

# Tentmakers Needed for World Evangelization

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**A**s we enter the 21st century, astonishing events have radically altered the world's landscape of nations, multiplying both the opportunities and the need for tentmakers. To finish world evangelization, thousands of Christians must support themselves abroad with their trades and professions and make Him known to people around them.

Today's global job market, which began during the decolonization period after World War II, has now been vastly expanded by the crumbling of the Soviet Union, the last of the European colonial powers. Its collapse resulted in 15 new ex-Soviet republics, in the liberation of seven satellite nations and a score of client states on every continent. Bereft of Soviet subsidies, they struggle to meet tough new demands for international aid. Most are trying to implement free market economics, multiparty politics and improved human rights. Russia's continuing instability portends that some of its remaining 100+ people groups will also gain the independence they seek. Yugoslavia has broken into separate states. Wars between countries have given way to a rash of civil wars. Along with this worldwide trend toward disassociation, are cross-currents of association, like the reunited Yemens, Vietnams, China and Hong Kong, and regional economic blocs as varied as the European Union and OPEC. Arab countries exhibit new vitality. All these factors are reshaping the world job market to provide more openings than ever before.

But before I list reasons for tentmaking, I must define this term lest someone ask, as one woman did—why China needs to have so many tents!

## What are Tentmakers?

Historically, tentmakers are missions-committed Christians who, like Paul, support themselves in secular work, as they engage in cross-cultural evangelism on the job and in free time. But over a dozen experience-based definitions have recently come into use, making it difficult to communicate on the subject. We must have a single, biblically based definition. Paul used his craft to earn his living as an essential part of his unique approach to missionary finance and practice. So tentmaking becomes a missiological term to designate his whole strategy. The main part of this paper is a study of his strategy, to learn how we can use our trades and professions strategically to win our post-modern world for Christ, as



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neering campus fellowships for the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). During the first six years she supported herself in secular binational schools, where she integrated work and witness. In 1976, on missions staff of IVCF, she founded Global Opportunities (GO) to provide counseling, training and job referral, to help Christians serve abroad as tentmakers. She continues on the board of GO and promotes tentmaking through speaking and writing.

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Paul used his craft to win the ancient Roman world. The study confirms the historic definition, so note some of the characteristics of Paul-type tentmakers.

**1. Tentmakers use their trades or professions to support themselves abroad.** In contrast, regular missionaries receive church or donor support, and are perceived by local people as religious workers even if they do medicine, agriculture or education. Between these two ministry models is a continuum of combinations—all of them valid and good. Missionaries are still viewed as religious workers even if they take part-time employment for increased support or better contact with seekers. Professionals are still tentmakers even if they supplement low pay with modest donor gifts, providing they spend significant time at genuine secular employment.

**2. Tentmakers do cross-cultural ministry.** So most of the several hundred thousand evangelical expatriates with jobs abroad are not tentmakers. Most have little or no missions-commitment and little or no ministry with locals. Probably not more than one percent are tentmakers, evangelizing the people of their new host country.

**3. Tentmakers do full-time ministry**—even in the context of a full-time job. People regularly ask me, “Wasn’t it frustrating to spend so many hours in your secular school and to have so little time left over for God?” But I believed all my time was God’s. He helped me do low-key evangelism with teachers, students and parents at work and other ministries in my free time. A job is no inconvenience to tolerate in exchange for a residence visa. Rather, it is the God-given context for living out the gospel full-time, while under the full-time scrutiny of non-believers—and for sharing it in an attractive, wholesome, non-judgmental way.

**4. Tentmakers do workplace evangelism.** Must tentmakers evangelize at work and maybe risk dismissal or even expulsion from the country? The many hours on the job make them spiritually responsible for people around them. If they evangelize elsewhere but not at work, sooner or later they lose credibility. But we will examine the low-key kind of evangelism Paul teaches his converts, which is appropriate for the workplace and for hostile environments.

**5. Tentmakers also do free-time ministries.**

In both Peru and Brazil, God helped me serve churches and to pioneer IVCF-IFES university fellowships, in addition to discrete evangelism in the schools where I earned my living.... A linguistics professor translated the New Testament for six million Muslims while he did university teaching and his wife taught English to the wife of a sheik.... A young high school science teacher evangelized his students in rural Kenya, and preached every third Sunday in the local church.... A young symphony violinist in Singapore had Bible studies with fellow musicians and worked in a Chinese church.... A faculty person and an engineer set up a Christian bookstore in an Arab Gulf city.... A theology graduate doing “study abroad” in India, also did campus evangelism and taught part-time in a seminary. Tentmakers do varied ministries as God leads and enables.

**6. Tentmakers are not second rate witnesses.** (as often implied because they are unfairly lumped with other expatriates), but often have full theological and missiological training, even though they serve as lay people. But in this cosmic, spiritual war for control of the world, not everyone needs officer’s training. Foot soldiers are needed to develop quality friendships with seekers. But all must know how to use “the sword of the Spirit”—good personal and group Bible study skills—and how to do spiritual warfare with evangelism and prayer. All need a course on missions, and cultural orientation for their target country.

**7. Tentmakers are not “lone rangers.”** They work together in fellowship and accountability groups. They seek prayer support from their home churches and friends, and in their new host country they work with a tentmaker team, a national church, or with a mission agency—if it will allow them to retain their tentmaker distinctives. An expatriate church can be helpful if it does not distract them from the host country culture and people.

## Practical Reasons for Tentmaking

**1. Tentmakers can gain entry into restricted-access countries.** About 80% of the world’s people live under governments that deny entry to missionaries but welcome professionals with needed expertise. Some recently opened doors into Marxist countries have been newly re-



stricted, because the driving force behind anti-communism is not democratic principles, but nationalism. Local people are hostile to all but their own historic religion. Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism have all become more aggressive. But economic need will keep doors open for educators, engineers and technicians, computer experts, health care personnel, business people, agriculturists, athletes and artists, etc. (Even missionaries can also enter, if they can go as tentmakers.)

2. *Tentmakers can serve in needy open countries.* After a century of missions, Japan is less than one percent evangelical. European Mediterranean countries have a lower percentage of evangelicals than India or China, and France has more Muslims than Christians. Educated people worldwide listen more readily to professional people, suspecting that religious workers say religious things mainly because they must do it to earn their living. Younger generations in the once Christian West have little knowledge of Jesus. Dr. Lesslie Newbigin, after years in India, said we should give high priority to Western youth because of their powerful negative worldwide influence. The Church is not an end in itself. It demonstrates God's kingdom. But its mandate is also to engage culture and to challenge unbiblical world views, especially in this new post-modern age. This must be done by Christian professionals in the marketplace, at home and abroad.

3. *Tentmakers can alleviate the cost of missions,* working for years at little or no expense to the church, as mission overheads and cost-of-living indices rise. The average couple needs two and a half years to raise donor support. One church reports sixty members training for missions and a budget that will accommodate only five. A church can multiply its ministry abroad with tentmakers, reserving limited funds for those missionaries requiring full support.

4. *Tentmakers can solve our problem of personnel.* Missionary recruitment has slowed, even though former receiving countries now send workers. We will need many more. Even though most unreached peoples have now been adopted, it may take years before they can evangelize their own people. And our mandate is not finished when these groups are reached.

Many countries inside and outside the 10/40 Window are still unevangelized.

Although missionary recruits have tapered off, lay people are the church's great untapped resource. They move naturally in their professional circles, in the worlds of finance, commerce, industry, science, education, health care, etc., understanding the mentality, the jargon and the hangups of colleagues. Missionaries provide excellent role models abroad for religious workers, but only professionals can provide role models for the other 99% of the church. Tentmakers can be an almost cost-free, parallel force to complement and assist the work of regular missionaries, and to pioneer where they cannot go.

5. *Tentmakers can reduce the missionary attrition rate.* Thirty percent of missionaries do not stay for a second term, after a first term learning the language and culture at donor expense. The expatriate failure rate reported by secular firms is similar. Some recruiters now seek applicants who have served with the Peace Corps. Mission agencies should recruit tried and proven tentmakers who have learned the language, culture and ministry skills at their own expense, and now commit themselves to a life they already understand. We should use the training potential of study abroad, modestly paid internships and expense-paid voluntary service.

6. *Tentmakers are ideal for new sending countries.* Many new sending countries cannot follow our Western model of donor-support—if their currency is low in relation to their target country, or their government limits currency export. But it may not be wise for Western churches to finance their operations. Some national ministries refuse foreign funds because they stifle local responsibility, enthusiasm and dependence upon God. But tentmaking provides them with an almost cost-free option. Every country has access to the global market in different ways. Labor is the invisible export—the main source of income for many countries.

7. *Today's international job market* itself is a powerful argument for tent-making. It is no accident, but is designed by God to help us finish world evangelization. Like many rulers, our King of Kings has a repopulation program. He transfers millions of hard-to-reach people into



freer countries—Turks to Germany, Kurds to Austria, everyone to America—and sends Christian professionals into restricted regions, so all may hear the good news.

The U.K. had a long tradition of tentmaking in its far-flung empire, but there were few jobs for Americans until after World War II. Then war-ravaged countries and 100+ newly independent European ex-colonies all needed development help. Now add to them all the ex-Soviet bloc countries. An estimated four million Americans work abroad, and millions more from other countries. But Muslims, Mormons and other cults make much better use of overseas jobs than Christians.

not understand workplace evangelism, and they consider secular work a waste of time instead of vital ministry.

Some tentmakers begin their own businesses—construction, manufacturing, tourism, computer software applications, import-export, business consulting, language institutes, elementary schools, and so on. A chemical engineer in the Middle East started twenty businesses—including a restaurant, a job placement service and miniature golf course. But experience and capital are required, and your own business usually demands more time and effort than a salaried position. And phantom businesses are an abomination to governments and to the Lord.

## Only tentmakers can reach that 80% of the world which is largely closed to regular missionaries.

For almost 20 years, our Global Opportunities staff laboriously researched overseas jobs, turning up about 3000 a month. But today 60,000 or 70,000 jobs can be accessed on the Internet in a day! Thousands of employers (about 40 kinds) hire people in every career field for positions in cities everywhere, as well as some rural and tribal locations. Most contracts require degrees in a needed field, and work experience, because governments protect less skilled jobs for their own people. But mineral-rich, sparsely populated countries also import unskilled labor, mainly from the poorer Asian countries. Westerners would not work for their wages and would be suspect if they did. But these men and women earn much more abroad than at home. In an affluent Arab city, Pakistani street sweepers joyfully share the good news.

Most initial contracts are for one to three years, and renewable. Serious tentmakers commit themselves to a region as long as God keeps opening doors. Salaries range from modest but adequate, to high, with generous benefits, and include round trip travel for employees and their families. This is true if they are hired while in their home country. If they go abroad to seek employment, they are usually considered local hires, with local pay and no benefits. Many Christians do not qualify for the contract positions. Many do not wish for full-time jobs because they do

Tentmaking is for all ages because the Great Commission has no age clause. Young people can

choose from hundreds of “study abroad” options and join campus ministry teams. Modestly paid internships and voluntary service are good tentmaker contexts, and in a more limited way, so are unglamorous summer jobs. Retirees are in demand. Never before have there been so many healthy, educated and affluent senior citizens as in our Western (and other) countries today. They may take full-time or part-time employment abroad, like a teaching couple Bill and Fern, both in their seventies, who still bicycle around a Chinese city, teach English and win their students to the Lord!

Although there are compelling practical reasons for tentmaking, the biblical reasons are more important, and a biblical basis is essential and urgent for the whole tentmaking movement.

### **Biblical Reasons for Tentmaking**

Several Old Testament believers supported themselves while making God known in foreign countries. But it is Paul, maker and repairer of tents, who explained, demonstrated and strongly defended this ministry model for us. He also reminds us there are two basic approaches to missionary work, his *self-support* model and Peter's *donor support* model.

Remember that Jesus had called Peter to leave his fishing business forever in order to trust God's people for his livelihood (Luke



5:1-11). When he returned to his business after the resurrection, Jesus met him on the lakeshore and asked him to renew his earlier commitment—three times (John 21). Years later Paul writes approvingly that Peter and his wife still make their missionary journeys on church support (1 Cor 9). This was not a problem for the Jewish people with whom they worked, but Paul knew it would put off his ever suspicious Gentile friends.

But in that same chapter, Paul lists strong arguments in favor of church support. This passage and three others are often used to prove that Paul mainly received church support and made tents only in financial emergencies. But these are proof-texts—taken out of context. An inductive study and careful correlation of all the relevant passages show that self-support was Paul's deliberate policy, part of his well-designed strategy.

We will consider these proof texts, as we seek to answer six basic questions: 1) How much did Paul work? 2) How much did he receive in donor gifts? 3) Why did he work at all when he did not have to? 4) What did he teach converts about lay ministry? 5) What was the result of his unique strategy? 6) How can a study of Paul help us today?

### How Much Did Paul Work?

Paul's three journeys took about ten years, but he had already evangelized for more than ten years in Arabia (the puppet kingdom of Nabataea), in his home province of Cilicia and in Syria, including Antioch. But let's look at the three journeys.

*The first journey.* Paul and Barnabas took the gospel through the island of Cyprus and the Galatian-Phrygian region. In 1 Corinthians 9:6 Paul suggests they already supported themselves at that time and continued that financial practice when they formed two separate teams.

*The second journey.* Paul's team did church planting in the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. In both of Paul's brief letters to the Thessalonians he said he worked "night and day"—that is, morning and late afternoon shifts. In Corinth, Paul's job and house hunting had resulted in employment and lodging with Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish refugees from Rome, because they had the same trade (Acts 18:3).

"Tentmakers" were not weavers, but artisans who made animal skin products, including tents. Verse five records the arrival of Silas and Timothy who had stayed on in Macedonia after Paul had to flee. It is usually assumed that they brought money, and that Paul immediately desisted from his manual labor. The men probably did bring money. But the Greek text suggests no change in Paul's activity—only his colleagues' surprise at the intensity of his preaching and the amount of ministry he had already done.

*The third journey.* They spent three years in the Roman province of Asia, which was already the most economically important region in the empire, and the center for the worship of Artemis, or Diana, whose temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In Acts 20, in Paul's farewell instructions to the Ephesian elders, he says, "I coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling you must also help the weak..." (Acts 20:33-35). Even pastor-elders were to continue their self-support, not just to give to the poor, but to provide a model for easily tempted converts from unsavory backgrounds.

Paul taught converts "from house to house"—house churches. He preached in the Hall of Tyrannus, probably during the long noon hours when the teacher did not need it himself. (F. F. Bruce considered the Early Western Text to be accurate in this detail.) Paul's listeners borrowed his apron and his handkerchief (the sweat rag around his brow), to heal the sick—a poignant glimpse of Paul in work clothes, teaching an audience similarly dressed (Acts 19:11,12).

But near the end of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, a crisis in Corinth gives us our best information about his tentmaking. Judaizers came to Corinth to discredit his apostleship. They criticized his simple preaching style, and deemed his message superficial, because he refused to make Gentiles adopt Jewish rituals in order to become Christians. But mainly they attacked his manual labor, saying it proved he could not get church support, because he was not an apostle. He was an imposter! Why didn't Paul quickly defuse

the whole controversy, saying he made tents only when church support was low? Why didn't the Corinthian converts say he quit tentmaking when money came from Macedonia? Because it wasn't true.

Instead, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, with an impassioned defense of his manual labor in chapter nine. First he gives evidences for his apostleship. Then he gives that long list of arguments in favor of church support—to prove his own right to receive it. But then, immediately he says three times—for emphasis—that he has never made use of this right! Never. This triple affirmation must cover all three journeys, and his prior ministry as well. Then he adds his reasons for self-support.

He sent the letter to Corinth with Timothy. But neither Timothy nor the letter convinced the now disillusioned Corinthians. Alarmed, Paul made an emergency visit to Corinth—his “painful visit,” because he was rebuffed. Then, back in Ephesus, he sent his “severe letter” with Titus, his senior coworker (it no longer exists). Meanwhile, Demetrius the silversmith incited the riot against Paul, who once again had to flee for his life. Too anxious to await Titus' return at Troas, Paul proceeded to Philippi, and intercepted him there. Titus reported that most of the Corinthians were repentant. But there may have been a holdout or two, because Paul then wrote 2 Corinthians, with more arguments for his self-support. He said that on his imminent third visit to Corinth, he would do manual labor as before, and as he was then doing in Philippi (2 Cor 11:12ff).

That Paul insisted on his self-support, even at the risk of his apostolic authority, suggests that this was a non-negotiable part of his pioneering. Before we examine his reasons, we must consider the extent of his church support.

### What Financial Contributions Did Paul Receive?

In 2 Corinthians 11:8-9 he says he even “robbed churches” to serve the Corinthians. The Macedonians had sent a gift to Corinth. But “robbery?” Paul uses hyperbole to shame the Christians in Corinth. But the crucial passage is Philippians 4:15-16 which he wrote more than a decade later. Paul was in Nero's palace prison, and totally dependent on friends for his needs. The Philippians sent a

gift—the first in years. In his thank you letter, Paul reminds them that they were the only church that ever gave toward his ministry (Antioch was not a donor church). How often had these Philippians given—a time or two? When Paul's enemies hinted that he was only pretending self-support and probably getting contributions on the sly, he strongly denied it (2 Cor 12:16-18). He said he received no funding at all. He even paid his hosts for food and lodging (2 Thess 3:6-16). Why was this so important to him?

### Why Did Paul Work At All When He Did Not Have To?

We will consider three of the most important of his reasons.

**Credibility.** Paul says twice (1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 6:3ff) that he works in order not to put an “obstacle” in the way of the gospel. He gives Gentiles no reason to distrust his message or motivation. He is not a “peddler of God's Word,” “not a people-pleaser,” saying things to gain fatter profits. He does not want to be classed with unscrupulous orators who roamed the empire, exploiting audiences. He is “free from all men”—owes no favors, is not beholden to any wealthy patron who could influence his message, nor any donor church or Corinthian faction. He gets no financial gain out of his preaching. Instead, it costs him dearly in every way.

**Identification.** Paul says he adapts culturally to people, in order to win them—to the Jews as a Jew and to the Greeks as a Greek—as an educated Gentile. But he also adapts to the “weak”—the lower classes. A skilled artisan was somewhere in the lower middle (1 Cor 9:19ff). As a highly educated upper class person, Paul quickly attracted the interest of the philosophers in Athens, affluent men and women in Corinth, and the Asiarchs in Ephesus. But he had to immerse himself in the marketplace to gain the trust of artisans and laborers. Why did he focus on them? Because most of the people in the empire were at the bottom—70 to 90 percent were slaves. His identification was not phony—he genuinely earned his living (1 Cor 4:11-12). Paul says his costly, incarnational service did not originate with him. He was imitating Jesus, whose identification with us cost him everything (Phil 2:5-11).



**Modeling.** Paul demonstrated Christian living because no one in the region had ever seen a Christian. He lived a holy life in the same immoral, idolatrous, cesspool society where he expected converts to live holy lives. Paul also modeled a Christian work ethic in this culture where indolence and thievery were the norm. In 1 Thess 3:8 he says, "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." Work was not optional for believers. Paul turned newly converted thieves, idlers and drunkards into good providers for their families and generous givers to the need (1 Cor 6:10-11; Eph 4:28; 1 Tim 5:8). Paul says much in his brief letters about work, because without a strong work ethic, there could not be godly converts, healthy families, independent churches—nor productive societies. And God wants his people to be a blessing to the countries in which they live and work (Jer 29:7).

More important, Paul established a pattern for lay ministry. All converts were to be full-time, unpaid evangelists in their workplaces, as well as in their extended households and communities. They were to answer the questions of all who asked about their changed lives and new hope. Each convert represented a beachhead into enemy territory, so Paul told them not to move or change jobs too quickly—unless slaves could get their freedom (1 Cor 7:17-24). Nothing matures new believers like evangelism. The churches multiplied.

### **What Did Paul Teach About Tentmaker Ministry?**

He modeled and taught workplace evangelism because most people spent most of their time at work. Also, evangelism in the marketplace was the best way to infiltrate all of society, because it was where people of every social level rubbed shoulders. But how were the converts to evangelize? Colossians 4:5-6 describes Paul's basic approach. "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders...." "Making the most of the time...." The Greek word for time here is *kairos*—special opportunity. So Paul does not mean incessant talking about God to avoid waste of time, but less talking and

more listening for special moments to make brief, fitting comments. Too much religious talk creates an awkward situation—so colleagues avoid you. "Let your speech always be gracious...." Good evangelism is always kind and courteous. "Seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one." Salty comments are thought-provoking, thirst-creating, and question-inducing. Our character, conduct and conversation should cause people to ask us questions about God.

This low-key approach is selective evangelism, not indiscriminate. It is fishing, not hunting. You "fish out" seekers from among the indifferent and antagonistic people around you, and talk where you won't arouse hostility in others. This is sensitive evangelism because you are building on what the Holy Spirit is already doing in the seekers. You do not run ahead of him. You let their questions pace the conversations, as they are ready. This is contextualized evangelism because their questions show you what to say—revealing what truths they already know, their misconceptions, felt needs, hurts, hangups and obstacles to faith. You answer from your personal experience and from scripture. It is easier for us than for Paul because we can pull out a New Testament and do a one-on-one mini-study with the seeker. Soon you have the seeker in an evangelistic Bible study group, and you can take more initiative in the conversations.

But Paul is also specific about what constitutes a godly workplace lifestyle. Note four essentials: personal integrity, quality work, caring relationships and brief, fitting comments about God. In Colossians 3:22-24 and Eph 6:5-8, Paul tells Christians to serve their employer as though he were Jesus Christ. That attitude turns all labor into worship. The New Testament seems to have few instructions for evangelism, but actually it is filled with them. But the focus is not on techniques, but on lifestyle. So all Paul's ethical teaching told converts how to live in the workplace, their extended households, their neighborhoods and social circles. His doctrinal teaching helped them answer seekers' questions.

## What Were the Results of Paul's Strategy?

On Paul's third visit to Corinth, he wrote Roman believers of his intended visit. But in Romans 15:19-24 he makes an astounding claim. "From Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum (today's Yugoslavia) I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.... I no longer have room for work in these regions." In just over 20 years Paul had finished establishing the church in six Roman provinces—the whole eastern, Greek-speaking half of the Mediterranean.

He accomplished this with only a handful of foreign workers and virtually no foreign funds. How did he do it? First, he had a strategy—he did not work haphazardly. He says, "Like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation.... Let each man take care how he builds upon it" (1 Cor 3:10). The foundation was theological and methodological, and self-support was an essential part of it.

*Personnel and funding.* To fulfill his commission to the Gentile world, Paul needed several hundred times more workers than he had on his little team. He acquired them, not by bringing in more foreigners, but by multiplying himself hundreds of times over in his converts. His ministry model turned them into unpaid evangelists. So he had all the personnel he needed, and they required no foreign salaries. He needed no building funds. Paul aimed at householders, many of whom are named. Family solidarity meant that a father's conversion committed his whole extended family and his servants to his new faith ("you shall be saved and your house"). To win a householder was to gain a leader, a new congregation and a meeting place. This might be a city workshop with living quarters upstairs or behind, or a country villa. Paul won clan heads by transforming their lying, pilfering slaves into trustworthy servants—like Philemon's Onesimus.

*Paul's churches.* His ministry model guaranteed indigenous, independent churches that were self-supporting—everyone worked—and self-governing. He never allowed them to become dependent on foreign funds or foreign leadership.

He quickly appointed lay leaders for the house churches. Some were converted householders, the natural leaders. He taught

house church elders "the whole counsel of God" so they could teach others (Acts 20:26-28). They were not paid (Acts 20:33-35). By the time regional heads were needed, it was clear which house church leaders were the most spiritual and most respected by the local Christians and non-Christians. Work experience was required (1 Tim 3:7). Otherwise, how could they "equip" converts for the marketplace? (Eph 4:10)

By the time regional elders were needed, local funds were available for their support. Paul, the maker of tents, was also an apostle, preacher and teacher. He was never against clergy or paid ministry (1 Cor 9). He wrote the maturing Galatian churches to pay their pastors (Gal 6:6), and at a later date recommended pay for the leading Ephesian elders (1 Tim 5:17-18). But Paul wanted no paid ministry in the pioneer stage, until the pattern of unpaid evangelists was well established. If you start with paid ministry it can be almost impossible to produce lay movements.

Paul's churches were self-reproducing. Although his evangelists were mainly from unsavory, uneducated, pagan backgrounds, with neither anthropological nor missiological training, most received the gospel at enormous risk, and they risked their lives to win others. In the marketplace, Paul's converts were strategically placed at all levels of society. The gospel spread like a forest fire.

But we see Paul working only in major cities. What about the hinterlands? He tells the Romans (1:14-16) that he is debtor also to the barbarians. These were not savages, but most of the people who were not native Greek speakers (Acts 14 recounts a near disaster in Lystra because trilingual Paul did not understand Lycaonian). The Roman empire was never more than a chain of city colonies and military outposts, each with its own customs, local laws and deities, which were usually respected by the Roman authorities. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans had ever tried to integrate or to educate the rural and tribal peoples. Many became day laborers or slaves in the cities. Captives from beyond the empire were sold in the slave markets. Many languages could be heard on city streets.

By focusing his evangelism on these multi-lingual laborers Paul guaranteed the evange-

lization of the hinterlands—without months of language lessons for his team. Converts ran to share the gospel in their home towns, and village people came to locate friends in the city. Converts took the gospel home, clothed in their own language and culture. This automatic contextualization of the gospel fueled its rapid spread.

*Paul's regional lay movements.* After only a few months in Philippi, there were Macedonian churches. In Paul's first follow-up letter to the Thessalonians he said the gospel had already sounded out from them through the whole region! Corinth spread the gospel through Achaia. But Ephesus was even more remarkable. Paul stayed three years, but Luke writes in Acts 19:8-10 that after a little over two years, "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." The whole Roman province of Asia. Did Luke exaggerate? Not likely. Acts 19:23-27 records even stronger testimony from a hostile witness. Demetrius, the silversmith (and crafter of gods made with hands), shouts to the rioting craftsmen, "Not only in 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!" The public bonfire of magic books in Ephesus had probably been repeated in many locations. The penetration of the gospel was so thorough that the silver and copper crafts were in distress, and the worship of Artemis was threatened with extinction!

The penetration of the gospel was also fast. Speed matters in hostile cultures. Hundreds of converts joined the lay evangelists so quickly, that by the time the opposition had geared up for action, it was too late to put out the fire.

*The role of self-supporting lay ministry.* To attribute Paul's phenomenal success to his making of tents would claim too much for "tentmaking." In various passages, Paul credits his success to the power of the Holy Spirit,

his Christ-centered message, his holy life, his suffering, his love for the people, his constant prayers, and his healings and signs and wonders. But Paul also considered his self-support model as essential to his total strategy. It was a non-negotiable policy. He would not have expended so much energy on manual labor if donor-paid ministry could have accomplished his goal. Only his workplace evangelism could produce the missionary lay movement that was his only hope of winning the Gentile world, and fulfilling his Damascus Road commission from Jesus.

### How Does a Study of Paul Help Us?

An inductive, correlated study of all the passages relating to Paul's ministry gives us a very different picture from that usually deduced from a few proof texts. A study of Paul gives us a definition of genuine tentmaking: *Tentmakers are missions-committed Christians who support themselves abroad in secular work, as they engage in cross-cultural evangelism, on the job and in their free time.* The essential criteria are self-support and cross-cultural workplace evangelism. It may be more, but it should not be less. Beyond a definition, Paul provides a manual for marketplace evangelism—a liberating, selective, lifestyle, fishing approach that is ideal for the workplace and is essential for hostile environments.

In conclusion, the Peter model and the Paul model are both biblical and needed. But only tentmakers can reach that 80% of the world which is largely closed to regular missionaries. To finish world evangelization thousands of Christians with solid trades and professions must do Paul-style workplace evangelism as they support themselves in unevangelized countries. With many more tentmakers in today's global job market and more missionaries, working together under our Commander-in-Chief, we can "fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9)!

### Study Questions

1. List the characteristics of tentmakers which distinguish them from Christians who simply work overseas.
2. What reasons does the author give for Paul's strategy of tentmaking?

