

Tentmaking (Self-Supporting) Evangelism and the Traditional “Missionary”

THESIS	SCRIPTURE	CONTEXT EXPLANATION
Receiving Support For Their Ministry	2 Co.9:6-22	Paul makes it clear that he had the right or authority to receive some type of material support (vs.11-12,18) for his spiritual ministry. And the Lord ordained that those who proclaim the Gospel should be supported by those who accept it. (See Luke 9:3-4; 10:4-7).
	2 Co.11:7-9	Paul at least once received support from different churches. But here he considered it “robbery” in that those churches really did not have much to spare. This gift probably came from Philippi through Silas and Timothy (Ph.4:10-18). Paul used this gift to help the Corinthians.
Emphasis on a Self-Supporting Ministry	Ac.20:33-35	Paul, preparing to leave Ephesus to go to Jerusalem, describes his self-supporting labor to the Ephesian elders. Apparently Paul met his own needs, and the needs of those who were with him (v.34), for the 3 years he was in Ephesus. Paul stresses that working will enable the elders to “support the weak” (v.35). This, Paul said, they “ought” (KJV) or “must” (NIV) do (v.35).
	2 Co.12:14-16	Paul makes at least three points in this passage. (1) Paul felt that securing financial help from the Corinthians would be a burden to them (v.14), thus he did not receive any. (2) He did not want to restrict the effectiveness of his ministry (or be misinterpreted), by receiving funds from the churches. But apparently the false “apostles” accused Paul of deceit anyway. Paul applied a principle of the parents spending for their children to justify his self-supporting efforts, and not receiving support from the churches. (3) Paul's genuine love for the Corinthians allowed himself to be mistreated by them.
	2 Th.3:7-9	Paul said that he worked “night and day” (v.8) to pay for the food he ate. He did this in order that he would not “be chargeable” to them. In verse 9 Paul said that he had the “right” (Gk. “authority”) to receive such help. But he said that he wanted to be an “example” (KJV) or a “model” (NIV) for the Thessalonians to follow. He said that his life was a model for a self-supporting type of ministry. (See 1 Cor.4:12).
Working and Witnessing were Accomplished Together	Ac.18:1-5	Paul came to Corinth and found Aquila and stayed with him because he also was a tentmaker. Paul, while working, was a witness to Aquila concerning Jesus Christ. Apparently Paul had the opportunity to win Aquila to Jesus Christ (salvation) because of his work relationship with him.
	1 Co.9:6-22 (v. 6, 15, 18)	Both Paul and Barnabas had the authority to receive some financial support (v.6), but they chose not to use this authority or right (v12). Paul gives a series of principles (v. 7ff) to apply to the working concept. In verses 19-22 Paul uses the principle of becoming like the ones you want to win to Christ. That is, those of the same occupation are best fitted to win someone of that occupation.
	Ep.4:28	Christians are to work and not steal in order to give to the needy. Paul used the Greek word <i>ἵνα</i> (hina) which gives the purpose clause of why Christians should work. And that is, to “have something to share with those in need” (NIV).
	1Th.2:9	Paul did not want to burden the Thessalonians with his needs. Thus, he made tents to support himself. He said that he labored “night and day”. We also know that Paul proclaimed in Thessalonica in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Ac.17:1-8). Paul probably worked on the week days and preached on the Sabbath to the Jews, and taught Christians on the first day of the week (modern day Sunday).

SUMMARY

“**Tentmaker**” — A believer who lives and works using his secular skills as an opportunity to share his witness of Jesus Christ. The term “tentmaker” does not appear in scripture. Biblically, what we call a “missionary” is an “evangelist” (Ac.21:8; Ep.4:11; 2Tm.4:5).

A typical “missionary” today would visit churches asking for support (financial and prayer). He would then tell where he desires to go. They may or may not commit to financially support him. When he has enough churches committed to support him, he will typically go to the “mission field”.

Most missionaries use a **mission board**. A mission board is an organization, typically non-profit, designed to represent and distribute money to a “missionary”. Financial support sent from churches to the missionary must go through the mission board before it goes to the missionary. The mission board typically keeps some percentage of the money to cover their own expenses (the facility, staff, supplies, etc). The result is that the missionary does not receive all the financial support sent to him.

ADVANTAGES OF USING A MISSION BOARD: (1) The mission board may know better how to get money to certain areas of the world than the individual church which may not.

ADVANTAGES OF TENTMAKING EVANGELISM: (1) In the course of work, they could meet classes of men not usually reached by typical missionaries. (2) They are no burden financially to a church (2Co.12:14-16). (3) They have access to countries often closed to typical missionaries. (4) They can be an example to other believers for what it means to sacrifice for the good of others (2Th.3:9).