

Sermon Notes for September 18th The Support of Gospel Preachers

The Jewish rabbis had a saying: “Whoever does not teach his son a trade is as if he brought him up to be a robber.”

Though Paul was educated as a scholar of Hebrew law under the celebrated Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), nevertheless, as a lad he had learned the trade of tent-maker. Accordingly, when Paul, on his second missionary journey, came to Corinth, the first thing he did was seek work to sustain his needs. He was able to connect with Aquila and Priscilla, who, having recently arrived from Rome, were of the same trade.

While Paul may have made tents during the week, or perhaps at night (cf. 1 Thess. 2:9), on the Sabbath day he went to the Jewish synagogue, there reasoning and attempting to persuade both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles who were attracted to the Hebrew religion) of the validity of Christianity.

In verse 5 of Acts 18, Luke records these interesting words: “But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ” (ASV).

The KJV suggests that Paul was “pressed in the Spirit,” but the better manuscript evidence has the term “word,” rather than “Spirit.” The question then is this: What is the meaning of the expression, “constrained by the word”?

The grammatical form of the verb “constrained” is an imperfect tense, middle voice. Thus, literally translated, the phrase suggests that Paul “started holding himself to the word” (cf. A.T. Robertson, *Greek Grammar*, p. 808). Some have suggested the meaning: “[Paul] was wholly absorbed in preaching” (Arndt & Gingrich, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 797). The common view is that the sense is: The apostle “restricted himself” to preaching, as opposed to continuing his involvement in the tent business. But how was he able to do this since other passages

make it clear that he was not financially supported by the church at Corinth? In fact, he refused such (2 Cor. 12:13).

The best answer is this: When Silas and Timothy joined Paul, they brought support from other congregations, so that the apostle would later say to the Corinthians:

“I robbed other churches, taking wages of them that I might minister unto you; and when I was present with you and was in want, I was not a burden on any man; for the brethren, when they came from Macedonia, supplied the measure of my want . . .” (2 Cor. 11:8-9).

“Robbed” is hyperbole (an idiomatic exaggeration for emphasis), suggesting that whereas the Corinthians should have been sustaining the missionary, others had to take up the slack. The apostle refused Corinthian support as a matter of expediency because of an anti-Paul element in that church.

And so, though the apostle supported himself for a while in Corinth, the time came when he had sufficient funds, and so could forego physical labor, and devote himself completely to preaching the gospel.

The Necessary Versus the Ideal

Over the centuries, there have been countless godly men who tirelessly have labored with their hands in order to support themselves so that they could proclaim the Word. Frequently, such has been absolutely necessary. Where would the church be today without such dedicated men? We all owe them a vast debt of gratitude.

Having said that, it must be conceded that **this is not the divine ideal**. The ideal is that God’s people should support financially those who utilize their time and energies in preaching the Holy Scriptures. Consider the following:

Jesus Sends Out the Seventy

When Jesus sent out the seventy disciples to proclaim the gospel, he admonished them to take no provisions; rather, they were to enjoy the hospitality of their students, the reason being, “the laborer is worthy of his hire” (Lk. 10:7).

Paul Instructs the Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 9, Paul argues at length that gospel preachers should be supported by those whom they teach.

- (1) Preachers have the “right” (*exousia* – “authority”) to be sustained in their work (v. 4);
- (2) The minister’s family has the “right” of support (v. 5);
- (3) The preacher has a “right” to forebear secular work (v. 6);
- (4) The minister should not be required to labor at his “own charges” (v. 7);
- (5) The Old Testament foreshadowed God’s “care” for his preachers (vv.8b,10,13);
- (6) Those who “sow” in the spiritual realm should be able to “reap” physical benefits (vv. 11-12);
- (7) The support of faithful gospel preachers is “ordained” of the Lord himself (v. 14).

“Communicate” with the Teacher All Good Things

Paul states that those who are “taught in the word” are required to “communicate” (*koinonia* – share) with their teacher all good things, i.e., they return material support for the spiritual support received (Gal. 6:6).

Producing “Fruit” in Their Account

The Philippian church was told that their support of Paul was not merely for his benefit; rather, his labor produced “fruit” that was deposited in their account (Phil. 4:17). The implication is clear — those who refuse to help sustain godly preachers are depriving themselves of spiritual resources.

Abuses

It certainly is not wrong, on occasion, to refuse “pay” for preaching.

Virtually every minister has done it from time to time. And any preacher who will preach only when he is paid is a hireling unworthy of the name. The truth is, though, churches can become spoiled and abusive.

Because he was wealthy, the great restoration leader, Alexander Campbell, would never take financial assistance for his preaching. While his intentions doubtless were noble, he did a disservice to poorer brethren who were not supported properly by churches that were swayed by the influence of Campbell's example.

I have never understood the mentality of certain brethren who think that preachers ought to be treated like the proverbial redheaded step child. God's ministers have as much right to wages commensurate with their abilities as anyone else. Do they have a right to insurance programs, and retirement? Why not? If the members are treated well by their employers, should we treat the Lord's messengers less responsibly?

Some preachers are pampered and unquestionably not worth what they make. On the other hand, there are others who simply are not treated fairly — consistent with the principle of the Golden Rule.

It is my judgment that when a congregation loves its preacher, and treats him with dignity and honor, he will repay them tenfold in dedication. On the other hand, a preacher should work so steadfastly that no one can call his dedication into question. His efforts should be such that the brethren could not afford to pay him by the hour!

What do we mean by "missions"?

The word "mission" comes from a Latin word that means "the act of sending." A "mission work" is a work that can be done by sending someone to accomplish the task.

Who is a missionary?

In one sense, all Christians are missionaries. All children of God are "sent" by Christ into the world with a mission to seek and to save

the lost. In a special sense, a missionary is a person sent to accomplish the mission of the church, which is two-fold — making and teaching disciples (Matt. 28:19-20).

What do we mean by “send”?

A congregation (or several congregations) sends a missionary. They enable him to accomplish the work by providing the necessary funds. First, financial support is necessary to care for the missionary’s family. Second, support may be needed to supplement his work with materials; transportation needs, meeting facilities, and other related expenses.

So what does this have to do with today’s topic?

- Today we are asking that we all communicate to the elders what we are willing to give/sacrifice in the support of David and Glenda Schmitt as they work in Lubbock to prepare for the ministry of God’s word so that the elders can move forward in the consideration of other plans and opportunities for the congregation.
- We have already made to commitment to the Schmitt family and it’s important that we keep this task prayerfully before us.
- Our giving is a very real and legitimate way for us to be faithful to our God in regards to the great commission.
- It is appropriate to support this family while they are in school preparing to do God’s work. This will help assure that God’s word is rightly divided, that it is preached.
- Education takes time and money. David and Glenda have committed the time but they can only do that as we work together to support them financially.
- Dan so often lamented that too many pulpits are empty; this is our opportunity to make sure that one more man is prepared to step behind the pulpit. We need to take the responsibility for the shortage of preachers by realizing that maybe, just maybe, we don’t do enough to encourage young men and their families to go into ministry. Our financial support takes that one more step by not just encouraging but creating a real opportunity.
- What a wonderful opportunity to model for our children how

important this is, how important this profession is. It's time to inspire, it's time to encourage, it's time to give for the future of preaching...