

Review

Missionary journeys of Paul in Acts of the Apostles: A study of partnership as a catalyst for evangelical success

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This study examines the missionary journeys of Apostle Paul in the Acts of the Apostles and analyzes the strategic role of partnership in the success of his evangelistic ministry. Rooted in the mandate of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:8), Paul’s missionary enterprise demonstrates that Christian mission is inherently collaborative rather than individualistic. Drawing from the Lucan account in Acts and supported by Pauline theology, the paper explores Paul’s three major missionary journeys and highlights his partnerships with co-laborers such as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, Aquila, and other associates. These partnerships provided spiritual support, complementary gifts, accountability, cultural access, and resilience amid persecution and opposition from both Jewish authorities and the Roman Empire. The study argues that Paul’s team-based missionary strategy significantly contributed to the rapid expansion of Christianity across Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia within a relatively short period. His model reflects the corporate nature of the Church as the body of Christ, where diverse spiritual gifts function collectively for effective evangelism and church planting. By examining biblical, historical, and theological perspectives on evangelism and mission, this work affirms that partnership is not merely a pragmatic approach but a theological necessity rooted in Christ’s own model of ministry. The paper concludes that contemporary mission efforts can draw vital lessons from Paul’s collaborative strategy to enhance evangelical effectiveness in the twenty-first-century Church.

Key words: Apostle, missionary journeys, partnership, evangelism, Acts of the Apostles.

INTRODUCTION

Partnership is a vital principle in human life and collective achievement. No individual, regardless of ability, vision, or authority, can successfully carry out complex tasks alone. Human activities whether social, economic, political, or religious—depend on cooperation, shared responsibility, and the contribution of different gifts.

Partnership highlights the simple reality that people achieve more when they work together towards a common goal. In both secular and religious settings, collaboration has consistently proved to be a driving force behind productivity, resilience, and lasting success. Within the Christian tradition, partnership is grounded in a

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clear biblical pattern. The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ provides a strong example. Although He possessed divine authority, Jesus deliberately chose and trained twelve disciples, sharing responsibilities with them and preparing them to continue the mission after His departure (Matt. 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16). This approach shows that God's work is carried out through community rather than through isolated individuals. The early Church continued this pattern, as seen in Acts 2:42–47, where believers lived in fellowship, shared resources, and bore witness together, leading to the growth of the Christian movement.

However, many studies on the missionary work of the Apostle Paul tend to focus mainly on his personal leadership, theology, or journeys, often giving less attention to the role of partnership in his ministry. This creates a gap in scholarship, as it overlooks how collaboration functioned not only as a practical necessity but also as an intentional theological and strategic approach in Paul's mission. This study therefore seeks to answer the central question: How did partnership function as a theological and strategic framework in Paul's missionary journeys as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles? To address this question, the study has three main objectives. First, it examines the structure and composition of Paul's missionary partnerships. Second, it evaluates the theological and missional importance of these partnerships in the growth of the early Church. Third, it draws out lessons from Paul's model that may be applied to contemporary missionary work and church leadership. The study focuses mainly on the account of Paul's ministry in the Acts of the Apostles, with occasional reference to his letters where necessary. It considers companions such as Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke, Priscilla, and Aquila, along with the wider group of co-workers who supported the mission. However, the study is limited to the presentation of Paul's work in Acts and does not attempt to cover all historical or scholarly debates about Pauline authorship or chronology. An examination of the nature and outcomes of Paul's partnerships shows that collaboration was not simply a matter of convenience but a core element of effective Christian mission. The discussion also demonstrates that Paul's team-based approach strengthened evangelism, supported leadership development, and helped ensure the stability of early Christian communities. In doing so, the study offers useful insights for mission and church leadership in the twenty-first century.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research method, as it seeks to examine and interpret the concept of partnership within the missionary activities of Apostle Paul using textual and historical sources rather than numerical data. Qualitative research is most suitable for biblical and

theological studies because it allows for detailed explanation, critical interpretation, and contextual understanding of texts and ideas. More specifically, the study employs a biblical-theological and historical-critical approach. The biblical-theological approach is used to explore how the theme of partnership develops within the broader narrative of Scripture, particularly in relation to the mission of the early Church. The historical-critical approach helps to situate the events recorded in the Acts of the Apostles within their first-century context, taking into account cultural, social, and political realities that shaped Paul's missionary work. This dual approach makes it possible to treat Acts both as a theological narrative which communicates the purpose and expansion of God's mission and as a historical source that provides insight into real missionary practices and relationships in the early Church.

In terms of specific qualitative methods, the study makes use of hermeneutics and exegesis as its primary tools of analysis. Hermeneutics guides the interpretation of relevant biblical passages by examining their meaning within context, while exegesis involves a close reading of the texts, supported by biblical commentaries and scholarly works, in order to explain key concepts such as mission, partnership, and co-labouring in Paul's ministry. These methods ensure that interpretations are grounded in the text rather than imposed on it. The study also adopts a cluster approach in handling sources. This involves drawing from a range of materials including the Acts of the Apostles, selected Pauline epistles, and secondary sources such as books, journal articles, and other scholarly publications in order to compare perspectives and present a balanced analysis. In doing so, the study remains open to multiple scholarly viewpoints while carefully evaluating their relevance to the research problem. In addition, the research employs phenomenological analysis as a way of interpreting the data. This approach focuses on understanding the lived reality of partnership as reflected in Paul's missionary practice, paying attention to patterns of collaboration, shared responsibility, and relational dynamics among co-workers. To further strengthen this analysis, the study uses Social Network Theory (SNT) as an interpretive lens. This framework helps to examine how relationships between Paul and his associates functioned, how networks of co-workers were formed, and how these networks contributed to the spread of the gospel across different regions.

The data for this study are drawn mainly from secondary sources, including the Bible (especially the Acts of the Apostles and selected Pauline texts), biblical commentaries, academic books, journal articles, and other relevant scholarly materials. The selection of these sources is guided by their relevance to the theme of partnership in Paul's ministry, their scholarly credibility, and their contribution to understanding both the theological and historical dimensions of the subject. In

analysing the data, the study follows a thematic and textual analysis. Relevant passages in Acts and Pauline writings are carefully examined, key themes related to partnership are identified, and these themes are then compared with insights from secondary literature. Attention is given to recurring patterns such as shared leadership, division of roles, mutual support, and continuity of mission. The findings are then interpreted in light of the research question and objectives. Finally, the study maintains an *epoché* (bracketing) stance, seeking to minimise personal bias by allowing the texts and evidence to speak for themselves. This ensures that conclusions are based on careful analysis rather than preconceived assumptions. Through this combination of qualitative methods, interpretive tools, and analytical frameworks, the study provides a systematic and well-grounded examination of partnership as a theological and strategic element in Paul's missionary ministry.

Literature review

Scholarly discussion on the missionary journeys of Paul in the Acts of the Apostles is both rich and diverse. Many studies have explored Paul's theology, leadership, missionary strategy, and historical context. However, although several scholars acknowledge the presence of co-workers in Paul's ministry, few have treated partnership as a central theological and strategic framework. This review engages seven key scholars in greater depth and highlights the gaps that necessitate the present study. Stenschke (2023) offers an important contribution by examining Paul as a model of sustainable leadership in Acts. He argues that Paul's missionary success was not only due to his personal calling but also his ability to build and maintain communities of believers and co-workers. Stenschke draws attention to Paul's intentional investment in people such as Timothy and Titus, emphasising leadership development and continuity. He also notes that Paul consistently worked with others rather than in isolation. While this insight is valuable, Stenschke's work is primarily concerned with leadership sustainability and ecclesial growth. It does not go far enough in analysing how partnership itself functioned structurally, relationally, and theologically within Paul's missionary enterprise.

Drews (2006) directly addresses the issue of Paul and his co-workers, making his work particularly relevant to this study. Drews challenges the long-standing perception of Paul as a solitary missionary hero and instead presents him as part of a broader missionary team. He carefully identifies various individuals who participated in Paul's mission and highlights their roles. However, his work remains largely descriptive. It catalogues co-workers and acknowledges collaboration but does not sufficiently interrogate the nature, dynamics, and theological meaning of these partnerships. In other

words, the presence of partnership is recognised, but its deeper implications are not fully explored. Ogereau (2014) provides a more focused analysis of partnership through his study of *koinonia* in Paul's relationship with the Philippians. He interprets partnership in terms of shared participation, especially in financial and material support for missionary work. By employing socio-economic categories such as *societas*, Ogereau shows that partnership involved mutual obligation, trust, and shared investment in the gospel mission. His work is significant because it moves beyond mere description to interpret partnership as a meaningful concept. However, it is largely limited to the Philippian correspondence and does not extend this analysis to the narrative accounts in Acts, where the broader missionary network and practical outworking of partnership are more visible. Mutavhatsindi (2017) examines Paul's early missionary journeys in Acts 13–14, paying particular attention to the role of the Holy Spirit and the inclusion of Gentiles. His work offers valuable historical and theological insights into the beginnings of Paul's mission and highlights divine guidance as a key factor in missionary expansion. Nevertheless, the study gives minimal attention to the human structures that supported this mission, especially the role of collaborative relationships.

As a result, partnership appears only indirectly and is not treated as a central analytical category. Baker (2013) approaches Acts from a literary and theological perspective, focusing on how the narratives of Peter and Paul are constructed to shape early Christian identity. His work is useful for understanding how Luke presents Paul within the broader story of the Church. However, Baker's emphasis on narrative construction and identity formation means that relational dynamics such as partnership receive little sustained attention. The study helps readers understand how Paul is portrayed, but not necessarily how Paul functioned within networks of collaboration. Regev (2023) contributes to Pauline studies by exploring the theological and symbolic importance of Jerusalem in early Christianity. He argues that Jerusalem functioned as a centre of authority and identity, influencing Paul's mission and theology. While this perspective is important for understanding the broader framework within which Paul operated, it shifts attention away from interpersonal relationships and local missionary practice. Consequently, issues of partnership, teamwork, and relational collaboration remain underdeveloped in his analysis. Dörpinghaus (2024) represents a more recent methodological development through his application of Social Network Analysis (SNA) to the study of early Christian figures in Acts. His work demonstrates that relationships, connections, and networks are essential for understanding how the Christian message spread. This approach is particularly promising because it provides tools for analysing patterns of interaction, influence, and cooperation. However, Dörpinghaus applies this method primarily to figures other than Paul, leaving significant

room for a similar analysis focused specifically on Paul's missionary network and partnerships.

A careful consideration of these scholars reveals that, although partnership is frequently acknowledged, it is rarely treated as a central organising principle in Paul's missionary activity. Three major gaps emerge: First, there is a conceptual gap. Many studies mention co-workers and collaboration but do not define or develop "partnership" as a theological concept. Partnership is often treated as incidental rather than essential to mission. Second, there is a methodological gap. Existing studies tend to rely on descriptive or historical approaches without employing a clear analytical framework for examining relationships. The potential of approaches such as SNT has not been fully utilised in relation to Paul. Third, there is a textual gap. Some scholars focus on Acts, while others concentrate on Pauline epistles. Few studies integrate both sources in a systematic way to provide a comprehensive understanding of partnership across narrative and theological contexts. The present study seeks to address these gaps by offering a focused and integrated analysis of partnership in Paul's missionary journeys as recorded in Acts. It moves beyond simply identifying co-workers to examining the structure, function, and significance of these relationships. Furthermore, it combines a biblical-theological and historical-critical approach with insights from SNT to analyse relational dynamics more systematically. In doing so, the study argues that partnership was not merely a practical necessity but a deliberate theological and strategic framework that contributed significantly to the success of Paul's mission. This approach provides a more holistic understanding of early Christian mission and offers meaningful implications for contemporary church practice.

DISCUSSION

Conceptual framework

Concept of missionary

The concept of missionary has been widely defined within lexicographical, theological, and missiological scholarship. Hornby (2015) defines a missionary as a person who is sent to a foreign country to teach people about Christianity. This definition highlights two essential elements: sending and religious instruction. The emphasis on foreign context underscores cross-cultural engagement as central to missionary identity. However, the definition is somewhat narrow because it limits missionary activity primarily to teaching Christianity, whereas contemporary missiology includes social transformation and holistic ministry. According to Bosch (1991), mission is fundamentally participation in the *Missio Dei* the mission of God meaning that a missionary

is one who participates in God's redemptive activity in the world. This theological framing deepens the concept beyond geographical relocation and situates missionary identity within divine initiative rather than human enterprise. Bosch's perspective broadens the missionary vocation from mere preaching to participation in God's comprehensive salvific purpose.

Newbigin (1989) argues that a missionary is one who bears witness to the reign of God in contexts where the Gospel is not yet known or fully embodied. This definition shifts emphasis from institutional expansion to faithful witness. It implies that missionary work involves incarnational presence and cultural engagement rather than only proclamation. Ott, Strauss, and Tennent (2010) define a missionary as a cross-cultural messenger of the Gospel sent by the Church to make disciples and establish churches. Their definition integrates ecclesial authority, cross-cultural movement, evangelism, and church planting. This reflects the New Testament pattern seen in Pauline ministry and reinforces that missionary identity is accountable to the sending Church. Goheen (2011) describes missionaries as agents of God's kingdom who embody and proclaim the Gospel within diverse cultural settings. His emphasis on embodiment suggests that lifestyle and ethical witness are as crucial as verbal proclamation. This view corrects overly verbalistic understandings of mission. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001) emphasise that missionary activity arises from the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), describing missionaries as those commissioned to disciple all nations. This biblical grounding affirms that missionary identity is rooted in Christ's authority and mandate, thereby reinforcing theological legitimacy. Wright (2006) frames missionary vocation within the broader narrative of Scripture, arguing that God's people are called to participate in His mission to bless the nations.

In this light, a missionary is one consciously engaged in God's redemptive-historical purpose. This expands missionary identity beyond professional clergy to covenant participation. Bavinck (1960) defines a missionary as one who communicates the Gospel across cultural boundaries with the intention of planting indigenous churches. His stress on indigeneity is significant, as it guards against colonial patterns and promotes contextualisation. Piper (2010) asserts that missions exist because worship does not; therefore, a missionary is one who labours so that Christ may be worshipped among all peoples. This doxological definition reorients mission towards the glory of God as its ultimate aim rather than mere numerical growth. Finally, Walls (1996) explains that missionaries function as cross-cultural transmitters of the Christian faith who facilitate the translation of the Gospel into new cultural forms. His insight underscores the dynamic and adaptive character of missionary work throughout history. Collectively, these definitions demonstrate that a missionary is not merely a religious teacher but a divinely sent, ecclesially

accountable, cross-cultural witness who proclaims, embodies, and facilitates the establishment of God's kingdom purposes within diverse societies.

Partnership

Partnership is a vital concept in missionary work because it ensures collaboration, mutual support, and the pooling of spiritual gifts for effective ministry. Hornby (2015) defines partnership as the state of being a partner in business; in the missionary context, this means believers joining hands to spread the Gospel. This definition highlights the cooperative nature of ministry and aligns with Paul's practice of working closely with fellow Christians, showing that mission is not a solitary endeavour. Stott (1975) describes partnership as co-labouring in the vineyard of the Lord, which emphasises shared responsibility and reinforces the idea that the success of gospel work depends on collective effort rather than individual heroism. Bosch (1991) sees partnership as a dynamic and reciprocal relationship among Christians committed to a common mission; this underscores the necessity of trust, communication, and complementary roles in ministry, reflecting how Paul's partnerships with Barnabas and Silas were mutually strengthening. Goheen (2011) stresses that partnership entails joint engagement in God's mission where participants bring different gifts and callings; this explains why Paul intentionally selected partners who could contribute uniquely to evangelism, exemplifying strategic teamwork. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001) define partnership as joining hands to accomplish what one cannot do alone, particularly in cross-cultural evangelism; this highlights the practical necessity for partnerships during Paul's journeys across diverse Roman provinces. Newbigin (1989) observes that partnership reflects the body of Christ in action, modelling Christian community; this is significant because Paul's collaborations demonstrated the theological principle that the church functions best when believers work together.

Walls (1996) argues that mission partnerships provide accountability, support, and shared vision among missionaries; this explains how Paul avoided isolation and maintained direction in the face of persecution. Ott, Strauss, and Tennent (2010) define partnership as cooperative ministry with mutual trust, shared leadership, and common goals, emphasising structure and intentionality; this clarifies why Paul's partnerships were methodical and effective. Piper (2010) asserts that partnership multiplies evangelistic effectiveness by harnessing diverse gifts for a unified mission, which validates Paul's recruitment of different partners for teaching, preaching, and church planting. Wright (2006) describes partnership as strategic collaboration that enables sustainable church planting; this shows that Paul's missionary journeys were not only about preaching

but also about establishing lasting Christian communities through the combined efforts of his team. Collectively, these definitions demonstrate that partnership in mission is essential both practically and theologically, as evidenced by Apostle Paul's journeys, where collaboration with fellow believers facilitated extensive evangelism, strengthened church communities, and modelled the body of Christ in action.

Missionary Journeys

The concept of missionary journeys refers to purposeful, Spirit-led travels undertaken to proclaim the gospel, establish church communities, and nurture believers, and it has been defined and interpreted across disciplines. Hornby (2015) identifies missionary journeys as travels in which religious agents go to foreign lands to spread religious teachings, highlighting that such journeys involve intentional movement and spiritual communication; this underscores that missionary journeys are not aimless wandering but goal-driven endeavours foundational to apostolic ministry. Guijarro (2019) notes that the conventional classification of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts involves narrative construction that shapes how scholars and theologians understand these movements, reminding us those missionary journeys must be critically appraised rather than accepted as merely sequential itineraries. According to Collins (2024), general dictionary usage situates missionary journeys within the broader category of outreach travels, reinforcing the idea that travel and mission are inseparable in missionary identity and practice. Alawode (2025) frames Paul's missionary journeys as strategic mission expeditions combining proclamation, leadership formation, and cultural engagement, demonstrating that these journeys were not simply geographical but also sociological and ecclesiological in impact.

From a biblical theological perspective, missionary journeys fulfil the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20) by advancing the gospel across diverse cultural boundaries, revealing that such journeys are intrinsic to obedience and faithful apostolic witness. Wright (2006) elaborates that missionary journeys reflect the unfolding narrative of God's mission in Scripture, emphasising that these travels illustrate how divine purpose intersects with human agency in evangelistic expansion. Schnabel (2004) adds that missionary journeys in the New Testament manifested a pattern of establishing sustainable Christian communities, indicating that mission was both evangelistic and formative. In the Nigerian context, Nwokedi and Afunugo (2024) observe that Paul's missionary strategies expressed through his journeys serve as a paradigm for effective evangelisation, pastoral duties, and discipline, thereby illustrating that missionary journeys provide practical models for

contemporary church leadership and mission. This perspective shows that missionary journeys are not just historical narratives but also enduring frameworks for ministry and evangelistic praxis. Bevans and Schroeder (2004) describe missionary journeys as movements that integrate proclamation, presence, and service, which underscores the holistic nature of mission travel. Finally, the *Missio Dei* approach positions missionary journeys as participation in God's own mission, emphasising that these movements are divinely initiated and sustained. Collectively, these scholarly interpretations demonstrate that missionary journeys encompass geographical movement, theological purpose, strategic evangelism, and ecclesial establishment, making them essential both for understanding early Christian mission and for shaping contemporary models of evangelisation and pastoral ministry.

The Great Commission

A key issue to reflect on is the matter of the Great Commission. This Commission is a directive that the church cannot ignore but must carry out. Christ's last command to His followers was to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19; cf. Acts 1:8). Just as the Father sent Christ into the world, He in turn sent His disciples (John 20:21). The central responsibility of the disciples, and of the church itself, has always been to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to every part of the world. According to Ekpendu (2016), believers have been called out from the world only to be sent back into it with a specific mission and message. The duty to evangelize comes directly from the clear command of the Lord of the church, aiming to share a message that changes lives and leads people to live in line with Christ's character.

Ogunewu (2013) notes that the Book of Acts shows the apostles' passion for this mission, and the early church also played its part, spreading the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Likewise, the church in the 19th and 20th centuries showed strong zeal and focus on global evangelization, evident in the many independent missionary organizations that emerged then. Similarly, the 21st-century church continues this work. Numerous conferences on world evangelization have been organized recently, with declarations followed by practical steps that have taken the gospel into many nations. Various denominations have established Mission Boards and evangelistic teams that have achieved notable results. Bible Societies worldwide keep translating the Bible into local languages so people can access God's word. Millions who are not reached by resident missionaries still encounter the gospel through missionary radio, and almost every region and village is being touched in some way. It was this desire to obey the Great Commission that led Paul to collaborate with believers in the places he visited. This approach set him

apart among the apostles, and his missionary journeys resulted in the successful planting of Christian communities among the Gentiles.

Evangelism

Evangelization is central to Christianity, and the early believers understood this well, which is why they spread the gospel even at the cost of their lives. This is why people say the blood of Christian martyrs helped water the growth of the Church. Evangelization is recognized as the main way the church reproduces and grows; without it, expansion is not possible. According to Ogunewu (2013), evangelization, as a direct result of obeying the Great Commission, has been a core focus of the Church from the beginning. It remains a lasting duty for the church until the end of the age, and each generation has taken this responsibility seriously. Ogunewu's view holds true because, despite facing opposition, early Christians continued to preach the Gospel until many cities in the Roman Empire became Christian. It was also this same drive for evangelization that led European missionaries to leave their comfort at home and go to Africa—once called the "White man's grave"—to establish Christianity. Evangelization is therefore a key instrument for spreading Christianity. Christ wants His church to keep expanding. He expects it to grow both in number and in spiritual depth over time through the work of His disciples. The main means He has given for this growth is evangelization.

Evangelization is the process through which Christianity spreads and reaches more people across the earth. For the church to grow, it must make spreading the Gospel and making disciples of all nations its top priority. There is a general agreement within Christendom that evangelization is the church's most urgent and important task. Meeks (1985) argues that it is the duty of the whole church, and every believer is called to take part personally. It is not something to merely debate, but a command to be carried out. It is the church's primary and ongoing mission, and without it, the church has no reason to exist. The Christian community exists because of the Gospel. Its purpose is to proclaim and live out the Good News of Jesus and to see that Gospel fulfilled in the Kingdom of God (Knight and Murray, 2002). Evangelization is thus both the work and the legacy of the church. One explanation of what evangelization entails is given by Stott (1975) in the following words:

To evangelise is to spread the Good News that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe in him. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelisation, and so is that kind of dialogue whose

purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelisation itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelisation include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world (p. 4).

Similarly, Thompson (1968) defines evangelization as the proclamation of the gospel of Christ—crucified and risen, the sole redeemer of humanity—according to Scripture. Its aim is to persuade condemned and lost sinners to place their trust in God by receiving Christ as Savior through the Holy Spirit's power, and to serve Him as Lord in every area of life and within the fellowship of His Church, in anticipation of His return in glory. It is a declaration of everything central to Christ's work for and in people, and to the transforming experience that comes through personal faith in Him. According to Miller (1993), the English term evangelization comes from the Greek root *evangel*, which appears in the Bible as both a verb and a noun. The word has two parts: the root *angel*, referring to a message, a messenger, or the act of delivering a message; and the prefix *ev*, which conveys goodness and describes the nature of both the message and the messenger. Wenhain (1980) supports Miller, stating that evangelization derives from *Evangelion*, meaning "goodness," and from the verb *Evangelisomai*, meaning "to preach the good news." Evangelization is thus the presentation of the entire church to the entire world. Green (1990) explains that early Christian preaching did not focus mainly on religious duties, moral codes, or reform agendas, but on a person—Jesus, who was crucified and whom believers knew to be alive. In other words, evangelization is not about following a set of rules or an ideology, but about proclaiming Christ and His redemptive work to the world. The core purpose is to lead people to saving faith in Christ. It involves declaring the good news of salvation to men and women so they may turn to Christ and become part of His church. Sowale (2001) describes evangelization as proclaiming the good news of God's love revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is sharing the Lord Jesus Christ with the world. He adds that evangelization goes beyond preaching; it is about extending to others the rich grace of God that Christians have received. Evangelism is the "heartbeat" of God and the commission He gave to the church. To neglect, ignore, or reject this commission is outright disobedience to God's word. It is the urgent responsibility of the church and every believer. The consensus among these scholars is that evangelization is vital for the church's survival and for bringing lost souls to experience Christ's redemptive work

for their salvation. The Apostle Paul exemplified this through his missionary evangelistic work.

Theoretical framework

Social Network Theory

The SNT according to Granovetter (1973), Wasserman and Faust (1994) provide a strong lens for examining Paul's missionary journeys in the Acts of the Apostles. SNT asserts that the diffusion of information, influence, and behaviour occurs through networks of relationships. In Paul's case, his missionary success was not only due to his personal zeal but largely due to strategic partnerships and relational networks with co-workers like Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, and Aquila. Each of these individuals represents a node within a network, and their collaboration strengthened the effectiveness of the gospel message. Paul's partnerships illustrate the principles of SNT: strong ties (close companions who worked with him over long periods) ensured doctrinal consistency, mutual support, and pastoral oversight, while weak ties (connections with new converts, city officials, or local churches) enabled him to penetrate new communities and expand the reach of the gospel. By applying SNT to Paul's journeys, one can see that missionary success is relational and network-driven. Contemporary church leaders in Nigeria can learn from this model, recognizing that evangelization, church planting, and pastoral mentoring are more effective when implemented through collaborative networks rather than isolated efforts.

Paul's missionary journeys and partnership with fellow believers

Missionary activities and evangelism were the main focus of the early Church in fulfillment of the Great Commission Matt.28:19. Although at first, Christianity was restricted within Jewish territory, the Pentecost experience and the persecution by Jewish leaders to the early Church led to the spread of the gospel to some Gentile territories. The conversation of Saint (St.) Paul to Christianity was instrumental to the reaching of the gospel to many Gentile cities through missionary and evangelism. St. Paul was one of the most prominent men in the New Testament who engaged in missionary activities, his major missionary strategy was partnership with other believers in the faith. Paul's profile is presented in Acts of the Apostles and other books which he authored in the New Testament. The book of Acts of the Apostles presents to us the beginning of a movement called Christianity which is based on Christ. This religion is termed a missionary religion because all that revolves around it is mission. This mission is a mandate given to

all Christians in order to populate the kingdom of God which is its primary objective. Arbely (1945) agrees that the spread of the gospel message therefore is the responsibility of all Christian mission bodies, and the primary task for today's church is the propagation of the gospel message throughout the world. The book of (Matt 28:19-20) captures an important instruction which was given by Jesus Christ to his disciples and this is widely known as "The Great Commission". This came with the command of spurring Christians to reach out to the unreached.

Allen (1962) notes that the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters outline the missionary methods of the Apostle Paul, who labored more than his peers in planting churches through gospel preaching. Within roughly a decade (AD 47–57), Paul had successfully established churches across four provinces of the empire: Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. He recognized that mission lay at the core of the Lord Jesus Christ's purpose and was central to the Great Commission. With this conviction, Paul dedicated his life to planting and strengthening local churches throughout the Roman world. Brien (1995) argues that Paul's approach shifted according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He understood that a strategy effective at one time, in one place, or with one group could prove ineffective at another time, in another place, or with a different group. The missionary mandate which was given to us by Jesus Christ have been trivialize by our contemporary churches. The strategies adopted by St. Paul in his missionary and evangelism outreach were a veritable tool which aided Christianity to spread widely in the then Greco-Roman world. However, it is important to note that he did not do it alone, he joined hands with fellow believers to ensure that the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ reached every nook and cranny of the Greco-Roman world.

The first missionary journey of Apostle Paul (Acts 13-14) (Partnership with Barnabas)

It was the Holy Spirit who provided Apostle Paul with his first partner for his initial missionary journey. Acts 13:1-3 records that in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, including Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." After further fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them out. Paul and Barnabas traveled to Cyprus, where they preached the Gospel and brought many Gentiles to faith, including the provincial governor, Sergius Paulus. According to the Jesus Film Project (2019), when Elymas opposed the message, he was struck with blindness, and this convinced the people of the power in the name of Jesus Christ. From there they

went on to other locations such as Perga in Pamphylia, Iconium, and Antioch.

The second missionary journey of Apostle Paul (Acts 15:36-18:22) (Partnership with Silas)

This time Paul used his own hand to choose Silas as another partner. Jesus Film Project (2019) observed that this could be as a result of minor misunderstanding between him and Barnabas. They sailed to Asia Minor. At Lystra Paul forged a link with Timothy as partners in the Gospel. Jesus Film Project (2019) opines that Paul circumcised Timothy. Since Timothy was going to join Paul in his travels, it was necessary for Timothy's background not to be a distraction for the Jews. A lesson is drawn here; believers should help their fellows to do things that will be of benefit to them. From Lystra, Paul and his partner Silas came to Macedonia. At Macedonia, they cast out evil spirit from a slave girl this led them to be imprisoned. At midnight, they prayed and praised God. God opened the prison doors and loosed their chains. The prison guard looking after them thought that they have escaped and wanted to kill him. Paul and Silas stopped him, preached the Gospel to him; he received Christ and was baptized with his household. Paul also formed partnership with Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. They worked and preached the Gospel message together.

The third missionary journey of Apostle Paul (Acts 18:23-21:14)

According to the Jesus Film Project (2019), after spending a short time in Antioch, Paul set out again for Asia Minor. He began by encouraging the believers in Galatia against the Jewish brethren who were creating disputes over the law. He then returned to Ephesus. Upon arriving, Paul explained to the believers the distinction between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For the next three months he preached in the synagogue. When relations with the Jews became strained, Paul moved his teaching to a local lecture hall and remained in Ephesus for two years. Paul later traveled to Caesarea, where a prophet from Judea came and foretold that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem would arrest him and hand him over to the Gentiles. Those who heard this urged Paul not to return to Jerusalem, but he chose to follow what he believed was the Lord's will, and he and his companions headed back. Paul was arrested and taken to Rome. The Jesus Film Project (2019) states that Paul was executed by beheading under Nero between 64 and 65 CE. In total, his missionary journeys covered more than 10,000 miles over about nine years. His dedication to the gospel played a key role in spreading God's message throughout the Near East.

Summary of missionary journeys of Apostle Paul

Team work/ partnership evangelism

St. Paul made teamwork and partnership central to his evangelistic work. As a missionary, he did not intend to carry out God's mission alone but preferred to serve alongside others. His method was to bring both men and women into the work with him. Paul lived, traveled, and ministered with fellow believers, following Christ's model of team ministry, particularly in evangelism (Acts 9:28-30; 13:1-5, 13-16, 44-46; 14:1, 7, 20-21, 25; 17:1-15; 18:5-8). The overall picture is of a missionary surrounded by many co-workers. It was rare to see Paul ministering without companions. In concluding his study of Paul's life, Bruce (1977) stated that:

Paul has no place for the solitary life as an ideal; for all his apostolic energy he would have scouted the suggestion that he travels the fastest who travels alone. He emphasizes the fellowship, the togetherness, of Christians in worship and action; they are members one of another, and all together members of Christ (p. 458).

Paul's example shows that ministry was never meant to be carried out alone. Kingdom work is a shared responsibility. In recent times, Billy Graham stands out as one of the few evangelists who followed Paul's pattern. From the beginning of his ministry, Graham worked alongside other believers. These co-workers, with varied gifts and abilities, played a major role in the success of his church-planting efforts. Church planting should involve others as partners in the work. What biblical and practical reasons support using this kind of team approach in missions today? Murray (1998) notes that corporate witness reflects the goal itself—a unified community and fellowship of believers in local churches. Another factor is the greater credibility that comes when multiple people give witness. Additional reasons for team-based evangelism and church planting include sharing spiritual gifts, mutual encouragement among workers, accountability to one another, and greater effectiveness through having more people involved. Paul's practice illustrates that the work of the kingdom is collective. Why did he insist on working with a team? He understood that God's mission is carried out in and through His church, the body of Christ, which consists of many members who belong to one another (Rom. 12:3-4). The Spirit distributes gifts to each member as He wills (1 Cor. 12:11), and these gifts are meant to be used together and in a complementary way as a team. Grassi (1965) also points out that a team of apostles sent from the church serves as good representatives, allowing new believers to see the church functioning in action.

The Early Church itself followed the pattern set by Jesus Christ, its Lord. The Gospels clearly state that Christ sent out the disciples two by two (Mark 6:7; Luke

10:1). This practice continued after His departure. Peter and John were together at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1). They were also sent as representatives of the Jerusalem church to the Samaritan converts (Acts 8:14ff). When Peter visited Cornelius's house, he went with six other brothers (Acts 11:12). Working in teams appears to have been the standard. It is likely that Paul's commitment to teamwork came from this precedent, and it may have been common in the missionary efforts of Diaspora Judaism as well. From his time in Antioch in Syria until the end of his life, Paul's ministry was a shared one, built primarily on partnership and teamwork with other believers.

Conclusion

The church's mission is to bring people to Christ through the work of the Spirit, and every generation must submit its ecclesiastical traditions to the scrutiny of Christ's Spirit. This is done not by mechanically applying church growth techniques, but by obeying the direction of the sovereign Spirit of God, who is Lord over the Church. Schnabel (2008) argues that missionary work cannot be carried out haphazardly. Therefore, the church must continually renew its sense of diligence and commitment to this clear calling. As the body of Christ, we should rise to meet this responsibility. Just as Paul relied on teamwork and partnership in his missionary efforts, the contemporary church can learn from his example and remain focused on evangelism in obedience to the Great Commission.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study of Apostle Paul's missionary journeys in the Acts of the Apostles and the pivotal role of partnership in his evangelical success, several recommendations can be drawn for contemporary mission practice and church leadership. First, churches and mission organizations should prioritise team-based evangelism, recognising that collaborative efforts enhance outreach, accountability, and sustainability, just as Paul's partnerships with Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla, and Aquila strengthened the spread of the gospel. Second, contemporary missionaries should intentionally identify and mentor partners whose spiritual gifts and cultural competencies complement their own, ensuring diverse and adaptive approaches to evangelization. Third, church leadership training programmes should incorporate modules on collaborative ministry, teaching leaders to operate within relational networks that mirror the early Church's cooperative model. Fourth, mission strategies should be contextually sensitive and flexible, reflecting Paul's adaptive methods across different cities and cultural settings, thereby

avoiding rigid, one-size-fits-all approaches. Fifth, churches should emphasise the integration of prayer, fasting, and spiritual discernment in forming partnerships, acknowledging that strategic missionary collaboration is divinely guided rather than merely human planning. Sixth, mission boards and church planting initiatives in Nigeria and beyond should employ structured networks to connect missionaries, local churches, and community stakeholders, replicating the relational dynamics highlighted in SNT as evident in Paul's journeys. Seventh, gender-inclusive partnerships should be actively encouraged, following Paul's example of collaborating with women co-labourers like Priscilla, thus harnessing the full potential of all believers in ministry. Eighth, mission evaluation frameworks should measure not only numerical growth but also relational health, doctrinal fidelity, and resilience in adversity, reflecting the holistic outcomes of partnership-focused evangelism. Ninth, local churches should cultivate mentorship chains to train emerging leaders, ensuring continuity of mission and leadership development as demonstrated in Paul's ministry. Finally, there should be deliberate documentation and sharing of missionary experiences, successes, and lessons learned, fostering a culture of collective wisdom and strategic collaboration within the global Church.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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