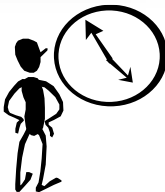


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:	
Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)	
Bible Study	4:00 p.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday:	
Bible Study	7:00 p. m.

Tent-Making Preachers

By Andy Sochor

God's design is that those who dedicate their lives to preaching the gospel receive full support for that work. Paul told the church in Corinth, "*So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel*" (I Corinthians 9:14).

However, one who preaches may not always (or ever) enjoy the blessing of such support. Perhaps the brethren cannot financially support a preacher. It could be that brethren could support a preacher, but will not because they do not value the work of preaching as highly as they should. Or, as in the case of Paul, a preacher may forgo receiving support because circumstances are such that it may actually hinder the cause of the gospel (I Corinthians 9:12).

When a preacher receives only partial support – or even none – for preaching, what is he to do?

Keep Preaching

When Paul gave instructions about the Lord's desire for preachers to "*get their living from the gospel*" (I Corinthians 9:14), he was not writing to a fellow preacher; he was writing to a congregation. Local churches – as well as individual saints (Galatians 6:6) – should see to it that they do what they can to support those who have devoted their lives to proclaiming the word.

Those who preach should simply "*preach the word*" (II Timothy 4:2). While there may be nothing wrong with a man actively seeking support for his work in preaching, he ought to continue to preach even if he cannot devote himself "*completely to the word*" due to a lack of support (Acts 18:4-5). Though preachers today are not divinely called to preach as the apostle Paul was, they should have the same willingness to "*offer the gospel without charge*" (I Corinthians 9:18).

Work to Support Himself

When Paul was first in Corinth, Luke recorded, “*He was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks*” (Acts 18:4). During the rest of the week, he was busy working as a tent-maker while he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3). It was necessary for Paul to work to support himself because he did not receive support from Corinth – even after the congregation was established (I Corinthians 9:12; II Corinthians 11:7; 12:13). So he worked to support himself until he received support “*from Macedonia*” that allowed him to devote himself “*completely to the word*” (Acts 18:5; cf. II Corinthians 11:8-9).

This was not the only time Paul worked to support himself. He did this in Ephesus (Acts 20:33-34) and Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 2:9; II Thessalonians 3:7-9). He told the Thessalonians that his work was to provide an example to them as he instructed them: “*If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either*” (II Thessalonians 3:7-10). Preachers are not exempt from this rule. If full support is not there, a preacher is still responsible to provide for himself, even if it means “*working night and day*” (II Thessalonians 3:8).

Make the Most of His Time

Paul told the Ephesians, “[Make] *the most of your time, because the days are evil*” (Ephesians 5:16). This admonition certainly applies to all Christians. But it is mainly important for those who must juggle the work of preaching with secular employment. There is simply no room for laziness, procrastination, or fruitless endeavors by one who must work to support his preaching efforts.

Manage His Other Responsibilities

It's not always easy to balance one's responsibilities as a preacher – preparing to teach (I Timothy 4:13, 15; II Timothy 2:15) and teaching itself (II Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:1, 15; Acts 20:20) – with his responsibilities at home (Ephesians 5:23, 25, 28-29; I Corinthians 7:3; Ephesians 6:4; I Timothy 5:8). It becomes more difficult when the responsibilities of secular work are added on top of these (Colossians 3:23; Ecclesiastes 9:10). Yet the responsibilities remain. Therefore, a “tent-making preacher” must be diligent to do the best that he can in his circumstances and fulfill the responsibilities he has.

Recognize His Limitations

In the parable of the talents, the man with five talents and the one with two talents both doubled their money (Matthew 25:14-17). The five talent man was not praised more highly than the second man (Matthew 25:20-21). The man who obtained two talents was not criticized for not gaining as much as the other (Matthew 25:22-23). Both were told, “*Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master*” (Matthew 25:21, 23). Both were judged according to what they did with what they had.

This principle was stated by Paul in his second letter to Corinth: *“For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have”* (II Corinthians 8:12). In other words, God will judge us based on what we are capable of doing. Each one of us only has so much time in the day. When one has to work, sleep, and take care of family responsibilities, the time he has to devote to his work in preaching is limited. Certainly, diligence is necessary; but a “tent-making preacher” should not try to do everything that a fully-supported preacher is able to do. It is simply not possible; if he attempts to do it, he will eventually burn out and become ineffective – or at least less effective – in his work in the gospel.

Avoid Jealousy and Bitterness

It is common for men and women to be jealous of others or bitter toward them because of some unfairness (real or perceived) that has resulted in the lives of others seeming to be better than their own. Yet Christians are to avoid this attitude. Jealousy is listed as one of the *“deeds of the flesh”* (Galatians 5:19-20). The Hebrew writer warned Christians not to allow any *“root of bitterness”* to spring up and cause trouble among them (Hebrews 12:15). We are to be content in all of our circumstances (Philippians 4:11-12). We are to *“rejoice with those who rejoice”* (Romans 12:15), not become bitter against them because we are jealous of their lives.

The same is necessary for preachers – particularly those who must work to support themselves. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the right of preachers to be supported, he compared himself and Barnabas – who were not being supported – with others who were. *“Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?”* (I Corinthians 9:4-6). It may have seemed unfair for others to receive support while he and Barnabas did not. Of course, that was not the reason why Paul mentioned this – he was reminding them of their responsibility, not complaining about any unfairness against himself (cf. I Corinthians 9:14-18). Those who work to support themselves in their preaching must have the selfless attitude of Paul, rather than becoming jealous of those who are fully supported for their work in the gospel or becoming bitter against other preachers or against brethren who are not providing support.

Give Brethren No Cause to Look Down on His Work

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he told the young evangelist, *“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe”* (I Timothy 4:12). Later in the same context, he said, *“Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all”* (I Timothy 4:15).

Why would some brethren possibly have looked down on Timothy’s youth? Because his youth could be a potential weakness in his efforts to proclaim the gospel?

Timothy was not to allow this potential weakness to become a legitimate reason for criticism of his work. In the same way, holding down a secular job is a potential weakness in one's efforts to proclaim the gospel (due to the necessary commitment of time and the physical and mental energy that must be expended). While it is true that secular employment makes for an unfortunate distraction to a preacher's primary work of teaching the word, a "tent-making preacher" must be diligent in his efforts in the kingdom to the degree he is able so that his "*progress will be evident to all*" (I Timothy 4:15).

Fulfill His Ministry

In his final admonition to Timothy, Paul said, "*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*" (II Timothy 4:5). This came immediately after Paul's warning to Timothy that in the future, some would "*not endure sound doctrine*" and would "*accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires*" (II Timothy 4:3-4). Those who would preach a message that people wanted to hear would be rewarded by the people (often in the form of financial support). If Timothy was to "*preach the word*" (II Timothy 4:2) when it was not popular, he would naturally have a difficult time acquiring the support that he should have (I Corinthians 9:14). But regardless of this, he was to "*fulfill [his] ministry*" anyway (II Timothy 4:5).

Preachers must recognize the great responsibility they have to "*preach the word ... in season and out of season*" (II Timothy 4:2). Even if the message is unpopular and unsupported, it needs to be preached anyway. Though circumstances may be different, "tent-making preachers" share the same responsibility as fully-supported preachers: "*Be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*" (II Timothy 4:5).

The Sin of Sodom

By Matthew W. Bassford

The most famous example of homosexual activity in the entire Bible occurs in the early part of Genesis 19. There, two angels in human form come to the city of Sodom and pretend to be travelers seeking hospitality. The patriarch Lot invites them into his home, but at evening, the men of Sodom come to his door and demand that he yield up the travelers so they can rape them. Shortly thereafter, the entire city is destroyed by fire from heaven.

For millennia, students of the Bible have taken the point. Indeed, the word "sodomy" has passed into our language as a description of unnatural sexual activity. In recent times, though, this traditional view has come under attack.

As part of the campaign to destigmatize homosexual behavior, many have argued that the true sin of Sodom is instead defined by Ezekiel 16:49, where God reports

that the iniquity of Sodom is the failure of its inhabitants to provide for the poor and needy despite having the resources to do so. The argument goes that this shows that the same-sex desires of the men of Sodom weren't the problem at all.

However, that isn't all that the Bible has to say about Sodom. In Jeremiah 23:14, God says that the people of Jerusalem sinned in the likeness of Sodom by committing adultery, walking in lies, and strengthening the hands of evildoers. More familiarly, Jude 7 testifies that the men of Sodom committed sexual immorality and perversions.

So what is the sin of Sodom? Is it hardheartedness? Adultery? Lying? Promoting wickedness? Homosexual lust?

The only possible Biblical answer is "all of the above". As Genesis 13:7 says, the people of Sodom were evil, sinning immensely against the Lord. This teaches us something fundamental about sin. In the lives of the wicked, the problem is never just one isolated sin that they are committing. The problem is an entire life lived in rebellion against God.

In fact, this same truth is evident in the lives of those who practice homosexuality and defend their practice today. It's not like they are getting everything else right about following God and just have this one little issue. Instead, spiritual problems are evident everywhere.

Certainly, all of them call evil good. Almost all of them are indifferent to the biblical teaching about the role of women in the church. They don't teach the truth about what we must do to be saved. Many of them, perhaps even the majority, have no interest in obedience and only make the argument to show what hypocrites Christians are.

Homosexuality was definitely part of the problem in Sodom. However, the real problem was a heart problem, an unwillingness to submit to the authority of God. If this unwillingness is present in our hearts, the precise expression that it takes doesn't matter much. As Jude points out, the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah provides an example of punishment by eternal fire, and that's where all of the disobedient are headed, whether their sin lines up precisely with Genesis 19 or not.

THE PASTOR STOLE OUR SPOON

A pastor had dinner at the home of a couple in his church. After he left, the wife said to the husband, "I think he stole our spoon!" This bothered her for a whole year.



A year later the couple had the pastor for dinner again. Unable to resist, the wife asked, "Did you steal our spoon last year?" The pastor replied, "No, I put it inside your Bible."