

Independent Baptists and Missions

Today begins our annual Mission's Conference. We have been looking forward to this time with prayer and great anticipation. We greet Dr. Keen and the missionaries from around the world. From Sunday through Wednesday we expect God to move upon our hearts in a special and unique way. As our church grows, we know that being a member of an independent Baptist congregation is new for many of our people. On the other hand, some of our church members have been members of independent congregations for several years. Both the new member and veteran member need to be introduced or reminded of the "way we do missions."

When we say we are independent, we need to clarify that we are very dependent on the Lord in all matters from salvation to discipleship. To understand why we are independent Baptist, allow me to take us on a speedy course in our view of church history. We believe that Christ Himself founded the local New Testament Church (Matthew 16:18). In the beginning there were no denominations. In 312 A.D. Constantine allegedly saw the sign of the cross in the Heavens declaring, "In hoc signo vinces" (by this sign ye shall conquer). Shortly afterwards, the church and the state of Rome married. Rome wanted Christianity but did not want to do away with her idols and way of life. So the heathen idols kept their position of reverence, they just changed their names. Prayers continued in an idolatrous fashion, using these newly christened idols as saints. Many other truths were sacrificed on the altar of the state church. True believers and preservers of "*the truth once delivered unto the saints*" (Jude 3), went underground. In the sixteen hundreds after centuries of dark ages, believers still in the church of Rome rebelled and formed the protestant denominations. It was a time of teaching the sole authority of Scripture over the traditions of man, which was inclusive of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, to God alone be the glory. The true believers who had never joined in the church /state apostasy surfaced and rose from the underground, but not without more persecution from not only Catholics, but some Protestants as well. We believe the doctrine of Christchurch Baptist Fellowship is the same as taught by Christ and His apostles. We believe we do not have the mark of Rome or her children, as evidenced by our teaching of the Bible as the final authority of Truth, justification by grace, immersion of the believer, eternal security of the believer, two ordinances (not sacraments) being baptism and the Lord's Supper and continual exaltation of the person of Christ without supposed venerating secondary side trips through deceased saints, pedo-baptism, or self-governed good works. Even the Baptists of recent history were not inoculated from slipping, so as liberal views began to seep into our framework through churches and educational centers, many believers saw the need to "*...come out from among them, and be ye separate*" (II Corinthians 6:17).

We are accountable to the Lord and each other. We do not have a denominational headquarters giving us directives or ultimatums. We sometimes humorously say, we do not bow down daily to Mecca, Nashville, Chattanooga, Greenville, Schererville, or Murphreesboro. We answer to heaven. In the matter of missions and missionary support, we remain independent while partnering with other like-faith churches in order to more perfectly fulfill the Great Commission which is given to us from the Lord Jesus, "*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15).

Our missionaries are not sent out by a co-operative program that assures them a salary or somewhere to land if they fall. This does not mean that our missionaries are left high and dry in the event of difficulties. What does it mean to be an independent Baptist missionary? It means:

1. Our missionaries are sent out directly from the local church.

Being sent out by a local New Testament Church places our servants of the Lord under the safest canopy of blessing. Jesus Himself gives the promise of His protection: "*...and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:18). This also provides direct accountability, thus protecting the testimony and witness of the missionary effort. Most of the time, our

missionaries are sponsored by Baptist International Missions, World Baptist Missions, Bible Baptist Fellowship Missions, Missions to Forgotten Peoples, Maranatha Missions, and others. These fine mission agencies provide extra accountability and in some cases help in times of great need. For instance, in the Bible Baptist Fellowship Missions program there are a group of airplane pilots who are ready a moment's notice to retrieve missionaries or their family members in the event of a crisis such as emergency health needs, a death in the family or civil unrest. In most every case, the missionary agency works with and under the New Testament pattern of church authority. We do not have a strong central government in our fellowship, but we do have bonds of love and cooperation that we believe serves us better than a strong denominational backing.

2. Our missionaries interact personally with our lay people.

One of the most valued truths that we as independents hold is the doctrine of the personal priesthood of the believer. *"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular"* (I Corinthians 12:27). The word from which "particular" is translated is defined in Thayer's as: *meros*: a part; one of the constituent parts of a whole. One of the healthiest aspects of the spiritual union we have in Christ is nurtured by the interacting of different giftings in the church. If someone has too many toes or fingers, the prognosis is he or she would be deemed a freak. One thing that keeps us from being freakish is a healthy rapport with other members of the Body of Christ. The legs connect with the body as well as the arms, and all under the Head of the Church, Christ.

Every missionary that we sponsor has represented their missions to our people. There are no unknowns being supported by our church. The blessings of this are many. For one thing, it is great to know we are holding the ropes for others. We develop a true sense in having a part of every missionary's effort. Do you realize every child who faithfully attends Christchurch Baptist Fellowship can personally know missionaries and often write and email with them and their children regularly? Also, having missionaries come to our church increases the burden for our people, especially our youth, to hear more clearly the call of God on their life to missions.

Our Women's Missionary Sorority provides a wonderful monthly meeting that keeps projects of all kinds from cards, offerings, recognizing birthdays, to even Christmas in July. Something all year long is going on that is exciting in our missionary program at Christchurch. As independent Baptists, no offense to the denominations, but we (to the glory of God) cut out the middle man! Our money goes from the church directly to the missionary, not to an octopus type agency that takes a cut for themselves and their staffs.

3. Our missionaries strive to start works that become autonomous and indigenouslyness.

Autonomous means having self-government; functioning independently without control by others. Indigenous means existing, growing, or produced naturally in a region or country; belonging to a native. Even as we remain independent and free, we have a goal that our missions will be the same, not dependent upon their culture or some far away church hierarchy. We also want to get the people native to the area of our mission field to grow up in the faith in such a way that they can more easily implement the wonderful truths of the Gospel and the Word to their own people. Our mission is not to Americanize other cultures, but to evangelize them! *"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified"* (I Corinthians 2:2).

Therefore, let us pray that God will bless our Missions Conference. May He increase our burden and widen our circle of influence in the world that God so loved (John 3:16). *"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest"* (Matthew 9:36-38).

- Pastor Pope -

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