

The Precious Stones of Partnering

by Alex Araujo

If mission speaks of what we do as people of God, *partnership speaks of how we function as people of God. To partner is to put into practice the oneness that we have in Christ in missions situations.* It is a manifestation, in a specific place and time, of our universal and eternal fellowship with one another and with our Head, Christ. This fellowship which we have with Christ and with one another (1 John 1) causes us to be always on the look-out for opportunities to manifest it in practical ways.

Partnerships thus are simply the working out of a deeper, permanent spiritual reality. If that is indeed so, the inability to work together when the situation offers itself can be essentially a spiritual problem. We may be able to get around the spiritual nature of divisiveness and fragmentation in kingdom service by appealing to utilitarian motives for partnership. But sooner or later the spiritual nature or this fragmentation will emerge as the underlying obstacle to partnership.

And here is where we find hidden treasures! Here are some precious stones: As we seek to work together in partnership, we discover differences, biases, and even unhealthy attitudes that we did not know we had. These are silent viruses that have been undermining our spiritual health, but that remain unidentified until we try to seriously enter into a partnership in Christ's service. Unidentified, these viruses hurt us but we don't know where the hurt is coming from. The partnership effort makes these viruses visible so they can be healed.

The process of forming and operating a partnership not only identifies these negative attitudes and weaknesses in us, but offers a real and favorable context in which to correct it. *Because the process of partnership formation is dedicated to bringing people together in harmonious service, it seeks to heal conflict by addressing its causes.* Everyone involved is, in principle, predisposed to work on this healing process. Thus we find a friendly environment for our own healing and growth.

The partnership process provides a facilitation team of people committed to help in the healing of unhealthy differences, so that we actually find loyal people willing to work on the problem with us to see it through to resolution. Once this barrier has been removed, we find ourselves in a relational environment that is conducive to personal spiritual growth. The partnership environment offers a fertile soil for growing the fruit of the spirit in our own life as well as that of the other participants. Given these benefits, we will find that our partnership toward an agreed missions task will be joyful, even when difficult, and that we are also growing in the stature of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:1-17).

Isn't the end of mission, after all, the growth and expansion of the body of Christ until it covers all the earth **as one body**? In fact, how can we even expect to effectively work toward building the body of Christ around the world if we are not able to function as a body ourselves? It is only right, then, that we should work as **one healthy body** toward that goal.

Let us all work together wherever possible, so we can grow in stature and in service to our Lord and Savior.

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