*KOINŌNIA* FOR THE NATIONS:
A BIBILICAL MODEL OF CHURCH-MISSIONARY PARTNERSHIP

PRESENTED AT THE EVANGELICAL MISSIOLOGICAL SOCIETY
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL MEETING, MARCH 23-24, 2012
SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, WAKE FOREST, NC

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MARCH 15, 2012

The Kingdom of God, inaugurated by Jesus Christ, is a global reign that will eventually extend

the authority of God over people from all nations and languages.[1] Such a future reality is not

simply hoped for, but is the promised τέλος: "This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed

throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end [τέλος] will come"

(Matt 24:14 ESV; cf. Isa 66:18–20; Hab 2:14; Rev 7:9–10). In order to achieve the kingdom's

globularity God is sending his missionary heralds to the nations. Since Pentecost it is no longer

acceptable for God's people simply to invite the world to observe their covenantal relationship

with God. Such a passive witness, largely used under the first covenant, has been replaced with

the centrifugal impulse to take to gospel to the frontiers.[2] As the resurrected Christ explained

"repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed . . . to all nations" (Luke 24:47).

Apparently the church tentatively embraced this innovative approach to kingdom expansion since

it was persecution, not missionary zeal, which moved them out from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).[3]

Eventually they caught on as the Antiochian Christian, under less forceful divine leadership, sent

out Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel to the nations (Acts 13:1–3).

  This sending-going partnership between church and missionary, first seen in Antioch, is

the principal biblical means by which the gospel is conveyed to unreached peoples (Rom 10:14–

15; 3 John 7–8; cf. Rom 15:20). Without this relationship the advance of the kingdom would

flounder and retreat. Missiologist Luis Bush explains that "The Scriptures underscore the value of

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[2] Though the New Covenant calls for an outward missionary focus, this is not to suggest that the church disregard the corresponding call to be the salt and light to its culture (Matt 5:13–16).

[3] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts,* rev. ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 163.

Christian partnership in advancing the gospel around the world. . . . The Christian community increasingly demands it."[4] Though many today would concur with such a sentiment, the nature of this missionary alliance remains largely underdeveloped. It is often understood simply as a relationship where the church provides the financial and the prayer support enabling the missionary to proclaim the gospel to unreached places. In short, the supporting church merely "holds the ropes" for their missionaries. Though such support is necessary and biblically mandated, it is my thesis that the Bible presents a more robust relationship: an underappreciated biblical model of true partnership where both the missionary *and* the church deeply contribute to the other. This missionary paradigm is seen in the letter to the Philippians, where Paul praised his partners for their "τῇ κοινωνίᾳ . . . εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον" (Phil 1:5). An adoption of this missionary κοινωνίᾳ would profoundly impact both church and missionary.[5]

I will defend this thesis by first reviewing the typical supporting church model, noting its stunting effects. Second, I will present and defend the biblical model of missionary κοινωνίᾳ, largely relying on Paul's letter to the Philippians. Last, I will consider the benefits of this robust biblical partnership for churches, missionaries and the kingdom building work.

<center>THE INADEQUACIES OF THE SUPPORTING CHURCH MODEL</center>

Typically the local church today supports global missions by either funding a missionary directly or giving to a sending agency. The church is the supporting partner in this relationship: it gives

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[4] Luis Bush, "In Pursuit of Partnership: A Biblical Basis from Philippians," in *Partners in the Gospel: The Strategic Role of Partnership in World Evangelization*, ed. James H. Kraakevik and Dotsey Welliver (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, 1992), 3.

[5] Moreover, this biblical model of missionary partnership may just unleash the kingdom into the final frontiers. George Miley concurs, writing "As we enter the third millennium of the Christian era, there is widespread awareness that the energy and capacity of the mission movement would be appreciably enhanced if we could bring more local churches into meaningful participation. To say that the church is an awesome resource is still an understatement, possibly somewhat condescending. She is more than that. She is a God-designed central player, a full partner." George Miley, *Loving the Church, Blessing the Nations: Pursuing the Role of the Local Church in Global Mission* (Colorado Springs: Authentic, 2005), Kindle location 629–636.

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and the missionary receives. Of the North American churches active in foreign missions, roughly 90% fit within this supporting church model (SCM).[6] Though the gospel has spread around the globe through this SCM, it nevertheless remains a deficient model, limiting the potential effectiveness of missionary work. The deficiencies of the SCM are fourfold.

## Deficiency #1: Limited Missionary Awareness

First, in the SCM, where the core of the partnership is financial, the bond between church and missionary rarely develops beyond a one-way fiduciary relationship. Despite an occasional letter posted on the bulletin board, the work of the missionary has little impact on the congregation. Bruce Camp explains the SCM even limits the intercession offered on the missionary's behalf, writing that in this model "prayer support for missionaries is usually limited, since the congregation is often only superficially involved in the life of the missionary and his or her ministries."[7] The foreign missionary work certainly suffers when the partners pay little mind to the missionary's labor.[8]

## Deficiency #2: Limited Church Involvement

Second, under the SCM the local church usually looks to a sending agency for direction in missionary decisions. Acquiescing to the "missionary professionals," the agenda set by the sending agency is uncritically accepted by the supporting church.[9] No input from the local church is sought nor is any offered.[10] The supporting church's guidance is not needed. Her role is simply

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[6] Bruce K. Camp, "Major Paradigm Shifts in World Evangelization," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 11, no. 3 (July 1994), 135.

[7] Ibid., 134.

[8] In many denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention, churches typically do not even know the missionaries receiving their financial support.

[9] This is not to suggest that sending agencies/missionaries should not set the missionary direction. I simply contend that seeking church input into these decisions will increase the church's ownership of the mission work.

[10] Paul Borthwick comments that recently churches are becoming increasingly frustrated with their lack of involvement in missionary decisions: "I hear churches with a heart for evangelism and a commitment to the Great

to write the check.[11] Despite, Scriptures word to the contrary, the missionary's work never becomes the church's work. It simply remains a work they fund.[12]

## Deficiency #3: Limited Sacrifice

Third, as the local church is marginalized in its missionary partnership the impetus for real and substantial sacrifice among the congregation wanes. Pressing and visible needs within the community constantly besiege the church, often muffling the foreign call for the gospel. If the missionary partnership is shallow, with little ownership or awareness of the missionary work, the church will invariably become preoccupied with local issues at the expense of international ones. The missionary partnership then degrades to the point where the mission society occasionally peppers the church will newsletters, updates and seasonal offerings for unnamed missionaries

Commission [asking the mission agencies to] . . . 'get us involved.' Hands-on involvement leads all other requests." Paul Borthwick, "What Local Churches Are Saying to Mission Agencies," *EMQ* 35, no.3 (July 1999), 326.

[11] Some have gone as far as to suggest that mission agencies are churches themselves. Ralph Winter offered his Two-Structures hypothesis in 1973, arguing that the church could be understood as a modality and a sodality: "God's purposes have been carried out via two main structures: Modalities (the local church) and sodalities (mobile task-oriented agencies)" (Ralph Winter, *The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission*." Frontier Mission Fellowship http://frontiermissionfellowship.org/uploads/documents/two-structures.pdf (accessed Nov 10, 2011)). Winter based his argument on parallels between Paul's missionary teams and modern day agencies, claiming both as churches (sodalities). One implication of this theology according to Samuel Metcalf is "for leaders to cleanse their vocabulary of the term parachurch. More accurate and healthy terms could be 'the church in local form' and 'the church in mobile mission form.' Continuing to use church and parachurch only perpetuates a wrong ecclesiology and the view that legitimacy rests only with the local congregation." Samuel F. Metcalf, "When Local Churches Act Like Agencies: A Fresh Look at Mission Agency-Local Church Relationships," *EMQ* 29, no. 2 (April 1993), 148.

Bruce Camp rightly critiques Winter's innovative ecclesiology detailing the vast differences between mission agencies and the biblical presentation of the local church, including the fact that local churches never limit their membership in the way mission teams must (e.g. the age of the members). Camp concludes, writing,

Instead of cleansing our vocabulary of the term parachurch, a more theologically precise approach would be to do all that we can to empower local churches to fulfill their God-given duties. Pragmatically speaking, agencies . . . are a gift from God and should be utilized by congregations. However, theologically speaking, they should never be considered as the church in mobile form. Legitimacy ascribed to mission agencies stems from their service with churches, not from usurping the local church's biblical mandate. Bruce K. Camp, "A Theological Examination of the Two-Structure Theory," *Missiology* 23, no. 2 (April 1995), 207 (cf. Eckhrad J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 394; Miley, Kindle location 1507–1516).

[12] Of course sending agencies are important partners in the missionary enterprise. George Peters is certainly correct when he writes "There is no question in my mind that our times and culture demand mission organization and missionary societies. God will have ways and means to maintain and/or to raise up such agencies. . . . God has set His seal of approval upon the mission societies thus far." (George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 228–9). Nonetheless, the missionary task is the church's not an agency's. The agency's proper role is to equip the church to fulfill her calling, not to appropriate that calling for itself.

doing unspecific work amongst an unknown people. The church will respond by offering some perfunctory financial contribution to allay its guilty conscious, but rarely make any real sacrifice.

As a consequence of the SCM, today only 10% of the 300,000 American churches have a mission program.[13] Tom Tellford claims the number may actually be less: "Some churches say they have missions programs because they send a token 5 percent of their budget to some denominational or church agency, and then wash their hands of further responsibility. Sorry, but that's not missions."[14] This anemic embrace of the biblical mandate to take the gospel to the nations is perpetuated by the SCM. As a consequence there exist today "many missionless churches and churchless mission societies" resulting in an inadequate kingdom growth to the unreached.[15]

Yet the damage is not simply limited to the missionary enterprise. The negative impact of the SCM extends to the supporting church by creating a distorted view of the local congregation.

### Deficiency #4: Distorted Ecclesiology

Fourth, the SCM, unlike Paul's relationship with his partners, never expects the missionary to support the congregation in its work. The missionary is simply the recipient of the church's help. As a result a perceived hierarchy of kingdom work emerges, as it is implicitly communicated that the missionary's work is worthy of support, while the church's ministries are less worthy. The missionary is understood as a soldier on the front lines, while the church is commissioned to maintain the supply line back home. Sadly, this diminished understanding of the church falls far

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[13] Roy A. Hargave, "The Effect of Direct, Hands-On Missions Involvement on a Church's Perception of Foreign Mission." (DMin thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 53. Alan Outhouse reports that among Southern Baptist Churches 44% have missions involvement; though what constitutes missions involvement is left undefined. Alan Outhouse, "Educating and Training Select Local Churches for the Purpose of Greater Involvement in Local and Global Mission Activities," (DMin thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 1–2.

[14] Tom Telford and Lois Shaw, *Mission in the 21st Century: Getting Your Church in the Game* (Charlotte: United World Mission, 1998), 148.

[15] Peters, 232.

below its biblical mandate. Jesus announced that gates of hell shall not prevail against *the church* (Matt 16:18). Paul cautioned *the church* to wage war against "cosmic power" and "spiritual forces of evil" (Eph 6:12). Peters warned *the church* that their adversary seeks to devour them (1 Pet 5:8). The church is not simply relegated to supply line work: it too fights on the front line. George Miley also recognizes this harmful trend:

> In the last several decades, some good-hearted missions enthusiasts have promoted the idea that if a Christian really loves the Lord he or she will become a missionary. This reinforces two unhelpful, unbiblical ideas. The first is that God's people are found in two categories: religious professionals (pastors, missionaries, etc.) and everybody else. The second is that there is a pecking order of spirituality with missionaries on top.[16]

Therefore, though the unique challenges facing foreign missionaries ought not be minimized, the church must be reminded that the missionary's work and the church's work is largely the same: the establishment of the kingdom of God through the proclamation of the gospel. As Denton Lotz explains "The Biblical record makes it quite clear that mission belongs to the whole church."[17] Even mission agency representative Larry Sharp agrees: "the local church is God's primary vehicle for bringing others to worship him."[18] Howard Foltz is even more forceful

> We should note that without the essential element of world mission to all the peoples of the earth, a fellowship or local church is not a church in the biblical sense of the word. Without missions, it is merely an ingrown parody of a church, a "hot tub church" where people are just looking at themselves and each other as they enjoy the blessings of the hot tub. It is true that many wonderful things can and do happen in Christian fellowships, but if the people are not outward looking, vitally reaching out to the world in evangelism and missions, they are not a church as God designed it. Emil Brunner, the great Swiss theologian, said it well: "As fire is to burning, so mission is to Christ's Church."[19]

This truth set Paul's missionary agenda to plant churches who would proclaim the gospel in their community as Paul did on the next frontier.

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[16] Miley, Kindle location 365–368.
[17] Denton Lotz, "Paradigm Shifts in Missiology," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 32, no. 1 (Jan 2008), 15.
[18] Larry Sharp, "What An Agency Leader would Say to Local Churches," *EMQ* 36, no. 1 (Jan 2000), 78.
[19] Howard Foltz, "Building a Home-Base for Global Outreach," *International Journal of Frontier Mission* 11, no. 3 (July–Aug 1994), 143.

Unfortunately many churches have forgotten this truth. A recent study found that "89 percent of church members listed the primary purpose of the church as taking care of them and their family's needs. Only 11 percent responded that the primary purpose of the church was to win the world for Christ."[20] What accounts for this theological amnesia as these puerile churches invest the preponderance of their resources and energies on themselves? Though it may not be the complete diagnosis for this ill, the SCM, which highlights the missionary as the kingdom builder and the church as the helper, certainly supports the church's failure to see *itself* as a missionary center devoted to kingdom advance among its neighbors and the nations. The remedy for such a disorder demands a robust and biblical understanding of missionary partnerships. Miley concurs,

> The solution requires more than missionary conference pep rallies designed to impart missions enthusiasm . . . . No, there is the need for a whole new approach, a new way of structuring things, a new paradigm. *Missions participation must be made meaningful. . . .* Perceptions must be reversed, and ownership of global mission must be understood to belong to the whole church. What might that look like?[21]

This meaningful missions participation looks like the biblical model for missions, beautifully displayed in the book of Philippians: a true missionary κοινωνία.

## THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF MISSIONARY *KOINŌNIA* ACCORDING TO THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS[22]

Much has been made about the reciprocal partnership of sacrifice and suffering between Paul and the Christians at Philippi. Upon his arrival in Europe the Philippian church soon became the first foothold for the gospel in this new land. Within weeks of its start, the church at Philippi began a

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[20] Dwight C. Buchholz, "An Evaluation of Common Methodolgies Used to Increase Interest in International Missions" (DMin thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 82.

[21] Miley, Kindle location 1998–2001(*italics added*).

[22] It should be noted that though Paul's theological principles are normative for the church, his missionary practices may not be. Therefore the model presented in Paul's missionary relationships is not a binding paradigm which must be received uncritically by all churches and missionaries. Rather, the Pauline model is best understood as a biblical template for missionary relationships that may need adjustment in specific contexts (see Peters, 233).

substantial partnership with Paul as he moved on to new frontiers. That relationship continued over the next ten to twelve years when Paul penned his letter to his partners.

Paul begins his letter commending the Philippians for their faithful partnership: "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership [κοινωνία] in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil 1:3–5). Paul's love for his friends, apparent in this greeting, remains forefront until the close of his letter: "Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown" (Phil 4:1).[23] This sacred love emerged out of a partnership in each other's lives and ministries. Peters describes this relationship, writing "Paul's partnership relationship was one of full participation in the life of the churches and in their mobilization and enlistment in prayer, personnel, and finances in evangelism. . . . it was a total partnership ministry from the very beginning."[24] This profound partnership is captured in the word used to describe it: κοινωνία.

Κοινωνία occurs twenty times in the New Testament and is found more frequently in the book of Philippians[25] than any other book.[26] Danker translates it as a "close association involving

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[23] Many have observed that the special intimacy between the Philippians and Paul is also evident in what Paul did not write: namely he refused to title himself as an apostle, unlike in most of his other letters. Rather than the apostle Paul, he was to the Philippians, "Paul . . . a servant of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:1). Evidently Paul felt no need to assert his apostleship to his partners The absence of "ἀπόστολος is generally understood as evidence of the warm relationship between Paul and the saints in Philippi. . . . there was no need to remind the Philippians of Paul's authority." Moises Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed. (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 39. (cf. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 62; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary in the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 45).
J. Paul Sampley understands that this unique relationship arises because of their missionary partnership: "Paul does not see any threat to his authority and therefore his gospel in Philippi, so he does not have to secure it by using the title 'apostle' for himself. His relationship with the Philippians is so stable . . . that he has no need to refer to himself in a way that sets him apart. He is a partner with them. They are therefore his fellow workers, fellow soldiers, his brothers and sisters. . . . The Philippians have been his partners from the very beginning and have never wavered from it." J. Paul Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ: Christian Community and Commitment in Light of Roman Law.* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 62.
[24] Peters, 234–235.
[25] Phil 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; 4:14 (cf. 4:15).
[26] Sampley understands the κοινωνία shared between the Philippians and Paul as a "consensual *societas* . . . commonplace in Roman Law." Sampley, x (*italics his*), cf. 51, 60.

mutual interests and sharing."[27]  Kittel explains "It implies fellowship or sharing with

someone."[28] Zodhiates understands it to mean "To share in, fellowship with, participation."[29] The

fellowship or sharing expressed in the term κοινωνία is reciprocal: both parties give and receive.

Kittel refers to this as the two sided meaning of κοινωνία: "The two sided meaning is obviously

present in Phil 4:15, where Paul commends the community for demonstrating its fellowship with

him . . . . Between the Apostle and community there is reciprocal relation."[30] Ronald Allen also

sees this mutual partnership between Paul and the Philippians. He explains that "The purpose of a

*koinōnia* was to accomplish a common goal. Two parties would each contribute and each

contribution was considered of equal value."[31] The reciprocal nature of this relationship runs

counter to the SCM where support is given in only one direction.

This is κοινωνία presented in the book of Philippians is the biblical model of missionary

partnerships that should serve as a paradigm for churches and missionaries today.[32] As Bush

explains, "The biblical basis of true Christian partnership is contained in the Apostle Paul's letter

to the church in Philippi. The Paul/Philippians partnership reveals the ingredients of successful

partnerships for the twenty-first century. . . . In fact Philippians could be called 'a manual on

genuine Christian partnership.'"[33] The ingredients which constitute this missionary κοινωνία are

sixfold: the sharing of 1) financial resources; 2) kingdom vision; 3) intercessory prayer; 4)

sacrificial affection; 5) personal information; and 6) triumphant joy.

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[27] *BDAG* 552.

[28] Kitell, *TDNT* 808.

[29] S. Zodhiates, "κοινωνία," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament* 873.

[30] Kitell, *TDNT* 808.

[31] Ronald J. Allen, "The Partnership that Makes All Things Possible: Philippians 4:10-20," *Restoration Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1991), 171.

[32] Christopher Wright's exegesis of 3 John presents a missionary partnership complementary to the Philippian model. He explains "3 John is, in our terms, talking about the relationship between a local church and traveling missionaries. Fundamentally, John describes it as a relationship of 'love' (v. 6a). But it was a love that took practical form, in three distinct ways: sending, going, and supporting." Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 218.

[33] Bush, 4–5.

## #1 Sharing Financial Resources

In Philippians Paul often refers to the financial support given by the church.[34] His most lengthy

discussion of their gifts is found in Phil 4:15–18 where he writes "I have received full payment,

and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent . . ." (Phil

4:18). In light of this passage, some see the book of Philippians as an ancient receipt, where Paul

acknowledges that the Philippians had paid in full.[35] Paul explained that these resources were

used for the proclamation of the gospel (also Rom 15:24). Though missionaries may find ways to

support themselves financially, it is vital that the local church understand and embrace its duty to

carry some, if not all, the financial burden freeing the missionaries to devote themselves to the

proclamation of God's word. It is in this element, the sharing of financial resources, that the SCM

has the greatest overlap with the biblical model of missionary κοινωνία.

## #2 Sharing Kingdom Vision

The Philippians not only gave so that Paul could continue to his missionary ministry, they too

gave themselves to kingdom building work. Their partnership in the gospel (Phil 1:5) was not

reduced to sending Paul money so he could preach. Rather their partnership was also located in

both the church's and Paul's spread of the gospel in the respective communities. They shared a

common vision: both gave themselves to kingdom work. Peters explains this commitment: "They

cooperated in the preaching of the gospel not only through their financial support for Paul (Phil

4:15–16) . . . , but also in terms of passing on the news of Jesus. The believers in Philippi

contribute to the 'progress of the gospel' through their financial support of the apostle and

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[34] Phil 2:25; 4:10; 4:15–18.

[35] Referring to Philippians 4:18 Sampley writes, "In this one sentence Paul writes what amounts to a formal receipt, using the technical commercial term *apechō*, 'I have received,' so common in papyri receipts." Sampley, 53.

through their own missionary activity in Philippi."[36] Paul's passing reference to the evangelistic ministry of the new believers converted through his prison preaching (Phil 1:12–14) implies that it was common practice for believers to proclaim the good news. This proclamation was not restricted to a separate class of churchmen (pastors, missionaries, evangelists, etc.), but was the activity of "most of the brothers" (Phil 1:14). In short, the missionary was not alone on the front line in the kingdom building battle. He was joined by his missionary partners.[37]

### #3 Sharing Intercessory Prayer

Perhaps the most helpful *and* the most neglected element of missionary κοινωνία is intercessory prayer. Paul attributed the fruitfulness of his ministry to the faithfulness of the Philippians' prayers. In fact he was so well aware of their intercessions for him that he based his assurance of deliverance from prison upon them: "I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance" (Phil 1:19). Knowing the impact of prayer support, he not only charged the Philippians to "let their requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6), he also requested intercessory aid from others. Peters explains: Paul was "deeply conscious of his own needs and of his dependence upon the prayers of the saints. Thus he humbly and persistently asked for the prayers of the churches. 'Brethren, pray for us' was his challenge and his plea."[38] His prayer requests always concerned the success of the gospel: prayer for the ability to speak the gospel (Eph 6:18–20); the freedom to speak the gospel (Rom 15:30–32; Phlm 22); the opportunity to speak the gospel (Col 4:2–4); and the positive reception of the gospel (2 Thess 3:1–3).

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[36] Peters, 254.
[37] Phil 1:7, 1:27–30; 3:17–4:1.
[38] Peters, 343.

This need for churches to intercede for their missionary partners is of course well recognized. In fact, many churches today receive regular missionary updates asking for prayer in addition to the missionary prayer cards covering many a Christian's refrigerator. What is often neglected, however, is the missionary's intercession for his partners, the church. This negligence is somewhat surprising in light of Paul's ubiquitous prayers for his partners.[39] For the Philippians in particular he prayed that they "would love more, learn more about spiritual truth, and gain discernment to make the right choices in their constant upward walk."[40] Therefore, the biblical model of missionary κοινωνία insists that prayer flow in both directions. This commitment to mutual prayer often gives rise to sacrificial affection.[41]

## #4 Sharing Sacrificial Affection

The intimate affection these partners share, pervasive in this letter, has been noted. Yet it is important to realize how this mutual love furthers the missionary cause. In light of their bond the Philippians were willing to sacrifice for their partner, as Paul himself mentions that they "shared his trouble" (Phil 4:14). "They put their shoulders under his load and helped him lift it."[42] They gave and did so sacrificially because of their "concern" for him (Phil 4:10). It is this love that caused Paul to "rejoice greatly" (Phil 4:10). Moreover, when they heard of Paul's imprisonment, they sent their emissary, maybe their pastor,[43] Epraphroditus to minister to Paul's needs.

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[39] According to Peters, Paul "prayed for love (1 Thess 3:12–13), for sanctification (1 Thess 5:23), for God's good pleasure (2 Thess 1:11–12), for consolation (2 Thess 2:16), for love and patience (2 Thess 3:5), for complete perfection (2 Cor 13:7–9), for unity (Rom 15:5–6), for hope (Rom 15:13), for knowledge of God's will (Col 1:9–14), for full assurance of knowledge (Col 2:1–3), for the glory yet to come (Phil 1:15–21), for the triune indwelling (Eph 3:14–21), for perseverance to the end (Phil 1:9–11). Ibid, 343.

[40] Bush, 14.

[41] Bush imagines Paul's prayer affection: "Paul's warmth of love and emotion pours itself out in fervent, frequent prayers of praise for what this partnership had meant to him. What must it have been like to listen in on those prayers of boundless joy as he brought this precious body before the Lord?" Ibid., 14.

[42] Allen, 171.

[43] Bush, 13.

It is perhaps because Paul feels so loved by his partners that his interests were not simply in his own well-being, but in theirs. In commenting on the gifts he received from them, he shows that his primary concern was not his financial needs; rather, he was more interested in the Philippians right relationship with God, as evidence in their financial sacrifice. He writes "Not that I seek the gift, *but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit*. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, *a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*" (Phil 4:17–19, *italics added*). Sampley comments on this selfless affection, writing that Paul "provides a receipt for their most recent support and reminds them that its significance is not merely some contractual responsibility. Neither is the central concern Paul's situation of need or plenty. What matters is their account with God . . ."[44]

### #5 Sharing Personal Information

In Paul's letter the Philippians are informed of the current events in his life. For instance he excitingly announced that, despite his imprisonment, he continued to proclaim the gospel (Phil 1:12–14). Of course, it is not unusual for a congregation to be aware of the happenings on the foreign field. But their missionary κοινωνία will not survive when personal information only flows one way. Paul was well aware of the happenings at Philippi. For example, perhaps due to Epaphroditus' transparency, he knew of their disunity troubles and encouraged them to make his joy complete by being of the same mind (Phil 2:1–5; cf. Phil 1:28, 4:2–3). In light of their friendship, Paul must have asked Epaphroditus scores of questions, just as the Philippians would have done to Timothy (Phil 2:19–24). Bush explains the value of this exchange: "Information is a precious resource. . . . Every partnership calls for a transparent sharing of information of success

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[44] Sampley, 60.

and failures in the overall task of advancing the gospel. Paul's honesty in sharing information about his own ministry is evident throughout the letter."[45] This mutual sharing of information was not unique to Philippi.[46] In virtually every letter Paul writes, he was aware of the events in the local church, providing a model of missionary κοινωνία rarely seen today.

### #6 Sharing Triumphant Joy

Even the casual reader of Philippians will note the pervasive motif of joy.[47] Certainly Paul's relationship with the Philippians, at least partially, occasioned such joy. Bush agrees, writing "Why was Paul so joyful? One of the main reasons, if not the primary reason, was because of his partnership with the Christians in Philippi. . . . Paul's joy in partnership is spelled out in no uncertain terms in 4:1 when he writes "you are my joy and crown," referring to his partner in ministry."[48] Paul wanted the Philippians to share his joy, as he called for them to rejoice in the Lord (Phil 4:4). It should be no surprise to missionary partners who support, share, love and pray for each other that a triumphant joy will permeate their κοινωνία.

## THE BENEFITS OF MISSIONARY *KOINŌNIA*

Many of the benefits enjoyed from this missionary κοινωνία are inherent in the relationship and therefore have been mentioned in the previous discussion (e.g. sacrificial affection, triumphant joy, etc.). Other benefits are less apparent, but are nonetheless greatly rewarding and transformative. The impact would be felt by the church, the missionary and the mission work.

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[45] Bush, 11.

[46] The often neglected final greetings in Paul's epistle demonstrate that both the church and Paul are intimately aware of the events occurring in the lives of the other. See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 180.

[47] Phil 1:3–4, 1:25; 2:2, 2:17, 2:18, 2:29; 3:1; 4:1, 4:4; 4:10.

[48] Bush, 4.

## Benefits to the Congregation

A profound understanding of God's global work emerges when a church experiences missionary

κοινωνία. As a result, many of the personal issues, which may preoccupy a church uninvolved in

reaching the nations, seem less troubling. Their collective head is lifted off the mundane and

trivial matters that beset their personal and congregational lives as they witness a God who is

working mightily for the salvation of the nations; *and* he is using that congregation to accomplish

this global initiative. They become active partners in this kingdom building work. It is no longer

what someone else does: it is the church's ministry. Such awareness enables the church to

prioritize its ambitions and ministries in line with the activity of God. Miley explains

> The church develops a grassroots ownership of the mission. This paves the way for a
> groundswell of investment. Over time, most believers find it hard to identify with what
> someone else is doing thousands of miles away, regardless of how significant and well
> intended it is. We can own the things we are doing much more easily than we can own
> what someone else is doing. And with ownership comes investment. . . . Who owns the
> mission? Those who feel ownership of it will be motivated to invest themselves in it.[49]

In short, the church becomes free to sacrifice boldly, pray passionately and live radically for a

cause worthy of the body of Christ.

Additionally, as the church ratchets up its involvement in God's worldwide work, its local

kingdom building work is validated, since not only are they supporting the missionary, she is

supporting them. The missionary is aware of the local church's community work, faithfully

interceding for it. The church becomes confirmed that their ministry too has profound kingdom

consequences which warrant the intercession of their missionary partners around the world.[50]

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[49] Miley, Kindle location 699–703.

[50] On a personal note, nothing has been more motivating for my congregation in its *local* missionary work that knowing that our foreign missionary partners are praying for the fruitfulness of that work.

**Benefits to the Missionary**

Serving cross-culturally is a challenging calling. The work is hard, the people are alien, the fruit is often slow-growing, and family and friends are far away. Despondency and isolation are very real dangers for the missionary. Some, though certainly not all, of these threats are mitigated through missionary κοινωνία, for such relationships "would bind the missionary to the church in a healthy and bolstering manner. He would feel neither 'independent' nor 'forsaken,' knowing that he has a home church that has 'gone with him into the field.'"[51] Ministry, including frontier work, is best done with partners.

**Benefits to the Kingdom Building Work**

A true and intimate partnership between missionary and congregation would be a powerful testimony to many potential frontier missionaries within the church. Many barriers standing between the youth and the nations come crashing down when they realize that not only does my church give to me, but they go with me, praying, sacrificing and working. Peters suggests the effect would be profound: "It is my solid conviction that the proper exercise of this biblical principle by the churches [missionary κοινωνία] would do more to boost the morale of our missionaries and the flow of missionary candidates than many other factors combined."[52] Many more may go the unreached, heralding the gospel, if they knew they do not go alone.

CONCLUSION

Paul's letter to the Philippians presents a model of missionary partnership that far exceeds the typically supporting church model in kingdom-building effectiveness. It is a deep reciprocal partnership which creates passionate prayer, intimate love, self-giving sacrifice and indomitable

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[51] Peters, 222.
[52] Ibid., 222.

joy. Churches, missionaries and sending agencies would do well to carefully consider this church-missionary relationship as a biblical model providing guiding principles of missionary κοινωνία for the advancement of the kingdom of God to our neighbors and the nations.

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