

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 1, 2015

God's Strategy For 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

It has been over two thousand years since the Church was born at Pentecost. Misunderstandings and distorted teachings have crept into the church that *have obscured the original plan of God for reaching the world*. Our entire approach for developing and supporting ministry has changed. The wisdom of God's strategy has been 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, however, the focus was on building up the sanctified people (set-apart people) of God as living stones. They were to be a people in whom God dwells. They were to 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). Ministry was winning, equipping, activating and sending people out, not on gathering people into ever larger and larger buildings.**

Our current model has become dependent upon buildings. 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 the many individuals who were experiencing God. It was an unstoppable movement because it was invisible. 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.

We fail to clearly grasp the big picture of God's strategy for His people. **In both Old and New Testaments, God is attempting to call out a people for Himself, ...a people 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 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' marching orders to His apostles were 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*. The strategy involves a called-out, obedient *people*. **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, where He is respected and His will is obeyed.**

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 Him, ...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 both testaments, certain people were called to leave other jobs to serve God without the limitations and restraints of a typical career. **They could study more, dig deeper, share the word more broadly, and serve in different capacities, because they were freed up to do so.** Jesus and all of His apostles exemplify this calling to consecrated service. They were supported by contributions from God's people (Lk. 8:1-3).

In the OT, God set apart one of the twelve tribes of Israel for this purpose. The tribe of Levi was *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.* **In the societies of those days, a king would typically collect 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 employ this common custom to collect a tithe from the Israelites, as a sign that He was their King. He then chose to devote this entire tithe to support the Levites, so that they could be free to serve Him (Num. 18). Monetarily, then, one Levite would be supported for every ten households.** No tithe money was ever to be used for building or maintaining the temple. That money was raised by voluntary gifts (Ex. 25:1-7; 35:4-29; I Chron. 29), and by a small 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).

Jesus said that He did *not* come to *abolish* the Law and the prophets, but to *fulfill* them (Matt. 5:17-20). Without a doubt, there *has been* a change of Law that came with the New Covenant (Heb. 7:12). We are *not legalistically* bound to OT practices. However, if we recognize the OT precedent as a *foundation* for the NT teaching and practice, then I believe that, **in faith, we can freely 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!?!** It is estimated that the American church spends \$50-60 billion each year on buildings. If we got rid of our church buildings, and devoted those resources to supporting people in ministry, we could support 1,000,000 to 1,200,000 ministers, at a generous \$50,000 per year! Right now, there are just over 500,000 paid pastors in the US. We could *triple* that number, if we would simply return to the NT strategy of meeting in homes and using the money to release people into active service. Of course, **this still falls way short of God's actual plan of utilizing a tithe.** It is estimated that there are 117,538,000 households in the US. If they all would tithe, that would support the release of more than 11 million, 753 thousand full time Christian workers, *over 23 times as many as are in the ministry, right now!* **If there was a dedicated, committed full-time Christian worker set aside 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.**