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Mobilizing Ministers

by Dan Trygg

“Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.’ God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sakes? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things among you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? ...Do you not know that the ones performing temple-services eat from the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” I Cor. 9:7-11,13,14

I mentioned this topic in passing in last week’s notes, so I thought it would be beneficial to write about the economics of God’s Kingdom strategy. **As we have so often seen, because we are two thousand years away from Bible times, misunderstandings and distorted teachings have crept into the church that have obscured the original plan of God.** Our entire approach for developing and supporting His work is different, and the wisdom of God’s strategy has been undercut to the point that it is all but lost. **We are into building edifices of lifeless stone and concrete** as sanctuaries (set-apart-places where God dwells) where people *gather* to worship God. **In the NT, the focus was on building up the sanctified people** (set-apart people) of God as living stones, people in whom God dwells, so that they could *go out* to reveal His excellencies to those who don’t know Him by their words and deeds (I Pet. 2:4-12; Eph. 2:19-22). **Our current model is dependent upon buildings**, at some level or another. Oftentimes, the majority of time, energy and money goes into constructing, beautifying and maintaining these structures, while *the people* remain spiritually immature and uncared for. **In God’s economy, the emphasis was upon building up the people.** There was *only one* building in the OT, the temple, and the NT makes *no* provision for religious buildings at all!! In fact, for the first three centuries of the Christian movement, believers met almost exclusively in homes or public places. Sometimes people would donate their home for a place to meet, but to *build* a place to meet or worship God was virtually unheard of. **The focus was exclusively on building the people up, and caring for their needs. Time, energy and money were invested in maturing the people.** As a result, *they* were filled with the Spirit and *their* radical witness caused the Church to multiply. In our minds today, a successful church is one that has large buildings with lots of people. **In the NT, a successful church met in homes, spread almost invisibly like leaven through neighborhoods**, communities and across international boundaries, fueled by the transformation of the lives of many individuals who were experiencing God. ***It was an unstoppable movement because it was invisible, because it had no recognizable buildings or centralized leadership, no administrative hub, no mailing list or membership role.*** It was simply people infected with joy, swept along by the inner transformation of life in the Spirit, motivated to seek God and live righteously, driven by love and zeal to serve others and reach out to *new* people.

This is not to say that there was no leadership, at all. There was, and it was of critical importance to the success of the movement. **In order to understand God’s leadership plan for the NT, we have to go back to see what God did in the OT.** We have to go back to grasp the mindset and worldview of *that* time, so we can clearly grasp what God was doing, and see how that would later be reflected in NT strategy.

A huge defect in our thinking is that we fail to clearly grasp the over-all picture of what God is attempting to do with His people. **In both the Old and New Testaments, God is attempting to call out a people for Himself, a people who would be willing to dedicate themselves to honoring and serving Him.** In the OT, He called Abraham out from a world full of idolatry. He promised to make a nation from him through which He could bring blessing to the entire world. In Abraham’s seed all the families on earth would be blessed. **God’s vision was to reach the world through Abraham.** In the NT, we find the fulfillment of this promise. **Through Abraham’s seed, Jesus, God provided a salvation that would forever change the world.** Jesus’ own marching orders to His apostles was to make disciples of *all nations*, teaching them to do all that He said (Matt.28:18-20). Again, the target is the *entire world*. **In both testaments, God refers to this called-out people as His kingdom**, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5,6; Rev. 5:9,10). **This kingdom is the reign and rule of God, the area where He is respected and His will is obeyed.** There are those who are in a covenant relationship with God, and those who are *not*. There are those who are in cooperation with God, those who honor and respect Him, and who abide by His wishes, ...and those who do *not*. **The scriptures reveal that there is a usurper, one who is called the “ruler of this world”** (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), “the god of this age” (II Cor. 4:4) and “the one ruling the authority of the air” (Eph. 2:2). He “deceives the whole

world” (Rev. 12:9) so that the entire world is under his influence (I Jn. 5:19). He initiated a conflict against God, and was thrown down to the earth, where he opposes the things of God (Rev. 12; Eph. 6:10-20). **It is God’s purpose to deliver us out from this dominion of darkness and transfer us to the kingdom of His beloved Son**, so that we might be delivered from the bondage of Satan to serve Christ in liberty (Col. 1:9-13; Gal. 5:1). **We are to oppose the usurper and call out others to serve God.**

Seeing ourselves as part of God’s larger kingdom, we can begin to appreciate that not all of us are called to do the same thing. *A kingdom, like a family or a business, is a cooperative enterprise with many interdependent roles and functions that are essential for the survival and prosperity of the whole.* Everyone is expected to participate, and everyone has something valuable to contribute. **As we discover our role, and faithfully carry out our responsibilities, the entire group benefits.** There is often a maturation and training process involved. Here, this entails developing a relationship with God, learning to walk in the Spirit, and carrying out the King’s will in accordance with the specific assignments He gives to me. **There are a wide variety of roles and career paths which fit into the kingdom. All of them can contribute to the well-being of the entire community**, if the people keep their priorities straight and are willing to work for the common good.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God called certain people to teach their fellow believers about God, ...about His word and His will..., and to continue to call others to the King’s service, to correct errors and champion obedience to the King.

In the OT, God set apart one of the twelve tribes of Israel for this purpose. They were not given land to farm, as other people were. **They were to not be involved in other work. They were to be devoted to studying and teaching the scriptures, helping in the worship and assisting in the temple.** They also served as scribes, judges and magistrates, to make sure the Law was correctly passed along and carried out. They were given cities to dwell in, scattered throughout the territories of the other tribes. They went about instructing their fellow Israelites in the things of God. **Virtually every king of that time also collected a tax or tribute from his citizens and underlords. This was commonly equivalent to a tenth (tithe) of the crops or the herds (I Sam. 8:11-17).** This was understood to be an act of submission and respect offered to the king, an appeal for protection and care. **God chose to collect a tithe from the Israelites, but designated the entire tithe to support the Levites, so that they could serve Him (Num. 18). Monetarily, then, one Levite would be supported for every ten households.** No tithe money was used for building or maintaining the temple. That was raised by voluntary gifts (Ex. 25:1-7; 35:4-29; I Chron. 29), and by a yearly temple-tax (Ex. 30:13; 38:26). **Unfortunately, many times the Jews abandoned paying the tithe, and the Levites had to do other things to survive (Neh. 13:10-12; Mal. 3:7-12).** During times of revival, however, the Israelites would quickly re-establish this practice (II Chron. 31:1-19; Neh. 10:37). Revival leaders understood that unless the people were taught the word of God, they would quickly go back to idolatry.

This OT practice provided a precedent for the support of NT teachers and missionaries. As you look at the passage at top of this study, you can see that **Paul argues for the financial support of those who preach and teach the gospel.** He uses seven illustrations from everyday life to establish his argument. (1.) A soldier does not serve in the army at his own expense. (2.) No one plants a vineyard, unless he expects to eat from its fruit. (3.) A shepherd does not tend sheep, unless he is able to partake of the milk of the flock. (4.) The OT Law says not to muzzle the ox, when it threshes. (5.) The plowman plows because he expects to benefit by partaking of the crops. (6.) A thresher works the harvest for a share of the crop. (7.) People serving in the temple (priests and Levites) eat out from the food in the temple. Then comes the conclusion, **“In this same manner, the Lord prescribed to the ones proclaiming the gospel to receive their living out from the gospel.”** Note the justification in verse 11, **“If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?”** The clear implication of this statement is that the spiritual benefit is of greater value than the material support. The word translated as “prescribed” is not the normal word for “command”. It is more along the lines of “He thoroughly arranged for”. It is clear from the context that **Paul felt that those who preach the gospel were “authorized” by Jesus to be supported.** The Greek word, *exousia*, which means “legal right, authority” occurs six times in this passage (vss. 4,5,6, 12 [2x],18). This adds additional weight to the argument that Jesus set things up so that gospel preachers and teachers should expect to be supported by those they teach. In fact, Paul says as much in Galatians 6:6, **“And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches” (cf. I Thess. 5:12,13).**

If we recognize the OT precedent as a foundation for the NT teaching and practice, then we see that **God expects us to give at a level that is at least equal to a tithe, and use it for the support of Christian workers. Can you imagine if we made it possible to release a full-time teacher, preacher or discipler for every ten families!?! The depth of care, training and discipling that could go on would produce a huge impact on personal maturity and church life. This would overflow in expressions of love, support and acts of service toward other believers and those outside. The kingdom of God would not only be clearly seen, but would powerfully advance against the opposition.**