

**AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS**

by

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**CHAPTER ONE -
THREE BASIC QUESTIONS**

WHAT PICTURE comes into your mind when people talk about missions? Is it a vision of a man in shorts and sun helmet talking to a bunch of naked savages? That's what it is to many people. And we can't blame them. What if it isn't a true picture of most missionary work? After all, it is hard to put missions into a picture. And maybe that picture can serve as well as any other to tell the story of Christian missions.

What story does the picture tell you? You know, we often say that "a picture is worth a thousand words," and "good pictures tell the story." But really a picture tells a different story to everyone who looks at it. It depends on our background and experience. The picture of a mountain lake attracts the artist for its beauty. The fisherman sees it, and right away he wonders how the fishing would be there. But there may be a parent who shudders when he sees it. He remembers a son who was drowned trying to swim in the frigid waters of such a lake. The story is in the viewer as much as in the picture.

What story, then, does your vision of the missionary tell you? Why is he there? What is he talking about? Would you like to be in his shoes? Or do you think the whole thing is rather silly and presumptuous? Does the strangeness of the scene attract you? the romance? Or are you looking below the surface? What is your idea of missions?

Now let me give you mine. No, I ought rather to say, let me give you the view of the man in the picture, the missionary. What does he think about it? What does missions mean to him? And to that basic question let's add a couple of others that need to be answered. What is the difference between "home" missions and "foreign" missions? And why do some people oppose missions?

WHAT DOES MISSIONS MEAN?

To the Christian missionary and those who send him out, *missions is the Christian Church trying to win others to the Christian faith, especially through a group of selected workers called missionaries*. This is the definition; now let's look at it in detail.

First, we have said that missions is a job of the Christian Church. We're not talking here about

denominations or local Churches. We're talking about the great body of believers in CHRIST who make up His Church. Missions can never be just a private affair. It always involves the Church. That's true even of those that we call "independent missionaries." They may be independent of any mission society on the field, but they almost always are sent out by one or more groups of Christians in the homeland. Besides, they always think of themselves as carrying out a task that was given to the whole Church.

Second, we have said that missions is the Christian Church trying to win others. In other words, missions calls for deliberate effort. Some people do come into the Christian faith without any person's trying to win them. But they are not often counted as the fruit of missions. In this missions is like selling. You are not a salesman when you simply hand over an item the customer asks for and take his money. You are just a clerk. In the same way, missions is not simply making the Christian gospel available. It's not just saying, "Here it is; you can have it if you want it," It means a job of selling, getting people to want it enough to pay the price to get it.

Third, in missions the Church is trying to win others to the Christian faith. Here's where we'll find some who disagree with our definition. For this means first of all evangelism. But evangelism to the Christian is proselytism to the anti-Christian. He looks at it as a sort of "sheep-stealing."

For example, there are non-Christian countries today, such as India, who would like to have many of the social services of Christian missions like doctors and hospitals. But they object to evangelism. They don't want the people to be converted to the Christian faith. And this is quite understandable. What is harder to understand is those Christians who try to separate the two things. They seem like those who try to help a famished people by giving them food, but neglect to give them seed. The food will help for the present moment, but that's all. Or can it be that they don't see the close connection between the Hindu religion and the pitiful condition of so many of the people?

But we don't need to take time to discuss these objections. Without a doubt, Christian missions in the minds of most people means an attempt to spread the Christian faith. It is the only view supported by the Christian Scriptures.

Fourth, the work of missions is normally carried on through a group of selected workers called missionaries. True, there is a vast amount of missionary work carried on voluntarily by members of the Christian Church. But they don't often think of themselves as missionaries. They are just personal witnesses to the transforming power of the Gospel of CHRIST. The work of missions could hardly be carried on without the aid of these voluntary workers. Yet when we speak of missions we almost always think in terms of full-time missionaries.

Notice the word *selected*. For the purpose of our definition the method of selection is not important. The fact is, even those who argue against the careful choosing of missionaries by a mission board do set up their own standards of selection. Maybe they will simply insist that the missionary be sure that GOD is calling him to the work. But added to that he will have to be able to persuade a number of Christians to provide his support. The important thing is that in one way or another missionaries are selected workers, selected for the job of missions. And to a large extent the success of missions depends on the wisdom with which they are chosen.

"HOME" AND "FOREIGN" MISSIONS

Perhaps you noticed in our definition that we didn't make any distinction between "home missions" and "foreign missions." There is a good reason for it. We don't find any such distinction in the Scriptures. Really they are just two different phases of the same task. The different denominations don't even agree on where home missions ends and foreign missions begins. At least two or three of them carry on their missionary work in Mexico and Central America under a home missions board. Others look at it as a part of foreign missions.

But we're not ready to give up the distinction altogether. Maybe it isn't basic, and we can't find a clear pattern for it in the Scriptures; but it's not contrary to Scripture, and it is practical. It has its real values. Business houses take notice of those values when they have many customers abroad. They usually set up a separate "export division" to take care of the foreign trade. Why? Simply because it brings up a lot of problems that are not found in the home market.

In the same way foreign missions faces many problems not met at home. Let's define home missions simply as *missions carried on within the national boundaries*. Then we can see how it is so. For instance, at home we don't often have the problem of a different language. Nearly everybody speaks English. There are some differences in the manner of living of the people, but it is remarkable how much similarity you will find all the way from California to New York. So we don't have much problem of adjustment there.

We don't have the problems with the government that missionaries face in other lands. We know how to live in this climate, and almost everywhere we have access to good doctors and dentists. We can even use older people as missionaries. It doesn't cost so much to put them on the field at home, so if their term of service is short it doesn't mean such a big loss as it would abroad. And finally, we don't have such serious problems of starting a Church and helping people to find their place in it.

So the distinction between home and foreign missions is a practical one. Foreign missions calls for missionaries with different qualifications from those at home. They will have to use different methods of work. The range of their activities will often be much broader. Their spirit and their message will be the same, but to be effective they will have to learn and follow different rules of practice.

This is why in these lessons we are going to deal chiefly with foreign missions. To try to deal with both at the same time would in many cases lead to confusion. Some of the principles will apply equally well to both home and foreign missions, as you will readily see. But from this point on, when we speak of missions we are thinking of missions overseas.

WHY PEOPLE OPPOSE MISSIONS

Of course you can expect people who are not Christians to oppose missions. It would be strange if they approved. After all, we don't believe in propagating what we think is not true. We may not mention our disbelief when we are arguing against missions, but it can't help being the main factor. So we're not going to bother with this kind of opposition.

What does concern us more is the opposition from those who claim to be Christians. These are people who say they believe the Christian message, yet they oppose trying to win other people to the same faith. Why?

When we try to find the reasons, we run into some arguments that are really excuses instead of reasons. We could call them "camouflage reasons," because they only serve to hide the real reasons. You will usually hear them expressed with catch-words or phrases picked up from somebody else and glibly repeated. "Charity begins at home" is probably the most common. (As if that meant that charity ought never to leave home!) "Officious meddling" is another term we hear, and sometimes "useless extravagance." It's seldom worth while to refute such objections. They are not the real reasons. But there are at least four basic reasons why many people oppose missions, and we ought to give them some attention.

The first, and perhaps the chief reason, is one that you might have a hard time getting the objector to admit. It is the lack of a personal and vital experience of CHRIST. It's safe to say that most of the members of our churches in the homeland have never had a deep religious experience. Their parents were members of the Church, and at the proper age they too joined. There was no deep conviction about it; it was just the thing to do. Many hardly ever attend Church services, but they still count themselves Christians. Others are very faithful to the Church, very active in all its affairs, just as they would be in a club.

Now such people find it hard to understand missions. Christianity is good, they will admit. It is even better than other religions. But why try to force our religion on other people? It is rather silly to get so wrought up about religion. Who knows but what their religion is really better for them than ours?

Naturally the one who looks at the Church as he would at a club will not be deeply concerned about spreading its ministry to the ends of the earth. Oh, he may be proud of it and speak of it every now and then to friends and acquaintances. Maybe you can even persuade him to give a little help in a membership campaign. But that would be just for the local chapter. After all, membership in the club is nice, but it isn't a life-and-death affair.

How can such people comprehend those young men and women who are ready to bury themselves in out-of-the-way places and give their very lives to win others to CHRIST? They think it absurd. But the measure of CHRIST's importance to us is the extent to which we will go to make Him known to others. So we can say that many are not interested in missions because their own faith doesn't mean much to them, and of course it wouldn't be worth much to others.

A second reason for opposing missions is a preoccupation with self. Bluntly put, it is selfishness. It is not the grasping sort of selfishness that tries to seize all the best for one's self. It is a more passive type that we might call self-centeredness. It is the kind that becomes so absorbed in its own affairs that it is blind to the needs of others.

Some of those who oppose missions are more than nominal Christians. They have had a deep religious experience. They are seriously concerned about spiritual needs that affect them personally or touch the local Church to which they belong. But when it comes to missions, they say they "just can't see it."

Such a statement is more accurate than they realize. Indeed they "can't see it." The difficulty is

the lack of vision in themselves. They see well at short range only. The needs of people beyond their range of sight do not concern them. Nor can they understand why others should feel concerned.

A third reason is ignorance of actual conditions in mission lands. It's strange that we are always objecting that foreigners get a false picture of life in our land from the movies they see. These movies were made right here in this country and by our own countrymen. Yet at the same time we are quite willing to take our ideas of life in other lands from the movies. But they are movies made by our people, and as often as not they are shot right here at home. Some of them are about as far removed from real life in those lands as they can be.

Some of course don't get their ideas from pictures but from books. Then it depends on the book. If the book is fiction the setting may be just as fictional, just as artificial as the plot. If it is a travel book, it still may be fiction. Some travelers are excellent storytellers. Their books are absorbing reading? but not always true. They write to entertain. They are often able to fill two or three hundred pages with the hastily plucked fruits of a two-or three-weeks' excursion. They don't know the language, so of course they don't know the people. But they can give you their impressions, and they can tell a lot of tales they have picked up here and there - tales that are full of color, even though the colors are false.

The usual author will do one of two things when he writes about natives of other lands. He may picture them as good-natured, contented, childlike people on whom the American traveler looks with condescension. His servants and helpers he calls his "boys." Or he may picture them as altogether vicious, unprincipled rogues, who need to be treated like the villains they are.

With the first picture the author succeeds in giving the impression that missions are actually harmful. The native leads a carefree, happy-go-lucky life until the missionary comes to change his way of living and spoil his Garden of Eden. A young journalist in the South Pacific had such an idea. He saw some young Papuans with black bands around their sleeves and at once condemned the missionaries for teaching the natives "our rotten idea of wearing crape." What he didn't know was that their former practice had been to lop off a joint of a finger whenever a relative died. This was one of the "charming native customs" which the missionaries had changed.

The second picture makes the natives out as hopeless and missionaries as useless. The converts are only clever rascals who impose on the missionary's gullibility. A well-known traveler in Korea was particularly vicious in his written attack on American missionaries there, some years ago. He blamed the missionaries for the disturbances which had taken place in the Orient and urged the government to restrict what he called the "violence" of the missionary enterprise.

In the same book he says of the Korean, "He has neither initiative nor the capacity for work, while he combines intemperance, immorality, and laziness in varying degrees." Then he goes on, "There is, however, an antidote for this state of things. If sufficient point be put into the argument, and the demonstration be further enforced by an occasional kick, as circumstances may require, it is possible to convert a first-class, sun-loving wastrel into a willing, if unintelligent, servant. Under any conditions, his dishonesty will be incorrigible."

Would you be surprised to learn that this traveler nearly lost his life at the hands of the Koreans?

His harsh tactics stirred up a riot among his servants. Before it was over he was seriously wounded and barely escaped with his life. Yet his book is still widely read.

During World War II, many Christian soldiers were sent to mission lands and saw missions in operation. The days of war may not have been the best time to see what they were doing, but the men were amazed at the real accomplishments they saw. They had not expected to see such things. A firsthand view corrected many of the false ideas they had before. A large number of them became enthusiastic in their support of missions, and many are themselves serving as foreign missionaries today.

A final reason for opposing missions is one that, in its older form, no longer bears much weight. I suppose it is because people are no longer much interested in questions of theology. For the reason is theological.

There are two types of theology which are not friendly to missions. The older one is a type we sometimes call hyper-Calvinism. In its extreme form it emphasizes the sovereignty of GOD to such an extent that man seems to be nothing more than a puppet. Its classical expression of opposition to missions is in a statement that an elderly minister is said to have made to William Carey, back in the eighteenth century: "When GOD wants to convert the heathen, He'll do it without your help or mine!"

But there is also a modern type of theology that opposes missions, at least in the sense of our definition. It is a theology that calls itself "liberal" but is so liberal that it can hardly be called Christian. In its view Christianity is not unique. It is not the true religion, it is only one of many. And religion is only man's attempt to find GOD. Other religions are just other roads to the same end. So missionary work is wrong. The religion of other peoples might not suit us, but it fits them. Why unsettle them by trying to get them to worship our way?

We can only remark that if this be called Christianity, it is certainly not the Christianity of the New Testament. Neither is it the Christianity of the historic Church. It is simply Satan's original lie in a new garb.

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