

The Support of Gospel Preachers ***Scriptural Methods***

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Paul told the Corinthians, “*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*” (2 Cor. 4:3). They are lost because “*he that believeth not shall be damned,*” and “*faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Mk. 16:16; Rom. 10:17). People cannot be saved without faith, but “*how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*” (Rom. 10:14). Hence, the need to support the preaching of the soul-saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are times and places where people are particularly hungry and thirsty for the gospel. Saints who are aware of such situations will work diligently to do whatever is possible to get the gospel into the hands and hearts of these Truth seekers. There is in these situations, however, the potential for danger. Some are so zealous to get the gospel into the hands of those who seek it that they overlook the New Testament pattern that governs *how* this work is to be done. Christians certainly need to support the preaching of the gospel, at home and abroad, but we must be careful to follow the New Testament pattern for how this work is to be done. God has spoken on this matter, and all subjects addressed by God stand under the auspices of His divine authority and governance. In this realm great care must be given to respect God's authority in all that we believe, teach, and practice (Colossians 3:17).

Decades of disagreement have existed among God's people over methods of evangelism and evangelistic support. Those who take liberties with God's word (liberals) have never felt restrained by the New Testament pattern of evangelism. Increasingly, I am seeing preacher-support-strategies and efforts, even by *non-institutional* brethren, that are not authorized in Scripture. For example, the church where I preach recently received a request from an overseas preacher who raised and received thousands of

dollars per month for what he called *the preaching of the gospel*. The dollar amount seemed rather extravagant in comparison with what others of his region were living on, so we investigated further. It turned out that this preacher was raising excessive funds from churches and individuals in order to personally redistribute those funds to those gospel preachers whom he saw fit to support. He was no mere *messenger* or *handler* of those funds; he was the sole *arbiter* of the funds. He dispersed the funds as *he* saw fit, neither consulting nor informing the contributors. Many people would question the *wisdom* of such a practice, but there is more than this to question. The real question is where does New Testament *authority* exist for such a practice?

“Messengers” Not Managers

Churches may employ the use of individuals to deliver money and goods to those whom they help, but churches may not relinquish control and direction of the use of those monies and goods into the hands of those messengers. It appears that some do not see the difference between a “messenger” and a “manager” with respect to this spending. Epaphroditus served the Philippian church in carrying assistance to Paul from the Philippian church (Philippians 4:18; 2:25-30). He delivered to Paul what the Philippian church had sent. Though Epaphroditus is the one cited for having *delivered* the support, yet Paul credited the Philippian church as being the contributor and supporter (Phil. 2:30).

Paul told the Corinthians, “*And when I come, whomsoever you shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem*” (1 Corinthians 16:3). He later spoke of those who were “*chosen of the churches*” as “*messengers of the churches*” (2 Corinthians 8:19, 23). The New Testament rule is clear: Local churches selected *their own messengers* to deliver help to those whom they assisted. The contributing church thus retained its own autonomy in performing its own work (even when cooperating with other churches). The messenger's duty was to carry out the will of the church. He did not act unilaterally in spending the money or distributing the money merely as he saw fit. Paul's example shows that suggestions and recommendations may have been made by

the apostle (or by other reputable persons) (2 Cor. 8:6), but that is the extent of their involvement. Messengers do not make decisions for how churches use their funds.

“Results Oriented” Practices In Evangelism

Do people need to hear the gospel? Yes! Should we do all that we can to help people in all parts of the world to have an opportunity to hear the gospel? Absolutely! However, the need for people to hear the gospel is no greater than the need for people to respect the gospel pattern for how gospel preaching is to be supported. Both are equally important. *“Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all”* (Jas. 2:10). Good end results do not justify the methods used to accomplish them. Paul called it “slander” when some attributed to him an “ends justifies the means” approach to sin (Rom. 3:8). *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Prov. 14:12).

Church Support of Preachers

During the institutional controversy we opposed *World Radio*, the *Herald of Truth*, and the *Sponsoring Church Arrangement*, not merely on the basis of *what* they taught, but on the basis of *how they operated*. (If the methods used by these organizations are in themselves scriptural, then one could use them to teach the truth.) Our objection was, however, that these methods violated the New Testament pattern for the support of evangelism. We cited passages such as 2 Corinthians 11:8 and Philippians 4:14-18 to prove that New Testament churches supported preachers *directly*, not through some intermediate organization that had been established for that purpose. To the Corinthians, Paul said, *“I robbed other churches, taking wages of them to do you service.”* This same principle is seen in Philippians 4:14-18. The church at Philippi did not fund some intermediary or agency, whether one individual or many, enabling it to in turn fund gospel preachers. The church at Philippi selected its own messenger (Epaphroditus – Phil. 2:25,30; 4:18) and sent the funds directly to the preacher with the need. This is our pattern for church support of preachers. Please consider the following

simple observations from 2 Corinthians 11:8:

- 1. Paul took support from “churches.” Thus, it is scriptural for a preacher to receive support from more than one church at a time.**
- 2. Paul received wages from other churches in order to preach to the Corinthian church. Thus, it is scriptural for a preacher to receive support from one or more churches in order for him to preach to another church.**
- 3. Paul received “wages” from churches in order to preach somewhere else. Thus, it is scriptural for a church or churches to pay a preacher's “wages” in order for him to preach somewhere else.**
- 4. Paul received his own wages, not the wages of others. 2 Corinthians 11:8 does not permit a preacher to receive excess wages in order for him to arbitrarily provide the wages for other preachers. If preachers want to be supported by churches they should make their requests, and be paid directly by those churches. Local churches may use messengers for the purpose of delivering the funds, but those messengers do not decide the use of the funds. The contributing churches should determine *who* is to be supported and *how much* he will receive.**

Paul and Barnabas well illustrate this principle. Though Barnabas and Paul worked together in doing evangelistic work, the New Testament does not teach that they were supported as a unit. Some argue that Paul raised excess wages and supported Barnabas on their preaching journeys. However, no passage teaches such a thing. In fact, the New Testament teaches that Barnabas operated on the same principle as did Paul. Whatever support was provided to them by churches was given directly to each man. Someone may demand of me to prove this conclusion. Here are the facts:

1. Paul cited *Barnabas*, along with himself, as being qualified to receive full support from churches for gospel preaching (1 Cor. 9:6). Why did he cite Barnabas as his example if Barnabas operated under an entirely different principle of support? Verse 14 says, “*Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach*

the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” Paul teaches the right of preachers to receive their living from churches. Paul did not argue that the churches should over support him so that he could then support Barnabas or others! Both Paul and Barnabas operated by the same rule.

2. Philippians 4:15 and 2 Corinthians 11:8 show that churches directly supported the preacher in the field. Did this rule pertain only to the apostle Paul? Did it not also apply to Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke and others? If it can be shown that the rule contained in these verses did not apply to these other men as it did to Paul, then how could one prove that it applies to any of us today? And if it doesn't apply to us, then it doesn't apply against those who use the sponsoring church arrangement for the purpose of propagating the gospel! If we are wrong in our application of 2 Corinthians 11:8 in limiting methods of evangelistic support, then we would need to apologize, particularly to institutionalists, for we have cited 2 Corinthians 11:8 as condemning their use of what we have described as an “unscriptural” preaching “arrangement.” Of course, sponsoring church evangelism *does violate* 2 Corinthians 11:8, and is, therefore, an *unscriptural arrangement*. My purpose here is to make a plea for consistency in the application of the principle contained in 2 Corinthians 11:8.
3. Paul and Barnabas did not function **jointly**; they functioned **concurrently**. Joint action involves multiple participants acting together to accomplish some task. They *have* and *do* things *in common*. Chiefly, there must be common leadership and a common treasury. Responsibility is assumed *by the whole group*. Decisions are made *for the whole group*, and money is spent by *the whole group*. Liability is also shared by *the whole group*.

With *concurrent action*, all persons may be doing the same work, but each person retains his own personal autonomy, responsibility, accountability and liability. These are not shared by others with whom he may work. The principle of concurrent action is demonstrated by the John Mark incident of Acts 15:39-40. The nature of Paul and Barnabas' support allowed them to be able to have a “sharp contention” between them, separate from

one another, and both still be able to preach the gospel. This is true **concurrent** action. There were no organizational connections between them. There was no centralization of power and control. Each one made his own choices and decisions independently of the other.

The “A-P-P” Preaching Society

Some have attempted to defend the preaching society concept by citing Paul's affiliation with Aquila and Priscilla in the tent-making business and in the work of gospel teaching (Acts 18:3, 4, 26). They wildly extrapolate that these three individuals formed a preaching society that was funded from a common treasury, from proceeds of the tent-making business. Their theory is impossible to prove. Nothing can be found, either in Acts 18 or anywhere else in the Bible that suggests a pooling of business funds for the purpose of financing evangelistic endeavors. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. Immediately following the statement that Paul, Aquila and Priscilla were “*of the same occupation,*” Luke said that “*he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath...*” (Acts 18:4). The “he” was Paul. The passage teaches that Paul *worked* and that Paul *preached*. **Paul supported himself to preach.** He did the same thing at Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3:8). Acts 18 does not teach that Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla formed a preaching organization and funded it from business proceeds. Though it is not here stated or implied that they did so, Aquila and Priscilla could have supported Paul in his preaching work. This type of preacher support is approved in Galatians 6:6. What I contend to be unscriptural is the setting up of a preaching organization that collects funds from one group of people in order to fund preachers to preach the gospel to another group of people.

Conclusion

Supporters of religious teachers are responsible for how their money is being used. When one supports a teacher who does not bring the doctrine of Christ he becomes a *partaker* in that teacher's *evil deed* (2 John 10,11). Some believe that by funneling their money through some intermediate, third party person or

organization they can avoid this liability. Not so! There are no escape hatches from God's pattern. People must be careful about what they are financing. Herein lies the simplicity and beauty of God's word. If we follow the New Testament pattern, the one supported is directly answerable to those who support him. Personal autonomy is maintained by the supporter. This is true whether the preacher is supported by individuals (Galatians 6:6), or by churches (2 Cor. 11:8). Third party arrangements breed covetousness and corruption. His often deep pockets and ability to make unilateral decisions in dispersing funds makes the middle man more powerful and influential than God intended. He is elevated to a god status, being seen as the financial savior of the poor, the afflicted, and all aspiring preachers. The Bible way contains safeguards against these abuses. Let us avoid justifying practices on the basis of mere conjecture and contrivance. Let us follow the Bible pattern in our preaching, both in content and in method.

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