

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Following the Lord's Direction

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.” 1 Corinthians 9:7-11,13,14

When we come to Christ, we begin a process of learning about God, about what it means to be a Christian, and what church is all about. We begin our journey with incomplete information, misperceptions, and a mixture of what we have learned from the world and the partial understanding we have gleaned about following Christ. Furthermore, most of us are introduced to a Christian subculture that existed before we came along, *...a subculture that is a mixture of Biblical truths and the traditions of human practice*. Most of us don't question these things. We just try to follow along with what others we trust have told us, or modeled for us. Of course, they, too had been introduced into a “way of doing church”, and many of them are continuing on with the traditions they received. **One of the goals of our spiritual growth is to renew our minds with the scriptures, so that we can more accurately understand what Jesus did for us, what God expects of us, and how He wants us to live, ...both as individuals and as a church community.** Sometimes, we discover that the Bible teaches us something that we had not realized before, and we need to make adjustments to follow Jesus more closely.

What am I talking about? We have neglected the plan of God to set apart and support workers for full-time ministry. We are often ignorant of God's plan, which He clearly and methodically set forth in scripture. Or, our priorities and expectations are different than what God has declared, and our traditions have obscured and blocked our minds from perceiving the truth. Somewhere along the way, we have *lost* our way. Our expectations, priorities and practices no longer reflect what God has laid out for us. **Because we do not clearly perceive God's purpose and plan, we do not clearly grasp our own role or place in His plan.** Instead of stepping up to the call of God, we succumb to the path of least resistance, or the priorities we see other people pursuing. *We are* neglecting the commandment of God, by holding to traditions that have originated with people. **As a result, we are *not* effectively fulfilling the Great Commission, as Jesus instructed us to do.**

First, we need to clearly understand that **God is the Creator and Owner of everything.** He made it all, and *it all belongs to Him.* **We are sojourners, stewards** who have been entrusted with what God Himself enables us to have (1 Chr. 29:11-16). **A steward is responsible to manage the resources entrusted to him or her in accordance with the wishes of the Master.** As stewards, we are answerable to Him for what we do with what He gives to us (1 Cor. 4:2).

Our God is a mighty King. When He redeemed a people for Himself, **it was His desire to designate one tribe out of the twelve tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi, to be dedicated to Him in a special way.** They were not given land to farm. They were to be set apart for the work of serving in the Tabernacle (and later, the Temple). They were to serve as scribes, teachers of the Law, judges and officials. They were given towns to live in that were scattered throughout the land, so that they could teach the Law to the peoples around them. **They were dedicated to full-time service. As King, God required a tithe (a “tenth”) to be given to Him from the people** (Lev. 27:30-32). This was a common practice at the time. This was seen as a tribute, as a sign that they were under the protection of, and in the service of the King. **God chose to use this tithe to support the Levites** (Num. 18:21-24). **This tithe was not to be used for anything else. It was used for the support of the full-time servants of God. 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; 1 Chron. 29), and by a small yearly temple-tax (Ex. 30:13; 38:26). **Unfortunately, many times in history 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 (2 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. Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. He expected that our righteousness would *surpass* that of the

scribes and Pharisees. What were *they* known for? They were meticulous at keeping the Law and their traditions. At one point, Jesus pointed out that they were known to tithe their mint, dill and cumin, but they overlooked the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faith. What was His comment on that? “These things you ought to have done *without neglecting the others*” (Matt. 23:23). By this statement, **Jesus acknowledged the principle of the tithe**. He Himself would have been at least a tither, and He expected that we would do follow His lead in this regard. I can’t imagine that Jesus would have been less than generous, ...and if we are going to have hearts like His, we must do the same.

He called His apostles to leave their jobs to follow and serve with Him (Matt. 4:18-21; 9:9), **and they were supported by the free-will offerings of others** (Lk. 8:1-3). **He also said that “the laborer is worthy of His wages”**, in the context of telling His disciples that they should expect people to support them in their ministry work (Lk. 10:7). The point of that statement was that they were not to be sheepish or embarrassed to accept support. We are not to beg, or be greedy, or manipulative, but support is appropriate and necessary if we are to get the job done! **Jesus’ example and teaching demonstrated that people ministering the word of God should be supported.**

In 1 Corinthians 9, **the apostle Paul argued for the financial support of those who preach and teach the gospel**. He used 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 directed to the ones proclaiming the gospel to receive their living out from the gospel.*”

This puts the primary responsibility on the shoulders of those who preach. Jesus’ counsel to us is that we *should* design our lives so that we are supported in the work we do for Christ. ***This is Christ’s direction to us, the ones preaching! Why does He need to say that? Because for many of us, it is difficult to ask or expect to be supported.*** It is easier for us to take matters into our own hands, and work to support ourselves. But for most of us, that choice compromises the ministry! It chokes off the number of hours we can serve. It ties up our time with other responsibilities than the work of the gospel. In 2 Timothy 2:4, Paul wrote, “No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him.” **Jesus is looking for those who are willing to leave the security and stability of other work so that they can have the freedom and flexibility to go places that they otherwise would not go, or devote time to things and people that they would not otherwise be able to do.** It is true that the apostles, Paul and Barnabas, made the choice to work, but they were single men. They could live on less, and could work into the night, if need be. Even then, when support was made available, Paul “devoted himself to the word” (Acts 18:5; cf. Phil. 4:14-16). They were trying to build *a ministry*, not *a business*!

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 (cf. Rom. 15:27). The word translated as “directed” 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 **the Lord set things up so that gospel preachers and teachers should expect to be supported by those they teach.** *This was Jesus’ plan!* In fact, Paul says as much in Galatians 6:6, “**And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches**” (cf. I Thess. 5:12,13). The very next verse says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a person sows, this he will also reap.” This verse is in the context of supporting workers in ministry! **This puts responsibility on us as givers and supporters.** If we are going to be faithful to Christ, then we are going to want to be supporting His plan for getting workers out into the harvest (Matt. 9:37,38).

An army is only as good as its supply line. **The logistical genius of God’s plan is that, if His people would implement His instructions, they could free up one full-time Christian worker for every ten families!** Can you imagine what would happen if we actually *did* that? What if we had a pastor or full-time ministry worker for every ten families? Unfortunately, what has often happened is that preachers and teachers are not clearly perceiving and teaching the plan that God has so carefully laid out for our instruction in His word. Or, we have misused the funds that have been given for other things, notably building expenses. And, as supporters, many of us do not see how strategic our giving could be, and we have misused the resources that God has given us for other things. The Great Commission will be completed by the investment of hours of labor, ...time spent with people, ...bringing the gospel into the lives of others. **Jesus said it, “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few”. We can ask God to send them, but He is going to ask us to do our part to free them up to go, and to enable them to do the work.**