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IMPACT ON ITINERANT MINISTRIES

Stephen Short

Stephen Short, who engages in a widespread Bible teaching ministry, reflects on the implications of the appointment of resident FTW's for the itinerant minister.

The purpose of this brief paper is to provide some reflections on the impact which is made on those who engage in a full-time itinerant Bible teaching ministry among Brethren churches of the growing practice of appointing in Brethren churches a FTW. The writer has been engaging in full-time itinerant Bible teaching among Brethren churches for thirty-three years, with a limited, though not insignificant, amount of his time being devoted to his own church.

It stands to reason that a Brethren church which has undertaken the financial responsibility of appointing a FTW has less funds available for calling on the ministry of full-time Bible teachers where a financial responsibility is obviously involved. Furthermore, such Brethren churches as appoint a FTW can hardly do other than make use of him for a significant proportion of their preaching services, with the consequence that other preachers who have served the church in this way over the years are either only thenceforth invited occasionally, or not at all. Some of these churches may have received in the past a good deal of systematic scripture instruction through such Bible teachers, and a number of 'Paul-Timothy' relationships may thus have become formed. This tends to cease in the case of churches with a FTW; but, doubtless, systematic Scripture instruction and 'Paul-Timothy' relationships are then acquired in other ways.

There must be several itinerant Bible teachers who regret the severance (for this or any other cause) of this kind of link with churches which they have regularly served for two or three decades, and with which they have developed very affectionate links (which one believes are mutual); but as against this, when one door becomes shut, the Lord, in his goodness, opens up other doors of opportunity; and new affectionate ties become established, and systematic Bible teaching can be given, in these fresh spheres of service.

If the question be asked, 'Does the appointment of a FTW in certain

Brethren churches affect adversely the financial situation of the itinerant Bible teacher?', the answer is 'No'. Itinerant Bible teachers look to the Lord alone for the supply of their needs. If one normal channel of God's supply tends, for any cause, to dry up, God provides another one. This is demonstrated in scripture (in the story of Elijah), and it has proved itself true again and again in the experience of those whose trust is in him. He is always faithful to them. Sometimes he causes them to pass through a period of testing for their own good; (this is not resented); but it has been the experience of thousands of the Lord's servants, whether labouring for him in the homeland or abroad, that 'they who trust Him wholly, Find Him wholly true'. For this, we praise his name. We serve a good master; and though the circumstances of our service may be subject to various changes, he himself never fails. And he never will.