

Life at the Intersection

Builders
Wanted:
See the
Carpenter

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Millennium Mission

Life at the intersection of privilege and responsibility: builders wanted

Excerpted from "Builder's wanted: see the Carpenter"

By Paul C. Guttke

Builders wanted: see the Carpenter

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear Children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

1 John 3:16-18

St. John's words have particular impact for Christians in the U.S.A.

1. The gospel we preach should be motivated by love: God's love for us, our love for him because he first loved us, and our love for fellow believers, our neighbor, and our enemy, too. This requires that our response to endemic needs in developing nations has to account for believers in those nations and work outward from there.
2. Love is defined by action, not feeling: Jesus laid down his life for us; we should "lay down our lives," too, i.e., live for a higher purpose than self-interest.
3. Doing this is mere rhetoric unless it includes sharing material wealth with fellow believers, and others, who are in need,

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especially by empowering them with opportunity to create indigenous wealth.

4. This applies globally, transcends all borders, nationalities and ethnic identities: wherever in the world the church is with health wealth, and wisdom, it must utilize all in a missionary enterprise that creates new health, wealth, and wisdom in other places in the world where it shares the gospel and builds Jesus' church.

5. A fifth conclusion is that utilizing wealth (and all that the concept of wealth implies) must involve vision, ingenuity, ability and whatever expertise and resources are available to truly care for the welfare of fellow believers around

the world. In short, sending temporary relief, while important, will not suffice; caring for hungry people one day, to let them starve the next will not do; limited responses, i.e., interventions, are essential in crises, but endemic conditions require more. Further, love demands more: that we work for the welfare of the loved one, beginning now, extending through all of time, and into eternity.

6. Thus, the sixth conclusion is that we must apply proven development solutions that provide sustainable economic, healthcare and educational opportunities for believers in regions of endemic poverty and disease.

7. A seventh conclusion follows that says any gospel we preach that falls short of the above falls short of fulfilling Christ's commission to "make disciples of all nations." To make disciples we must be disciples, and to be disciples we must follow Jesus and do what he did: lay down our lives for his body, the church. The very least of our "life" is our material wealth, and to lay down wealth has to include using it for the good of Jesus' church globally.

8. This makes a final conclusion unavoidable: if it don't work globally, it ain't true locally. It is time to closely examine our confession of faith, i.e., what we believe and how we apply it, and the assumptions this entails. To assume that God has

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prospered me in America simply because I have believed right, confessed right, and tithed right while giving extra offerings, too, is a self-deception, if not a deception of evil. Unless what you confess here can be applied there, say, in Eritrea, it isn't true.

The fact is, opportunity is available in America as in few other places on earth. So to simply assume that problems of poverty elsewhere can be solved by mere verbal proclamation of the gospel; that we can thus teach believers there how to ask heaven for daily bread, how to rebuke poverty and "confess" wealth, plant corn and work hard, while yet telling them how Jesus broke bread and fed 5000, is not only ludicrous, but borders on being satanic. It ignores the fact that every believer in America - in the developed world, for that matter - stands on the shoulders of economic giants who created opportunities here that we now share in; we dare not take for granted the gift they handed to us. We are obligated to use our opportunities to create similar opportunities for others elsewhere in the world God loves.

Regarding this, the obligation of the evangelical missionary enterprise is implied in Scripture as early as Jeremiah 29:7. The prophet urges believers to "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you...Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers you will prosper, too."

Where the gospel goes effectively, some kind of expanded prosperity ought to follow. In part, at least, it is the task of those God "carries" there.

Thus, God's solution to poverty in Eritrea, Uganda, Colombia, or Venezuela – or anywhere – is not merely a right confession by someone there, as important as that may be. God's solution more likely begins with right action on the part of believers in the U.S.A. and/or other wealthy nations. This action must involve those whom God calls to go with the gospel and those who send them: those God "carried" there must incorporate the action of love into the gospel they preach; we, i.e., the missionaries we send and we who support them, must reach out to all the world with not mere rhetoric, but with actual commitment, substance, and effective development strategies. These must be designed to mitigate endemic conditions

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of poverty, disease and ignorance by replacing them with economic, educational and healthcare opportunities. Only then will a Christian confessing faith in Eritrea or elsewhere be able to realistically develop his/her own wealth producing strategies and mechanisms.

This article is excerpted from the forthcoming book
Builders Wanted: See the Carpenter, by Paul C. Guttke