Core Value #1—Biblical Authority: Ministry is driven by the inspired, inerrant Word of God

Continuing our Missions Essentials series, this month’s Serve is written by Dr. Bruce Burkholder, the General Director of EBI, the Spanish publishing ministry of BMM. Dr. Burkholder previously served as a missionary to Mexico.
As a missionary enters a foreign culture for evangelism and church planting, his
every motive, message, and method are suspect. Under whose authority does the
missionary operate? Who determines what the missionary should say and how he
should conduct his ministry? These are vitally important questions.

Although a missionary operates under several levels of authority, no authority is
more important than God’s Word. In Matthew 4:4, Christ declares that “Man shall not
live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” The
apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 6:17 that we are to take up “the sword of the Spirit,
which is the Word of God.” These verses declare, as one theologian notes, that “God
himself is the ultimate authority … God has delegated his authority by creating a
book, the Bible. Because it conveys his message, the Bible carries the same weight
God himself would command if he were speaking to us personally.” (Millard J.
This truth carries several implications for the missionary life and ministry. Let me unpack just a few.

First, the missionary can confidently take the gospel wherever God leads. The Great Commission reminds us that Christ possesses all authority in heaven and on earth and that He sends us forth as His ambassadors. So, like Paul and the early disciples, we can boldly proclaim Christ no matter our geographic or cultural context.

Second, biblical authority equips the missionary with a culturally relevant message. In Acts 2, God worked equally in the hearts of Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, and Cappadocians, who all came to saving faith in Christ. As missionaries we do not have to change the gospel. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture “is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.”

Third, God’s Word provides missionaries with a foundational methodology.
While styles of dress, worship, and community will vary from one location to another, missionaries' basic tasks remain the same: “Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2) and “Make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:20). That’s pretty straightforward.

Fourth, Scripture helps resolve disagreements by calling us to biblical faithfulness over personal preference. Acts 15 shows how such disagreements are to be settled in a spirit of grace and humility. God’s Word serves as the ultimate arbitrator, not the missionary or the local culture.

As BMM missionaries, we see the authority of God’s Word as essential to the mission. It has provided us with great comfort, confidence, and counsel for 100 years of ministry, and we’re certain it will continue to do so as we advance in the years ahead.

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