

The Need for Theological Education in Missions: Lessons Learned from the Church's Greatest Missionary

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Introduction

The modern missionary movement has made unprecedented progress in reaching the lost peoples of the world. The gospel has penetrated many countries and people groups that only a generation ago were considered “off limits.” There is much to be thankful for, and yet there is much work left to be done. The question, then, is where our efforts should be focused. Do we press on “full steam ahead” and put all our forces on the front lines in order to engage more and more unreached people groups? Or do we spend time and energy fortifying and strengthening the progress we have already made so that the enemy does not steal the fruit of our labor?

The Apostle Paul struggled with this same dilemma. As the apostle to the Gentiles, he felt compelled to preach the gospel where Christ had never been named (Rom 15:20). His desire was to press on into new territories expanding the kingdom of God—not only numerically, but also geographically. His goal was to lay the foundation and not to build on someone else’s work. As a pioneer he was constantly seeking to preach the gospel “to the ends of the earth.” Approximately twenty-five years after his conversion, Paul claimed that from Jerusalem to Illyricum he had fulfilled the ministry of the gospel (Rom 15:19).

We, however, would be mistaken to suppose that Paul’s only concern was to

preach the gospel to “unreached people groups.” Paul’s mission strategy was much more comprehensive. It is simply not true that Paul viewed his ministry as complete in the regions from Jerusalem to Illyricum. In Rom 15:19 Paul does state, “from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled [*peplērokenai*] the ministry of the gospel of Christ.”¹ Yet, this verse has often been misunderstood. Paul is not saying that there is no work left for him to do and that he must put all of his effort elsewhere. The focus of his ministry after his letter to the Romans indicates that he did not abandon his previous mission efforts. Rather, Paul’s statement must be interpreted much more narrowly. He does not claim that the gospel has reached every person, every “people group,” or that his ministry has been fulfilled, but that he “fulfilled the gospel.”² So what does Paul mean by this statement? His statement must be understood to mean that as God’s apostle to the Gentiles, he has fulfilled his apostolic obligation to start new evangelistic work in the regions from Jerusalem to Illyricum. The Greek word translated “fulfilled” can also be translated “completed.” By preaching the gospel and establishing churches in all the various regions, in one sense Paul had “completed” the gospel.³ Yet, as a well-balanced missionary, Paul did not simply move on and abandon his previous works.

The goal of this article, then, is to demonstrate Paul's great concern for the ongoing need of missionary involvement in the churches he previously planted as a model for the need for theological education in missions. Eckhard Schnabel rightly explains how Paul's missionary theology and practice serves as an example for us today:

He repeatedly visited the churches that he had established in Galatia, Macedonia and Achaia; he stayed for several years in Corinth and in Ephesus; he took time to write letters, to train new workers whom he sent to the existing churches with various tasks. Paul's main concern evidently was not to reach as many people as quickly as possible with the gospel. He spared no effort, time and energy in safeguarding the consolidation of his missionary "successes."⁴

Paul's mission strategy of continuing to strengthen his churches will be shown by (1) his practice of revisiting churches, (2) his practice of writing letters to churches, and (3) his practice of sending co-workers to churches.

Paul's Practice of Revisiting Churches

Paul's missionary strategy has been well-documented and is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, we will focus on three specific areas that demonstrate Paul's on-going concern for the theological and practical development of the churches he planted. The first area is Paul's practice of revisiting churches to ensure their viability.

On his first missionary journey Paul established churches in many cities including Antioch (in Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:13-14:14). Paul and Barnabas began their missionary endeavors in Asia Minor in the city of

Antioch. After preaching in the synagogue, Luke records that "many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13:43). But as more and more people grew interested in the message of the gospel, the opposition grew with equal strength. The jealousy of the Jewish leaders caused them to contradict Paul's message and revile him. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas announced that the gospel was now being offered to the Gentiles. Upon hearing this, the Gentiles "began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord" (Acts 14:48a). Luke then informs us that "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed" and as a result "the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region" (Acts 14:48b-49). We find similar reports in the other cities. In Iconium Paul preached in the synagogue so that "a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed" (Acts 14:1). Even though they received opposition to their message, Paul and Barnabas "remained [there] for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord" (Acts 14:3). In Lystra Paul and Barnabas were treated like gods after they performed a miracle-healing. But the crowd quickly turned against them and after being stoned and taken for dead, Paul fled to Derbe with Barnabas. Again, Luke informs us that after they preached the gospel there they "made many disciples" (Acts 14:21).

Paul was not content to leave these new believers on their own. He knew that they needed a follow-up visit. So, instead of returning directly to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). They also appointed

elders in every church. Paul realized that these new churches needed help. He did not simply plant the church and then hope they would make it on their own. Not only did Paul entrust them to the Holy Spirit and pray for them regularly, but he also gave them further instructions on what it means to be a Christian and how the church of God should function.

On his second missionary journey Paul did not focus his efforts only on new, unreached areas. Before making his way to Greece, he once again revisited the churches of Asia Minor. Having a great burden to make sure the churches were living according to the gospel, Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are" (Acts 15:36). But after a dispute concerning John Mark, Paul separated from Barnabas, taking Silas with him. As they traveled through the region of Asia Minor preaching the gospel, "the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily" (Acts 16:5).

After the Holy Spirit prevented them from going into Bithynia, Paul and his companions entered Macedonia and Achaia. There they made disciples in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth (among other cities). In Philippi, Lydia and the jailer, along with their households, believed the gospel and were baptized. In Thessalonica the missionary team again entered the synagogue and preached about Jesus. According to Luke, "some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:4). Next they traveled by night to Berea after escaping persecution in Thessalonica. The Bereans eagerly received the word, and, as a result,

many of them believed, including many prominent Greek women and men. In Athens Paul preached to the Greek philosophers, some of whom mocked him while some believed. In Corinth he met Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, and "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue," who "believed in the Lord, together with his entire household" (Acts 18:8a). In addition, "many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:9b). After teaching the word of God in Corinth for a year and a half, Paul and his team returned to Antioch by way of Cenchreae and Ephesus.

On his third missionary journey, we find Paul again revisiting the churches in Asia Minor. Luke records that Paul "went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). Paul then journeyed to Ephesus, preaching in the synagogues for three months. When the Jews became stubborn and continued in unbelief, Paul began reasoning in the hall of Tyrannus, which "continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). As a result, "the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily" (Acts 19:20). After this time Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia before returning to Jerusalem. So, after departing Ephesus, Paul went through Macedonia (Berea, Thessalonica, and Philippi) encouraging the churches in those regions. He then entered Greece and spent three months strengthening the believers there. Due to intense persecution Paul was forced to flee. Yet, even amidst all of his difficulties, Paul decided to return through Macedonia in order to visit the churches again. Finally,

the missionaries came to Miletus where Paul called for the elders of the church at Ephesus to come to him so that he could give them further instructions.

Paul's visits to some of the above-mentioned cities and regions, however, do not end with the book of Acts. After his two-year imprisonment in Rome, it is assumed that Paul was released and resumed his missionary travels. Although he had a great desire to visit Spain (Rom 15:24, 28), and according to church tradition he eventually did make it there, we again find Paul revisiting some of the places where he earlier planted churches. Paul writes to Timothy, "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus" (1 Tim 1:3). Two locations are mentioned in this text. Apparently, Paul and Timothy visited Ephesus in order to help strengthen the church there.⁵ While Timothy is urged to remain, Paul mentions that he was again headed for Macedonia (presumably the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea).

According to the above data, Paul visited the churches in central Asia Minor (Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) at least four times over a period of seven years (A.D. 46-53), the church in Ephesus three times over a period of twelve years (A.D. 52-64?), the churches in Macedonia four times over a period of fifteen years (A.D. 49-64?),⁶ and the churches in Achaia (Athens, Corinth, Cenchræa) three times over a period eight years.⁷ Of course, this data does not prove the need for ongoing theological education in the mission field today, but it does at least suggest that from the very beginning Paul established a pattern of returning to his work in order to strengthen the churches. His work was not finished after a church was planted in a new region or after the first converts

were disciplined. Rather, year after year he returned to the churches he planted to appoint leaders, teach true doctrine, correct false doctrine, and instruct the believers in godliness. Bowers rightly concludes,

Insofar as the pattern of Paul's plans and movements is available to us, there is no restless rushing from one new opening to another but rather a methodical progress concerned both with initiating work in new areas and at the same time with bringing the emergent groups in those areas to stable maturity.⁸

Paul's Practice of Writing Letters to Churches

It was Paul's desire to answer doctrinal and practical questions or problems in person. Such a desire, however, was sometimes not practical or even possible to fulfill. As a result, Paul often wrote letters in order to continue his teaching ministry among the churches. Based on the letters preserved in the canon of Scripture, Paul wrote no less than thirteen letters to churches and individuals.⁹ Paul's correspondence with the churches, however, cannot be limited to the canonical letters.

Two of Paul's first extant letters were written to the church at Thessalonica.¹⁰ According to Acts 17:5-10, Paul's ministry in Thessalonica was short-lived. He and Silas were forced to escape the city at night so that the angry mob did not seize them. Shortly after leaving Thessalonica (A.D. 50), Paul became greatly concerned about the Thessalonian Christians since they were suffering persecution for their faith. Paul himself could not immediately return there since "Satan hindered" him (1 Thess 2:16).¹¹ As a result, he sent Timothy who returned with a good report that they were standing firm. Yet, some of

them were grieving the loss of their loved ones as those who had no hope. Apparently, the Thessalonians came to believe that those who died before Christ's return would miss out on the resurrection. Paul, therefore, wrote 1 Thessalonians (possibly from Athens; see 1 Thess 3:1) in order to correct their misunderstanding of the Second Coming and encourage them to persevere under trials. Learning of new developments related to the Thessalonians' incorrect view of the return of Christ, Paul was forced to write a second letter (probably from Corinth, A.D. 51). Some believed that the Parousia had already taken place, while others refused to work for a living. Paul's message was that the end had not yet come since other events had to first take place (2 Thess 2:1-12) and that those who do not work do not deserve to eat (2 Thess 3:6-12).

Paul also wrote a letter to the churches in Galatia (Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, Derbe).¹² Although the date of Paul's letter to the Galatians is debated, it is possible that Paul wrote this letter on his third missionary journey (A.D. 53-57). In this case, after having worked with the churches in South Galatia for over seven years, Paul still felt a burden to instruct and encourage these churches. One might suppose that the church's greatest missionary could have adequately taught and trained them after spending so much time there. Yet, the threat of the false teachers was real and was threatening to undo the work that he had built up.

We know from his letters to Corinth that Paul wrote at least two letters in addition to the ones known as 1 and 2 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 5:9; 2 Cor 2:4; 7:8). In this case, Paul felt compelled to write at least four letters to a church that he had visited on no less than three separate

occasions (the first visit lasted for eighteen months; cf. Acts 18:11). Although we do not know the precise date of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (i.e., the letter he wrote before 1 Corinthians), we do know that the Corinthians misunderstood at least part of his letter. Paul wrote that they should not associate with sexually immoral people (1 Cor 5:9), but the Corinthians understood that to mean immoral unbelievers. Thus, in his second letter (i.e., 1 Corinthians), written at the end of his third missionary journey in Ephesus (A.D. 55-56?), Paul corrects this faulty view by making it clear that he meant not to associate with an immoral person who claims to be a "brother" (1 Cor 5:11). But things in Corinth went from bad to worse. Paul desired to return to Corinth but first intended to visit Macedonia (1 Cor 16:5-9). Consequently, he sent Timothy as his personal representative (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10). Timothy returned with a negative report because many in the congregation had begun to doubt the validity of Paul's apostleship. As a result, Paul made an emergency visit to Corinth (not recorded in Acts; see 2 Cor 2:1; 12:14; 13:2). This visit, however, was very painful because Paul was not well received as his apostolic authority was being questioned (2 Cor 2:1). Shortly after this difficult visit, Paul wrote his third letter to Corinth. This letter was written before 2 Corinthians and is often referred to as Paul's painful or harsh letter (2 Cor 2:3-4, 9; 7:8). Paul sent Titus to deliver this letter; and when Titus returned with the good report that Paul had won most of the Corinthians back, he penned 2 Corinthians (A.D. 56?) and then later visited the church and from there wrote his letter to the Romans.

Paul also felt compelled to write to the Philippians. During his first Roman

imprisonment Paul sent a letter to the church at Philippi (A.D. 60-62). More than ten years after establishing a church in that city, Paul's work among the church was not finished. They were his partners in the ministry, and Paul felt obligated to give them a status report on his condition and to thank them for the gift they sent via Epaphroditus. Yet, Paul also felt obligated to exhort them to live unselfish and humble lives (2:1-16; 4:2-3) and to beware of the false teachers (3:2-3). Paul could not visit them as he was confined to house arrest in Rome. So he wrote a letter in order to keep communication with the church and instruct them in the gospel.

Finally, Paul's letters to the church at Ephesus demonstrate his on-going concern for the growth and maturation of the churches. Paul spent at least two and a half years in the city of Ephesus during his third missionary campaign. Yet, several years later he wrote from Macedonia in order to encourage their faith. Although this letter is general in nature (not addressing a specific setting) and there is debate as to its intended location (the phrase "in Ephesus" in 1:1 is not in some early manuscripts), it is still probable that Ephesus was at least one of the intended destinations for this epistle. Paul's second letter to Ephesus was written specifically to his associate Timothy. Yet, Paul did not just write to Timothy, but through Timothy he wrote to the entire congregation. This position is confirmed by the use of the plural "you" at the end of 1 and 2 Timothy (1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 4:22) and the fact that the issues related in the epistle concern the entire congregation. First Timothy was written after Paul was released from house arrest in Rome. When he writes, Paul is once again engaged in missionary endeavors.

Approximately fifteen years after planting a church in Ephesus, Paul, through his co-worker Timothy, wrote to encourage and strengthen the church. They still needed help in appointing leaders (overseers/elders and deacons), stopping the false teachers, and protecting the gospel. After a short season of traveling freely throughout various regions, Paul was arrested and imprisoned a second time in Rome. Sensing his imminent death, Paul sent off one final letter to Timothy who was still in Ephesus. At this point in his life, with such little time left to live, Paul's actions speak volumes as to what was most important in his life. Before he died, Paul did not command Timothy to drop what he is doing at Ephesus in order to preach the gospel where Christ had not been named.¹³ Rather, Paul encouraged Timothy to remain in Ephesus in order to take care of lingering problems.¹⁴ Yes, Paul was concerned about reaching the unreached, but he was equally concerned with strengthening and fortifying his existing work—lest he labor and run in vain.

Paul's letter writing, then, demonstrates his concern for the on-going growth of the churches he planted. His goal was not merely to plant churches and let them loose, regardless of the consequences. Rather, Paul wisely maintained a healthy on-going relationship with his churches so that the work of the gospel continued to flourish.

Paul's Practice of Sending Co-Workers to Churches

A third example demonstrating Paul's on-going concern for his churches is his practice of sending co-workers in his place. When Paul was unable to visit churches that needed his guidance, he not only

wrote letters to fill that vacuum but also frequently sent delegates on his behalf. These delegates did not simply complete the next stage of mission work after the Apostle Paul finished. Rather, they were an extension of Paul's mission work itself. Like his letters, these co-workers were sent to complete Paul's ongoing task of mission work. In order to demonstrate this thesis, we will look at the ministries of Tychicus, Titus, and Timothy.

Not much is known about Tychicus since he is only mentioned five times in the New Testament. We know from Acts 20:4 that he accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey. Having become Paul's faithful companion, Tychicus was sent as an emissary to Ephesus. In Eph 6:21-22 we read, "So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts." Paul commends Tychicus to the Ephesian congregation, describing him as a "beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord."

Paul's stated reason for sending Tychicus is twofold. First, he was given the task of relating to the Ephesians Paul's status by means of the letter he bore and the personal testimony he could convey to them. Second, Paul also gave Tychicus the task of encouraging their hearts. Because Paul was not in a position to come to Ephesus himself, he decided to write a letter and send the letter by means of his trusted co-worker. For Paul, the letter could not be sent by just any messenger, but only by someone who could faithfully discharge and continue the duties of the apostle himself. Colossians 4:7-8 presents a simi-

lar picture where Paul writes, "Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts." Tychicus continued to serve as an important co-worker with Paul. In Titus 3:12 Paul made plans to send Tychicus or Artemas to the island of Crete so that Titus would be able to go visit Paul at Nicopolis, where he intended to spend the winter. Finally, Tychicus was sent back to Ephesus in order to replace Timothy and was also possibly the bearer of the letter (2 Tim 4:12).

Titus was another one of Paul's trusted associates. He was born to Greek parents and became an early traveling companion of Paul (Gal 2:1, 3). Although never mentioned in the book of Acts, he accompanied Paul and Barnabas to the church in Jerusalem during the so-called "Jerusalem Council" (Acts 15). Titus became instrumental in helping Paul deal with the problems in the Corinthian church. Following his first canonical letter to the Corinthians, Paul made an emergency visit to Corinth, but he was not well-received. As a result, he wrote a harsh letter to the Corinthians and sent Titus to deliver it (2 Cor 12:18). Titus apparently returned to Paul with good news; and when Paul later penned 2 Corinthians, he again sent his "partner and fellow worker" (2 Cor 8:23) as the messenger.

Several years later, after being released from his first Roman imprisonment, Paul made a visit to the island of Crete. For some unknown reason, however, Paul was forced to leave Crete. Because Titus was accompanying Paul at this time, Paul left Titus behind in Crete in order to fulfill the ministry Paul himself could not do.

Later, Paul wrote to Titus and reminded him, "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). According to Acts 14:23, it was Paul's custom to appoint elders in the churches. Paul's quick and unexpected departure forced him to assign this important responsibility to Titus. In addition to appointing elders in Crete, Titus was also given the task of teaching sound doctrine (Titus 2:1) as well as exhorting and rebuking those under his ministry (Titus 2:15). Titus' work, however, did not end in Crete. When his work in Crete was finished, or at least things were stable, Paul wanted Titus to meet him at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12). Finally, according to 2 Tim 4:10, Titus went to Dalmatia. Although it is not certain as to whether Paul sent Titus to Dalmatia, its close proximity to Nicopolis fits Paul's earlier request (Titus 3:12) and evangelistic strategy.¹⁵

Finally, we will briefly look at the ministry of Timothy. From the evidence of the New Testament, it appears that Timothy was one of Paul's closest and most trusted partners in the gospel. Because Timothy was half Jewish, he was circumcised in order to effectively minister among the Jews (Acts 16:1-3). He joined Paul on his second missionary journey and became a nearly constant companion of the Apostle. Timothy quickly earned a good reputation among the believers in Lystra (his home town) and Iconium (Acts 16:2), and that reputation was maintained when he joined Paul's team. He and Silas were left behind in Berea after Paul was encouraged by the local believers to flee the city (Acts 17:14). Very early in their relationship Paul found that he could trust Timothy with the task of finishing

what he himself could not. Later, Timothy became Paul's emissary to Thessalonica to help strengthen their faith. Paul writes, "and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions" (1 Thess 3:2-3). Then we read that Paul sent Timothy, along with Erastus, to Macedonia while Paul himself remained in Asia (Acts 19:22). Timothy was also chosen by Paul to travel to Corinth so that he could remind them of Paul's ways in Christ (1 Cor 4:17). During his first Roman imprisonment Paul made plans to send Timothy to Philippi, although there is no clear indication elsewhere in Scripture that he actually traveled there during this time (Phil 2:19). Finally, Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus in order to combat the false teaching that had infiltrated the church. Not only did Paul himself spend more than two and a half years in Ephesus and write a letter to the church there, but Paul also felt it was crucial to send Timothy there to ensure the survival of the true gospel.

Paul's on-going concern for the health of the churches led him not only to revisit them when possible, but he also wrote letters and sent his co-workers in his place when he could not visit in person.¹⁶ We have evidence that Tychicus, on behalf of Paul, was sent to the churches in Ephesus (twice), Colossae, and possibly Crete. Titus was sent to Corinth, Crete, and Dalmatia. Timothy remained at Berea, and was sent to Thessalonica, Macedonia, Corinth, Ephesus, and possibly Philippi.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I will make three observations based on this study. First, the traditional method of referring to Paul-type missions versus Timothy-type

missions introduces a false dichotomy. Timothy did not have a different mission strategy than Paul but was an extension of Paul's own mission strategy. Timothy was often sent to places where Paul had already planted churches to strengthen and encourage them. If possible, Paul would have visited the churches (as he did on numerous occasions); but if he himself could not visit, then he would send a letter or one of his co-workers or both. Many commentators and missiologists, however, maintain that Paul was not so concerned with building up the churches as he was with planting them. After all, they reason, Paul testified that it was his ambition not to build on someone else's foundation (Rom 15:20). Thus, some have concluded that Paul did not build at all. Yet, this reasoning is flawed. Paul Bowers rightly notes,

Paul's vision was not limited to initiatory efforts. If he wishes to go only where there is need for a first foundation to be laid, this does not mean that in such cases Paul is only concerned with putting in that foundation. If he will not build on another's foundation, this does not mean that he is disinterested in construction of what he himself has laid. Paul repeatedly displays commitment not only to founding but also to upbuilding, not only to begetting but also to rearing, not only to planting, but also to nurturing.¹⁷

Peter O'Brien similarly remarks that Paul's "letters themselves, as well as his practice, stated priorities and descriptions of his commission indicate . . . his commitment to the upbuilding of congregations, not simply to their founding—not only to their planting but also to their watering. . . . Paul's work was not finished until he had instructed the Christians and left a mature and settled congregation."¹⁸ Thus, it is misleading to maintain that Paul

laid the foundation or planted and that others, such as Timothy, did the building and watering. Although not his main calling and passion, Paul was constantly involved in nurturing the churches that he had planted.

Secondly, we notice that Paul's work through his visits, his letters, and his co-workers was primarily focused on enabling the local believers to do the work of the ministry. His goal was to equip others so that they could continue and pass on the gospel ministry. In 2 Tim 2:2 Paul writes to Timothy: "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Timothy was not sent to Ephesus to establish himself as the leader of the congregation and to rule over it. Rather, he was sent there to help fix some problems, establish godly leaders, and then return to Paul and let the local believers at Ephesus lead the church. Perhaps at this point it will be helpful to mention Roland Allen's classic book entitled, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours*.¹⁹ Allen rightfully maintains that Paul's strategy was not merely to convert individuals but to establish churches and that his success in establishing churches is found in his method of training the first converts. He did not let the first converts become dependent upon him as a missionary. Rather, he taught them to do the work of the ministry so that they were forced to use and develop their own gifts. When new converts seek to find their strength in the missionary rather than in the Holy Spirit, then the missionary has failed in his task. The new converts will not grow as they ought but will be stifled by the control and authority of the missionary. Thus, from the very beginning, Paul's desire was never to establish his author-

ity or the authority of his co-workers as the leader of the congregation. Rather, his goal was to raise up local believers who could carry on the work of the ministry and thereby allow Paul to venture into new territories. Again, we do well to heed the words of Allen:

St. Paul was careful not to lose touch with his new converts. They sorely needed visits and instruction, and they received them. I have no doubt that he was in constant communication with them by one means or another. But there is an immense difference between dealing with an organized Church through letters and messengers and occasional visits, and exercising direct personal government. Visits paid at long intervals, occasional letters, even constant communication by means of deputies, is not at all the same thing as sending catechists or teachers to stay and instruct converts for a generation whilst they depend upon the missionary for the ministrations of the sacraments.²⁰

Finally, we need to have a balanced approach to missions. If we are to be faithful to the Great Commission, it is important that we press on into new territories and engage new people groups who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. This task is at the very heart of mission work. Without it, missions becomes stagnant and ineffective. Yet, as we have already seen, Paul did not only plant new churches, but actually spent most of his time nurturing and encouraging the churches that he had already planted so that they would remain faithful to the gospel of Christ. Similarly, theological education in missions helps the work of missions to bear fruit and endure. We would be mistaken, however, if we suppose that theological education on the mission field must be carried out precisely how it is in the West. As a missionary, Paul

would visit various churches seeking to establish them in the gospel. Those who received training and instruction did not go to Paul. On the contrary, Paul went to them and trained them in their local setting where they could continue to work, raise their families, and lead the church. Among people groups where the church is newly established, the type of “theological education” the church leaders should receive should look more like Paul’s work in the first century than the model being used by most theological schools in America today. In some circumstances, and perhaps in most circumstances among newly reached people groups, formal theological education should not be the preferred method of training. The crucial factor is that some on-going training takes place to ensure the viability of the Christian faith.

The goal of theological education in missions is to strengthen the local believers to do the work of the ministry. It is not about controlling the local believers or even indoctrinating them. It is, rather, empowering them with the Word of God, which liberates them in their service to God and to others. It is about passing on what we have learned to other faithful men who will do the same. It is about training local Bible teachers who can help train the next generations of pastors. It is about training missionaries who will go out into the harvest fields. It is about training scholars who will be able to translate the Bible into their own language or write theological literature that will be used to educate others. It is about preventing the tempter from stealing the fruit of our labor lest we labor in vain. Let us learn from the Church’s greatest missionary and have a balanced approach to missions—one that both pushes back the darkness by

engaging unreached people groups with the gospel and also keeps the darkness back by leaving behind a church that is mature and able effectively to grow and reproduce.

ENDNOTES

¹All Scripture citations come from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

²Schnabel writes, "Certainly [the early Christian missionaries] did not understand 'world mission' as the task of reaching every single individual 'privately' with the gospel" (Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul & the Early Church* [vol. 2 of *Early Christian Mission*; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004], 1546). Also see P. T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 38-39. Hultgren suggests that "the only way to comprehend what Paul has written [in Rom 15:19] is that Paul here does not think in terms of individual persons but instead of 'nations'" (Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Gospel and Mission: The Outlook from His Letter to the Romans* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 132).

³So Paul Bowers, "Fulfilling the Gospel: The Scope of the Pauline Mission," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30 (1987): 185-98. Bowers writes, "Paul's missionary vocation finds its sense of fulfillment in the presence of firmly established churches" (ibid., 198). Also see Robert Lewis Plummer, "The Church's Missionary Nature: The Apostle Paul and His Churches" (Ph.D. diss.; Louisville, KY: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 84-86; John Knox, "Romans 15:14-33 and Paul's Conception of His Apostolic Mission,"

Journal of Biblical Literature 83 (1964): 1, 9-10; Andreas Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 11; Leicester: Apollos, 2001), 184; David G. Peterson, "Maturity: the Goal of Mission," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission* (ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Leicester: Apollos, 2000), 187-88; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 60-61; David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 131. Bosch offers two reasons for Paul's statement in Rom 15:23: "(a) In view of the shortness of time and the urgency of the task it would be bad stewardship to go to places where others have already evangelized; (b) he is not suggesting that the work of mission is completed in the regions where he has worked, but simply that there are now visible churches, which may reach out into their respective hinterlands; therefore he has to move on to the 'regions beyond'" (ibid.). Similarly O'Brien writes, "Proclaiming the gospel meant for Paul not simply an initial preaching or with it the reaping of converts; it included also a whole range of nurturing and strengthening activities which led to the firm establishment of congregations. So, his claim to have 'fulfilled the gospel in an arc right up to Illyricum' signified that he had established strong churches in strategic centers of this area" (*Gospel and Mission*, 43).

⁴Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1547. Polhill similarly writes, "Paul was a pastor as well as a pioneer missionary. He ministered to his churches not only

through letters and coworkers but in person as often as he could" (John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 221).

⁵There is some doubt if Paul was actually in Ephesus or not when he urges Timothy to remain in Ephesus. The text only says that Paul was going to Macedonia but it is unclear whether he was in Ephesus. That Paul did not visit Ephesus again is strengthened by his prediction in Acts 20:38 that the Ephesian elders would not see his face again.

⁶An additional trip to Macedonia is possibly mentioned in 2 Cor 1:15-16.

⁷This data is taken primarily from the book of Acts and does not include other visits alluded to in Paul's writings.

⁸Bowers, "Fulfilling the Gospel," 189-90.

⁹The book of Hebrews is considered by most scholars to have been written by someone other than the Apostle Paul.

¹⁰There is the possibility that the letter to the churches in Galatia was written first.

¹¹Some suggests that Paul is possibly alluding to Satan working through his persecutors who often ran him out of various cities.

¹²These cities assume that the Southern Galatian theory is correct.

¹³Bowers states, "Nowhere either in the letters or in Acts are we offered examples of Paul ever leaving a newly emerging church expressly for the purposes of undertaking a mission into yet unreached territory" ("Fulfilling the Gospel,"

192-93).

¹⁴Paul also asks that Timothy come to him as soon as he is able (2 Tim 4:9).

¹⁵So George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 465.

¹⁶Bowers adds, "Remarkably, in the data available to us, whenever members of the team are found dispatched by Paul on a tour they are engaged not in a new evangelistic thrust but in confirming the already existing churches" ("Fulfilling the Gospel," 190).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 188-89.

¹⁸O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission*, 44-45.

¹⁹See Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours: A Study of the Church in the Four Provinces* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), 109-17.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 117.