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01

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD?

One common justification for not supporting the Gospel is that so many ministers today are only in it for the money and many of them abuse ministry funds. But probably the most common justification advanced is that the Bible teaches offerings of any kind are optional and not a duty under the New Covenant.

Does the Bible really say that? Perhaps on the surface it does, but when we study the Word of God as we ought, we discover how erroneous such teaching really is.

The number of Scripture passages frequently misquoted are too numerous to mention them all, but one or two examples will suffice to prove our case. The first comes from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. We read:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

The Bible does clearly state that it is faith alone in the atonement of Jesus that grants us righteousness before God and not our good works. Yet other Biblical writers tell us what true faith is. The Apostle James writes:

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

(James 2:18-19)

The message here is clear. True and genuine faith will be accompanied by actions! But if there is mere talk and no fruit, then there is reason to doubt genuine regeneration. The Apostle John says just that:

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

(1John 3:17-19)

Notice also what Paul says elsewhere in the Book of Romans:

He condemned sin in the flesh so that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(Romans 8:3b-5)

God delivered us from the Law as a means of obtaining right-standing with Him not so that we could just live for ourselves and establish our own standards. He freed us so that we could be empowered by His Spirit from the inside to fulfil His Law, and to do so as a loving and grateful child and not as a slave.

To sum up, the Holy Spirit will never cause a person to be tight-fisted. One distinctive characteristic of His is generosity. When He is in control of a believer's life, He will make us a generous person like Jesus.

An Important Difference

Our final example comes from Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew:

Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.

(Matthew 10:8-9)

It is very surprising that anyone, even with a superficial knowledge of the Bible, would use this passage to support their argument against giving to God's work, because the very next sentence proves it to be false. Jesus continues:

Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for labourers deserve their food.

(Matthew 10:9-11)

The point the Lord wants to emphasize here is that the message and benefits of the Kingdom are not something that we should sell or commercialize. In other words, God's blessings should be given to everyone, and Church-doors open to them, whether they give an offering or not.

But this does not imply that ministers of the Gospel are not to accept or ask for financial support when needed. On the contrary, as we shall demonstrate in the next chapter, the New Testament clearly states that in the local Church, it is the duty of ministers to ask and the duty of church-members to respond, willingly and generously!

AN UNCHANGING PRINCIPLE

As we underlined previously, one reason some Christians give to justify not supporting their local Church, and even attending one, is the many abuses of ministry funds the Body of Christ has witnessed over the last few years, and how corrupt and greedy for material gain some leaders have become.

While we can all identify with that, it cannot change the Biblical Request that the local Church should provide a salary for the Pastor.

Perhaps the clearest and most careful exposition on the subject can be found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. In this Epistle, he also lists some important reasons WHY local Churches should pay for ministry. He asks the first logical question:

Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?

(1 Corinthians 9:7)

The first reason Paul gives here is that workers of every other profession make a living from their labour. This is a universally accepted principle, so why should Church work be any different? His second question reinforces the point:

Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop.

(1Corinthians 9:8-11)

This shows that it is very important to God to provide for His servants. In case you have missed the point, Paul is saying here that this line in the Old Testament was written exclusively for the benefit of the Church.

It would be cruel to make an ox work and not allow it to just bow its head down and eat a little along the way. How much more those who labour for the Kingdom? Paul uses this same illustration in his Letter to Timothy (*1Timothy 5:17-19*). The third important reason is as follows:

If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more?

(1Corinthians 9:11)

Here Paul is using a "how much more" argument. He is saying we are doing a work of greater importance; A work that will enrich you in every way and benefit you also eternally. It is also a work that requires so much more time, energy and responsibility than ordinary, secular work, together with much persecution!

There are numerous other passages in the New Testament that teach the same thing. In Galatians we read:

Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

(Galatians 6:6-7)

Paul goes on in chapter nine of Corinthians to list the last two reasons why the local Church must pay ministers:

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

(1Corinthians 9:13-15)

Here the Apostle is saying that this was a principle in the Old Testament, so why should it not be the same under the New Covenant of grace?

Under the Old Covenant a whole system of tithes and offerings was set up to benefit the Levites. This Tribe was to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel in the dividing of the Land. Their inheritance was the Lord Himself and they were supported by the sacrificial system, the offerings and tithes that people were required to give to God.

If the other tribes had failed to give as the Lord commanded in the Law of Moses, the Levites would not have been able to carry out their priestly duties. So Paul takes that principle and moves it over to the New Testament.

Finally, Paul gives his last reason – the Lord “commanded” it. This alone should settle the issue!!

Setting a Good Example

After establishing some very clear reasons to support his argument, Paul makes a very interesting statement. He says:

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this so that they may be applied in my case.

(1Corinthians 9:15-16)

He had said the same thing previously, elaborating on it a little:

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the Gospel of Christ.

(1Corinthians 9:12b-13)

Lest anyone accuse Paul of establishing rules to accommodate his own interests, he decides to deny himself these rights, doing manual work to support himself and his companions.

This self-sacrifice would bear powerful witness to the truth of the Gospel for fresh converts and even to unbelievers. They would know from Paul's example that financial gain was not the driving force behind his mission.

Better to Leave than Moan and Groan

Now what about those "ministers" who abuse ministry funds and do not feed the sheep as they should? The King will deal with them when He returns. In the meantime, Moses' advice is still valid. In Deuteronomy chapter twenty-six he warns not to sow our seed in "*any dead place.*" In other words, go elsewhere.

Consider It an Honour

I will finish this chapter with one last point worth considering. Some have asked why God does not provide supernaturally for His people in ministry, as He did with the loaves and fishes. Again, Paul gives us some insight:

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account.

(Philippians 4:17-18)

In the preceding verses, Paul had expressed his joy over the money he had received from the believers in this Church. But to avoid any misunderstanding, he gives the real reason why.

It is not because he is now complete, for he was content before he received their blessing. His real joy comes from knowing how much their providing for him will abound in blessings for themselves.

Those blessings he speaks of are many and diverse, but for sure the most important is the honour of being a co-worker with the Holy Spirit in the spread of the Gospel and of having Treasures stored up for you in Heaven.

03

WORTH MORE THAN ONE-TENTH?

Now that we have established the importance and duty of giving for the Kingdom, the question of how much to give arises. Young Christians often ask if there is a minimum amount mentioned in Scripture. Some Churches believe there is. They teach that God's Command in the Law of Moses to set aside the tithe to support ministers to be still in force today.

For the reader who is not familiar with the Bible, the Old Testament defines the tithe as a tenth of all legitimate financial income.

Under the Law of Moses paying tithes was not an option. After giving them, one could give additional offerings called the free-will offerings.

Contrary to this are Churches that teach the New Testament nowhere establishes a specific amount, or a law of setting aside the tithe, but leaves it up for each individual to decide.

And as you can imagine, each of these views puts forward Biblical evidence to support it. But what you would not imagine is that some Christians have actually fallen out over the issue.

I say this because when we consider why God established the paying of tithes in the first place, squabbling over whether or not a Christian should continue this Old Testament principle is, if I may say, without excuse!

As we stated in the previous chapter, tithes were designated primarily to finance the Kingdom of God on Earth, for Temple maintenance, and as a salary for the Levitical Priests.

But the second and more important reason tithing was established was to remind the people of God that He is the Source of all blessings and to be a way of honouring Him for all His bounty to us. Abraham and his sons tithed for this reason.

Now, all over the Bible we see contrasts being made between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant and how Christians have entered into much better blessings.

And the Apostle Peter reminds us of the price that was paid so that we could have them. He says that we were ransomed, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with precious blood.

The point is this: If God's people under the Law gave Him one-tenth of their income, and sometimes more, without considering it too much, could anyone under Grace give anything less, when he could give more, and still define himself a Christian?? Ten percent should be what he has left!!

Therefore, we must conclude that God's principle established in the Old Testament remains unchanged in the New: Generosity towards Him releases His blessing, stinginess does not! If you are still not convinced, consider the following New Testament Scripture verses:

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

(2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.

(Matthew 25:29-30)

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

(Galatians 6:7-9)

Give and it will be to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

(Luke 6:38-39)

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

(Hebrews 13:16-17)

So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

(Luke 14:33-34)

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity.

(2Corinthians 9:10-12)