

NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT
FOR THE CHRISTIAN WORKER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		
	I. INTRODUCTION	3
	The Need for the Study	
	Assumptions for the Study	
	Arrangement of the Study	
	II. NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT . . . 5	
	The Basis of Support for the Christian Worker	
	The Qualifications of the Worker Who is Supported	
	The Attitudes of the Worker Regarding Support	
	The Procedures of the Worker Regarding Support	
	III. MODERN APPLICATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF SUPPORT	22
	The Issue of Making One's Needs Known	
	The Issue of Receiving a fixed Salary	
	The Need for Teaching on Biblical Giving Today	
	IV. CONCLUSION	32
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	34

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Need for the Study

One of the first and most important issues facing a person entering so-called “full-time” Christian work is the question of financial support. Whether he is a seminary graduate entering a pastorate with a monthly salary of a person joining a missionary or evangelistic organization which requires him to raise his own support, the issue must be faced. It is an obviously crucial and key factor in Christian service, and one of inherent practical significance.

The financial practices of Christian leaders have provided ammunition for the world’s skeptics down through the centuries. It is an area which can be either an impressive testimony or a sorrowful indictment of a man’s ministry. Therefore, the Christian worker must be thoroughly informed concerning the New Testament principles of financial support. He cannot afford to follow the example of the world nor the tradition of the church. He must have the biblical perspective clearly in mind in order to avoid the snares of the devil in this most important area.

Since the subject of financial support for the Christian worker is such a foundational issue, it is surprising that there is not an abundance of literature dealing with the subject from a New Testament perspective. However, this seems to be the case. Researching for this paper consisted of digging out a short comment here, a paragraph there, and a few short articles on the subject. There are also a few men of noteworthy example in this area, such as George Müller and J. Hudson Taylor. Most of the books dealing with church finance, however, seem to discuss matters of financial support without questioning current practices in light of biblical precepts and examples. Twentieth century evangelical Christianity generally seems to operate financially either upon the basis of custom or pragmatism.

Thus because the area of financial support is so crucial to the Christian worker and because there has been a general neglect of the biblical approach to this area, there is a need for this current study on New Testament principles of financial support for the Christian worker.

Assumptions for the Study

The central assumption for this study is that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God and that it thus speaks authoritatively on the issue of financial support. A corollary assumption is that the Bible is inspired concerning what it does not say as well as concerning what it does say. In other words, the Bible is sufficient for the Christian. A seeming silence on a particular subject is not a mistake, especially if the subject is an important one. Since God has faithfully communicated to the believer all that is necessary concerning life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), a seeming silence on an area of importance must in itself be intended to communicate something to the believer.

A further assumption, stemming from the above assumptions, is that the Bible is the believer's rule for faith and for practice. This means that the examples of Scripture as well as the precepts of Scripture must be sought to be followed, especially when the examples reflect underlying principles of faith. This is especially applicable to the subject of financial support.

It should also be pointed out that the term "Christian worker" is used in this thesis to refer to any person engaged in the Christian ministry, whether a pastor, a professor at a Christian school, a missionary or evangelist, or any other type of worker, whether in the United States or in a foreign country. The principles discussed herein should be equally binding upon all Christian workers, no matter where their geographic sphere of labor may be.

Arrangement of the Study

The major body of this study will be an examination of the New Testament passages pertaining to the area of financial support for the Christian worker. These passages have been organized in the second chapter under four headings: the basis of support for the Christian worker; the qualifications of the worker who is supported; the attitudes of the worker regarding support; and, the procedures of the worker regarding support. These areas are interrelated and build upon one another: The procedures of the worker stem from the qualifications of the worker, which rest upon the basis of support for the worker.

Most of the issues discussed in the second chapter have obvious, direct application to the twentieth century and will not be discussed further. Certain issues, however, raise special problems for today and need to be singled out for further treatment. This is done in the third chapter, which deals with modern applications of the New Testament principles of financial support under three headings: the issue of making one's needs known, the issue of receiving a fixed salary, and the need for teaching on biblical giving today.

A final chapter will sum up the conclusions of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The Basis of Support for the Christian Worker

The normal basis of support

The normal basis of support for the Christian worker is the teaching that the laborer is worthy of his hire. The Lord taught this in the sending out of the twelve (Matt. 10:10) and the seventy (Luke 10:7). Paul builds upon the Lord's teaching in 1 Corinthians 9:6-14, where he gives four main arguments to support his claim that the one who works in the Gospel should be supported by the Gospel.

First, the example of the world shows that men receive pay for their labor. In verse seven Paul states, "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?"¹

Second, the Law of Moses teaches that the one who works in spiritual ministry should receive material rewards for his labor. Paul states (verses 8-11),

I am not speaking these things according to human judgement, 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 sake? 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 in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?

¹ All Biblical references are from the New American Standard Bible (La Habra, California: Foundation Press Publications, 1971).

Third, the example of the Old Testament priests and Levites argues that the one who works in spiritual ministry should be supported in his labors. In verse thirteen Paul states, “Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar?”

Fourth, the Lord Jesus Himself taught that a worker in the Gospel should be supported. In verse fourteen he states, “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” Concerning this passage, Ironside states, “The apostle here shows that it is quite right and proper that the Lord’s servants should be supported by the Church of God.”² Paul repeats this same idea in an exhortation to the Galatians (Gal. 6:6) and in his instructions to Timothy regarding local church elders (1 Tim. 5:17-18). This constitutes the normal basis of support for the Christian worker.

The exception to the normal basis of support

While it is the normal right of the worker in the Gospel to be supported by the Gospel, there is an exception to this right. There are certain times at which a worker may have to support himself by means of a “secular” job while continuing to work in the Gospel. Ironside states, “The divine method is that the gospel of God should be supported by the people of God who give out of love for Christ, and when a servant of Christ under certain circumstances is not thus properly supported, he should not be above working with his own hands while he continues to minister the gospel as occasion presents itself.”³ There were two reasons why Paul followed the exception and supported himself at times: he lacked funds for the work; and, he desired that the ministry not be discredited.

Acts 18:1-4 states that Paul went to Corinth and began making tents with Aquila and Priscilla. At the same time he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath. Verse five states, “But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.” When this passage is compared with 2 Corinthians 11:8-9, it can be seen that Paul went to work making tents because he lacked funds for the work of the ministry: “I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone, for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.” As soon as Paul received the funds from the Macedonians through Silas and Timothy, he stopped making tents and devoted himself completely to the ministry.

The second reason that Paul followed the exception to the normal basis of support is that he did not want to do anything that would discredit the ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9:12 he states, “Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.” Paul

² H. A. Ironside, Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, n.d.), p. 253.

³ Ibid.

refused to take any money from those to whom he was ministering at that particular time so that he could not be accused of teaching and preaching for the sake of monetary gain. Roland Allen notes,

In his first contact with strangers and in his dealings with the Church he was careful to avoid any appearance of money making. Amongst the heathen there was a large class of teachers who wandered from town to town collecting money from those who attended their lectures. There was also a large class of people who wandered about as mystery-mongers, exhibiting their shows and collecting money from those who attended them. For these men philosophy and religion was a trade. St. Paul would not be accounted as one of them. He refused to receive anything from those who listened to him.⁴

Paul's refusal to accept support from those to whom he was currently ministering can also be seen in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:34-35) and in his Thessalonian letters (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10). In order to set the example for his converts and to prevent anyone from questioning his motives, Paul refused support from the churches to whom he was ministering, although it was his right to accept it.

Thus the normal basis of support from the Christian worker is the teaching that the laborer is worthy of his hire. But because of either a lack of funds or a possibility of discrediting the ministry through receiving support, a worker may follow the exception to the normal basis of support and engage in a secular occupation in order to support himself in the ministry.

The Qualifications of the Worker Who is Supported

A life of faith

The central qualification for the Christian worker who is supported is a life of implicit faith and dependence upon God. The life of faith with regard to finances was taught by the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:19-34). The Lord sums up His teaching in verses 31-33:

“Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or, ‘What shall we drink?’ or, ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”

⁴ Roland Allen, Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or Ours? London: World Dominion Press, 1956), p. 67.

A worker's attitude toward finances always will be bound up with his measure of faith; the two are inseparable. Watchman Nee states,

If a man can trust God, let him go and work for Him. If not, let him stay at home, for he lacks the first qualification for the work. . . . Utter dependence on God is necessary if the work is to be according to His will; therefore God wishes His workers to be cast on Him alone for financial supplies, so that they cannot but walk in close communion with Him and learn to trust Him continually. The more an attitude of trustful dependence on God is cultivated, the more spiritual the work will be. So it is clear that the nature of the work and the source of its supply are closely related.⁵

Thus a life of faith is the most important qualification for the worker who is to depend upon God for support. The area of finances is the testing ground of faith.

A life of prayer

A corollary qualification to the life of faith is a life of prayer. This is obvious and needs only to be mentioned. Just prior to discussing the subject of finances, Paul states, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). The man of faith will depend upon no one but God, and thus he must take his needs to God in prayer in order to receive back from God his daily bread (Luke 11:1-13).

Called and sent out by God

The third qualification for the Christian worker who is supported is that he is called and sent out by God. It would be presumptuous for a man to go out and expect God to support him if God had not first called him to the work and then sent him out. Paul was commanded of God to go to the Gentiles in Acts 9; but he did not go out until the Holy Spirit called him in Acts 13. When he and Barnabas were sent out, there is no mention of finances. They do not first solicit funds from churches in the area or arrange pledges from people for their support. The Holy Spirit has not furnished a record of how they were supported on this first missionary journey. All that is recorded is that He directed them to be set apart for the work to which he previously had called them. "Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:3). Nee states, "The whole question hinges here, has God called us and sent us out? If the call and the commission have come from Him, then He must and surely will be responsible for all that our obedience to Him involves."⁶

⁵ Watchman Nee, The Normal Christian Church Life (Washington, D.C.: International Students Press, 1962), p. 98.

⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

Thus the central qualification for the worker who is supported by the gospel is a life of implicit faith in God to supply all of his material needs. A corollary to this is the qualification of a life of prayer. A third qualification is that the man has been called and sent out by God to the work of the ministry.

The Attitudes of the Worker Regarding Support

The New Testament reveals certain attitudes regarding financial support which are to characterize the individual engaged in Christian work. These attitudes are specific extensions which result from the qualifications of faith, prayer, and God's calling and sending discussed above.

An attitude of submission to God's sovereignty

The worker in the gospel must have an attitude of submission to the sovereignty of God, especially as it relates to financial supply. He must recognize that financial circumstances are sovereignly controlled by God. This submission to God's sovereignty in money matters is a direct result of a life of faith and also relates to the issue of making one's needs known (to be discussed later).

Paul exemplifies this attitude of submission and faith. In Philippians 4:11-12 he says:

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned to secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

When his financial supplies ran low, Paul did not decide that it was his responsibility to go out and raise support. He did not decide that God's sovereignty had run out and now it was time for action on his own part. Rather, he simply learned to do without when God saw fit to withhold supplies.

This submission to the sovereignty of God in financial matters allows Him to direct His work. If God wants the work to go forward, then He must provide the supplies. If, on the other hand, He wants to curtail the expansion of the work for a time and teach His servants some lessons in dependence upon Him, He is free to do so. Concerning this direction of God, Nee says,

In His own work God must have the sole direction. That is why He wishes us to depend on no human source for financial supplies. Many of us have experienced how again and again God has controlled us through money matters. When we have been in the center of His will, supplies have been sure, but as soon as we have been out of vital touch with Him, they have been uncertain. At times we have fancied God would have us to do a certain thing, but He has showed us it was not His will by

withholding financial supplies. So we have been under the constant direction of the Lord, and such direction is most precious.⁷

Alexander Hay also substantiates this point from his experience:

Sometimes we have desired to do things that God did not provide for. In such cases we have often found later that there was a good reason for the withholding of the supply. Our desire had not been God's will.⁸

Thus the first attitude concerning financial support which must characterize the worker is one of submission to the sovereignty of God, thus allowing God to use money matters to direct His servants in His work.

An attitude of seeking God, not gifts

The worker must also be characterized by an attitude of seeking God, not gifts. This attitude is also closely related to a life of faith and to an attitude of submission to God's sovereignty in money matters. The worker who seeks after God will be free from the love of money and from the anxiety of one who seeks after money. As the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 6 (quoted earlier), the world is characterized by an attitude of seeking after material provisions, but the disciple is to be characterized by seeking after the kingdom and righteousness of God, leaving financial worries to Him.

This attitude of seeking after God must be a settled decision with a man who desires to serve the Lord. He must determine that he is not going to seek after money nor be influenced by financial considerations in his ministry. Paul wrote to Timothy:

And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction (1 Tim. 6:8-9).

Thus a man must determine that he will not allow the prospect of better pay to influence his decision to a sphere of ministry. Nee says, "Let us honestly engage in some secular pursuit if we want to study our personal advantage; but if we want to serve the Lord, let us have it settled forever that our concern is the furtherance of the gospel, not our own advancement."⁹ This attitude of seeking after the Lord and not seeking after financial gain is essential for the Christian worker.

An attitude free from greed

⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

⁸ Alexander Hay, *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary* (3rd ed.; Temperly, Argentina: New Testament Missionary Union, n.d.), p. 509.

⁹ Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Worker* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Church Bookroom, Ltd., 1965), p. 113.

The Christian worker must be free from greed or covetousness. This attitude is an extension of the negative side of the previous attitude. The Scriptures often connect greed with immorality, and both are condemned as characteristic of the world (Eph. 4:19; 5:3). Paul, on the other hand, did everything within his power to demonstrate to his converts that he was not interested in them for the sake of money. He said to the Thessalonians, “For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness” (1 Thess. 2:5). Rather, he labored night and day and paid for his keep so that they might see his pure motive and follow his example (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

There always have been and always will be men who are in religion to make money. Paul warned Titus of such men, who were “teaching things they should not *teach*, for the sake of sordid gain” (Titus 1:11). Peter warned of false prophets who “in their greed . . . will exploit you” (2 Pet. 2:3). He says further that these men have hearts “trained in greed” and that they follow in “the way of Balaam, . . . who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:14, 15). If a man’s attitude is not completely free from greed and covetousness in the ministry, he will not be able to determine the true leading of the Lord, but will be led astray even as was Balaam.

An attitude of freedom from worldly entanglements

The Christian worker must be free from worldly entanglements. This would involve business deals with unbelievers or concern anything else which would interfere with the work. Paul wrote to Timothy, “No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4). This does not mean, of course, that a Christian worker cannot work in a secular job to support himself, if necessary; Paul himself did that. Kelly comments,

The conclusion has sometimes been drawn that ordained ministers should not engage in business or commerce, . . . This is however, a pedantic misreading of Paul’s intention, which is simply to insist that Timothy, and presumably Christian leaders in analogous positions, should cut out of their lives anything, however good in itself, which is liable to deflect them from total service to Christ.¹⁰

Hay says,

Any secular work engaged in to earn a living must be of temporary nature that can be left at any moment when the missionary is called to move on.

¹⁰ J. N. D. Kelly, A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972), p. 175.

. . . Missionaries have erred in this, establishing businesses that have made demands upon their time and thought and caused them to settle in one place thus ceasing from their true calling.¹¹

Thus while it may be necessary at times for a worker in the gospel to engage in secular work to support himself, he must be careful not to entangle himself in such a manner as to hinder his work in the gospel.

An attitude of willingness to endure hardship

The worker must be willing to endure hardship and, sometimes, privation. This attitude is related to the previous attitude of remaining free from worldly entanglements. In the verse prior to the one just quoted, Paul tells Timothy, “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3). Keeping oneself free from worldly entanglements is a part of suffering hardship.

There is no guarantee that a man who keeps himself from worldly entanglements will be rewarded by the Lord with material blessing and comfort. The opposite is more likely to be true: following the Lord in financial principles will often lead to hardship and privation. Paul repeats to Timothy, “But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5).

Paul himself at times suffered from hunger, a lack of proper clothing, and a lack of a place to stay (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 6:4-5; 11:27). Yet he endured these things so that “the ministry be not discredited” (2 Cor. 6:3). Thus the Christian worker must have an attitude of willingness to endure hardship and, perhaps, privation, in fulfilling his ministry.

An attitude of setting the example

The Christian worker must have the attitude of being an example to others in financial matters. He must not view himself as an exception because he is in the ministry, but must put himself forth as a model for others to follow. Concerning Paul’s financial policy, Allen says that “he speaks as if its importance lay wholly in the way in which it might affect those to whom he preached, never as though it made any personal difference to him.”¹²

Paul made frequent reference to his own example. He said to the Ephesian elders:

“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard

¹¹ Hay, New Testament Order, p. 89.

¹² Allen, Missionary Methods, p. 66.

in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than receive’” (Acts 20:34-35).

He also mentioned his own example in financial matters to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-10). Peter also exhorts the elders to whom he writes to “shepherd the flock . . . not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; . . . proving to be examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Concerning Paul’s example in money matters, Hay says,

In many places that example had been a necessary part of his ministry. It put him in an unassailable position when he had to deal with the unfaithfulness of many in the Corinthian Church. No one could accuse him of seeking ought that was of this world, or of being simply a professional preacher.¹³

Thus a worker’s life must be a model for other Christians to follow. There must be no room for accusation in the area of finances, and the worker cannot beg exception because of being in the ministry; he must set the standard.

An attitude of stewardship

The Christian worker must have the attitude of being a steward, not an owner. This means that he must view the gifts as given to God, not to himself. The donor should also realize that he is giving the money to God, not to a man. But he can only do this if the worker maintains the attitude of a steward of God.

As a steward of God Paul saw himself “as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things” (2Cor. 6:10). The steward is not in the business of acquiring things for himself but only of properly managing the funds of his master.

If the donor and the receiver both understand that the money is given to the Lord alone, then there can be no control of the recipient by the donor. The recipient is not indebted to the donor, but to the Lord. And the donor cannot exercise control over the recipient, because the real recipient is the Lord, not the worker. That Paul operated on this principle can be seen in Philippians 4:17-18:

Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the fruit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance: I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.

Hay substantiates this principle:

It should be taught that the believer’s responsibility is toward the Lord only, not toward the church or the Elders. What he gives is given to his

¹³ Hay, New Testament Order, p. 90.

Lord as his Lord instructs him; if he does not give, it is to his Lord that he does not give. The believer is much less ready to fail the Lord than to fail the church. He may find reasons for not giving as he should to the church; he can find none for not fulfilling his duty towards his Lord. He may find little incentive to give to the church; he finds a deep satisfaction in giving to his Lord.¹⁴

Thus the worker must maintain the attitude of a steward, so that believers may see that their gifts are given to the Lord, not to a man. This will lead to a proper responsibility for giving on the part of the donor and will free the worker from the control which a donor might wish to exercise over him if he, not the Lord, were seen as the recipient.

The Procedures of the Worker Regarding Support

The New Testament not only reveals the attitudes which are to characterize the Christian worker regarding financial support, but it also reveals certain procedures which the worker should follow in this matter. These procedures are related to and result from the attitudes discussed above.

A financial policy must be followed

The Christian worker should have a financial policy which he firmly believes and strictly follows. Hay, Allen, and Herd all point out that Paul had a definite financial policy which he followed as a part of his overall missions strategy.¹⁵ An area as complex and yet as practical as money-matters is not one in which a worker can drift along without a predetermined, carefully thought-out policy. The need for this procedure of following a financial policy is a result of all of the attitudes toward support previously discussed.

That Paul had thought through the financial policy which he followed can be seen from 2 Corinthians 11:7-9,12. In defending his apostleship to the Corinthians, Paul reminds them of his financial policy and then concludes by saying, “and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so” (verse nine, underlining mine). In verse 12 he also states, “But what I am doing, I will continue to do” (underlining mine). It is clear that Paul had thought through the issues and knew exactly why he behaved as he did in financial matters. The attack upon his apostleship did not alter his financial policy which he had previously followed.

Personal needs must not be disclosed

¹⁴ Hay, New Testament Order, p. 366.

¹⁵ Hay, New Testament Order, p. 85; Allen, Missionary Methods, pp. 66-67; and Alexander Herd, “A Study of Paul’s Principles of Missionary Financing” (unpublished master’s thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1962), p. 14.

The personal financial needs of the worker must be kept quiet. He should not make his needs for financial supplies known except to the Lord in prayer.

The argument in favor of this procedure is largely an argument from silence, but it is a very loud silence. It seems that if Paul had been in the practice of disclosing his financial needs to others it would have been recorded somewhere in the New Testament. But, on the contrary, Paul never is seen disclosing his own needs to anyone (except long after the fact), even when he would have had good occasion to do so. Upon receiving the Philippians' gift Paul writes that they have done well to share with him in his affliction (Phil. 4:14), showing his past condition of need. But instead of magnifying his poverty he magnifies their generosity. He rejoices more over the fruit in their lives which their gift demonstrated than in the gift itself, and he even has the faith to tell his chief supporters that he has an abundance (Phil. 4:17-18).

This principle of keeping one's personal needs quiet can also be seen by Paul's example in Corinth. As was discussed previously, when his funds ran low he simply went to work making tents. But when Timothy and Silas came from Macedonia with a gift, he devoted himself completely to the work of the gospel (Acts 18:1-11; 2 Cor. 11:7-12). Paul trusted in God's sovereignty in financial matters; thus he kept his needs quiet and trusted in God to provide. When funds ran low Paul did not send out "prayer letters" to his constituency telling them of how the work was being hindered due to lack of funds. In fact, contrary to modern common practice, Paul never gave a prayer request in which he asked for prayer for finances. Hay says, "Twice it is recorded that Paul asked the churches to pray for him that he might be enabled for the work, kept faithful and protected from danger, but there is no request for prayer that his financial needs be met."¹⁶

Thus the New Testament example is that the worker should not disclose his own needs to anyone but the Lord. Since this procedure has been grossly abandoned in the present day, it will be dealt with at greater length in Chapter Three.

The needs of others may be disclosed

While the worker must keep his own needs quiet, he may make known the needs of other servants of God and of poor saints who need financial assistance. Paul instructs Titus to help Zenas and Apollos on their journey, adding "so that nothing is lacking for them" (Titus 3:13). He also made known the need of the Jerusalem Christians to the Corinthians, urging them strongly to contribute (2 Corinthians 8 and 9; 1 Cor. 16:1-4).

Although Paul made a very strong appeal to the Corinthians to give to the collection for Jerusalem, he did so on the basis of the grace of God (2 Cor. 8:8; 9:7-8). He did not use fleshly methods of appeal. Concerning the many modern corruptions of this procedure, Hay says,

There can be no question that a true adherence to the Scriptural principles of giving excludes all manner of drives for raising funds,

¹⁶ Hay, New Testament Order, p. 85.

solicitations or appeals for donations and pledges, bazaars, etc. Even the yearly money efforts of “Missionary Week,” with their emotional stimulants such as raising thermometers, the breaking of records, and such like, are out of harmony with the principles of spiritual giving.¹⁷

Thus the worker may make known the needs of other Christians, and even make appeals for gifts to them, but these appeals must always be based on the principles of grace giving contained in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, and not rooted in fleshly gimmicks.

Must be scrupulous and open in financial matters

The Christian worker must be scrupulous and open regarding financial matters. There must be no grounds for anyone to accuse him of misappropriating funds nor of using his support for personal gain. In administering the gift for the poor saints at Jerusalem, Paul was careful to have several other men of good reputation travel with him, “taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:20-21). Paul allowed no room for rumors to start that he was living in luxury by appropriating for himself the money which had been given to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Does not take advantage of anyone

In addition to being scrupulous and open in financial matters, the worker must not take advantage of anyone in matters of support. This procedure stems from the attitude of being free from greed and of seeking after God, not material gifts.

Paul often stated that he was careful not to take advantage of anyone in financial matters (2 Cor. 7:2, 11:7-12; 12:18). This even included paying for his meals when he was in Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3:8). When he sent his slave-convert, Onesimus, back to his owner, Philemon, Paul offered to pay Philemon for any of Onesimus’ debts. He did not want to take advantage of Philemon even in the matter of his slave (Philem. 18-19).

On several occasions Paul did accept the hospitality of others. But he would not do so if there was a possibility of his taking advantage of them. In Philippi he lodged with the household of Lydia, but not until as Luke states, “she prevailed upon us” (Acts 16:15). He also accepted the hospitality of Philip the evangelist and of Mnason of Cyprus, “a disciple of long standing” (Acts 21:8, 16). But since both of these men were mature in the faith, they would never have accused Paul of taking advantage of them by accepting their hospitality.

At the heart of this procedure is the attitude of being free from greed. A worker who does not trust in God alone may grasp after every offer of support, but one who trusts in God will want to receive only those gifts which are from

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 367.

Him, and thus will be careful so that no one feels as if they have been pressured into giving.

George Müller's life contains frequent incidents of his example in this matter. On one occasion, fearing that a woman had given money to the orphanage on impulse, he paid her way for a visit so that he could ascertain from a personal interview with her whether she had given from the proper motives. He strongly urged her to take back the money and reconsider before giving it, and it was only after he was certain that she was not pressured in any way and that her motive was pure before the Lord that he would accept the gift.¹⁸ Thus the worker must not take advantage of anyone in financial matters.

Certain gifts must be refused

A corollary procedure to that of not taking advantage of anyone is the procedure that certain gifts must be refused. This would include certain gifts from Christians and most gifts from non-Christians.

As mentioned previously, Paul refused gifts from the churches to which he was ministering at the time he was ministering to them. This is because the gospel is free, and Paul did not want to charge for giving them the free gospel. Hay states, "While gifts were accepted from even the most recently formed churches, it was not the practice of the Evangelists to receive financial support from the congregation to which they were ministering."¹⁹ Plummer confirms this principle.

We are nowhere told that he accepted anything for himself from the Philippians, while he was at Philippi, or from the Thessalonians, while he was at Thessalonica. His main object was to avoid all possibility of suspicion that in his preaching he was influenced by the thought that he must say what would please the people who housed and fed him.²⁰

Allen also comments on Paul's refusal to accept support from those to whom he was ministering: "He received money; but not from those to whom he was preaching. He refused to do anything from which it might appear that he came to receive, that his object was to make money."²¹ Thus the worker must not accept support from the church to which he is ministering at that time. This would apply only to traveling evangelists and not to local church elders who are supported. The issue of support of elders will be discussed in the third chapter under the subject of salary.

As was also mentioned previously, the worker must refuse gifts from Christians which were given with wrong motives. This would include any gift which was given under pressure. Paul tells the Corinthians, "And when I was

¹⁸ Arthur T. Pierson, George Müller of Bristol (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), p. 338.

¹⁹ Hay, New Testament Order, pp. 86-87.

²⁰ Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1948), p. 305.

²¹ Allen, Missionary Methods, p. 69.

present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone” (2 Cor. 11:9a). Plummer translates the latter phrase, “I put pressure on no man, did not squeeze him till he was numb.”²² Since the worker should desire to promote the spiritual growth of those contributing to his support, he should not accept any gift which he has reason to believe was given contrary to the principle, “Let each one *do* just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

Not only must the worker refuse certain gifts from Christians, but he must also refuse most gifts from non-Christians. Hay states,

... no one who is not a believer in Christ can participate in the ministry of giving. It is not right nor is it fair to unbelievers that they be allowed to think that they can partake of this privilege. God does not require nor desire the unbeliever’s money. The unbeliever cannot offer good works to God. His sacrifices are an abomination to God. It is wrong to give him any ground to think that he can gain merit by giving to God or even that God will accept his unsanctified gift.²³

John talks of those workers who “went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles” (3 John 7). Thus the general procedure should be to accept nothing from those who are not saved.

Paul, however, did accept hospitality from the unsaved Publius when he was shipwrecked on Malta (Acts 28:7-10). After affirming the principle of taking nothing from the Gentiles, Nee states,

However, this does not mean that we need reject even the hospitality of the Gentiles. If in the providence of God we visit some Miletus, then we should do well to accept the hospitality of a friendly Publius. But this must be definitely under the ordering of God, not as a matter of regular occurrence. Our principle should always be to take nothing from the Gentiles.²⁴

Thus Paul’s accepting three days of hospitality from the leading man of the island on which he was shipwrecked would have to be seen as an exception to the general procedure.

Paul also accepted supplies from some of the islanders upon leaving three months later (Acts 28:10). While the text does not record whether or not the islanders had become Christians, it is not likely that Paul simply healed them (as is recorded) without sharing the gospel. Lenski states:

In view of the rest of Acts it is impossible to believe that on Malta only miracles were wrought and that no gospel was preached in connection with them. What happened as a result of the shipwreck was that the gospel with its great seal of miracles was spread through the island. . . .

²² Plummer, Second Corinthians, p. 304.

²³ Hay, New Testament Order, p. 364.

²⁴ Nee, Church Life, p. 103.

We have no report on the part of Luke and no other record of a church on Malta except the tradition that Publius became the first bishop. The gospel never returns void. Malta could be no exception.²⁵

In any case, the general procedure should be to refuse gifts of support from unbelievers.

Distinctions must not be made on the basis of gifts

The worker must not make distinctions in the Body of Christ on the basis of gifts which he receives. This procedure has two ramifications.

First, the amounts of the gifts received should never be praised. That is, large gifts should not be praised over small gifts. The Lord was unimpressed with the large gifts of the rich in the temple treasury, but He did take special notice of the widow's small gift (Mark 12:41-44). While Paul urged liberality and generosity upon the saints in the matter of giving, he never singles out anyone for the amount of their gift. With the Philippians he played down the gift and rejoiced rather in the spiritual progress which the gift signified in their lives: "not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the fruit which increases to your account" (Phil. 4:17).

The reason that the amounts of particular gifts should not be praised is twofold. First, the motive of the giver is the most important factor. The believer should give cheerfully, out of a heart of love for God. Second, all gifts should be seen by the recipient as coming from the hand of God. Thus to praise a gift of one thousand dollars but to neglect a gift of one dollar is to fail to see both gifts as from the faithful provision of the Lord.

From the life of George Müller come these incidents which illustrate this point:

On one occasion a poor woman gave two pence, adding, "It is but a trifle, but I must give it to you." Yet so opportune was the gift of these "two mites" that one of those two pence was just what was at that time needed to make up the sum required to buy bread for immediate use. At another time eight pence more being necessary to provide for the next meal, but seven pence were in hand; but on opening one of the boxes, one penny only was found deposited, and thus a single penny was traced to the father's care.²⁶

The second ramification of the procedure of not making distinctions in the Body of Christ on the basis of gifts received is that the largest donors are not to be elevated over the smaller donors. This principle can readily be seen in James 2:1-6, where James rebukes the churches for making distinctions between the rich and the poor by giving the rich the best seats in the assembly.

²⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1944), p. 1105.

²⁶ Pierson, Müller, pp. 179-180.

For a Christian worker to take a potentially large donor out to lunch at a lavish restaurant and to give only a passing handshake to a poorer Christian who is not able to contribute very much is to violate this principle. Often the large donors, because they are giving so that they can feel important and have personal recognition for their gift, demand special attention and would feel slighted if they did not receive it. But it is at this point that the worker should not succumb to the ways of the world. If the donor is giving to the Lord out of what he has from a cheerful heart, then the amount should be inconsequential both to the donor and to the recipient. If, however, the donor is giving to receive personal recognition, then the gift may well fall under the category of gifts which must be refused by the worker because it is given from the wrong motive. The true spirituality of the worker will be tested in such situations.

Eager to give

The Christian worker must follow the procedure of eagerness in giving to others. Although he is in Christian work and being supported by the gifts of others, a worker is not exempted from giving. This is related to the attitude of setting the example. The worker should set the example in giving even as he sets the example in other financial matters. In his message to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:34-35, quoted above) it is obvious that Paul set the example in giving to others. He not only supported himself and the men who were with him, but also gave to “help the weak.” He did this to teach them, by practical example, the words of the Lord Jesus, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (verse 35).

The Lord instructed His disciples to “make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven . . .” (Luke 12:33). By giving to the needs of other Christians, including those in God’s work, the believer is instructed that he is storing up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20; 1 Tim. 6:18-19). Paul told the Corinthians that God would supply them with the money which they needed to give: “Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness” (2 Cor. 9:10).

No recent Christian worker has demonstrated this principle with more force, perhaps, than George Müller of Bristol. From around 1870 on, he personally contributed almost 2000 pounds yearly to the work of the China Inland Mission.²⁷ In 1874, with a personal income (from gifts received) of about 3100 pounds, he gave out to the needy and to the work of God all except 250 pounds, which went toward personal and family expenses.²⁸

Thus the Christian worker, rather than being exempt from giving to others because he himself is being supported, must set the example in giving to those in need and to the work of the Lord.

No trust in savings

²⁷ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission (London: The China Inland Mission, 1918), p. 183.

²⁸ Pierson, Müller, p. 338.

The worker should not put his trust in a savings account. This means that the worker should not worriedly hoard up money in times of abundance for future times of need. This does not mean that a worker cannot have a savings account, but that he must be careful to have his trust in God and not in a storehouse of money. He must view his money as a steward and be ready to give it to the Lord's service and as the Lord directs.

At the center of this issue is a man's heart attitude before the Lord. The worker must honestly ask himself whether he is seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33) or if his savings constitutes an earthly security upon which he is placing his faith in case God somehow does not "come through." It is basically a matter of faith (Matt. 6:30b).

Included in the concept of stewardship is the responsibility to provide for one's own family (1 Tim. 5:8; 2 Cor. 12:14b). A savings account of some sort might be the prudent method of fulfilling this responsibility. Concerning laying up provisions for the future, Hendriksen notes,

God did not condemn Joseph for advising Pharaoh to store up grain for future use (Gen. 41:33-36). Nor were Solomon and Agur wrong in pointing to the ant as an example of the common sense revealed in providing during the summer for the needs of the winter (Prov. 6:6; 30:25). Nor did Paul make a mistake when he wrote 2 Corinthians 12:14b and I Timothy 5:8. . . .

Nevertheless, the accumulation of wealth is fraught with spiritual danger (Matt. 19:24; Luke 12:16-21; I Tim. 6:10). To be sure, money can be a great blessing, if it is not an end in itself but a means to an end, namely, to prevent one's own family from becoming a burden to others, . . . to help those who are in need, . . . and to encourage the work of the gospel both at home and abroad. . . . However, money can also be a snare.
 . . .²⁹

Thus as long as the worker is trusting in the Lord and not in his savings account he may have such an account. But he must also beware of the danger which is inherent in money and guard himself against laying up treasures on earth. He should examine honestly his motives for having a savings account and live at all times as a faithful steward.

²⁹ William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1973), pp. 346-47.

CHAPTER THREE
MODERN APPLICATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
PRINCIPLES OF SUPPORT

Most of the principles of financial support discussed in Chapter Two are straightforward and obvious in their modern application. Certain issues, however, raise special concern because of the twentieth century common practices, and thus need further treatment in order to relate them practically to the present day. These issues include: the degree to which a worker should go in making his needs known; the question of elders in a local church receiving a fixed salary; and, the need for correct teaching on the subject of biblical giving in the churches today.

The Issue of Making One's Needs Known

One of the most difficult and debatable issues in the matter of financial support is the degree to which, if at all, a worker should advertise his needs. At the heart of this question is the issue of God's sovereignty versus man's responsibility. How much does a worker trust God to do for him, and how much does he do for himself? Should the worker just pray for finances to come in, should he pray and send out letters of information, or should he pray, send out letters of information, and also make direct appeals for funds? How much (if at all) should the worker utilize advertising and salesmanship techniques, such as mailing lists, emotional appeals, and return envelopes? The answers to these questions hinge upon the issue of God's sovereignty versus man's responsibility.

It must be stated that those on both sides of this issue in modern evangelicalism claim to be trusting God for finances. In favor of utilizing advertising and salesmanship techniques to some degree or another it might be argued that God wants men to do more than just trust Him; He also wants them to take action themselves while trusting Him. A parallel situation which might be raised is the issue of evangelism. Men must not just pray and trust God for converts; they must also go out and share the gospel with the unsaved. Thus the same balance must be followed in finances.

In opposition to this argument, however, are the following considerations. As was stated previously, one of the assumptions of this paper is that the Bible is sufficient; that it has not omitted anything of importance for men today, particularly in the crucial area of finances. This means that the degree to which the worker goes along the spectrum of sovereignty-responsibility must be determined by biblical precept and example in that particular area. Thus in the area of evangelism, there is both the biblical precept to pray for the spread of the gospel (as in 2 Thess. 3:1) and the biblical precept and example of going out to share the gospel (Mark 16:15; 1 Thess. 1:8-10). But the precepts and examples for evangelism (or any other area) must not be carried over into another area, such

as finances. The biblical precepts and examples in finances must determine the degree to which the worker takes responsibility himself or trusts in God's sovereignty in that area.

What then are the biblical precepts and examples in the area of making one's financial needs known to prospective donors? The answer is that there are no direct biblical precepts on this subject. Neither Paul nor any of the other apostles wrote to their co-workers or to the churches on this particular subject. Thus one must look to the example of these men in this matter.

When the example of the apostles and early Christian workers which is recorded in the new Testament is examined, it is found that there is no instance of a worker making his own financial needs known to a prospective donor. This is an argument from silence, as was stated previously, but the silence is so significant that those who would claim to be following the Scriptures in making their financial needs known must be on the defensive, and not vice versa. The reasoning behind this statement runs as follows: The Bible is not silent on anything that is of major importance for the believer to know, because it is inspired and sufficient (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible, however, is silent about making financial needs known. Because this is an area of major importance for the Christian worker, the silence of the Bible therefore must be significant and not in fact a silence at all.

It indeed seems rather strange that God would remain silent on such an important issue, one which every man going into the ministry must face, unless that silence was intended to teach those men something. In fact the silence does teach something, namely that the man going out to serve God must be dependent upon God alone, and therefore must not advertise his needs to men, as if God were not capable of providing without his help. Thus the silence of the Bible on the matter of advertising personal needs is no accidental omission by God which allows a man to raise his financial support in any manner he chooses, but rather is meant to teach the worker, by the example of the apostles, that faith in God means that God will supply sovereignly without the worker's efforts. Watchman Nee states,

It is a remarkable fact that though the Book of Acts supplies many minute details regarding the work of an apostle, the one subject which from a human standpoint is of paramount importance in the carrying on of any work is not dealt with at all. No information whatever is given as to how the needs of the work, or the personal needs of the workers, were supplied. This is certainly amazing! What men consider of supreme importance, the apostle regarded of least consequence. In the early days of the Church God's sent ones went out under the constraint of divine love. Their work was not just their profession, and their faith in God was not intellectual but spiritual, not just theoretical but intensely practical. The love and the faithfulness of God were realities to them and that being so, no question arose in their minds concerning the supply of their temporal needs.³⁰

Thus the fact that there is no mention in the Scriptures of any worker disclosing his own needs to prospective donors should be seen as a significant fact, and not one to be lightly disregarded as an "argument from silence."

The position that a worker should not make his needs known is also strengthened by the fact that Paul did not make any mention of his needs at times when it is obvious that he was in great need and would have had reason to do so. As mentioned previously, in Corinth Paul very quietly went to work when his funds ran low until Silas and Timothy brought relief. Then he quietly went back to full-time involvement in the ministry. During his imprisonment in Rome, when he had great financial needs (Phil. 4:14), he wrote to Philemon that he himself would repay Philemon for any of Onesimus' debts (Philemon 18-19), when he would have had good cause instead to write Philemon of his financial needs. And shortly after³¹ he wrote to the Philippians that he had learned to be content in all circumstances, yet thanking them for their gift (Phil. 4:10-19). As was mentioned before, Paul trusted in God's sovereignty in financial matters, and did not see the dwindling of financial support as requiring him to advertise his needs. Paul did not so much as hint that he lacked anything, except after the need had been met (as in Phil. 4:14); and, as was stated previously, he never asked for prayer for his financial needs, even when he was in fact in need. These things argue very strongly that the Biblical example is that a worker should not advertise his needs, even when they are great, nor should he even make hints about his needs (as through "prayer-letters").

It can be further argued that to make one's needs known is inconsistent with the qualification of a life of faith and the attitude of seeking after God, not gifts (both discussed in Chapter Two). Writing on the life of faith, C. H. Mackintosh states,

It will not do to talk about the life of faith; we must live it; and in order to live it, we must know God practically—know Him intimately, in the deep secret of our own souls. It is utterly vain and delusive to profess to be

³⁰ Watchman Nee, The Normal Christian Church Life (Washington, D.C.: International Students Press, 1962), p. 97.

³¹ This chronological order is according to Harold Hoehner, unpublished class notes, Bible Chronology, Dallas Theological Seminary, Summer, 1975.

living by faith and looking to the Lord, while in reality our hearts are looking to some creature resource. How often do people speak and write about their dependence upon God to meet certain wants, and by the very fact of their making it known to a fellow mortal they are, in principle, departing from the life of faith! If I write to a friend, or publish to the church, the fact that I am looking to the Lord to meet a certain need, I am virtually off the ground of faith in that matter. The language of faith is this: “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him.” To make known my wants, directly or indirectly, to a human being, is departure from the life of faith, and a positive dishonor to God.³²

Not only is the worker to live in complete dependence upon God, but he is to have the attitude of seeking after God, not after gifts. To go to individuals or to churches for the purpose of stating financial needs in order to raise support is totally contrary to the command of Jesus to not seek after these things which the Gentiles seek, but instead to seek first after His kingdom and His righteousness, trusting God to add all these things (Matt. 6:31-33).

This does not mean that the work in which one is involved cannot be described to people and that reports on what God is doing cannot be made. Paul did that on several occasions (Acts 14:27; 15:3,4’ 21:19). But these reports should not be for the purpose of fund-raising, but to describe God’s working so that the saints can pray for the work and praise God for what He is doing. There must be no appeals for money in such reports, nor hints or direct statements about personal needs.

The practical question arises: Is the worker free to disclose his needs when asked to do so by a prospective donor? George Müller refused to disclose the needs of his work, even when asked to do so by a man wanting to give, because he wanted to demonstrate through his work that “there is reality in dealing with God alone.”³³ However, it could be argued from the procedure of being scrupulous and open about financial matters (Chapter Two) that a worker could disclose his needs, without solicitation, if he is asked to do so. The individual worker would have to work out his own policy in this regard, making certain that it did not violate any of the previously discussed attitudes and procedures, and especially that it did not compromise total dependence upon the Lord.

Thus the example of the apostles in the New Testament as well as the attitude of submission to God’s sovereignty in financial matters, the qualification of a life of faith, and the attitude of seeking after God, not gifts, argue for the fact that a Christian worker should not make his needs known to anyone except God. There may be room for a worker to disclose his needs to an interested donor who makes an unsolicited inquiry about those needs, based on the procedure of being

³² C. H. Mackintosh, *Miscellaneous Writings*. Vol V: *Elijah the Tishbite* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1966), pp. 259-60.

³³ G. Fred Bergin, compiler, *Autobiography of George Müller* (4th ed., London: Pickering and Inglis, 1929), p. 134.

scrupulous and open about financial matters, but this must be determined between the individual worker and the Lord.

Before leaving the subject of making one's needs known a possible objection to the position of not advertising needs must be dealt with. In several places Paul mentions "being helped on his way" by a church which he was planning on visiting. For example, to the Romans he writes, "for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while" (Rom. 15:24). (This same phrase is used also in Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; 1 Corinthians 16:6,11; 2 Corinthians 1:16; Titus 3:13; and 3 John 6.) Does this not constitute a request for financial help from the local church in question, thus being a violation of the principle of mentioning one's financial needs?

In commenting on Romans 15:24, Sanday and Headlam state that this phrase "need not mean more than to be sent forward on a journey with prayers and good wishes."³⁴ Commenting on the same expression in 1 Corinthians 16:6, Robertson and Plummer state, "He is not asking for money or provisions; the verb does not necessarily mean more than good wishes and prayers."³⁵ Charles Hodge, commenting on the same passage, and Lenski, commenting on the same phrase in Acts 15:3, both point out that it was the customary thing for people to escort an honored or respected guest for a short distance on his journey, and that this is the matter to which Paul is referring.³⁶

In 3 John 6 and in Titus 3:13 it seems that financial help is in view in connection with this phrase. However, in both passages the respective authors are talking about supplying the financial needs of other workers, not their own needs, which is quite proper.

There is no mention of finances in any of the other passages mentioned above, however. In fact in 1 Corinthians 16:6 and 2 Corinthians 1:16 it is obvious that Paul had no intention of hinting about financial assistance in any form, because he later states emphatically that he will continue his policy of taking nothing from the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:9,12; 12:14). In the actual example of this practice of "helping on the way" recorded in Acts, there is no mention of financial assistance in the accounts (Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5). Thus it may be concluded that this practice did not imply the issue of financial aid unless it was directly stated in the context, but rather was simply a hospitable custom of respect involving the escorting of a guest for a short distance on his journey, accompanied by prayers and good wishes. Thus Paul was not asking or hinting for aid by making mention of this practice.

The Issue of Receiving a Fixed Salary

³⁴ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (5th ed., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1968), p. 411.

³⁵ Archbald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians (2nd ed., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1967). P. 388.

³⁶ Charles Hodge, An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), p. 366, and R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1944), p. 596.

Another issue which faces the modern Christian worker is the issue of receiving a fixed salary. This practice is commonly accepted today as the method by which a pastor of a local assembly is supported. Two main questions need to be answered in dealing with the issue of receiving a fixed salary: (1) Are there New Testament grounds for a pastor receiving a salary? (2) In conjunction with that question, does a fixed salary negate a life of faith and total dependence upon God for the Christian worker?

In seeking to answer these questions, a distinction must be made between those workers who travel among the churches, ministering in many places and establishing new assemblies, and those who stay in one locality, functioning as pastors, teachers, and overseers in a particular assembly. The former were primarily in view in the previous discussion, whereas the latter are primarily in view in the present discussion.

It must also be noted that the current ecclesiological practice of having one senior pastor over a congregation, with perhaps an assistant pastor and a youth pastor (depending on the size of the church) is not assumed herein to be biblical. Since there is not room in this paper for developing and defending a church polity, it must be assumed. What is assumed is that the New Testament order is that a local assembly should be presided over by a plurality of elders (also called bishops, presbyters, and pastors or shepherds) who are recognized as such by the assembly and who have been appointed by the Holy Spirit from among that assembly. They may or may not all be “full-time” Christian workers, but in any case they are not to be elevated over other members of the assembly as “clergy.” They are simply brothers in the local assembly who have been called to the work of overseers, and, in some cases, to the work of teaching and preaching (1 Tim. 5:17). What is in question in the present discussion is whether or not such men are entitled to a fixed salary on biblical grounds.

The entire New Testament case for paid, local, full-time leaders seems to rest on two passages: 1 Timothy 5:17-18, and Galatians 6:6. All of the other passages dealing with finances seem to be referring to itinerant workers.³⁷ These passages, however, seem to clearly refer to local workers: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17); “And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches” (Gal. 6:6).

The main difficulty in 1 Timothy 5:17 is determining what “double honor” means. “Honor” (τις) can mean either “price” or “honor” (esteem) in the New Testament.³⁸ In the previous context Paul uses the word in its monetary connotation (1 Tim. 5:3), whereas in the following context he uses it to mean “honor” alone (1 Tim. 6:1). Most commentators take verse seventeen to have a monetary connotation because of verse eighteen: “For the Scripture says, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.’ And ‘The

³⁷ Cf. J. Andrew Kirk, “Did ‘Officials’ in the New Testament Church Receive a Salary?” *The Expository Times*, 84:4 (January, 1973), 105-108. Kirk also discusses a third passage, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, as bearing on this subject. The author, however, does not think that it has any bearing whatsoever.

³⁸ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (3rd ed., New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), p. 446.

laborer is worthy of his wages.’” Lenski, however, sees no idea of pay in verse seventeen, but rather takes it to mean that the elders are worthy of what naturally should go with their office—honor; just as the ox is worthy of what naturally goes with his task—eating some of the grain; and just as the workman is worthy of what naturally goes with his work—pay.³⁹

But Lenski’s interpretation does not seem to take into account Paul’s discussion in 1 Corinthians 9:1-18, where Paul quotes the same passage about oxen (Deut. 25:4) and clearly uses it to support the position that an apostle is entitled to live by the gospel. The normal interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:17 in light of verse eighteen and in light of 1 Corinthians 9 would have to include some concept of financial remuneration as a part of the meaning of “honor.” That “honor” means only remuneration is not necessary nor likely, but it must at least include remuneration as a part of what is meant.⁴⁰ Kelly states,

Honour and respect in the congregation are of course included here, but the inference from 18 that financial, or at any rate material, rewards are primarily intended cannot be evaded. We have of course no idea of the character, scope or size of these, but the natural conclusion to be drawn from 18 is that the elders concerned are entitled to look to the church for their maintenance.⁴¹

Galatians 6:6 suffers from similar interpretive problems in relation to the meaning of “share all good things.” Based on the 1 Corinthians 9 passage as well as upon the usage of the verb (κοινωνεω) to refer to the sharing of material things in Romans 15:27 and Philippians 4:15 (the noun is used similarly in Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:13; and Hebrews 13:16), it would seem that a sharing of material and/or financial goods is at least a part of what Paul intended. In commenting on Galatians 6:6 and referring to 1 Corinthians 9:11, Lightfoot says, “The resemblance of language in this last passage leaves no doubt that St. Paul is here speaking of imparting temporal goods.”⁴²

Having thus established that members of a local church are to share financially toward the support of at least some of the elders (to discuss which elders qualify is beyond the scope of this paper), it still remains to determine if a fixed salary is in view. Modern thought automatically connects the ideas of remuneration and salary, but this connection is not necessarily biblical. Ironside states,

And, first, let it be noted carefully, there is no such thing known in Scripture as putting the servant of God upon the low level of a salary basis. The only man mentioned in the Bible to be hired by the year as a

³⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1956), p. 683.

⁴⁰ Cf. Patrick Fairbairn, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), pp. 216-17.

⁴¹ J. N. D. Kelly, A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972), p. 125.

⁴² J. B. Lightfoot, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), p. 218.

“minister” was the recreant Levite who was engaged by Micah of Mount Ephraim, and later by the Danites to be their “father and priest” (Judges, chaps. 17 and 18).⁴³

Roland Allen, commenting on Galatians 6:6 and 1 Timothy 5:17, says that “even if those passages do refer to money gifts, they certainly do not contemplate fixed salaries which were an abomination in the eyes of the early Christians, . . .”⁴⁴

The problem with a fixed salary in the early church was related to the existence of men who were in the ministry for monetary gain and who greedily extracted money from whatever congregation they could. Eusebius quotes Apollonius’ comments on Montanus: “it is he who . . . appointed collectors of money, who organized the receiving of gifts under the name of offerings, who provided salaries for those who preached his doctrine in order that its teaching might prevail through gluttony.”⁴⁵ The Didache, while stating that an apostle who extended his visit beyond two days or who asked for money was a false prophet, also states,

Likewise a true teacher is himself worthy, like the workman, of his food. Therefore thou shalt take the firstfruit of the produce of the winepress and of the threshing-floor and of oxen and sheep, and shalt give them as the firstfruits to the prophets, for they are your high priests.⁴⁶

Thus there seems to have been some sort of regular allotment for “true teachers” around the second century, as long as the men involved were not greedy.

Kirk maintains that the New Testament church, however, did not pay fixed salaries to its local elders. His reasons may be summarized as follows⁴⁷:

(1) the local churches in the first century would not have had the funds to support a group of full-time paid workers. Paul’s exhortations for those who can support themselves to do so would have also applied to the elders. (2) The natural implication of 1 Timothy 3:7 (“he must have a good reputation with those outside the church”) is that the elder is regularly employed in secular work. (3) The word *ti:Z* never was used to mean “regular salary.” When referring to money it meant a due reward, recompense, or honorarium for services rendered. (4) Paul would not have made a regular salary dependent on some kind of an efficiency test as in 1 Timothy 5:17. Kirk concludes that 1 Timothy 5:17-18 means the following:

All elders are worthy of honor (i.e., respect), those who are especially conscientious in their work . . . should expect to receive a handsome token of gratitude in recompense for the work they do. Money, or other material gifts, is the proper expression of gratitude for spiritual help received (cf.

⁴³ H. A. Ironside, Notes on the Epistle to the Philippians (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1973), p. 121.

⁴⁴ Roland Allen, Missionary Methods, St. Paul’s or Ours? (London: World Dominion Press, 1956), p. 67 (footnote).

⁴⁵ Eusebius, Book V 18:2.

⁴⁶ The Didache, XII:2,3; cf. also XI:4-6.

⁴⁷ Kirk, “Salary,” p. 107.

Rom. 15:27). This honorarium is on a person-to-person and day-to-day basis, according to the circumstances. Above all it is a free-will offering, the very antithesis to a regular paid salary that can be demanded as a right.⁴⁸

Thus Kirk is saying that it is not wrong for an elder to receive monetary recompense for his work as long as his attitude and the attitude of the people are right on the matter. The money should not be viewed as a salary in a secular job would be viewed, but as a free-will offering to the Lord.

To sum up, it seems that the concept of a fixed-amount salary per se is not defensible if one wishes to adhere strictly to New Testament practice. It is clear, however, that certain elders in a local assembly are entitled to receive monetary and material support from the assembly, derived from free-will offerings and in proportion to the financial situation of the members in the assembly. Lehman Strauss states, "No man has a right to put a price on his ministry, but he does have the right to expect that God will supply his needs through His children."⁴⁹ It must be added, however, that he can only expect that right if the congregation to which he ministers is financially able to supply his needs. A man ministering in a poor assembly should rather expect to support himself with some work of outside occupation.

Applying these principles to today, a man ministering in an assembly which can support him might work out an arrangement in which the assembly agrees to pay him a certain amount each month, dependent upon the amount of the offerings received. Thus if there were bountiful offerings he might receive over the specified amount, whereas if the offerings were slim he would not receive the specified amount. The spirit of both the elders and the assembly involved is the important factor. The elders should not be greedy, but rather serving the Lord gladly. The assembly should give generously, as to the Lord, to those who labor among them.

The question remains, "does a fixed salary negate a life of faith and total dependence upon God for the Christian worker?" Or does a "loose" salary (as just described) negate a life of faith? The answer would have to be, "It could, but it does not necessarily have to." While those involved in "full-time" Christian work are to be examples in a life of faith, all Christians are required to live by faith. This includes Christians who receive wages and salaries in their secular jobs. Thus if receiving a salary necessarily negated a life of faith, no Christian could be employed in a job which received a fixed salary and still live by faith.

But while a salary does not necessarily negate a life of dependence upon God, it must be realized that it can do so. A man who is living day-to-day for his sustenance must be in more conscious and constant dependence upon the Lord than one who knows that he will receive a regular check. But the man who receives a regular salary can still be dependent upon the Lord for his needs if he realizes the source of his support. It all depends upon whether his eyes are fixed

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 107-108.

⁴⁹ Lehman Strauss, Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1957), p. 97.

upon the paycheck or upon the Lord. If the previously discussed attitudes and procedures concerning finances characterize the life of the Christian worker, and if he is himself aware of the danger of fixing his eyes upon his paycheck instead of upon the Lord, then there is no reason that a salary should necessarily negate a life of faith and total dependence upon God.

The Need for Teaching on Biblical Giving Today

There is probably no area in Christian teaching and practice which has been subject to more abuse and misuse than the area of finances. How a Christian worker obtains his support and what the member of a local church does with his money is one of the most tangible tests of true spirituality, and hence one of the most certain areas to be out of alignment when genuine uprightness of heart and dependence upon the Lord are lacking.

Also, since the obtaining of money (and the status and power which accompany it) is at the heart of the world system, it is an area in which the Christian is particularly susceptible to worldly influence. At the same time this fact affords the Christian an area of impressive witness and testimony, if his financial ways are straight.

It is because the modern church has been so influenced by worldly methods of finance that there needs to be clear and vigorous teaching on this subject today. The people in churches are accustomed to hearing emotional (and often pressured) appeals for money. Therefore they assume that any existent financial needs will be made known to them, and, as a result, they do not look for needs which they can meet themselves. The practical import of this is that a Christian worker who wanted to follow the New Testament example of keeping his own needs quiet could either go hungry or be forced to find secular employment, while church members watched unaware. Romans 12:13 exhorts Christians to be contributing to the needs of the saints and to be pursuing hospitality. This definitely implies looking for needs which can be met out of one's personal resources, rather than waiting to be pressured into giving by some emotional appeal.

It is only when the principles of biblical giving are taught and practiced that Christian workers will be able to completely follow the New Testament principles of financial support, with the result that the work of the gospel will go on unhindered by financial shortages. The principles of financial support for Christian workers discussed in this paper need to be taught also, so that Christians can be aware of the financial operating procedures of those involved in the work of the gospel.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the New Testament principles of financial support for the Christian worker. Proceeding upon the assumption that the Bible is inspired and thus authoritative in matters of faith and practice, the New Testament passages pertinent to this subject were examined in Chapter Two.

It was concluded there that the normal basis of support for the Christian worker is the teaching that the laborer is worthy of his hire. Sometimes, however, because of either a lack of funds or else the possibility of discrediting the ministry, a worker may follow the exception to the normal basis of support and engage in a secular job in order to support himself in the ministry.

The qualifications of the worker who is supported were also examined in Chapter Two. These include a life of faith and prayer, a life of faith and prayer, and the calling and sending by God to the work of the ministry. As a result of these qualifications, the following attitudes regarding financial support should characterize the worker: (1) submission to God's sovereignty in financial matters; (2) seeking after God and not gifts; (3) being free from greed; (4) being free from worldly entanglements; (5) willingness to endure hardship; (6) being an example in financial matters; and, (7) being a steward of material possessions.

Stemming from the attitudes which should characterize the Christian worker regarding financial support, the New Testament reveals certain procedures which the worker should follow. These are: (1) a financial policy must be followed; (2) personal needs must not be disclosed; (3) the needs of others may be disclosed; (4) the worker must be scrupulous and open in financial matters; (5) the worker must not take advantage of anyone in matters of support; (6) certain gifts

must be refused, including some gifts from Christians and most gifts from non-Christians; (7) distinctions must not be made on the basis of gifts; (8) the worker must be eager to give to others; and, (9) the worker must not trust in a savings account.

The third chapter focused on several issues which needed special attention in light of twentieth century common practices. In examining the question of whether or not a worker should make his financial needs known, it was concluded that the example of the New Testament apostles, the attitude of submission to God's sovereignty in financial matters, the qualification of a life of faith, and the attitude of seeking after God, not gifts, all argue strongly that a worker should not advertise nor even hint about his own financial needs. If he receives an unsolicited question about his financial needs from an interested Christian, the worker may disclose his needs, providing he can do so in good conscience before the Lord.

The issue of local elders receiving a fixed salary was also examined in Chapter Three. There it was concluded that a fixed-amount salary per se is probably not in accordance with New Testament practice. The financial support of local elders in accordance with the economic condition of the local assembly is quite acceptable, however. It was suggested that some form of a loose-amount salary (dependent upon the amount of the offerings received) might be in accordance with the New Testament example, as long as the previously discussed attitudes and procedures regarding finances were observed by the elders. It was also concluded that such a salary would not necessarily negate a life of faith and total dependence upon God (although the possibility is present), as long as the worker's eyes are focused upon the Lord.

Finally it was concluded that because of the widespread abuse and misuse of the matter of financial support by Christian workers, there is the need for the clear and correct principles of financial support and biblical giving to be taught in the churches today. Christians need to be trained to look for needs which they can meet, and workers need to give up pressure tactics and emotional appeals for finances, and learn to wait upon God alone to meet their needs.

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