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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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Paul's Right to Financial Support, and His Decision Not to Use It

1 Corinthians 9:1-15

The Abuse of Money by some in ministry

One of the most common accusations about pastors from people who don't usually go to church is that they are always asking for money! Well, I understand that. The stories of some of these famous false teachers with their private jets and their vast estates and their multi-million dollar book contracts is well-known and sickening.

I was watching a documentary on Kenneth Copeland, the father of much of the word of faith movement, the core of the prosperity gospel movement in the US... he lives on a waterfront estate outside Forth Worth, TX, valued at over \$6 million, and he flies a private jet—a Cessna Citation, with a pricetag at over \$20 million, the fastest private jet money can buy. It costs over \$1.1 million per year to operate.

So it may at some level feel awkward that this very morning, I am going to preach about money... and not just any topic, but five reasons why churches should pay their pastors! But all awkwardness aside, I trust the Word of God, and this is indeed the next text!

Ironically, while Paul does in fact give five reasons why those who minister the gospel should make their living from the gospel, Paul is actually citing the OPPOSITE example in himself—how he chose to give up what was rightfully his for the sake of the gospel.

This will be a lasting call to all of us to ask ourselves, what freedoms and rights and privileges are we willing to lay down for the cause of the gospel... the exact opposite of the prosperity gospel!

I. The Central Lesson: Laying Down Our Rights Out of Love for Others

A. Christianity is a Religion of Self-sacrifice

1. Christ taught the principle

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

2. Christ lived out the principle to the very end

Matthew 20:28 the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many

3. Christ commanded his followers to live out the principle every day

Mark 8:34-35 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself [daily] and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

In other words, it was by Christ not seeking to please himself and do what was in his own best interest that we sinners were atoned for with Christ's blood on the cross... and the Kingdom of Christ grows to the ends of the earth whenever his followers are willing to do the same... to deny themselves daily and do what is best for the glory of God and the good of others

B. Amazingly difficult for us sinners

1. From the moment we are born, we are fanatically committed to self interest... even a NEWBORN INFANT
2. Saint Augustine, in his masterpiece *Confessions*, talked about the sins he committed as a nursing infant

“Who reminds me of the sins of my infancy? ... Does not each little infant teach me what my own sins were when I was an infant? What then was my sin? Was it that I cried to be nursed? For if I would behave like that now for the food that is reasonable for my age, I would deserve to be scorned and rebuked by everyone around me. ... That proves those selfish angry ways were really sinful. I have seen and known even a baby jealous; that little baby could not speak, yet it turned pale and looked bitterly on its foster-brother when he was being fed. So infants seethe with sinful jealousy, though they are too weak to do anything about it.”

We can see plainly how fanatically committed to self-interest every single human being is, even from infancy!

Christianity calls on us to deny ourselves for the glory of God and the good of others... but our flesh fights it; we want to eat what we want, when we want it; we want to spend our money and our time as suits our tastes; we want to live as comfortable and pleasing a life as we can, and not be burdened with pain and sorrow if we can avoid it.

But such a mentality cannot build the Kingdom of God... it is essentially
SELFISH

C. The Context in 1 Corinthians: Chapters 8-10 address Meat Sacrificed to Idols

1. The topic basically goes on for three chapters...

a. It is opened up in 8:1 and continues through the end of chapter 10

- i) Paul came to Corinth and plainly taught them the doctrine of idols—that there is only one God, and that idols are nothing, and that meat is just meat; some grasped it more quickly and clearly than others
- ii) The more knowledgeable were prideful of their knowledge and flaunted their freedoms... they ate meat whenever and wherever they wanted, and they were damaging weaker Christians
- iii) When the weaker ones saw their more confident and knowledgeable brothers eating meat so freely, it threw them into a spiritual crisis... they would imitate their brothers in eating meat, but their consciences would be screaming at them that they were sinning
- iv) Paul's solution: teach the doctrinal principles that idols don't really exist as spiritual realities, and that meat is just meat; BUT ALSO command people who know these things to ALWAYS ACT IN LOVE toward weaker brothers

1 Corinthians 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

b. Paul is still discussing the topic to the end of chapter 10

1 Corinthians 10:24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others

Culminating in this grand lesson on eating meat:

1 Corinthians 10:31-33 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³² Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- ³³ even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

c. So chapter 9 is a part of the overall topic; not a parenthesis, but part of his case

- i) Chapter 9 is mostly Paul talking about his own life as an apostle and how he goes about his business
- ii) But if you see the overall flow, you will see that Paul is revealing how he personally lives out this principle of voluntarily giving up his rights to help other people spiritually... either by leading them to Christ or helping weak Christians to grow

iii) He gives up his preferences constantly for the sake of the gospel

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ... 22 I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel

The topic in the passage we are studying today must be seen in that light as well... it is an ILLUSTRATION of the principle

Paul had the right to financial support in the ministry of the Word... he establishes it with five clear reasons... and then says he chose to give up that right for the sake of the gospel

SO... that's the context... and the flow of the argument

HOWEVER... we should not miss the fact that these verses contain some of the clearest teaching in the New Testament on the responsibility Christians have to pay their pastors... to support them financially

II. The Right of Ministers to Financial Support (vs. 1-14)

A. Reason #1: Apostles Have Rights Too (vs. 1-6)

1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?

1. Basic argument... if ordinary Christians have freedoms and rights, why shouldn't apostles also have them?
2. Paul's apostolic credentials
 - a. He had seen Jesus our Lord
 - i) Acts 1: an Apostle must be an EYEWITNESS of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
 - ii) On the Road to Damascus, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Paul and called him into ministry
 - iii) Paul also had had various other visions of Christ, as he records in various places...
 - b. He had planted their church, leading many of them to Christ

1 Corinthians 4:15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

- c. So, their own memories of the power of his preaching and healing ministry among them should prove that he is an apostle
- d. AND as an apostle, he had the right of financial support from them... the right to be cared for physically while he ministered to them spiritually

1 Corinthians 9:3-5 This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. ⁴ Don't we have the right to food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?

- 3. Notice that Paul mentions the right he had to “take along a believing wife” (literally “to lead about a sister, a wife”)
 - a. Paul was single, perhaps a widower... but he lists other apostles and Peter (Cephas) as bringing their wives in the ministry
 - b. the church had the responsibility to care not only for him as an apostle, but also for his wife if he had one

4. vs. 6 “Or is it only I and Barnabas that must do manual labor?”

- a. Paul uses a little sarcasm here
- b. But he’s saying, “Do you really think I and Barnabas should be the only one of the leaders of the church who have to work with our own hands?”
- c. Usually travelling scholars and orators and professional philosophers in ancient Greece were well-paid for their intellectual contributions... Greeks were well-aware of this
- d. It was a surpassingly unusual thing for Paul to make tents with his own hands... but that is exactly what he did!
- e. SO as an apostle of Christ, he had every right to expect his basic physical needs to be met while he did the work of an apostle

B. Reason #2: Workers Get Paid in All Other Professions (vs. 7)

1 Corinthians 9:7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?

- 1. This is the usual custom for all other professions
- 2. Look at his rhetorical questions... all expecting a negative answer
 - a. “Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?” **NO ONE!**

- i) Soldiers don't have to get a night-time job to meet their expenses... their food, clothing, shelter are all provided for
 - ii) If soldiers were not paid, they would soon revolt
- b. "Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes?" **NO ONE!**
- i) We fully expect a hardworking farmer to be the first to receive a share of his own crops... after he has done the plowing, and sowing and tending of the crop all summer long, when harvest time comes, he should certainly be able to take as much of the harvest into his barn as he and his family need. No one would accuse him of stealing if he ate some grapes during the harvest!!!
- c. "Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?" Answer: **NO ONE**
- i) This is a **UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED PRINCIPLE**
 - ii) Why would church work be any different?
3. Does it not stand to reason that the same principle would be here?

1 Corinthians 9:11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?

- 4. Paul clearly thinks spiritual seed is worth far more than material things... it is a **HOW MUCH MORE** argument!
- 5. He makes the same argument when raising money from Gentile Christians for poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem

Romans 15:26-27 Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

So... ordinary workers expect to be paid... how much more those who work in the eternally rich harvest of the Word of God?

C. Reason #3: God's Law Teaches It (vs. 8-10)

1 Corinthians 9:8-10 Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.

1. Paul says that the Law of Moses gives clear indications of this as well... in Deuteronomy 25:4
 - a. In the Ancient Near East, farmers would thresh their grain by laying it on a threshing floor, and having an ox tread over it while dragging a threshing sled weighed down with stones
 - b. This would separate the wheat from the chaff
 - c. But in the process, it would have been cruelty for the beast of burden to be muzzled
2. Honestly, it's fascinating that Paul reaches for the law concerning muzzling an ox while it is treading out the grain... God's law says very directly that you should pay a worker promptly for his labors

Deuteronomy 24:15 Pay him his wages each day before sunset

3. Paul seems to say that God doesn't care about oxen at all...
 - a. Don't misunderstand... God cares very much for every animal and bird and fish that he has made
 - b. Psalm 104 makes it plain that God feeds every creature on planet earth

Psalm 104:27-28 These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. ²⁸ When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.

4. However, the principle is written in the Law of God ultimately to make certain that human workers are paid

D. The Consistent Religious Pattern (vs. 11-13)

1 Corinthians 9:11-13 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹²If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?

1. It is well-known that those serving God at the altar make their living from the sacrifices that the worshipers brought to the altar
2. A portion of the offering always went to the priest
3. Paul said that the Corinthians were already accustomed to paying other people for ministry... we don't know who this was, but it might have been the pattern

I mentioned of traveling philosophers before the gospel came to Corinth who would be paid for their speaking and wisdom; or it could refer to other church planters that came after Paul and Apollos... but again, Paul is using a HOW MUCH MORE argument; if they had the right of support, how much more do we?

4. And in the Old Testament, the priests who worked at the temple got their food from the offerings of the temple
5. In the Law of Moses, a whole system of tithes and offerings was set up to pay the priests for their spiritual labors on behalf of the people

Deuteronomy 18:1 The priests, who are Levites-- indeed the whole tribe of Levi-- are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall live on the offerings made to the LORD by fire, for that is their inheritance.

6. So also in the New Testament, Paul is arguing, that those who minister the gospel and teach it and shepherd Christ's flock are worthy of financial support from the church

E. The Lord Jesus Commands It (vs. 14)

1 Corinthians 9:14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

1. When Jesus sent the apostles out on their first missionary journey:

Matthew 10:9-11 Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; ¹⁰ take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. ¹¹ "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. ...

Matthew 10:41-42 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

2. Jesus Christ: "Those who preach the gospel should make their living from the gospel"

F. Other verses assert the same thing:

Galatians 6:6 Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For

the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

So Paul has clearly established that he had the right to financial support from the church...

III. Paul Voluntarily Gave Up His Rights (vs. 15)

1 Corinthians 9:15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me.

- A. Paul willingly laid down his rights
- B. This is the whole point of this elaborate illustration
- C. He is not making a pitch for them to give him money... that is the furthest thing from his reasoning!
- D. No... he is establishing that Christ calls on us to make sacrifices of our rights and our freedoms for the sake of the gospel
- E. More next week!

IV. Applications

- A. FBC has been faithful over the years... just need to continue!!
 - 1. The church and its non-paid elders have been faithful to find ways to support the paid elders well over the years
 - 2. Just like all other areas, the Lord wants us to continue to be faithful, to be certain that the paid ministers of the word have their needs met at a reasonable level
- B. Other Churches... on the Stingy Side
 - 1. I have heard from time to time how other churches over the years have been quite stingy with their pastors
 - a. Sometimes, the mentality is that the church does not want to tempt the pastor and his family with materialism
 - b. So, they want to help the pastor and his family to not be worldly
 - c. Perhaps this is a holdover from the old Roman Catholic days when monks would take vows not only of celibacy but also of poverty!
 - d. But isn't it more biblical and reasonable to pay the pastors a good salary for their labors, and trust that God will work in them to be good stewards of

the money; rather than forcing them toward a simple lifestyle by being stingy

- e. Also, the SBC started the Annuity program because many retired pastors had worked all their lives for churches that didn't sufficiently support them and they had NO RETIREMENT set aside... they were scandalously poor when they could no longer work! That is a great sin on the part of the local churches where they served

2. Another problem: "He who pays the piper calls the tune"

- a. An old saying that implies a level of power and control over the preacher and his message
- b. "We pay your salary... you work for us!"
- c. But that is completely false! A genuine man of God is a servant to the Word of God in his preaching ministry... not to the people who pay his salary. The genuine ministry of the Word is somewhat like a table-waiter at a five-star French restaurant in Paris; the chef is renowned around the world for his artistry in cooking and presenting the food on the plate... the waiter's only job is to deliver it safely to the people sitting at the tables; if the waiter is every caught rearranging the plate, the vegetables or the beef or the drizzle or the garnish or the potatoes... he will be immediately FIRED! The five-star cook's work cannot possibly be improved upon...
- d. So it is with an expository preacher... the chef is the Holy Spirit who has cooked the meal already in the perfect Scripture; it is the pastor's job to deliver it intact to the people...
- e. I MUST NOT rearrange the Word of God to suit any human audience; so FBC does not control the message, even though they pay my salary

C. Other Churches on the Prosperity Gospel Side

- 1. On the other hand, some churches lavishly support their pastors and their wives far beyond what most of the people in the church could afford because they have been taught false doctrine... that the serving the Lord means financial prosperity... HEALTH and WEALTH
- 2. So the pastors drive around in luxury cars and wear expensive clothes and live as wealthy men... and the people think that by giving to the "man of God" they will similarly be blessed
- 3. Paul is advocating that the church meet the basic needs of the pastor... he does not intend that the Word of God is a means to worldly wealth

D. Church Planting

1. Many church planting movements strongly advocate BI-VOCATIONAL pastors, because the funding is such a problem
2. They want RAPID SPREAD, and it takes too long to raise the funds for the pastor's financial needs; but I think this runs contrary to the clear teaching here
3. Paul was making a highly unusual point with his tentmaking... he was trying to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was not in it for the money... more on this next week
4. But new churches should be trained right away in these principles from 1 Corinthians 9:1-14... basic rule: ten families who tithe can support a pastor at their median income level

E. Give to the FBC Budget!!