. Paul commends Phoebe to the church of Rome so that they will receive her in the Lord "in a manner worthy of the saints" (Rom. 16:1, NASB). He prays for and encourages Christians in order that their walk, or entire life, will be worthy of their calling, worthy of the Gospel, worthy of Christ, or worthy of God (Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10; 1 Th. 2:12). In all of these occurrences, Paul implies that the matter under discussion is something which should be done, and ἁγίως describes the manner in which it should be accomplished. The idea is that believers are

¹Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 78.

representatives of God (or of the Gospel). Vine suggests that the phrase "worthily of God" signifies "in a manner consistent with their devotedness to the service of God" (author's italics) referring to the devotedness of the missionary brethren.¹ It would be better to understand this phrase as "in a manner worthy of Gaius' devotion to God," because of the way ἀξίως is used in other places. Although the object of ἀξίως is impersonal in some references, the subject is always personal: believers are instructed to walk "worthy of their calling" or "worthy of the Gospel" (Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27). Here John exhorts Gaius to receive and support such men "worthily."

Verse 7

The conjunction, γάρ, is causal, expressing ground or reason. It is most commonly translated "for" in the sense of "for this reason" or "because." This word introduces the final clause of the sentence which began in verse 5. This entire clause is causal. It provides the reason John is commending the Christian workers to Gaius' care, and thus, John's commendation of Gaius for assisting them. These missionaries are here described as serving in the name of Christ; for this reason they deserve assistance from others. Because Gaius has helped them, he has earned John's praise.

The verb, ἐξῆλθον, is the aorist form of ἐξέρχομαι.

¹Vine, The Epistles of John: Light, Love, Light, p. 124.

Because it is a common verb, its meaning must be determined by the context. Some of the ways it is translated are as follows: "to go out; come out; go away; retire; get out; disembark."¹ The word, in itself, carries no indication of purpose and should not be thought of as necessarily indicating that these men were sent out with any particular sense of mission. In similar contexts this word does describe Paul's departing or going forth, but it is not a technical term. If, as Stott suggests, it "depicts a deliberate setting out on a mission," this is not due to any inherent meaning of the word; but is due to its setting in the context and the aorist tense of the verb, which marks a definite action in the past.² The men under discussion here are identified as missionaries, not because of this verb, but because of the context and the qualifying prepositional phrase, "for the sake of the Name."

The prepositional phrase, "on behalf of the Name," expresses the reason for which these men have gone out. It is "in the interest of" or "for the sake of" (ὕπερ) the name; that is, they have gone out on behalf of the name of Christ. The preposition, ὕπερ, has a causal significance, here explaining the purpose for which these missionaries have gone forth.³ From the contexts in which this absolute use of "the

¹Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, pp. 273-74.

²Stott, The Epistles of John, p. 222.

³George Benedict Winer, A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1877), p. 383.

Name" occurs in the New Testament and among early Christian writers, it is evident that "the Name" is "Jesus Christ."¹ By saying that these men went out on behalf of Christ's name, John defines their purpose or motive as that of serving Christ.

Bruce comments that "the Name" appears as a synonym for Christ in the same way that "the Name" substitutes for the divine name, or the Tetragrammaton, in Jewish writing and conversation.² As early as Acts 5:41, it appears in reference to Christ or the Christian cause. Its use here parallels the absolute phrase, "the Way," which was an early designation for Christianity. According to Maclaren, the substantive use of "the Name" means the same thing as "the Person Jesus," signifying His whole character and nature.³ Vine, suggesting "the Name" entails all that Christ is, states:

The Name is that of the Lord Jesus. His Name expresses all that He is, His character and attributes as seen in His doings, and therefore is summed up in all the doctrines concerning Him, His Deity, His eternal Sonship, His sinless Life, His Death, Resurrection and exalted position at the right hand of the Throne.⁴

The participial phrase, "accepting nothing from the Gentiles" (NASB), is adverbial. It depicts the manner which characterizes the missionaries' work. The verb, λαμβάνω, is

¹Westcott, The Epistles of John, p. 238.

²Bruce, The Epistles of John, p. 150.

³Alexander Maclaren, The Epistles of John, Jude and the Book of the Revelation (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), p. 63.

⁴Vine, The Epistles of John, p. 124.

another very common verb, the meaning of which varies widely depending on the context. Its usual meanings include "to take, take something into one's possession, receive, accept, get, obtain, accept a donation."¹ Categorizing its major uses, Moulton and Geden's concordance makes note of the use of this verb with ἀπό, ἐκ, and παρὰ, prepositions which can mean "from."² This verb appears with ἀπό only five times. Two of these are in the Gospels in reference to something which is owed; it is used of kings receiving tribute and of a landowner receiving payment from tenants (Mt. 17:25; Mk. 12:2). The other three uses are in John's letters, here and twice in 1 John. The two uses in his first epistle both refer to what the Christian receives from God. In one place John speaks of the believer as having received the anointing of the Holy Spirit; in the other, he speaks of the believer receiving whatever is requested from God (1 Jn. 2:27; 3:22). The Gospels use this word combination to refer to something that is owed or required. John uses it in his first epistle of two truths that are established facts: the past fact of the believer's anointing and the certainty of answered prayer. The dominant idea is that λαμβάνω with ἀπό refers to something as guaranteed to be forthcoming. Winer's distinction between ἀπό and παρὰ and his suggestion that ἀπό does not necessarily

¹Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, pp. 465-66.

²W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, eds., A Concordance to the Greek Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 4th ed. rev. by H. K. Moulton, 1963), s. v. "ἀξίως."

indicate a genuine offer of support from the Gentiles does not seem to fit the New Testament use of this phrase.¹ Support probably was offered by Gentiles, but it was not accepted.

The present tense of the participle, λαμβάνοντες, indicates a continual practice. The missionaries are characterized by their custom of refusing to accept assistance from the Gentiles. The word μηδέν is a substantive use of a neuter adjective meaning "nothing" or "nothing at all."

Those from whom the missionaries resolved that they would not accept support are called "Gentiles." This term is an articular adjective, or substantive, meaning "heathen" or "Gentile." In Barnes' words: "The term Gentile embraced all who were not Jews, and it is evident that these persons [the missionary brethren] went forth particularly to labor among the heathen."² Bruce draws attention to the distinction between this term which means Gentile individuals and the more common word for Gentile nations. This word, ἔθνη, occurs only here and three times in Matthew, where it is used to contrast the behavior of unbelievers with that of believers. The other word, ἔθνος, is used in a more general sense of "nation or people" and is employed by Paul to refer to Gentile Christians (cf. Rom. 11:13; 15:27; 16:4; Gal. 2:12, 14;

¹Winer, A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament, p. 370.

²Albert Barnes, James, Peter, John, and Jude, Vol. X of Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the New Testament (Glasgow: W. G. Blackie and Co., Printers, 1872), p. 373.

Eph. 3:1).¹ John's choice of this word means that the ones from whom the missionaries refuse to accept support are unbelievers.

Exhortation

Verse 8

A new sentence, this verse begins with the inferential conjunction, οὖν. Inferential only in dependent clauses, οὖν is translated by such words as "therefore, so, consequently, then."² John uses it to introduce a conclusion based on the argument of the preceding sentence (i.e., verses 5-7). John states that the basis of what he is now telling Gaius has been given in what immediately precedes.

The verb ὁφείλομεν with an infinitive communicates moral obligation: "we must; we ought."³ John emphatically includes himself as being under the same obligation to support such men by his use of both a plural verb and the subject pronoun. Calling this the "communicative plural," Braune states that it denotes the general Christian duty to take part in missions.⁴ The present tense of this verb indicates that

¹Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), pp. 129-30.

²Dana and Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 253.

³Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 603.

⁴Braune, "The Epistles General of John," p. 198.

this duty is a continuing responsibility.

This obligation consists of receiving or supporting such men. There is a definite play on words intended in the paralleling of λαμβάνω ("to take") and ὑπολαμβάνω ("to support"). Lenski, among others, refers to this as a paronomasia.¹ Winer, however, defines paronomasia as a combination of words which have similar sounds and identifies the figure of speech here as annominatio, a play on words which involves not only their sound but also their meaning; consequently, annominatio usually consists of antitheses.² Vine achieves much the same effect in the following statement: "As the missionaries refused to take from the Gentiles, others ought to undertake for such servants of God."³

This is the only non-Lucan use of ὑπολαμβάνω in the New Testament. In Luke's writing, as in the Septuagint, it occurs in various senses of "support, answer, receive."⁴ In extra-biblical Greek this word is used in the sense of "receiving with hospitality, and especially of supporting."⁵ The verb may be translated "to welcome," but suggests much more

¹Lenski, St. John, p. 584.

²Winer, A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament, pp. 636-38.

³Vine, The Epistles of John, p. 125.

⁴A. E. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, in The International Critical Commentary, ed. by C. A. Briggs, et al. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 187.

⁵Ibid.

than hospitality alone.

John's exhortation to Gaius, "We ought to support such men" (NASB), refers to the missionaries who have been the subject of discussion; but it is not limited to them. The articular adjective, τοὺς τοιούτους, has as its antecedent the missionary brethren of verse 5, on the basis of agreement of gender and number. This adjective, τοιοῦτος, "of such a kind; such as this," describes a particular type of people and includes all who act on the same principles.¹ The significance of this is that Gaius should receive and support not only these specific missionaries, but also other Christian workers who are likewise serving on behalf of the name of Christ.

John concludes this paragraph with a "pure final clause," a clause which expresses a distinct purpose.² The conjunction, ἵνα, expresses purpose; fully translated "in order that," it is simply translated by "so that" or "that." The purpose John gives for supporting such missionaries is "so that we may be fellow-workers with the truth" (author's translation).

Paul, the only other New Testament writer who uses the term "fellow-workers," always applies it to persons as being "fellow-workers of" other people. Most commentators

¹Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, pp. 828-29.

²A. T. Robertson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 981.

state that the word appears here with the dative τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, in the sense "that we may become their fellow-workers for the truth," assuming that the dative is a dative of advantage and that fellow-workers means "fellow-workers of the missionary brethren." Plummer, for example, makes the following statement: "In the New Testament persons are invariably said to be 'fellow-workers of,' never 'fellow-workers to,' or 'fellow-workers with': those with whom the fellow-worker works are put in the genitive, not in the dative."¹

Brooke considers that a possible understanding of this phrase, but advocates an alternative. Although there is no other New Testament example of συνεργός with the dative, "the usual construction being with the genitive, either of the person or the work, or with the preposition," Brooke observes that the dative is frequently used with the verb, συνεργεῖν (Jas. 2:22; 1 Esdr. 7:2; 1 Macc. 12:1).² He concludes that the use of the verb with the dative and John's use of ἀλήθειας which he often almost personifies, makes the correct translation, "become fellow-workers with the Truth."³ John's own Gospel records that Jesus Christ referred to Himself as "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). On the basis of this Maclaren adds the following: "'The Truth' is supposed

¹Plummer, The Epistles of St. John, p. 190.

²Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, p. 187.

³Ibid.

to be an active force in the world, which both the men who directly preach it, and the men who sustain and cheer those who do, are co-operating with."¹ Even though this does not correspond to Paul's consistent use of συνεργός with the genitive, it does agree with John's personification of the truth as another way of referring to Christ. In this context, it seems best to understand "the Truth," like "the Name," as a reference to Christ and both the missionaries and Gaius as working together with Christ.

¹Maclaren, The Epistles of John, Jude and the Book of the Revelation, p. 71.

CHAPTER IV

OBSERVATIONS

The Relevance of the Passage

In its historical setting, 3 John dealt with a specific problem within a particular church. John addressed this personal letter to Gaius, an individual who was directly related to the situation. The historical setting of this epistle is first century A. D., but the principles set forth in the letter remain valid even when viewed apart from the historical, cultural, and geographical contexts.

Although John wrote this epistle to settle an immediate problem which concerned a specific congregation, its inclusion in the canon of Scripture makes it more than a personal directive to an unidentified individual of the first century. The fact that precise date and destination, as well as the identity of the recipient, have not been preserved encourages the reader to view the letter as teaching general principles that are not limited to the original setting. The tenet that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine and instruction allows contemporary Christians to apply the practical teaching of 3 John in their present relationships with Christian workers (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Major Ideas in 3 John 5-8

Right to Support

The brethren in this passage are worthy of support due to their status as servants of Christ. The fact that "they went out for the sake of the Name" (NASB), that is, on behalf of Christ's name, identifies them as Christian workers. They are generally regarded as "missionaries," working among unbelievers.¹ John affirms that they deserve support for two reasons: (1) on the basis of their motive of serving Christ and (2) because of their policy of refusing to accept assistance from the Gentiles. John encourages Gaius to send them forth in a manner commensurate with his love for God.

Source of Support

Believers have a responsibility to contribute financially to Christian workers. When John addressed this letter to Gaius, one individual, he established a general principle for believers and churches (which are groups of believers) to employ. Even when they are not the immediate beneficiaries of such workers, believers, as individuals and collectively, ought to support others who labor for the sake of Christ's name. John makes this clear by his emphatic inclusion of himself in this responsibility (verse 8). The idea John communicates in the strong statement, "therefore, we ought to support

¹Among those who identify them as "missionaries" are Barclay, Braune, Brooke, Plummer, Smith, and Stott.

such men" (NASB), is that Christians in general are under obligation to meet the needs of other Christians who are working for the cause of Christ.

The letter does not state why the Holy Spirit directed John to address this epistle to one specific man, rather than the entire congregation in which this problem occurred. However, John's instructions to Gaius constitute enduring principles which a believer of any era should practice. The custom of the missionaries in rejecting aid from those who did not believe in Christ parallels Paul's practice of self-support. These missionaries apparently chose to accept assistance only from other Christians to avoid the charge of serving God in order to receive financial remuneration.

Personal Contact

Although Gaius does not know these brothers very well, he has had some contact with them. As demonstrated by the exegetical study (cf. pp. 6-7), the men under discussion in verses 5-8 are the same men who had previously visited Gaius. John again commends them to Gaius' care, so that he will entertain them and provide for their needs.

The apparent principle is that it is in order for missionaries to receive support from other Christians and from churches other than their sending church. One may also conclude that although these brothers were formerly unknown to Gaius, they are no longer strangers. One cannot understand the passage as teaching that John expected Gaius to

contribute financially to people who were and who remained unknown to him. Gaius probably received these missionaries in the past on the basis of John's commendation; having had personal contact with them, Gaius now has two reasons to accept these missionaries: John's commendation of them and his own knowledge of them.

Biblical Parallels

The Principle of Remuneration

The Bible consistently teaches that a worker deserves payment. The clearest statement of this principle appears in 1 Corinthians 9:7-14, where Paul expressly discusses the apostolic rights of which he has chosen to refrain from availing himself. Dr. James L. Boyer summarizes Paul's right to expect support from the churches in the following series of arguments:

(1) Argument from human analogy (v. 7). Three parallel examples show that such is the rule in all of life. The soldier, the farmer, and the shepherd all participate in the rewards of their own labor. (2) Argument from Scripture (vv. 8-10). He quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 and sees in it not so much God's concern for the well-being of the ox, but even more his concern that the person who serves the Lord in the harvest field should do so in the hope of participating in the physical results of the harvest. (3) Argument from the common sense of what is right (vv. 11-12). (4) Argument from actual practice (v. 13). As a matter of fact, those who ministered in holy things in the temple did get their support from the temple. This would be true in both the Jewish and the pagan world. (5) Argument from the word of Jesus (v. 14). Probably this is a reference to our Lord's saying, "The laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7; Matt. 10:10).¹

¹James L. Boyer, For a World Like Ours (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1971), p. 92.

The principle that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living from the Gospel recurs throughout the New Testament. In the epistle to the churches of Galatia Paul commanded: "Let the one who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches" (Gal. 6:6, NASB). 1 Timothy 5:17-18 restates the command adding that those who rule well and work hard at teaching and preaching deserve double honor. This no doubt implies more than respect; it means commensurate financial reward in addition to intangible honor.

The Example of Paul

Although Paul recognized his right to expect support, he deliberately chose to support himself so that he would not burden the churches (1 Th. 2:9; 2 Th. 3:8). Paul consistently and consciously labored to avoid the charge of seeking to profit financially from the preaching of the Gospel. At the same time, he taught with equal consistency that the one who labors deserves to be paid and the one who receives is under obligation to share materially with his teacher (cf. Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17).

Bruce's comment on Acts 20:33-35 reveals a harmony of seemingly antithetical ideas:

Returning once more to the example which he had set them, he reminds them finally that those who take care of the people of God must do so without thought of material reward. . . . Paul calls the Ephesian elders to witness that all the time he spent with them he coveted nothing that was not his; on the contrary, he did not even avail himself of his right to be maintained by those for whose

spiritual welfare he cared, but earned his living--and that of his colleagues--by his own labors.¹

Paul states here that the one who ministers the Gospel should not expect payment; yet, he teaches elsewhere that those who profit from the preaching of the Gospel have an obligation to the one who teaches them. This kind of blending of apparent opposites characterizes the Bible. Corresponding truths often appear in juxtaposition, as they do here.

The careful reader observes an apparent discrepancy between Paul's stated policy of self-support and his actual practice. He approvingly acknowledges gifts from the Philippian church, adding that their giving to him will result in profit for them (Phil. 4:14-17). In addition to accepting gifts, Paul also accepts hospitality. Paul consistently uses *προπέμπω*, "to help on one's journey," to announce his intention to visit or to send an associate.² In every instance where he uses this word, Paul seems to expect that the recipients of his letter will receive him or whomever he is sending, first offering hospitality and subsequently forwarding that person on his journey (cf. pp. 16-19). Paul also declares his desire to visit Philemon and his expectation that Philemon will prepare a lodging for him (Phile. 22). Paul goes so far as to tell the church at Corinth, "I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present

¹F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 418.

²Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 716.

with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone . . ."
(2 Cor. 11:8-9).

The apparent conflict between Pauline policy and actual practice resolves itself when one recognizes the evident principle of maturity. It seems that Paul refuses to accept assistance from young or immature believers but does not reject hospitality or support from those who are more mature or who spontaneously offer aid. This explains Paul's scrupulous concern that he set a good example for the Thessalonians and his sanction of gifts to him from the Philippians.

The Reciprocal Truths

The Bible emphatically teaches that one should not strive to accumulate wealth.¹ Jesus Christ taught that material riches are only transitory in nature:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mt. 6:19-21, NASB).

The qualifications for one who is an overseer (or pastor) require him to be "free from the love of money" (1 Tim. 3:3, NASB). In fact, Christ commanded His followers not to concern

¹"Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens" (Prov. 23:4-5); "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions" (Lk. 12:15, NASB).

themselves with meeting their needs for the necessities of life, but to seek His kingdom and righteousness first. He assured them that their heavenly Father knew their needs and would supply them (Mt. 6:28-34).

The principle that one should not seek money corresponds to the truth, emphasized in this paper, that those who serve should receive payment. Far from contradicting one another, these truths balance each other. The minister of God should serve without thought of reward. Nevertheless, God has ordained that those who profit from his ministry should contribute toward his monetary needs.

CHAPTER V

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Preliminaries

This paper does not propose to argue for or against the question of the mission society's "right to existence."¹ While the New Testament does not mention any institutions of this nature, this writer knows of no principle prohibiting such organizations. In the present day of bureaucracy and "red tape," a mission society can function as an effective service organization in helping churches send out missionaries.

It is important to distinguish between practices and patterns and the principle behind them.² The practices of Paul and of the missionaries in 3 John are culturally related; they do not necessarily carry over to the present. For example, Paul operated in a home mission field under circumstances greatly different from today:

Paul was a citizen of the world in which he labored and not a guest in a foreign country, as most missionaries are. He enjoyed the hospitality of a government

¹George W. Peters, A Biblical Theology of Missions (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p. 217.

²George W. Peters, "Pauline Patterns of Church-Mission Relationships," Evangelical Missions Quarterly 9 (Winter 1973), 112.

under specific conditions. The apostle had no language to learn. He was born in a mission field and had no cultural barriers to overcome.¹

Today's missionaries, however, need passports, visas, and language training. Although Paul worked to support himself and his associates, certain countries, Canada, for one, have government restrictions prohibiting foreigners from entering the job market. A missionary to Canada would have to receive support from Christians back home unless he ministered among Christians who would contribute to his support. The New Testament does not state that missionaries went out with full support and work funds; but that could have happened. John's exhortation to Gaius that believers ought to support missionaries (3 Jn. 8) establishes an abiding principle that Christians should contribute to other believers who are serving the Lord. The reason the present deputation-support system does not fit the New Testament example is not that contemporary missionaries receive support, but that they solicit it. The system, not the missionary, should be criticized.

Problems

Discussion of some particular problems must necessarily precede any proposed solutions. As the introduction indicates, the current support-deputation system needs revision. This will occur only when people recognize the problems; it will occur gradually, if at all.

¹Ibid., p. 117.

Costs

At the present time missionaries rely more on organized churches than on individuals for support. This fact in no way diminishes the individual's responsibility. The high cost of living requires that the missionary receive more support than individuals, or even some churches, can provide. Several churches may work together to meet the needs of one missionary family.

Donn Ketcham explains the reason missionaries usually speak of their support level in terms of percentage, rather than specifying the total number of dollars needed--pastors and churches would be shocked at the figure.¹ Many people falsely assume that living expenses are lower in other countries; in many countries they are comparable, in others considerably higher.² At times inflation is lowest in the United States.³ The devaluation of the dollar is another factor.⁴ A recent editorial summarizes the combined effects of "the ravages of inflation" and the dollar's plunge in the international money market as severely curtailing purchasing power.⁵

¹Donn W. Ketcham, "The Missionary and His Finances," taped lecture, IFRBC Conference, September, 1975.

²Richard C. Shumaker, "Economic Enemy Number One," Christianity Today, June 2, 1978, p. 8.

³Eldon J. Howard, "Inflation and the Missionary," Moody Monthly, April 1976, p. 91.

⁴"Devalued and Hurting," Christianity Today, May 25, 1973, p. 54.

⁵"On Missions and the Price of Cauliflower," Christianity Today, September 8, 1978, pp. 12-13.

Many churches, recognizing the financial needs of missionaries and their responsibility to support them "in a manner worthy of God" (3 Jn. 6), are adding cost-of-living increases to their present programs. Others have decided to delay increasing the number of missionaries supported until they can make substantial increases in their giving to those they currently support.¹

Inefficiencies

The introduction alludes to the question, does the present system effectively use personnel and adequately encourage interest in missions among the churches? The deputation schedule is often strenuous and expensive--so much so that some people question if this method of gaining support is not "a waste of the Lord's money and the missionary's time and energy."² A common pattern seems to involve arranging as many meetings as possible with the usual stated objectives of making the work known and seeking prayer support.³ David Marshall, a mission society director, observes: "An excessive number of churches supporting a given missionary causes thousands of miles of expensive travel, loss of efficiency in financing and loss of real personal contact which could

¹Shumaker, p. 8.

²Arnold Pearson, "Is This Trip Necessary?" Eternity, April 1974, p. 18.

³George H. Slavin, "The Missionary and His Local Church," Evangelical Missions Quarterly 7 (Spring 1971): 174.

be had in fewer churches if time were conserved so a missionary had more than a fleeting visit once every five years."¹

The counter-productivity of this method is inherent within the present system. Disregard for the biblical principle that believers should concern themselves with serving God and allow Him to meet their needs, and its counterpart that the one who works deserves payment, constitutes the first error. From this point, the effect of ignoring God's clearly-revealed program spirals.

The missionary who seeks his personal support spends great time and energy in the initial stages. When he returns for furlough he attempts to follow Paul's example of reporting back to those who sent him out. In Acts 14:27-28, Paul not only gathered the church together and began to report, but also spent "not a little" time with the disciples. Bruce comments, "The tour had occupied the best part of a year, and now Paul and Barnabas spent another year or thereby in Antioch."² Hillis notes the contrast with present practices and expresses his desire that missions permit modern missionaries to do the same.³

The effect is tragic. David Gotaas mentions one family with fifty-six sources of support and comments on their

¹David Marshall, "Conserving the Missionary Dollar," Baptist Bulletin, February 1975, p. 12.

²Bruce, Commentary on the Book of Acts, p. 297.

³Hillis, Who Really Sends the Missionary? p. 26.

furlough, "They hardly had time to share any of their experiences with their supporters and certainly did not remain in any area long enough to let down their hair to relate much concerning the spiritual battles they confronted on the field or about the spiritual victories which they witnessed."¹ That kind of brief visit does not lend itself to the establishment of enduring personal relationships. The supporters do not have an adequate opportunity to learn about the real work and needs of a missionary. Consequently, contrary to the widespread idea that having many supporting churches automatically results in increased prayer support, the people in the churches do not really know the missionary and, therefore, cannot effectively pray for him. The shallow knowledge of missions on the part of church members directly results in a lack of concern for missions:

Prayer support does not emerge necessarily from giving financial assistance to a missionary as much as it does from being informed of the problems and opportunities which the missionary confronts. We shall all learn more of missions and pray more earnestly for missionaries as we become more and more knowledgeable concerning the work and the people.²

Marshall verbalizes his doubt that people will really remember to pray for the missionary who visits only once with the comment that if he is remembered at all, prayers for him will be only general due to the lack of acquaintance with the man,

¹David Gotaas, "Let's Banish Missionary Begging," pp. 52-53.

²Ibid., p. 53.

his family, the country, and the work.¹

One can hardly expect enthusiasm for missions or effective prayer to develop under these circumstances. Most of those who worked with Paul knew him because he had ministered among them; their interest grew out of personal acquaintance with the missionary.² Lack of interest in serving overseas is probably related to lack of familiarity with missions and missionaries.

Detrimental Results

Failure to follow biblical principles affects the cause of missions by requiring that the missionary spend considerable amounts of money to make just a brief report to his supporters. It affects the churches by denying people an opportunity to understand the actual work of missions; this lack of information hinders development of interest in missions. It particularly affects the missionary and his family.

The current deputation-support system under which a missionary receives money from a number of churches disrupts the missionary's relationship with his home church. According to Dr. George Peters, "A partial or token monthly support . . . dislocates and disinherits a rightful member of the church by making him or her a member at large and a

¹Marshall, "Conserving the Missionary Dollar," p. 11.

²Peters, "Pauline Patterns of Church-Mission Relationships," p. 114.

debtor to several churches and at times to numerous individuals."¹

Traveling to all the supporting churches, as previously observed, involves expense of funds, time, and energy. The physical strain of an irregular schedule and eating and sleeping away from home takes its toll. Perhaps less obvious to others, the missionary often suffers spiritually because he has no opportunity to find refreshment in the teaching ministry of others. He needs time for spiritual renewal, evaluating his past term of work, and personal study and preparation.²

Deputation of necessity disrupts family life. If the children are under school-age, traveling with them requires considerable patience (as well as paraphernalia). If they are school-age, the family can travel together only when it does not interrupt their education. This usually means that the father travels without the rest of the family, leaving them without his spiritual leadership and instruction. Donn Ketcham judges this to be contrary to the scripturally delineated principles of priority for a man as head of the family. Dr. Ketcham states that his first sense of responsibility and priority as a Christian man is to God, next to his wife,

¹George Peters, "Towards Co-operation," in Fiftieth Annual Meeting Study Papers (IFMA, 1967), quoted in Michael C. Griffiths, Who Really Sends the Missionary?, p. 30.

²Levi O. Keidel, Jr., "Problems of the Furlough Missionary," World Vision, February 1973, p. 15.

third to his children, then, and only then, to the work. (This conforms to the principle that an overseer must be in control of his family as an illustration of his ability to handle responsibility in the Lord's service [1 Tim. 3:4-5].) If he leaves his family to visit churches, Dr. Ketcham maintains he will be out of his God-appointed place as the head of that home.¹ Children need the stabilizing effect of having their father home to solve problems, just as much as they need a definite home where they know they "belong" and can develop normal friendships.²

Suggestions

It is clear from 3 John 5-8 that the needs of missionaries are to be met by the spontaneous giving of individuals, without solicitation of funds. Believers need to recognize and fulfill their responsibility to support Christian workers in a manner worthy of God. God blesses individuals and churches as corporate groups of believers for giving generously to missionaries and other Christian workers with whom they are acquainted (Phil. 4:17).

Dividing support among a large number of missionaries is not efficient in terms of bookkeeping and, more importantly, in terms of promoting missions if the support is spread too thinly. David Gotaas suggests that it would be better to

¹Donn W. Ketcham, "The Missionary and His Finances," taped lecture, September, 1975.

²Pearson, "Is This Trip Necessary?" pp. 19, 24.

take on a higher percentage of the needed support for a few missionaries.¹ Then these missionaries, because they have fewer sources of support, would be able to spend more time with that church, like Paul and Barnabas, who spent about a year in Antioch after being gone for one year. By being a part of the church, the missionaries would benefit in terms of personal friendships and the opportunity to have a place where they "belong." The church would also benefit from the opportunity to learn from the missionary and would probably have a greater concern for missions.

One of the best ways to foster such a relationship between a church and a missionary is for the home church to share in the responsibility of sending out and take on a major share of support for those who go out from that body of believers. Peters affirms that the action of the church in commissioning a missionary is a serious responsibility and a commitment to financial backing of that individual:

It is my solid conviction that the proper exercise of this biblical principle by the churches would do more to boost the morale of our missionaries and the flow of missionary candidates than many other factors combined. Should our young people realize that not only does "my church go with me, but my church goes in my person, stands with me, sacrifices with me, and underwrites my support," the challenge would become inescapable. Laying on of hands is not a favor we extend, but a divine authority we exercise and a responsibility we assume.²

¹Gotaas, "Let's Banish Missionary Begging," p. 52.

²Peters, A Biblical Theology of Missions, p. 222.

If the home church can assume the majority of support for its own missionary and help him get support from other nearby churches, many problems will disappear.¹ Limiting the number of supporting churches for a missionary allows him to spend more time with each one. If a missionary has support from four churches located near each other, he could live in that area, dividing his time among those few churches.

Some churches already provide full support for those whom they send out. Obviously, not every church can do this. But individuals and churches can work to correct what Gotaas calls "the strange practices into which we have allowed missionary financial matters to fall."²

¹Lud Golz, "Missionary Support: Why Not the 'Antioch' Way?" Eternity, April 1974, p. 57.

²Gotaas, "Let's Banish Missionary Begging," p. 54.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Although 3 John originally dealt with a specific problem in a first century church, this brief letter contains practical theology which contemporary believers should apply to their own relationships with Christian workers. 3 John 5-8 contains two abiding principles: first, that Christian workers should receive support, and second, that this support should come spontaneously from other Christians.

This first principle, that the worker deserves payment for his efforts, recurs throughout the Bible. Stated here with specific reference to those who serve Christ, this truth balances the teaching that the one seeking to serve God should depend on His provision for physical necessities (Mt. 6:25-33). The New Testament does not encourage the solicitation of funds for one's personal needs. Evidently, provision through generosity, or wages from secular employment, sufficiently fulfilled the needs of the early missionaries and evangelists.

The missionaries in 3 John merit the assistance of other believers for two reasons: the fact that they serve in the name of Christ and their policy of choosing not to accept any help from those who do not know Christ. This corresponds to Paul's custom of preaching the Gospel without

charge (1 Cor. 9:18). Even though the Gentiles may have been willing to contribute to them, these missionaries lived by the principle that God would supply their needs through other believers.

Applying these principles to the present day, one finds in this passage New Testament precedent for contributing generously to missions. Although the New Testament does not expressly state that missionaries were sent out with guaranteed support, as long as such support is offered to them, there is no prohibition against accepting it from fellow-Christians. 3 John does, however, indicate that missionaries should refuse support from non-Christians.

The current deputation-support system, under which many missionaries seek to secure promises of support for their needs, has no basis in the New Testament. In fact, this system stands in contrast to teaching that one should not ask for money. Individuals and churches need to study the New Testament and attempt to change present practices to conform to biblical principles. Missionaries as individuals, and the cause of missions itself, can only benefit from an attempt to follow the enduring principles set forth in the New Testament.

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