

# GO Paper A-1

## Why Did Paul Make Tents? A Biblical Basis for Tentmaking

“Why did Paul make tents?” may be the most important question to ask as we enter our 21st century of missions!

The question arises because many countries in our “post-post-colonial” age restrict the entry of missionaries, but welcome people with expertise they need, so many Christians are using their professions to make Jesus Christ known abroad—as Paul used his tentmaking craft in the first century.

Exciting things are happening! English teachers are merging two house fellowships in a Muslim city where there was no believer six years ago! A linguist translated the Bible into the language of five million Muslims who never had it before—while he and his wife supported themselves teaching! An engineer has founded churches in Israel, where his firms provide manufacturing jobs for Jews and Arabs! A civil engineer and his wife do church planting in a Buddhist country, as he plans water resources and roads. Graduate study gave another couple a foothold in India. All use their vocations for missions because Paul once used his craft to make Jesus Christ known.

### I. Paul’s Ministry Model

I have given this question about Paul much thought because in 1954 God *called* me to Peru and then to Brazil, as a fully self-supporting tentmaker. He gave me an exciting ministry in secular elementary and secondary schools, and in my free time helped me start university fellowships. Then I worked in Spain, Portugal and Austria, on donor support with the IFES, and then in the U.S. with IVCF. I was evangelizing, training students for *lay ministry*, and mobilizing many for *tentmaking*. God led me to start Global Opportunities, to provide job referral, counseling and training services. So I draw from my 21 years overseas, plus 20 years of international job research and feedback from tentmakers, and a sizeable collection of articles and books on this subject. But in this paper I will focus mainly on Paul in Scripture.

Paul’s amazing pioneering strategy emerges when we carefully correlate his letters with Luke’s account in Acts. Little attention has been given to Paul’s tentmaking because the mission community is mainly interested in professionals for *creative access* to that 70% to 80% of the world which restricts the entry of missionaries. But Paul did not use his craft to get work visas, nor even primarily for financial support, which he said he could receive from churches. This adds importance to our question.

**Why did Paul support himself with his own manual labor when he did not have to do it?** Can his model in

the first century have value for us in the twenty-first? *I am convinced we cannot finish world evangelization unless we adapt and implement Paul’s larger strategy to our post-modern world.*

We can rejoice in recent advances! What we are accomplishing is exciting, but it is not enough. Ralph Winter and others met recently to consider why we seem stalled in reaching the huge Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist blocs. An *overwhelming task remains*, and we cannot do it without Paul.

### Three unevangelized categories:

**1. Unreached peoples.** It is not true that our mandate is fulfilled when we adopt a few more people groups. It may take much time and effort to start viable churches in most of them.

**2. Unevangelized open countries.** Take Japan—still less than one percent evangelical, after more than a century! Only 6% of the churches have 100 members, and these average 35 in attendance. Most have 10 to 20 people. Southern European countries are also less than one percent evangelical, as are some in Eastern Europe.

**3. The “post-Christian” countries.** Formerly Protestant Europe and North America now have a couple of generations with little or no knowledge of Christ, and millions of immigrants. In the U.S. we have let hostile forces rob us of our liberties and intimidate us into privatizing our faith, as we helplessly watch our culture slide into neo-paganism. The late Dr. L. Newbigin, after a lifetime of work in India, said that he found the *ignorance* of Christ in Asia less daunting than the *rejection* of Christ in Britain and the U.S. He said our Western countries should concern us deeply because of their powerful influence on the rest of the world, and on newly reached people groups.

What yet remains to be done is highly challenging! But not discouraging! Our only hope is to produce *missionary lay movements everywhere!* We have plenty of personnel in our churches, but most are spectators in the pews, immobilized by entertainment model services, and unable to evangelize even their own family, neighborhood and workplace. “Mobilizing the laity” often means getting them onto church committees—not equipping them to win outsiders, as Paul taught. (Eph. 4:10)

Only a tiny percentage of Christians are ever in “full-time ministry” (a terribly damaging term!) and only a few of these go abroad. Training programs become increasingly complex, time-consuming and costly, and the attrition rate grows. This is no way to win a cosmic war for control of

the world! We must marshal all our forces—foot-soldiers as well as officers. But our problems are small compared to the dilemma that Paul faced!

## 1. Paul's dilemma

Saul of Tarsus he was then. He was personally commissioned by Jesus to evangelize the Gentiles. He understood that to mean the whole Roman empire. Where would he find hundreds of missionaries? There was no church yet in Antioch, and he had just destroyed the one in Jerusalem—turning all its members into refugees, prisoners or corpses. But even if he could have found the personnel, where would he have found funding for so many? He had just confiscated the property of Jerusalem believers and it was now safely in the hands of the enemy.

After some initial evangelism, Paul, “like a skilled master builder” devised an ingenious strategy which provided all the personnel he needed and required virtually no foreign funds! He produced both as he went along. His Spirit-guided *tentmaking* strategy was intentionally designed to produce *missionary lay movements* everywhere!

**Five reasons why Paul' example gives us our best hope for finishing world evangelization:**

- A. It is the only complete strategy** for pioneering in the New Testament.
- B. The Holy Spirit preserved it in great detail**, so we would adapt and use it!
- C. It has produced remarkable results** throughout history wherever it has been implemented.
- D. It can solve our problems of diminishing personnel and rising costs.**
- E. It would make use of today's global job market** which God designed to help us finish world evangelization. It is a phenomenon of our day—nonexistent in the 1950s when a few of us went abroad. The job market and Paul's strategy perfectly fit each other, yet we have largely ignored both.

## 2. Why is there so little interest in Paul's strategy?

Most evangelicals have poor Bible study skills, for people who staunchly defend *sola scriptura*—even *inerrancy*! In talks and articles, church and mission leaders constantly cite three or four *proof-texts* as evidence that Paul did manual labor only when he ran out of donor money! But *proof-texts without contexts are pretexts*—pretexts for proving almost anything, especially our cherished ideas and practices. Most of us do not relish making major changes. But let's examine a few of the relevant Scriptures.

We need to carefully correlate what Luke writes in Acts with Paul's own letters. These all interpret each other. (Also, Luke's Gospel reflects Paul's teaching as Mark's Gospel reflects Peter's.) Then, we must put ourselves into Paul's shoes, understanding the cultural milieu in which he

lived and worked. What an exciting picture emerges! And what hope it holds for the future of the world!

**We must ask at least six main questions:**

- A. How much did Paul work?**
- B. How much did he get in gifts?**
- C. When did he do spiritual ministry?**
- D. Why did he work at all?**
- E. What was his strategy and how effective was it?**
- F. What are the implications for us today?**

## II. How Much Did Paul Work?

I will start with Corinth, because it provides the most information, then consider Paul's early years and each of his three journeys.

### 1. Paul's tentmaking and the problems in Corinth

It was Paul's second missionary journey. He was jailed in Philippi, fled Thessalonica, briefly visited Athens, and then proceeded to Corinth. We see him job and house hunting. He finds both when he meets Aquila and Priscilla, maybe in the synagogue, or the street of the tentmakers' guild. They are refugees—victims of Emperor Claudius who expelled all Jews from Rome. They were *Jews*, but not Christians. If they had also been Christians, Luke would have said so because that fact would far outweigh their Jewishness. But the three hit it off and Paul accepts both employment and lodging, because all were tentmakers!

The word translated “tentmaker” is thought to mean a leatherworker. If they had been weavers, several other words would have been used. Paul may have been expert in the kind of goat-skin for which his home province, Cilicia, was famous. Instead of carrying looms on his long walking journeys, he may have taken only a sharp knife, an awl and a big curved needle.

The tents they made or repaired may have been for traveling traders, since all Paul's base cities were important trade crossroads, and inns were scarce. But he probably did more business for the ubiquitous military. The over-extended Empire with its indefensible borders was never more than a chain of military outposts and city colonies along its incredible network of highways. Soldiers were posted in the cities and at intervals along these roads, to maintain internal order and national defense. (Is this why Paul used so many military metaphors?)

The refugee couple are said to be “householders,” so they were people of some means, and probably had both slaves and day laborers. Where many householders lived in rural villas, urban ones often lived with their extended families, behind their workshops, or on two or three floors above them. At least 70% of all the people in the provinces were slaves and 90% in Rome and Italy. Paul may have done supervision and training on the job as well as his own expert labor. He quickly won the couple to the

Lord. They became lifetime colleagues in ministry, hosting congregations, training leaders, relocating their home and business to Ephesus for Paul's convenience, and then back again to Rome, to prepare for his anticipated arrival. Paul says they even risked their lives for him! They were first-rate tentmaker missionaries!

We have considered Paul and his milieu in Acts 18:3, and verse 5 is our first problem *proof-text*. It is claimed that when Silas and Timothy caught up with Paul in Corinth, they brought money from Macedonia, so Paul quit tentmaking and dedicated himself to preaching. (A couple of translations say this.) He became a "full-time" missionary—because only that counts!

Did Paul really give up his job a few days or weeks after acquiring it? The Greek suggests only that the men were surprised to find Paul already deeply immersed in spiritual ministry. (No change is indicated.) He had made converts in the synagogue, including its leader(!) and moved them next door to the home of a convert, Titius Justus. But we will see convincing evidence that Paul did not stop making tents.

After Paul's initial ministry in Corinth, he sailed for Jerusalem, leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, the important metropolis he hoped to pioneer next. Jews in the synagogue begged him to return. So he came back to Ephesus overland, and had a spectacular three-year ministry in this city.

But near the end of the three years, he received word that there was trouble in Corinth. People from Chloe's household told him of the crisis in Corinth, and in Chapter 16 he mentions the visit of Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. (City treasurer Erastus was there, too.) They said Judaizers had come to Corinth and brought their heretical teaching. They taught that Gentiles couldn't become Christians without becoming Jews first—heeding circumcision and dietary laws. They made serious charges against Paul.

Paul answered their charges in his 1 Corinthians letter, so we can deduce what they were. They said his preaching was shallow and incomplete and his oratory was not up to standard. But most serious, they said he had to support himself because he could not get support from churches—*because he was not a genuine apostle!*

Now if Paul had quit his tentmaking when Silas and Timothy arrived, the charges would have had no credibility. Everyone would have said he only worked a bit at the beginning. Paul could have written that he only made tents when donor funds were low. But what does he do? He makes an impassioned defense of his manual labor! In 1 Cor. 9, he uses the same words he later used before Felix and Festus, "With this I make my defense. . ."

First he gives some evidences for his apostolic authority. Then he comments favorably on support received by Peter and his wife, and James, and other apostles. He asks, "Are Barnabas and I the only ones who cannot refrain from earning our own living?" This strongly suggests that

he and Barnabas were already self-supporting on their first missionary journey. But more about that later.

Then in 1 Cor. 9 we have the second problem *proof-text*—Paul's long list of arguments *in favor* of donor support. Nowhere in Scripture do we find such a strong defense of fully supported missionary ministry. We need not fewer supported missionaries, but many more than we have! Church and donor support is biblical, and Paul approved of it. But how does this list fit into Paul's formal defense of his tentmaking? He presents this whole list as reasons why he himself has a right to the same financial support as the other apostles! It sounds like this is the approach to missionary finance which Paul prefers.

But no one seems to notice that Paul then says three times, in the same chapter—*three times for emphasis*—that he has *never* made use of this right! *Never. Three times!* His teammates have also never made use of support.

Paul puts this defense of his manual labor in the center of his letter—where ancient writers (including the biblical ones) usually put their most important content relating to their main *purpose* in writing. He also puts it in the middle of a long section on giving up one's rights for the sake of the gospel. Paul's forceful triple claim is then reinforced with the reasons he gives for always insisting on self-support. I will examine the reasons later, and also a couple of *proof-texts* about gifts he received that seem to contradict the claims he makes here.

But first, Paul sends Timothy with his 1 Corinthians letter. (Luke says Erastus accompanied him.) How did he fare? To know what happened we must read how Paul recounts the story later in 2 Cor. 1:8-2:13. Timothy returns to say that neither he nor the letter resolved the problem. Alarmed, Paul makes an unscheduled emergency visit to Corinth (and apparently postpones a scheduled one). He later refers to the emergency trip as his "painful visit." Why? The great apostle Paul was actually rebuffed by the Corinthian house churches! He returns to Ephesus and writes a letter, which he later refers to as his "severe letter." He sends it with his more experienced, senior partner, Titus. But Titus has no sooner left than Paul wishes he could get the letter back, fearing it is too strong, and may prove counterproductive. (The letter has not survived.)

Paul had been nearly ready to leave Ephesus when the Corinth crisis arose, but had decided to stay until Pentecost, because new doors had opened up to him, even though there were now many adversaries. Then Demetrius rounds up the silversmiths and coppersmiths and leads a city-wide riot against Paul, and he barely escapes with his life. He says that Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives on his behalf. It seems the Asiarchs also helped him escape.

Paul flees to Troas, where he had agreed to meet Titus on his return. But Paul is so anxious about Corinth that he proceeds to Philippi to intercept him there. Titus brings good news. Most (but maybe not all) of the Corinthians

were repentant and eager for Paul's forthcoming rescheduled visit. So in Philippi Paul writes 2 Corinthians, ostensibly to ask them to have their offering for Jerusalem ready when he comes. (This is the content in the middle.) But most of the letter in one way or another continues his defense of his manual labor, especially chapters 11 and 12. He says that on his third visit to Corinth he will follow his same policy of self-support as before.

(Note that the person under discipline in 2:5-11 is not the immoral man of 1 Cor. 5:1, as often claimed, but someone who has sinned against Paul, and needs his forgiveness—probably an unrepentant local ringleader of the revolt.)

But before we consider Paul's reasons for tentmaking, we must see more evidence for how much he worked and then how much financial help he may have received from churches. First, we will consider his early ministry and the three journeys chronologically.

## 2. Paul's early ministry

We recall how Saul of Tarsus, chief persecutor of the church, searched out Jesus' followers in the synagogues and in their homes, both men and women, and interrogated them about Jesus, and tried to make them blaspheme, and took them to the Sanhedrin for trial and death. His stated intention was to destroy the whole movement. When he set out for Damascus he must have believed he had found all those in Jerusalem who had not fled. Then we recall how Jesus intercepts Saul on the road, and how Saul quickly capitulates to Jesus' lordship. He is commissioned by Jesus to be his apostle to the Gentiles. His sight is restored on Straight Street, he is baptized, and *immediately* begins preaching in the local synagogues! He powerfully convinces the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.

Because we are told little about these "three silent years," it is usually suggested that Saul spent this time in quiet study before he continued his ministry. (After all, how could anyone serve God without Bible school or seminary?) But Luke says he went from Damascus into Arabia—the puppet kingdom, Nabataea. (For a brief time Damascus was part of it.) We can be sure the warrant for his arrest three years later was not issued because he had been meditating under a palm tree! Paul tells us he was "not disobedient to the heavenly vision," but immediately began to preach.

Saul didn't begin at zero. He said he had a better knowledge of the Torah than most young men his age. He must also have learned much about Jesus. How do you think his victims answered his questions about Jesus? One might have said, "Once I was blind, but now I can see." Each had a story about Jesus, and reasons for believing in him. Most were eyewitnesses of his crucifixion. Many saw him after his resurrection. They spoke with conviction—knowing they risked death! Saul heard more than we have in all four gospels!

It is no wonder his steps slowed as he neared Damascus. What a terrible, unthinkable possibility that he might be fighting against God! The stress could have caused his

blindness. By the time Jesus interrupts Saul's journey, this shaken persecutor does not need to ask who addresses him in Hebrew. He knows. So the newly converted, newly baptized Saul puts together facts about Jesus with the prophecies. God's Spirit has prepared Saul in advance, and also speaks to him in direct revelations.

How was Saul's early ministry supported? Almost certainly by his own artisanry—because it was the normal way for any Jewish rabbi of that day. Besides, he had destroyed the church in Jerusalem and there were no others. There were several cities in western Nabataea—today's Jordan—and many synagogues. This was a crossroads of the east-west Old Silk Road and the north-south Spice or Frankincense Road, and an excellent location for a maker and repairer of tents—or for an evangelist.

We recall how he was eventually lowered over the wall of Damascus and how he fled to Jerusalem. Some saints had returned to Jerusalem, but they were terrified of Saul. But we recall how Barnabas took him to Peter and James. Then Saul powerfully preached to his fellow Hellenistic Jews in the Synagogue of the Freedmen, the very group that had martyred Stephen! But Saul was too hot a commodity, and a liability to the Jerusalem believers, so the apostles hustled him off to the port of Cesearea and onto a ship for Tarsus, in his home province of Cilicia.

Paul tells us in Galatians that he spent the next ten years preaching in the provinces of Cilicia and Syria. Judaeans had never seen him, but rejoiced that the former persecutor was preaching the faith. Where Paul's great persecution had undercut his future ministry, it had also initiated it. The first great missionary movement in the early church had been inadvertently set off by Saul! The believers fled and everywhere they preached the Word! They spoke mainly to Jews, except for the Cypriots, who won Gentiles and produced fellowships in the great capital city of Syria—Antioch.

Barnabas is sent from Jerusalem to investigate these Gentile believers and he soon goes off to find Saul. Note that it is Barnabas who needs Saul's help, not the reverse. Gentile converts were already so numerous and influential that outsiders call them "Christians." Saul already had 14 years of experience with Gentiles. (Gal. 1, 2.)

In Antioch, too, Paul and Barnabas almost certainly supported themselves (1 Cor. 9:6). Paul's triple claim in the same chapter that he had *never* had donor support would make that likely. Luke does not give us more information about these early years because Acts has a limited purpose—to show how the gospel was taken from Jerusalem to Rome, and how a strictly Jewish religion became a predominantly Gentile faith. But a number of the hardships in Paul's four long lists of sufferings in 2 Corinthians must fit into these first fourteen years of Paul's ministry.

## 3. The first journey

1 Cor. 9:6 suggests that Paul and Barnabas also supported themselves on the first missionary journey—the only one they made together, and Paul's triple assertion in 1

Cor. 9:12, 15 and 18 would seem to rule out church support. They traveled through several cities on Cyprus, Barnabas' homeland, then crossed over to the mainland. A crisis occurred in the port city of Perga, which resulted in John Mark's return home and a change of plan which took the two evangelists on an unscheduled visit into the highland cities of Galatia and Phrygia. Paul's letter to the Galatians suggests he fell ill. (We wonder where they had intended to go?)

After a fruitful ministry, but much persecution, they returned to Antioch, and remained there for some time. We recall a journey they made to Jerusalem with money for its famine victims.

Meanwhile, Judaizers visited the Galatian churches and tried to convince the Gentiles they needed circumcision and dietary laws. Paul wrote the Galatians to denounce this heresy, to clarify salvation by grace, and to encourage them. The same issue became crucial in Antioch, so the two men made a second visit to Jerusalem, for what became the first Church Council.

#### 4. The second journey

We recall how Paul and Barnabas then decided to make a follow-up visit to the Galatian region and to do further pioneering. But they disagreed over John Mark, and ended up forming two teams. We can be sure Barnabas continued to have an effective ministry, but it is not described because it does not fall within Luke's purposes. And John Mark eventually became an important member of Paul's team, and then of Peter's. So Paul leaves with Silas and Titus, and they take an overland route through the Taurus Mountains, no doubt taking the Council letter to the Galatian churches.

Then they seek to go to Ephesus. Is that where Paul had hoped to go on the first journey? Paul was a strategic thinker and in the Empire, Ephesus was second in importance only to Antioch. But once again they are unable to go. Maybe military men, stationed at intervals along the highways, had closed the road. The way to Bithynia was closed, too. So the men end up in Troas—definitely not on Paul's list. (Even Paul did not always receive direct guidance.) God had to get him to Troas in intermediate steps, in order to get him to Europe—to Macedonia and Achaia.

We conclude from Paul's triple assertion in 1 Cor. 9 that he supported himself everywhere, and we have seen in detail what occurred in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians Paul tells us he made tents also in Philippi, at least on his second visit. But Paul's two short letters to Thessalonica give us much valuable information. You will remember that he had to flee persecution. In 1 Thess. 2 and 2 Thess. 3 Paul says he worked "night and day"—not to be a burden on them. He did not mean 24 hours, but both early morning and late afternoon shifts—with a long break over the hot noontime. It was the same work schedule which is observed in the Mediterranean today.

Paul had fled Thessalonica, stopped briefly in Athens and then made his first visit to Corinth. We have already con-

sidered his tentmaking there with Priscilla and Aquila. Paul intends to concentrate on Ephesus next, so he takes the couple along and leaves them there. He promises the Jews he will return after his visit to Jerusalem.

#### 5. The third journey

You will recall Paul's remarkable ministry in Ephesus, including a huge public bonfire when converts burned their magic books and fetishes.

When the crisis occurred in Corinth, Paul could have downplayed his tentmaking, but at the beginning of the letter he sent them, he already says he is then doing manual labor in Ephesus! (1 Cor. 4:11-13) But the most important evidence for Ephesus is Acts 20. Paul had barely escaped Ephesus with his life. Then he met Titus in Philippi with news that the Corinthian crisis had been resolved. On his third short visit to Corinth, persecution intensified, and he changed his travel plans. Eventually, he caught up with the Gentile converts who would accompany him to Jerusalem with their money gifts.

Their ship made a stopover in the port city of Ephesus. Paul called the house church elders to meet him on the beach at Miletus. It may have been too dangerous for him to enter the city. It would be a farewell meeting. Paul reminded them how he had served among them—the precedents he had set which they were to follow, including his financial policy. They were to continue their self-support. Paul said, "With these hands I have provided for myself and for those who are with me." (Other passages show his companions also worked, at least some of the time.)

Paul told the house church elders to continue their self-support in order to help "the weak." He quoted Jesus to say it is better to give than to receive. But Paul was not thinking of their charitable work. To earn money in order to give it to the weak is just the opposite of what Paul meant here.

He often uses "the weak" to mean the poor or the spiritually immature. He didn't want any converts to be tempted through sloth or greed to seek spiritual ministry for material gain. For this and other reasons, Paul allowed no paid ministry during the pioneer stage. But he stipulates financial support of leading elders at a later stage—maybe for those who eventually became regional supervisors.

So it appears that Paul supported himself everywhere. But we must consider two more proof-texts that seem to contradict these findings.

### III. How Much Did Paul Receive In Financial Gifts?

In 2 Cor. 11:7-12 we find another proof-text. Paul says, "I even robbed churches in order to serve you." He speaks of money brought from Macedonia, almost certainly by Silas and Timothy when they caught up with him in Corinth. "Robbed" should put us on alert, since no matter how much money was involved, it would not be *robbery*. Paul is using hyperbole in order to shame the Corinthians. Is

there any other passage about Paul receiving donor gifts? Yes, if we correlate Paul's letters. They interpret each other. We must go to Philippians 4.

Ten or eleven years go by after Paul's first visit to Philippi. He finishes the second journey, spends 3 years mainly in Ephesus, then two years in the palace guard in Caesarea under Felix and Festus. Then he makes the long sea voyage with three months shipwrecked on Malta. Finally, he arrives in Rome and spends two years under house arrest, with freedom for ministry. Since he lived there "at his own expense," it seems possible that he could continue his manual labor.

But then he is taken to Nero's palace prison to await trial. (Dangerous for Nero! During his long wait, Paul even converts members of his household!)

The Philippians send Paul a generous gift, knowing that he could not support himself in prison, and was dependent on friends for his personal needs. Paul thanks them, and then reminds them that they were *the only church that ever gave toward his ministry!* This would seem to rule out Antioch. How often had the Philippians given? Paul says, they gave "once and again," "a time or two." It is a vague expression, but all the other passages rule out any sizeable, regular giving.

Paul had written to the Thessalonians that he did not even accept free food and lodging from his hosts! He says in the 2 Corinthians 11 passage that he will not let anyone rob him of his claim to make the gospel free of charge. This suggests that the Judaizers were accusing Paul of receiving donations secretly from some source—that his claims to self-support were dishonest. Paul insists he receives no such funds.

He volunteers his ministry without pay from any source—for a very personal reason. He could not give his ministry to the Lord as a gift, because that is a debt he owes. "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" But he says, "I can make it free of charge!" (1 Cor. 9:15ff) He could do it without pay! He had a right to financial support, but would forego it. He turns his manual labor into a daily act of worship—of gratitude to the Lord! (This is something every lay person can do! It can transform the most boring or difficult job into worship!)

So here we have a highly personal reason for Paul's arduous manual labor. But the Lord would not have thanked him for long days of manual labor that he might otherwise have spent preaching! So we know Paul was convinced his manual labor would also enhance and accelerate his ministry. It was a non-negotiable part of his carefully designed strategy. So we must ask our next question.

## IV. When Did Paul Fit In His Spiritual Ministry?

Paul integrated his work and witness, so he could do "full-time ministry" even in the context of a "full-time job." This is the genius of Paul-style tentmaking! Although Paul was fully qualified as a formal religious worker, he chose to approach people as a lay person—as a fellow common

laborer. But it could not have worked if there had been any pretense. He genuinely earned his living.

How did he evangelize in the workshop? We know, because he tells his converts to imitate him, and we have quite a few of the explicit instructions he gave to them. The focus was on lifestyle. They were to conduct themselves wisely toward outsiders, and to say gracious, thought-provoking words, that would elicit questions from them. Then they must be ready to answer the questions. (Col. 4:5,6) He doesn't recommend indiscriminate personal evangelism, but this selective approach, of fishing out the seekers, the people on whom the holy Spirit was already working. It is a superb approach for us to use with the people we see regularly, at work, on campus, in our immediate neighborhood, and in social, professional or recreational associations.

Workplace conduct must include *personal integrity*—moral purity, truthfulness regardless of the situation. It must also include *quality work* for the employer—as though he were Jesus Christ! (Col.3:23-25, Eph. 6:5-9) It must also include *caring relationships* (See 1 Thess. 2:7-12, and other passages, about treating everyone with dignity, giving up one's rights for others, etc.) Most of Paul's ethical teaching relates to the workplace because that is where he and his converts spent most of their waking hours. (See GO Paper, *Workplace Evangelism: Fishing out Seekers.*)

But Paul also used his free time for more formal teaching. On the sabbaths he taught in the synagogues, as long as they would have him, fishing out both Jewish and Gentile seekers there. In Ephesus, he used the Hall of Tyrannus during the long noon time when this teacher did not need it for his own school. (The late F.F.Bruce considered the Western Text accurate in these details.) Luke gives us a poignant picture of Paul preaching in his work clothes! Listeners took away his apron and the sweat cloth on his brow, to heal sick people in the audience! (Acts 19)

In Acts 20 Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that he had taught them the whole counsel of God, in public, and "from house to house." Paul's church in each city was made up of house fellowships, which met in the homes of householders and others. It seems that he made the rounds. We know that he did some teaching at night because in Troas a long sermon put one young listener to sleep! (When I lived in Spain, supper was at ten or eleven, and committee meetings after midnight!)

Tentmaking is the most "full-time" ministry imaginable, because on the job you are under almost uninterrupted scrutiny, so your life is speaking for Jesus Christ even when your mouth is not! In addition, you have time away from the job for other ministries. When the work is manual labor, like Paul's, there can be conversations without detracting from one's work, and productive meditation and prayer.

Most of the articles I have collected on tentmaking, say that a major drawback of self-support is that it allows too little time and energy for spiritual ministry. Immediately I know the writer has never done Paul-style tentmaking!

Mission leaders tell tentmakers not to put so much effort into their jobs, because “that is not what you are here for.” This causes stress, and often makes the tentmaker a poor testimony at work.

When I talk about my years as a teacher, and then administrator, in secular binational schools in South America, always someone asks, “But didn’t you find it frustrating to have to spend so many hours on a demanding *secular* job and to have so little time left over for the Lord?” I answer, “No—I was under the impression that *all* my time belonged to God—every minute I spent at work as well as my free time! I asked God to help me do my job better than I could with only my natural ability and training. I had supernatural help for my job! Much of my ministry took place in the school, where I tried to live out the gospel, and developed relationships, and made brief comments about the Lord. Much of this led to significant longer evangelistic conversations—and home Bible studies. God helped me evangelize teachers, elementary and high school students, and their upper class local parents. (Even some school cooks, janitors and bus drivers.) I started a high school Bible club. This evangelism spilled over into my home, but left time for additional ministry—in local churches, and especially, pioneering university campus fellowships.

I was a part of that first wave of tentmakers in the early fifties. I hoped to do Bible translation in Peru, but then became very ill. After a long slow recovery, I knew no mission agency would send me out with only one functioning lung. When I was able to resume normal activities I studied at Chico State and several of us started the first IVCF group. Then I taught in the Bay Area, with two IVCF alumni, and we started a teachers Christian fellowship. Then God surprised me with a salaried, secular position, in Peru—the country he had laid on my heart—and he turned me into a tentmaker. He had used illness to delay me long enough to give me two kinds of training—how to start campus fellowships and how to do full-time ministry in the context of a full-time secular job. In this new wave of tentmaking there was no one to tell me how to do it, but the Lord himself undertook my training.

Because we are to serve our employer as though he were Jesus Christ, there is no conflict of interest between the job and the ministry. The job is not a nuisance to tolerate in exchange for a work visa, but is the essential context for effective evangelism. But we must be sensitive to how the Spirit leads us to accomplish his goals, and not insist on pre-field strategies we designed.

## V. Why Did Paul Work When He Did Not Have To?

We will consider only three of the several reasons he gives. The first two are part of his formal defense in 1 Cor. 9 and the third is in 2 Thess. 3.

### 1. Credibility

Paul says twice that he works in order not to put an “obstacle” in the way of the Gospel, so his message and mo-

tivation will not become suspect to the Gentiles. (It was fine for Peter and others to get support because they worked with Jewish people.) Paul’s self-support demonstrates his genuineness—he gets no financial gain from his ministry. It costs him! He is not a “peddler of God’s Word,” nor “a people-pleaser,” preaching what the audience wants in order to gain fatter profits. He says “we do not preach out of greed or guile.” He will not be identified with the unscrupulous orators who roamed the empire, exploiting their audiences. He does not take money from anyone, so he can be “free from all men”—beholden to no wealthy patron or social clique—not to any affluent person or faction in the church. What a wise policy this proved to be in divisive Corinth, where he would have been suspected of being in the pocket of the wealthy and influential members of the house churches!

### 2. Identification

Paul adapts culturally to people to win them. The Roman empire then was not much more homogeneous than the British empire at its height. Rome usually respected the local rulers in its provinces, their local laws, religions and customs, and interfered mainly in major disputes and national defense.

Paul approaches the Jews as a Jew himself, and the Greeks (educated Gentiles) as the highly educated, trilingual, tri-cultural upper-class Roman citizen that he was. But he focuses mainly on the “weak”—the poor, less educated, lower classes, including the “barbarians.” (These were not savages, but rural or tribal people whose first language was not Greek, and foreigners—many of them captured abroad and sold in slave markets.)

Paul’s social class and erudition gained him the respect of the upper class everywhere. (Apparently, not even his shabby clothing stood in the way.) In Athens he was quickly invited by this university city’s philosophers to speak in the Areopagus. In Ephesus, even the Asiarchs (local Asian rulers) became his friends.

But Paul needed a job to identify with the artisan classes, to earn his living through manual labor (1 Cor. 9:19ff). He must dress and live as they do. But there is no pretense. He and his team actually depend on their manual labor. (Was Paul disinherited when he put his trust in Jesus? Phil. 3:7-9.)

Why does Paul choose to identify with the artisans? Because most of the Roman empire was near the bottom of the social and economic scale. Besides, the barbarians were his channel to their own people groups in the rural and tribal hinterlands. The Empire was just a chain of military outposts and city colonies along the Roman highways, and neither Rome nor Greece had ever tried to educate the tribes and villages nor to integrate them into their empires. But Paul felt indebted to them, and to the Jews and Greeks. (Rom. 1:14-16)

His identification with the working people was not phony. His pay was poor. Often he was hungry, cold, ill-clothed. This incarnational service did not originate with Paul. He is

the one who tells us how Jesus left all he had to identify with us. It cost Jesus everything and Paul imitates him. (1 Cor. 11:1, 2 Cor. 8:9, Phil. 2:5-11.)

In another time and country Paul might have chosen to identify with a higher social group. Even if he earned an excellent salary, it would not be an obstacle, as long as it was not pay for his spiritual ministry.

Paul not only identified culturally, but vocationally—with the people he sought to win. Tentmakers' jobs usually put them into their own professional milieu, where they can move naturally as insiders. They understand the jargon, the mentality and the hang-ups of their fellows. They can evangelize their colleagues, clients, patients, students, etc., from the inside.

### 3. Modeling

Paul writes, "With toil and labor, we worked night and day that we might not burden any of you, and *to give you an example to follow.*" (1 Thess.3:8.) What is Paul modeling?

First, he was modeling *the Christian life*. None had ever seen a Christian before. So Paul shows converts *how to live out the gospel*, not just in church, but in the marketplace. It was not enough to tell them how to live. The converts would have told Paul it could not be done in their cesspool society. He demonstrates a holy life in their immoral, idolatrous culture. Paul's immersion in this world, his modeling in it, his evangelism from inside the marketplace, makes his counsel to converts credible. (1 Thess. 4:1ff.)

Secondly, he models a *biblical work ethic* (2 Thess.3:6-15), transforming newly converted thieves, idlers and drunks into good providers for their families and generous givers to the needy. (1 Cor.6:10,11, Eph.4:28, 1 Tim.5:8.) Imagine the effect of their transformation on non-believers! Paul writes much about work, without which there cannot be godly converts, healthy families, independent churches nor productive societies.

The converted ex-Soviet economist, Zaichenko, says that after 70 years of Communism, foreign money and expertise will not help Russia much until a Judeo-Christian work ethic can be instilled in society. The same problem exists in other mission fields.

Thirdly, Paul's example establishes a *pattern for lay evangelism*. (1 Thess.1: 5-8) Converts must *immediately be full-time, unpaid, lay evangelists* in their social circles, prepared to answer the questions about their changed lives and new hope. Converts were new beachheads into enemy territory. They should not hastily change their circumstances until they had won their extended families, friends, and their colleagues at work. (1 Cor.7:17-24.)

Paul did not evangelize haphazardly. He planned a careful strategy and set solid precedents. "Like a skilled master builder I have laid a foundation; let everyone take heed how he builds upon it." (1 Cor.3:10-15) Paul's foundation

was theological—Jesus Christ—and it was methodological, with unpaid lay evangelism an essential part of it.

## VI. What Was Paul's Strategy and How Effective Was It?

It would take a longer paper to pull all this together, but I will just suggest a few points in Paul's strategy. This "apostle to the Gentiles" had received a daunting commission from the risen Christ. He set out to evangelize the Roman empire, but with no source of personnel or money. But the Holy Spirit helped this strategic thinker to devise a plan that would produce the personnel and the money as he went along. Paul aimed not just for individual conversions and church planting, but for **lay movements and exponential growth.**

To achieve this he will have to produce a specific kind of churches, which will have to be made up of a specific kind of converts, for whom he will have to provide a specific kind of teaching and model.

### 1. Paul's teaching and model

He would fully support himself to gain credibility for himself and the gospel, to identify with working people, and to model a holy Christian life in an unholy marketplace, a biblical work ethic, and unpaid evangelism. But Paul's example included much more: His thorough teaching of the whole counsel of God, his simple communication, his love for the people, his willingness to endure suffering and the Holy Spirit's power in his life.

But was it necessary for Paul to make tents to implement this strategy? He thought so, or he would never have spent so many hours doing manual labor. If he had received support, most of his converts would have waited around for it, too. Then unpaid volunteers would have been considered second rate. They could have said, "You do the evangelism, Paul, because you get paid for it, and you have more time than the rest of us who work two shifts to support our families."

### 2. He aims for godly, self-supporting, evangelizing converts, willing to suffer for Jesus Christ

Paul wanted Jesus Christ reproduced in himself (2 Cor. 5: 14 ff, Gal. 2:20, Rom. 12:1) and in his converts, but as a Christian worker, he tells them to imitate him as he imitated Jesus. He multiplies himself many times over in his converts, who are to be godly in their relationships and dealings, providing well for loved ones, giving to the poor, and evangelizing their extended families, neighborhoods and workplaces.

### 3. He aims for indigenous, independent house churches

**A. His churches were self-reproducing** from the start. Everyone evangelized, without pay. For Paul to have brought in a few dozen foreign missionaries to evangelize



these provinces could have been damaging to the local Christians. It was their responsibility to evangelize their region. *Immediately!* Not ten years later after pastors have been produced in seminaries. Michael Green in his exciting book *Evangelism in the Early Church* says the converts didn't even have their doctrine straight when they ran to their towns and villages with the gospel. But they had Jesus Christ inside! Paul arranged for their doctrine to be corrected by good teaching later. Paul's own willingness to suffer communicated a great sense of urgency.

**B. His churches were self-governing.** They were not dependent on foreign leadership. Paul and his team members did not pastor these churches, but appointed local house church leaders whom they coached and whom they taught the "whole counsel of God," so they could teach their home fellowships. The churches were Bible schools! Their job was to equip members—not for church committees—but to evangelize outsiders. (Eph. 4:9ff) Since the pastors also supported themselves in the marketplace, they reinforced Paul's model.

**C. His churches were self-supporting,** never dependent on foreign funds. Even the house church pastors supported themselves during the pioneer stage. In many cases, the converted well-to-do householder would be the natural leader of the fellowship in his rural villa or city house. But converts were taught to give. Generosity and hospitality were not optional for Christians. They gave to the needy. And we recall the time they sent gifts to help the Jerusalem church during a famine.

Paul appointed house church leaders almost immediately, but they maintained themselves financially. (Acts 20:33-35) By the time a full-time pastor was needed, it was clear which local leader had the greatest respect among the house churches and among local non-believers. (Paul made this a requirement. 1 Tim.3:7) If the pastor had never worked and witnessed in the pagan workplace, how could he ask his members to do it? How could he train them for it? (Eph.4:11,12)

By the time house churches multiplied and a paid leader was needed (maybe for regional supervision), local funds were available for his support. Paul's older churches were to provide well for their pastors, as he reminded the Galatians. Later, some of the same Ephesian elders of Acts 20, may have been among those receiving support. (Gal.6:6, 1Tim.5:17,18)

Members could support the pastor because they all worked—Paul's strong work ethic. "Six days you shall work" was as important as the day of rest. They would give more willingly to a local senior person they respected, than to an unknown seminary graduate from elsewhere.

Most important, by then the basic pattern of *unpaid evangelism* was well established so that paid ministry was the exception rather than the rule.

Paul never allowed his churches at any stage to become dependent on foreign funds or on foreign leadership.

Paul's strategy was not haphazard. He warns others to take heed how they build on his carefully set precedents.

**D. He aims for missionary lay movements everywhere.**

Paul's unique approach to church planting was designed to produce *missionary lay movements!* Members had to reproduce themselves. He aimed for *exponential growth.* He did not merely add members to the church, but helped them multiply themselves.

It was a plan in which both doctrine and methodology mattered, 1 Cor. 3:10. It never required more than a handful of foreign workers and virtually no foreign funds.

By reproducing himself in the working people Paul guaranteed the infiltration of Christians into all the structures of society, at all levels, all the vocations, into the labor guilds, etc. It is also how he aimed at heads of households, the natural social units in a culture where household solidarity was obligatory. He aims at employers through their transformed employees.

## VII. How Well Did Paul's Strategy Work?

Many of his lay evangelists were from unsavory, uneducated, pagan backgrounds. Most were slaves. None had anthropological or missiological training. It cost Paul dearly to bring them the gospel, and they risked their lives without pay to take it to others. Paul had provided a model of suffering.

In ten years (the three journeys took a decade) Paul and his friends (a small team without financial support) evangelized six Roman provinces! They did it by winning and mobilizing their largely uneducated, unpaid converts.

Paul writes to the Roman Christians (there probably weren't many) about his past twenty years of missionary work. He says, "From Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum (modern Albania) I have *fully preached the gospel of Christ.* . . . I no longer have room for work in these regions" (Rom. 15:19-24) He had finished evangelizing the Greek-speaking half of the Empire and now turned to the more Latin half, including Rome, Italy and Spain.

But how can he claim to have finished the Greek half of the Mediterranean when he seems never to have worked outside the major cities. Yet he wrote the Romans that he was debtor to the barbarians as well as to Jews and educated Greeks. (Rom. 1:14-16). Paul must have believed that the gospel had sufficiently taken root in the hinterlands, so it would continue to grow.

We have seen how his strategy included the evangelization of the rural and tribal people who came to the big city, and they were the ones who ran home with the gospel. Neither Paul nor his team members had to learn the many local languages spoken in the hinterlands. Remember the trouble he and Barnabas barely averted in Lystra because they did not understand the Lycaonian language and didn't realize the local people had mistaken them for Hermes and Zeus! (Acts 14)

Paul reproduced himself in these multilingual, lower class converts, and they guaranteed the evangelization of the hinterlands. Furthermore, it was truly contextualized evangelism, since they took the gospel clothed in their own language and culture! The gospel did not come to the people as a foreign religion. No wonder the church spread so quickly.

**Macedonia.** After a few months in Philippi, Paul speaks of Macedonian churches, in the plural. In his first follow-up letter to the Thessalonians he says the gospel had already sounded out from them into the whole region!

**Achaia.** Corinth spread the gospel through Achaia, and we soon read of a church in Cenchræ.

**Asia.** But our best example is the Roman province of Asia. Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years, but Luke writes in Acts 19:19 that in just two years “all Asia had already heard!” (Not the continent, but the province.)

Is Luke exaggerating? Maybe he means only the province’s major cities (the seven of Rev. 2, 3). Paul seems not to have left Ephesus. Does Luke mean also the rural and tribal areas?

We have strong corroborating testimony from an unlikely source. It is Demetrius, the silversmith, who started the riot that nearly cost Paul his life, who inadvertently confirms Luke’s report! He cried out publicly from the platform of the amphitheater—“Not only at Ephesus but *almost throughout all Asia* this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable company of people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. . . .” Neither Luke nor Demetrius mean that all were converted, but so many believed that the silversmiths and coppersmiths were almost out of business and the worship of Artemis was in danger of extinction! (Acts 19:24-26) In *under three years!*

Paul evangelized the hinterlands. But he could not have gone to them all, nor learned all their languages. But he takes the gospel to them through his converts, and the new converts immediately reproduce themselves! It is exponential growth! The gospel spread so quickly that by the time the opposition had geared up, it was too late to put out the fire! Today we give non-Christian religious leaders decades to mobilize their opposition as we win occasional, often marginal, converts.

Not only was Paul’s strategy successful, but he has never been equaled! How can it be useful to us 21 centuries later?

## VIII. What Value Has Paul’s Strategy For Us Today?

I am convinced that Paul’s strategy for producing missionary lay movements, for exponential growth, holds the solution for world evangelization for the 21st century! I think we cannot fulfill our mandate without Paul.

So what can we derive from a study of Paul?

### 1. It gives us a tested and proven strategy to adapt and implement

Paul gives us our only N.T. strategy for pioneer missionary work, and the Holy Spirit has preserved it for us in great detail, because he intends us to use it. It is designed to produce missionary lay movements, and has done so repeatedly when implemented through history! (John Nevius taught this strategy to the early missionaries to Korea, and it has never recovered! There are reasons why it is “the bright light of Asia.”)

Remember that his strategy includes not only his self-support and workplace evangelism, but his holy life, deep Bible teaching, his spiritual power and his willingness to suffer.

Paul’s strategy mobilizes lay people as lay people—and doesn’t turn them into religious professionals, as our mission agencies often do today. By teaching lay people to do workplace evangelism, we can guarantee the infiltration of every structure of society by Christians!

We win too many individuals from the fringes of society, or we remove converts from their social circles, so they have little evangelistic influence. We must aim at the heads of extended families and at employers—people who can bring many converts with them. Paul did this by requiring former lazy, thieving, lying slaves to do quality work, with great personal integrity. So the householders and employers would ask about the transformation, and be led to Paul and to Jesus Christ. (This can work as effectively today!)

Donald McGavran said that church growth requires a large force of unpaid evangelists. But how are they to be produced if the only models we provide are donor-supported? Missionaries from western countries are considered wealthy, even when they live modestly.

Paul’s strategy almost totally frees missions from the bottleneck of money, and all its related problems.

I think it is significant that our need for Paul’s *lay missionary* strategy should come just at a time when there is an exploding *international job market!* It is not there by accident, but by God’s design! He intends it for one purpose—to help us finish world evangelization. But we are making extremely poor use of it while cults and non-Christian religions use it well.

### 2. It provides a biblical basis for tentmaking

We need it to motivate and guide us and to reduce our high attrition rate. It makes a difference when discouragement comes, to be able to look at Scripture, and say “Here is the biblical reason we are here and serving in this particular way.” About 30% of missionaries do not finish their first term or return for a second one. In the case of tentmakers, they just don’t renew their one to three year contracts. We are pleased at how many of our applicants have made long term commitments. But would not many tentmakers do so, if they had a strong biblical basis from Scripture? This is especially true because many get little

encouragement from their home churches, or the mission community, or from *creative access people* on the field. Paul-style tentmaking is neither appreciated nor well understood. If they don't need financial support from their home churches it is difficult for them to get any prayer support at all!

The only missionary couple in an African town, refused the help and fellowship of a theologically trained tentmaker, because he did not belong to their mission, even though they were from the same evangelical tradition.

### 3. It gives us a basic definition for the term “tentmaker”

Our definition has to be what Paul did, for the reasons that he did it: *Tentmakers are missions-motivated Christians who support themselves as they do cross-cultural evangelism on the job and in their free time.* (It may be more than this, but not be less.)

Our biggest immediate problem is the lack of a common definition. A word with 13 to 20 definitions is as devalued as currency in triple digit inflation. The attempts that have been made to derive a definition from the diverse practices called tentmaking, can only give us a lowest common denominator—not a useful definition. *We must never begin with experience* (what cults do), but *with Scripture*, and then bring our practice in line with it.

All combinations of self-support and donor support are legitimate, whether or not they are Paul-style tentmaking. But if we appropriate the *term* from Paul, we should take our *primary definition* from what he did and taught, and for his reasons. We may then design our variations around him.

#### A. Why is a common definition needed?

**a) For clear communication.** At present, anything one person says on the subject can be contradicted by others who use a different definition. People are finding it inexcusably confusing!

**b) For recruiting.** A great many lay people are excited about using their professions abroad in tentmaking. But when they contact mission agencies, they are told to raise support, and to minimize their jobs, and they realize this is not what they believed God wanted them to do.

Someone recently wrote an excellent description of the whole confusing tentmaker scene—all the options called tentmaking, and then said graciously that we probably just have to rejoice in our diversity. But I thought we should sit down and weep! This is no way to win a war! Paul says that if the bugle sound is not clear no one will go to battle. Our confusion is keeping professional people at home in droves!

**c) For mutual respect, fellowship and cooperation.** Missionaries who use jobs mainly for entry visas often express disdain for those who feel God wants them to do workplace evangelism. (One book that considers these latter as second class calls them “Priscilla” types!) On the

other hand, Christians with substantial jobs often feel some creative access people are deceitful, getting visas under false pretenses, and doing clandestine missionary work behind the front or cover of minimal jobs and phantom businesses. When we have so few troops in hostile countries, we cannot afford to have them suspicious of each other! It is *urgent* to have clear terms and definitions, and all should understand what Paul taught and did.

**d) For implementation of Paul’s lay movement strategy.** Our problem is not in what we are already doing—God is blessing. It is what we are failing to do because of the confusion. Because so many things are called tentmaking which have little or no resemblance to Paul’s strategy, the Paul-style tentmaking which we so urgently need, is largely ignored, along with our God-given global job market. And we need both to finish world evangelization!

**B. Suggested terms:** If we use “tentmaker” only for Paul’s model of *self-support and cross-cultural workplace evangelism*, then we can employ terms already in use for models which do not coincide with Paul’s, or do so only minimally. I suggest the following:

**a) Christian expatriates.** Several hundred thousand American Christians have jobs in other countries, but probably not one percent do any cross-cultural evangelism, because they had little or no ministry at home, and crossing an ocean did not change that. It is not fair to lump them with genuine tentmakers, and attribute their deficiencies to faithful workers who take risks for the gospel in hostile countries. It is this confusion which has damaged tentmaking more than any other. Almost every article on tentmaking ends up with a long list of “disadvantages,” most of which apply to expats, but not to genuine tentmakers. Mere “Christian expats” are not missionaries of any kind! (But many have potential. God helped me mobilize a number of them with on-the-field training.)

**b) Lay witnesses.** Paul’s ministry principles are as effective at home as they are abroad. But the term “tentmaker” is like the word “missionary.” We use “evangelism” as a general term, and “missionary” when it is cross-cultural. So we say “lay ministry” but should save the term “tentmaker” for cross-cultural lay ministry. That is important also because the word designates not just an activity, but a unique approach to missions strategy and finance. If Paul had never left Jerusalem, it would not matter much to us if he had been a potter, a spice vendor or a toga tailor.

But *lay witnesses* at home are important, and those who do *cross-cultural evangelism in the workplace*, are tentmakers like those who go abroad.

**c) Regular missionaries.** We need many more of them! But even those who do educational, agricultural, or health care work, etc., are viewed by local people as missionaries because of their support and organizational ties. They have a wonderful model in Jesus, and in Peter, who left his fishing business forever at Jesus’ request (Lk. 5:1-11, John 21). They also have Paul’s approval. But those who work some hours in secular institutions, (to satisfy gov-

ernment requirements) also gain some benefits of Paul's approach.

#### d) Christian social service workers

We need more of them, too! How God must be pleased with our relief and development work around the planet, because "the world" that he loves is not just the Christians! (Jn. 3:16, Rom. 5:8) But the workers are usually church or donor-supported. Exceptional cases might fit Paul's model.

#### e) "Creative access" missionaries

They are often called tentmakers, but differ from Paul because most are on donor support, and usually give little importance to workplace evangelism. Minimal jobs are sought for entry visas. In some ways the approach is the opposite of Paul's. But God is blessing in many locations!

Consider some hybrid options. I suggest that people on salary, who receive a small supplement in gifts, are still tentmakers, while those on donor support, with minimal earnings, are still "creative access missionaries." In summary, all the combinations are good as long as they are honest, and we must all serve as God leads us.

But we must have clear terms. Unless we have a clear definition and a commonly accepted term for what Paul did, his strategy will not be implemented because it will continue to be lost in the present confusion.

### 4. It helps solve our problems of personnel and finance

Paul's strategy can allay our alarm at the fact that many missionaries are at retirement age, and fewer young ones are applying. At present, we are in a demographic trough in the U.S. and the ratio of young people to retirees is low. But we have an enormous number of lay people who love the Lord, and Paul's strategy urges us to mobilize them for overseas service. Many overseas positions have no upper age limit and there is part-time work. Older people are respected abroad. (See our GO Paper for *Retirees*.) But let's help them to serve as lay people, and not turn them into religious professionals.

### 5. It suggests needed training

**A. Academic training and work experience.** Christians must see that excellent academic preparation is essential to their ministry. Governments only allow the hiring of foreigners with expertise their country needs. Because of today's trend to globalization, many college majors require language and culture study abroad. We have helped some students gain ministry experience with Christian campus workers at the same time.

Mission leaders often say overseas jobs pay so little that tentmakers have to raise donor support. Our experience with the job market and applicants reveals **three job-related problems:**

**a) Many Christians are not qualified.** Many of those most interested in missions are poorly prepared for any secular work. Even those on donor support should have a vocation to fall back on.

**b) Many job-hunt overseas.** Mission agencies often take their people abroad to job-hunt there. But that makes them local hires, and they are paid local wages, with few benefits, if any. Contracts signed at home usually offer generous pay with round trip and vacation travel for the whole family, and other benefits. (In places where university teaching is part time, foreign faculty people are often encouraged to take on consultancy work for pay.)

**c) Often only part-time jobs are sought—the minimum for a visa.** Agencies often do not want their people to take significant positions, because they consider the hours on the job as time they could better spend in spiritual ministry. There is little understanding of Paul's model or appreciation for it.

**B. Spiritual preparation.** This should resemble that of most regular missionaries. In a war, not all soldiers need officer training, like doctorates in missiology or theology. (Some tentmakers have them.) But all must know how to do spiritual warfare, and must have good inductive Bible study and evangelism skills. They need at least the equivalent of one year of Bible school, but may acquire it in various ways. Some of the finest missionary training is given by campus fellowships in secular universities—because it is in-service training. Universities are microcosms of a multicultural, spiritually hostile world. All aspiring tentmakers should gain experience on a secular campus or in a secular job. But all should also take a missions course like *Perspectives*. (See GO Paper: *Tentmaker Preparation*).

### 6. It brings balance into our missionary work

We need to provide both kinds of models for new converts—ideally, together. Otherwise we export abroad the same distortions our churches suffer at home. We usually give our converts no models for how to live and serve God in the working world. We teach, by default, that all Christians are second rate, except for "full-time" religious workers.

**A. Lay people can give converts models for life and witness in the working world.** Dr. Pius Wakatama from Zimbabwe says missionaries never helped their converts to get into the economic mainstream of their countries. I think it wasn't their job—they needed tentmakers to do it! (But they did provide education!)

**B. Lay people can infiltrate every structure of society,** in a way that religious workers cannot. Paul had Erastus, the city treasurer of Corinth, well-to-do householders, artisans, slaves and rehabilitated bums from off the street! He probably had people in every vocation, some from every trade guild, and every ethnic group. Too often after decades, we have only reached people from fringe groups.

**C. Lay people can effectively engage culture** at home and abroad in a way religious workers cannot.

Dr. Newbigin says we are wrong to focus only on individual conversions and church planting, but must also challenge the worldviews and the falsehoods that dominate the cultures in which we serve. 2 Cor. 10:3-5.

Jacques Elull says we have little right to criticize the sad state of our society, because the church has all the answers, but remains silent. It can speak to society only through its lay people, and they are ineffective because they have been neglected. Only they are distributed throughout the structures of society.

We could not accomplish much without our religious workers—and we count ourselves among them. Pastors, teachers and missionaries are God's gifts to the church, with important roles to fill. But as religious workers, let us mobilize the lay people in our churches for their important roles in our own country, and as tentmakers abroad.

In conclusion, I urge that we seriously consider Paul's strategy, and adapt it for our day, because I believe its main components are essential if we hope to fulfill our missionary mandate to finish world evangelization!

—Ruth E. Siemens

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