

# Evangelistic Responsibility

Tim Haile

Preachers can feel overwhelmed by the amount of work that lies before them. There are sinners who need to be taught the soul-saving message of salvation (1 Cor. 1:21), there are unruly brethren who need to be warned (1 Thess. 5:14), there are fallen saints who need to be restored (Gal. 6:1) and there are saints whose faith needs to be sustained and strengthened (Acts 11:14; 14:22). These duties are briefly comprehended in Paul's statement to the Colossians. Speaking of Christ he said, "*Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man, that we may present every man mature in Christ*" (Col. 1:28).

Making this task far more difficult is the fact that Satan's ministers (2 Cor. 11:13-15), are always busy distracting people from spiritual things, and brewing up deceitful and damning doctrines. These errors must be opposed, and preachers are particularly entrusted with the task of opposing false teachers and exposing their errors (1 Tim. 1:3). The preacher is to "*preach the word, be ready in season and out of season: reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and teaching*" (2 Tim. 4:2). The conscientious preacher sees no end to his work, and he will do all that he has the ability to do in fulfilling his work as an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

## The Danger

Some preachers are taking on works and programs that are larger than what they can support and manage by themselves. This fact is reflected in the many preaching reports that I read. I know that some of these preachers feel pressured by the abundance of teaching opportunities that lie before, for they frequently cite the words of John 4:35 that the "*fields are white for harvest.*" These preachers seek funds from various sources to support their preaching agenda. Some of these men err only in judgment. Their intentions are good, but they make plans and commitments that they cannot honor. As we shall see later, their mistake is in attempting to do more than God authorizes them to do. These brethren are honestly mistaken about the work of the preacher. Many, it appears, simply need to be taught the difference between a "preacher" and an "apostle" (more on this later).

Others are more deliberate in their practices. They have a misunderstanding of the nature of New Testament evangelism. Their practices ignore the Bible pattern, going beyond the doctrine of Christ. I received a report from one overseas preacher who was raising (and receiving) financial support to operate his own evangelistic society. In the very course of writing this article I received a report from another preacher who apparently has the same misconception. In his expenditure breakdown he lists a certain amount of expense for the support of gospel preachers. Churches are not authorized to pay preachers so that they can pay other preachers. The practices of some of these “sound” gospel preachers reminds me of the preacher “ministries” of the evangelicals. And while it is true that the gospel is being preached in places where the “fields are white for harvest,” God’s pattern for the support of gospel preachers is being ignored and violated (2 Cor. 11:8). The main operating principle of some preachers appears to be that the ends justifies the means. Brethren must be careful (Rom. 3:8).

## Evangelistic Situationism

I have questioned some American preachers about the evangelistic practices of some of the foreign preachers in the places where these Americans work. Some have candidly admitted that corrective teaching needs to be done on this subject. Others have refused to condemn these abuses, explaining that “things are different over there,” and that one really needs to see that difference for himself in order to understand it. Having never been to these places, and out of respect for those who are doing overseas work, I have been reluctant to speak out. However, some things obviously need to be said. I acknowledge the fact that some “things are different” in other places than they are here, in North America. However, there is one thing that is the same: the New Testament pattern! The same evangelistic principles that apply in North America also apply in other countries. Programs like the Herald of Truth and World Radio are as much wrong in other countries as they are in North America. Institutions like the American Christian Missionary Society were wrong in North America, and they are wrong everywhere else in the world. Incidentally, the gospel was not exclusively committed to North American Christians! American preachers should not assume that they are the only ones capable of teaching the gospel in foreign countries. We must not underestimate the willingness of others to read their Bibles, nor their ability to understand and teach it to their neighbors.

## Some Areas of Concern

As I mentioned above, some preachers are assuming huge evangelistic works and programs, knowing in advance that they are greater than their ability to support. We are reminded of the Sponsoring Church mentality, in which a local church assumes works that are greater than it can bear. All accountable humans, including preachers, are morally responsible to God only for what they are capable of doing. God dispensed the talents to the servants on the basis of their “several ability” (Matthew 25:15). We are to do what we are capable of doing, and God does not hold us accountable for, nor authorize us to undertake and supervise, what we cannot do. It is possible for a preacher to assume responsibility for works and activities that are beyond his ability to support. This is the basic error of the Sponsoring Church, which we readily recognize as unscriptural. The following areas appear to be problematic:

**Preacher Training Schools** - The church where I preach has received requests from some overseas preachers for financial help to operate “preacher-training schools.” No New Testament authority can be produced for paying a preacher to operate a preacher-training school. In fact, we don’t read about “preacher-training schools” in the Bible at all. Certainly, it is wise and honorable for seasoned Bible students to train teachers. Paul told 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”* (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul instructed Timothy to train teachers. However, he is not calling upon Timothy to establish religious seminaries, or some other formal “school of preaching.” He is calling upon Timothy to help others in the same way that Paul had helped him. That is, Timothy was to “teach” those who would “hear” the gospel. Brotherhood preaching schools, whether in this country, the Philippines, or some other country, go far beyond the simple procedure that is referenced in this passage. Preacher training has been institutionalized. Obviously, aspiring teachers and preachers will want to spend more time than others at the feet of learned men, especially at the feet of experienced gospel preachers. And such preachers should do what they can to teach and encourage others who may aspire to teach and preach. But let this be done in a way that is consistent with New Testament teaching.

The New Testament authorizes churches to pay wages to preachers for them to teach and preach (2 Cor. 11:8, 9; Phil. 1:5; 4:14-17). After making several arguments, both from natural law and Mosaic law, Paul stated what God has plainly “commanded” with regard to preacher support: *“That those who proclaim the gospel should receive their living from the gospel”* (1 Cor. 9:14). Notice that Paul spoke of the preacher receiving his living or his wages from the church. These passages do not authorize the intentional over support of the preacher for

the purpose of enabling him to form and fund preaching schools or to equip him to arbitrarily support other preachers.

**Logistical Limitations** - It is right for a group of people to invite a preacher to travel to their area and preach to them the gospel. The preacher's expenses may be paid by the inviting church (1 Cor. 9:11), by some other church (Acts 15:3), by the preacher himself (Acts 20:34), or by another individual (Acts 20:34). A preacher might travel uninvited to some remote location for the purpose of establishing a church, or teaching people. However, some factors should be taken into consideration. There will undoubtedly be lost souls in that far-away place, but how many lost souls did the preacher pass by on his way there? How many lost souls did he leave in his own immediate community? I am paid a wage by the church in Kentucky where I preach, to preach and teach in the area where the church assembles. The fact that my teaching is done in this area doesn't mean that there aren't lost souls also in other places, for there certainly are. I could solicit churches and individuals to raise the support necessary for me to drive to a different state each week in order to preach the gospel there, but such would be wasteful and irresponsible.

The apostle Paul stated a principle that has considerable bearing upon this matter. He told the saints at Rome, *"And thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation"* (Romans 15:20). Paul's apostolic purpose was to preach where Christ was not named. He would not travel land and sea in order to preach the gospel where it was already being preached by others. On the same principle, Paul told the Corinthians that his boasting would be right only to the extent that he had preached in the area of influence that God had assigned to him. Contrary to the allegations that were made against him by false brethren, that "area" did extend to include Corinth (2 Cor. 10:13, 14). Paul later told the Corinthians that he desired to *"preach the gospel in lands beyond" them, "without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence"* (2 Cor. 10:16). False accusers had accused Paul of interference and meddling at Corinth. He defended himself by saying that God had assigned him the Corinthian territory, and that he was not "overextending" himself into the fields of others by preaching there. Paul was an inspired apostle, so some aspects of these passages may have a unique application. However, the basic principle obtains. Some preachers are requesting and raising financial support to travel to places where sound preachers are already preaching. Some foreign preachers are seeking support to preach in places far beyond where they live, even though there are plenty of lost souls where they are. Again, so as to not be misunderstood, preaching invitations should be hon-

ored when possible, but in the absence of an invitation the preacher should do his own work in his own location. God does not miraculously call preachers to some particular location. He expects men to do what they have the ability and opportunity to do wherever they are.

**Preacher Ministries** - Religious evangelicals have their preacher ministries, and it appears that some gospel preachers may be getting some ideas from these denominationalists. Unlike the simple New Testament picture of a man with a Bible leading others to Christ (Acts 17:2, 3), the preacher ministry involves large programs, organizations and activities. Supporters are not merely supporting a man to preach: they are supporting whatever the preacher decides to do with the money. It is important to note that these funds are spent at the preacher's discretion. He does not function as a mere messenger, allocating funds as authorized by the givers. In some cases the money is not earmarked. These preachers become sole arbiters of the money. They spend it and dispense it as they see fit, and the personal control of large sums of money gives a preacher a lot of power, prestige, fame and popularity. After paying for their travel and personal expenses, these preachers generally use remaining funds for things like benevolence, teaching materials (often from a particular bookstore with which they are affiliated, in which case there is an obvious conflict of interests), and the support of other preachers, which positions these men as one-man missionary societies.

**Professional Evangelists** - I have observed that the preachers of these preacher ministries spend huge amounts of money on frequent international trips. Some preachers take such trips, spending multiple thousands of dollars on travel expenses, and spend only a few days at their destination. I have also observed a change in the nature of the preaching that is done by these preachers. Their preaching is done primarily through lectureship tours and preacher-training seminars. Many of the preaching reports that I read speak of "lectureships" that are held in various places. There is a "professional" approach to the pulpit. Sadly, these preacher-ministry preachers are seen as icons to the novice and aspiring preachers. They quickly develop a skewed and flawed concept of the work of the gospel preacher. Rather than going out into the highways and hedges, inviting and teaching people one-on-one, these brethren are taught to attend lectureships. Granted, some "lectureships" are nothing more than gatherings where the gospel is taught, and there is never anything wrong with that. Some, however, are regional brotherhood events through which preachers conduct the business of their preaching ministry. No local church or individual saint should feel compelled to contribute to preacher-ministry styled operations. They are unscriptural.

**Apostle-Styled Evangelism** - All apostles were preachers (1 Tim. 2:7), but not all preachers were apostles. There are no apostles today, hence there is no possibility of there being any preacher-apostles today. And though most every preacher will agree with this, yet the practices of some are to the contrary. That is, some modern preachers appear to be functioning as New Testament apostles. They readily cite and apply great commission passages to themselves, as if God were directly calling and commissioning them to “go into all the world...” Have these brethren considered the context of Mark 16:15, 16? Have they considered the next 4 verses? The apostles were commissioned directly by God, and were miraculously guided by the Holy Spirit to accomplish their work (Mark 16:15-20). They were told where to begin and where to end (Acts 1:8). They were told where to go, and where not to go (Acts 16:6-10). Today’s preachers are under no direct divine commission to preach the gospel. The gospel preacher is simply one who loves and obeys God’s word, and learns it well enough to explain it and proclaim it to others (2 Tim. 2:2).

{Editor’s Note: The following was submitted by brother **Bill H. Reeves**, who has vast preaching experience in places outside of these United States. His suggestions fit quite well with the direction and purpose of my article. I commend His observations to you.}

## What Preachers Can Do

Preachers may go to areas considered “white already unto harvest” (Jn. 4:35), in this country, as well as elsewhere, and:

1. Preach in the “market-places,” or on a “Mars Hill,” as did Paul (Acts 17:17,19).
2. Upon permission, preach in a denominational meeting place (17:17) or other public gathering places (16:16). (I have preached at bus stops to people waiting for public transportation, and by loud-speaker in public gathering places).
3. Conduct gospel meetings in established churches and then while there teach interested souls and confirm the faith of new converts, or even conduct special studies for any and all (including visiting preachers). Public debate is also a form of preaching/teaching. Let less-experienced preachers, desirous of learning more from an experienced preacher, make the sacrifice to go hear him preach and teach in that local church’s gospel effort.

If it is argued that some are too poor to travel to such a place for such teaching-benefits, let the local preacher, who has learned from the visiting preacher, then go, being sent by the local church, to preach the gospel in the area where the poorer preacher labors and teach him personally while there. (If time and situation permit, let the visiting preacher go there).

4. Let all preachers, poor or otherwise, give themselves to reading and study, with diligence and continuance (1 Tim. 4:13-16). (If a “poor unlearned” preacher is not doing this, he is not worthy to “live of the gospel,” 1 Cor. 9:14. He is to “give himself wholly to them,” ver. 15. If he is doing this he will not long remain “unlearned and inexperienced”). There is no need for, nor excuse for, a dependence upon a seminary-type program, with expenses (travel, food, lodging) mostly, or all together, paid (by others) to cause each preacher to make the progress that he desires to make and should be making!

If every gospel preacher were following divine wisdom in the matter, there would be no “need” for seminary-type ministries.

The attraction of the evangelistic-ministry-type program is the same as that which the advocates of the Missionary Society proposed in the mid-1800s: mass concentration (centralization) “gets the job done!” The same mentality is behind the Sponsoring Church arrangement. Human wisdom glories in numbers and quick fixes! (And in such programs of human wisdom there will always be those who participate for the “loaves” and fishes, Jn. 6:26, and for other such materialistic benefits). Our institutional brethren for many years now have been conducting “evangelistic campaigns” in foreign countries. I have witnessed some of them first hand. They are not simply cases of a gospel preacher doing the “work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5). They are in essence “evangelistic ministries.”

God’s plan to carnal man often seems too slow and unimpressive, yet look at what it accomplished in the first century within a few decades (Col. 1:23; Rom. 15:19) and without man-made arrangements.

Brethren, impressed, for example, with the number of baptisms occurring as a result of some current plans of gospel preaching in the Philippines, or in any other place, will be slow to accept any positive criticism of the work, just as brethren in the 1800s were not pleased with criticism of the Missionary Society's glowing reports of many conversions in foreign lands as a result of the Missionary Society’s work! But it was not, and is not, an issue of whether or not to rejoice in conversions but of the scripturality of the arrangements producing such happy

news! After all is said and done, the principal reason for rejoicing is the fact that all of us are “walking in the truth” (2 John 4; 3 John 3). This is what caused the apostle John to rejoice! ... *Bill Reeves*

## Conclusion

“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom. 10:15). But preaching the gospel requires responsibility. Preachers should do what they can to teach and preach the gospel wherever they have the opportunity to do so, but they must remember their place and role. They must respect New Testament teaching that governs their role and their support. A “preacher” is supported to preach, not to administrate. His work description has been given by God (2 Tim. 4:2) and no preacher should seek to change or expand it.

Tim Haile  
7693 Russellville Rd  
Bowling Green, KY 42101