

Alarm to Carnal Christianity 4

The three previous issues of this paper have taken up the principal issues provoking the Corinthian letters. These issues were addressed with a phrase peculiar to the epistles to the Corinthians, "know ye not?". This phrase was employed by the Apostle as an imperative reminder of a truth well known. It was intended to awaken this church to the absurdity and unchristian character of its carnal conduct.

The tenth and final of these reminders is found in verse 13 of 1 Corinthians 9. The full context must be read to appreciate the force of the verse: *"Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."*

A superficial glance at this passage would guess that this is a reminder about ministerial support. But further and closer investigation reveals that this passage is loaded with insights to one of the biggest issues of the Corinthian's carnality. The real problem is not a lack of understanding the issues at stake in ministerial support. The real problem sticks out all over both letters to the church at Corinth. It is M-O-N-E-Y!! Money, the love of which is the root of all evil. Money, the gain of which is supposed by men of corrupt minds to be godliness. Money, the desire for which causes many to fall into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition (1 Timothy 6:5-9). Money, which Paul calls "your carnal things" to these carnal people. That is it. That is the whole thing in a nutshell. If you yet doubt it, then notice this: Large portions of two whole chapters in the first letter are devoted to money questions. 1 Corinthians 6:1-10, 1 Corinthians 9:1-18. Two whole chapters in the second letter deal with money problems, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Portions of chapter 11 (verses 7-12) also deal with financial matters. When you consider that no other book in the New Testament takes up more than a verse or two about money, then it becomes clear that this is a key issue in Corinthian carnality.

Consider now the connection:

Church members suing each other in civil courts. What is the squabble over? Money! It is possible that the defendant was charged with some offense or damages that did not monetarily profit him, but not likely. It is certain that he allowed the matter to be brought to court rather than settle out of court because he did not want to pay the *money* demanded by the plaintiff. It is also certain that what the plaintiff wanted and expected to get from the lawsuit was money. Money is all civil courts can award. Did he destroy or harm your property? Compensate in money. Were you bodily injured? Compensate in money. Were you maligned or inconvenienced? Compensate in money. Was a relative's life taken? Pay for it in money. Money will fix anything. It is the chief thing all carnal people want.

This is understandable in the world of lost people. All their hope is fixed in things of this life. Therefore the courts are jammed and backlogged with people suing each other for money. This country is overrun with hordes of lawyers, hungry and greedy as locusts, prodding and enticing people to sue somebody on any frivolous pretext, in hope of striking it rich.

But this sort of thing has no place in the thinking and behaviour of Christians. Our hope is not in the mammon of this life. Souls are more important than cash. Our riches in Christ have not been diminished when someone cheats us out of some currency. And rather than bring a reproach upon the church by the shameful spectacle of two Christians battling away at each other (lovingly?) before a court of unbelievers, we had rather be defrauded and let the loss go by the board. But not these carnal Corinthians. The church does not matter. Personal testimony does not matter. Offending a brother does not matter. The thing that matters is M-O-N-E-Y! They were not in court for righteousness' sake or justice, or for the glory of God. They were there for money.

Should a preacher be paid?

These carnal-minded people had two common misconceptions about a preacher's income. First, they thought his salary was an indicator of his ministerial worth. Second, they were not sure that paying him for his services did not make him an hireling.

The first of these misconceptions is taken up in 1 Corinthians 9:1-3. Paul had deliberately declined to receive support from the Corinthians, receiving rather the gifts of other churches, to cut off any criticism by these money-loving people. For this, they assumed that he was not a "real man of God". This is a common error that persists today. It is taken from the commercial world where a man's wages determine his social status, and is assumed to be an indicator of his worth. Thus, the big-shot preacher with the big annual take is touted to be a great man of God, while the sacrificial servant who exercises his gifts in and among poorer peoples and receives little for his labors is assumed to be inferior. (If he were not, would he not be able to get a position paying more money?)

The foolish wisdom of this world reasons that if you can buy a better automobile with more money, then you can buy a better doctor or teacher or judge or senator or preacher with more money. While doctors and teachers and judges and senators might be for sale, their higher price does not indicate superiority, but *inferiority*!! They do not want to serve; they want money. How much more true this must be about a preacher of the gospel. If he can be bought with money, it is certain that he has no message from God. That is why it is a good rule to ignore *any* preacher who comes with his hand out, regardless of the means by which he does it. Especially is this true if the cause for which he is pan-handling is *his* ministry or *his* personal support. There is not a single instance in the Bible of a man of God engaging in this sort of thing.

But carnal-minded Christendom will opt for the money-mad tyrant every time. Listen to Paul's lapse into sarcasm: "*For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you if a man take of you, if a man smite you on the face*" (2 Corinthians 11:19-20). That is why the vast majority of professing Christianity, like silly goats being led to the slaughter, clamor after the pompous pretending popes, the Robertses, the Robertsons, the Falwells, the Swaggarts, Humbards, Copelands, Hagins, Jim Joneses, and anyone else who will deceive, plunder and abuse them.

Paul rips apart this evaluation-by-pay principle in the first two verses in 1 Corinthians 9. A preacher's worth and validity is demonstrated, not in his pay, but his people. The Corinthians themselves were living testimonies to his apostleship. His apostleship to others might be denied, but it was unshakably established in the church at Corinth. They themselves were the seal of his ministry. A man's poverty or prosperity are zero indicators of his spirituality or ministry. That is testified in his fruit, not his paycheck.

The second above misconception is taken up in the following verses through verse 18. (If he is paid, is he not a hireling? Isn't he in it just for the money? Should we not withhold support to keep his motives pure?). Again, the manipulators of this old saw are still busy at it. "Keep the preacher poor and his wife barefoot and they will not get uppity and out of line. Wouldn't want them to get self-sufficient and independent. The needier they are, the more humble and trusting they will be." So goes the thinking of carnal-minded men. "Money, the abundance of it or the lack of it will fix anything. God does not have anything to do with a preacher's faithfulness. Money, the lack of it, does."

Paul unequivocally establishes the validity of ministerial support in the passage before us. He first takes up some basic economic principles.

1. Preachers eat (verse 4). From the appearance of some, they eat too much, but the fact remains, they are not exempt from the costs incurred by necessary food to hold the mortal frame together. Preacher wear clothes, live in houses (or some sort of shelter), and pay the same kind of bills everyone else does. "Living by faith" is not an exercise reserved for preachers alone. All the just live by faith, and this living by faith does not exclude the validity of receiving necessary income.
2. Preachers also have a right to a wife, and sometimes to employ others to help them (verse 5). More often than not, marriages result in children, which incur just as much expense, if not more, in a preacher's household as in anyone else's home.
3. Often a preacher's labors render it better for him to leave off secular labors which would normally produce the revenue for the above expenses (verse 6). Paul and Barnabas, as itinerant apostles, had this *right* to abandon secular employment.
4. Generally speaking, a person should eat of the field of his labors. The dirt farmer eats of what his land produces, or sells that produce in order to buy his food. The cattleman or shepherd either eats of the flock, or the earnings produced by that flock. Therefore, a preacher should eat of the flock he serves (verse 7).
5. A servant ought to be compensated for his labors *and* his expenses. A soldier is not expected to feed and clothes himself in the trenches. He has a legitimate right to expect equipment and food from the one for whom he fights (verse 7). Jesus, upon sending the twelve, told them to make no provisions for themselves, for "the workman is worthy of his meat." (Matthew 10:10). To the seventy, He said, "*in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give*" (Luke 10:7).

Now the Apostle tells us in 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, that God has ordained this economic principle in the ministry. As the Old Testament ministers of the altar ate of the altar, so the New Testament preachers of the gospel are to live of the gospel. Again, in Galatians 6:6, he that is instructed in the word is admonished to "communicate" (to give) to him who teaches in all good things.

There are some peculiarities of these principles as applied to the gospel ministry we would do well to take note of.

1. We ought to give only to those who *sow spiritual* things (verse 11). We should be careful that we do not give one dime to false prophets, money-grubbing religious promoters, religious entertainers or covetous hirelings. These are generally all of the same breed. A true prophet of God does not entertain. Therefore, you will *never* hear him in a religious television production. A true prophet of God trusts the Lord to move upon people's hearts to supply his need, so you will never read in his newsletter, or hear at the end of his broadcast, a pitch for money. A true servant of the Lord knows quite well that God sponsors what He initiates, so you will never hear him crying to you for money to get him out of a financial crunch so his "great ministry" can continue. A true prophet of God cannot be bought or hired. He is sold out to the Lord. Your offers may buy a Balaam, but not an Amos.
2. We should compensate those who minister to *us*. A person may report about his great ministry to others, but if he does not minister truly spiritual things to your heart, it is not likely he does to anyone else. And how irrational it would be to receive faithful services from one man, and send the bulk of your support to another who brings you nothing from the Lord.
3. A preacher should be compensated in proportion to his ministry. He should be paid in proportion to its quantity; that is, the time and volume spent. He should also be supported in respect to the quality of his ministry. (1 Timothy 5:17). There are occasions, to be sure, where a preacher's needs exceed the worth of both quantity and quality of his ministry. Such a preacher, if he is a faithful man of God, ought to be fully cared for, even if it is on the basis of almsgiving.
4. There are exceptions. A preacher may voluntarily exempt himself from that which is his right to receive (1 Corinthians 9:15, 18, 2 Corinthians 11:8). This is what Paul did at Corinth. He may do this by taking support from others, or he may do it by supporting himself by his own labors. In either case, the preacher is no less God's sanctified vessel for his freely bestowed labors.

5. One more peculiarity as pertains to ministerial support in view of labors bestowed must be kept in mind. In every other field, a laborer is hired to do a job, and he is obliged to his employer to serve him. Having then been served, the employer is obliged to pay the person his wages. He owes it to him.

This is not true in the gospel ministry. The preacher is not the servant of men, but the servant of God. He is obliged to serve no man (am I not free? 1 Corinthians 9:1). He is not an hireling. His services to men are a *free gift*. His is the prerogative to serve or not to serve. “*For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant to all*” (1 Corinthians 9:19). This is the only safe place for a preacher of the gospel. Money did not buy him, cannot hold him or turn him. It has absolutely nothing to do with his ministry. He is not “making a living preaching the gospel”. If he were, he would be up for sale to the highest bidder. He is freely exercising his gifts in the gospel ministry to the glory of God, and God, in turn, is seeing that his needs are met from the fields of his labour. The preacher’s debt is to God alone.

Likewise, the people to whom the preacher preaches are not indebted to him. They received nothing of the man of God that the man of God did not freely receive of God. And he received it only to give to them. Their debt, then, is not to the preacher, but to God. Therefore, that which they bestow upon the preacher in view of his ministry is not wages to a man they hired, but a free gift to God. So the principles of free grace, rather than legal obligation, reign in this aspect of the divine economy as well as in others. No one is hired, no one owes anyone anything but God: and we are all afforded the joy and delight of freely giving.

There are numerous other illustrations of the Corinthians’ love of money in these letters.

They were niggardly in their giving, even though they were evidently the most prosperous of churches at that time (1 Corinthians 13-14). I have noticed this trend through the years. Most Christian giving is done, not by the rich, but by the poor. And this is not because there are far ore poor Christians than rich ones. The poor ones give more, not only in proportion, but actually give larger sums individually than to wealthy ones. There are, to be sure, widely scattered exceptions where certain individual Christians, greatly blessed by the Lord with this world’s goods, give heartily out of their abundance. But the rule seems to be that poverty among Christians abounds to their liberality in this world’s goods (2 Corinthians 8:2).

They made promises (pledges?) which they were reluctant to keep (2 Corinthians 8:10-11, 9:3). The carnal mind may be quick to promise to part with his treasure in the future, but find it difficult to open his tight fist when the time comes to give.

They had to be exhorted, motivated to give (2 Corinthians 8:1-6), 2 Corinthians 9:4-9). This is probably the sorriest report of all on their behalf. It is noteworthy that the Apostle Paul was not raising support for his personal ministry, or even “mission support” or support for some “poor preacher”, but for poor and suffering saints. He is compelled to stoop to tactics he never used otherwise. He shames them by holding the poor Macedonian churches’ sacrificial giving up as an example. He exhorts them to get ready. He sends Titus and other brethren ahead of him to collect this bounty. All of this ought to be utterly unnecessary to a child of God whose riches are laid up in heaven. It need only be employed when covetousness and the love of money still have a grip and claim on men’s minds and hearts.

Covetousness is declared to be idolatry (Colossians 3:5), and among those things “*for the sake of which the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience*” (Colossians 3:6). If it provokes the wrath of God in the children of disobedience, can it be any less hateful in the blood-bought children of God? Could it even be there? Absolutely!! Not only can it be there, it often is. That is why we are admonished to mortify it (Colossians 3:5). It is included among those hateful “members which are upon the earth”. It flourishes in “remaining sin” in the believer’s flesh, and it is our duty to mortify it with all the other tattered remnants of the old man that yet cling to the believer’s life. God has given us resources in the Cross of Christ to render all this carnality up to death.

One other point deserves mention and needs to be kept in mind during this “mortification”. We who receive gospel ministry have spiritual things sown unto us, for which our preachers reap only carnal things of us (1 Corinthians 9:11). That has got to be the biggest bargain on earth. We receive incorruption and compensate for it with corruption. We get what we cannot lose, and in return give what we cannot keep. What foolishness! What insanity! What blindness it must be for a person to argue with an arrangement like that!

If that is not enough, think of this. God has promised a bountiful harvest for bountiful sowing (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). Carnal men have a cheap view of this passage. They tell us that the more money you give, the more money you get back. The more corruption you sow, the more corruption you get back. The more carnal things you sow, the more carnal stuff you get in return. That may motivate a carnal man, but it will do nothing for a Christian. That is not what the Lord promises. What He promises is this: The more of carnal, corrupt things you give away, the more bountifully you will reap of spiritual things! *That* is the promise that the Lord has affirmed. It is almost enough to make a man want to give away everything he has!

- C. M.