

Robbing Paul to Pay Peter

1 Cor 9:3-14

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. A minister, in an address to other ministers, once said he thought ministers ought to be humble and poor, like their Master. "I have often prayed," said he, "that I might be kept humble; I never prayed that I might be poor—I could trust my brethren for that."
1. Churches have often been "funny" about the preacher's salary.
 - a. Charles Hodge, a well-known preacher in our brotherhood, says that he was once asked by a large church in Texas to take a \$25 a week cut in pay "out of dedication."
 - There were four elders who had did very well in their professions, and he asked them to cut his pay by \$5.00 a week and for them to give an extra \$5.00 a week to bridge the gap.
 - The elders got mad and refused to hire him.
 - b. Back in June, *The Christian Chronicle* asked the children of ministers to share their memories of growing up in a preacher's home. One lady wrote in and told a story which took place more than 30 years ago, but still shakes her to her core.
 - It was Easter, and this little girl got a new dress to wear to church. She seldom got anything, let alone a new dress with white lace, gloves, and shoes to match.
 - She was so proud of her dress and pranced around the building that morning. On her way to Bible class, a lady stopped her and said, "My, what a lovely dress! We must be paying your daddy too much money!"
 2. Preachers often feel funny talking about money.
 - That has often been the case because churches have felt so funny about money—like the brother who said he didn't care what the preacher got paid as long as he got less than he did or the sister who said that the preacher ought to make less than the lowest paid member of the congregation.
 - Sometimes preachers have felt funny in talking about money because the church wasn't being at all fair in the compensation, and they didn't want to expose that.
- B. This morning I must admit that I feel funny talking about money.
1. Not a one of you has ever said anything derogatorily about my salary, nor do I feel that I need to cover up some injustice that's being done to me. Let me be clear: this church has been fair and good in its compensation.
 2. I don't feel funny because you've been unfair, but some of my other brethren have been.
 - a. After RJ was born, I asked for a raise—I was barely bringing home \$12,000 a year—and I believed that as a father I needed to be doing better.
 - b. You would have thought I had asked for \$1 million a year plus a mansion on a hill plus my own private jet and yacht.
 - c. To make matters worse, one of the elders even publicly told untruths, but come to find out, he had Alzheimer's.
 - d. That was for me and my family a very painful experience.
 3. My preaching this text today has nothing to do with a "beef" I have because of money.
 - a. My motivation in preaching this text this morning is simply that this is the will of God, and we cannot ignore it.
 - b. If I purposefully ignore this ext because it makes me or you uncomfortable, I have not performed my duty before God to preach his Word. I cannot ignore a single text of Scripture.
- C. The brethren in Corinth were being unfair toward Paul because he had not received pay from the church.
1. He says at v. 3: "This is my defense to those who would examine me."
 - a. Both the word "defense" and "examine" are legal terms in the ancient world and refer to court cases.

- b. Although, as we have mentioned, this text is about how Paul abandoned some of his rights for the cause of the Gospel, it is also about the rights Paul had.
2. One of the rights Paul mentions throughout this chapter is the right to fair compensation. From where does that right come? The right comes from PRECEDENT & PRECEPT.

II. PRECEDENT, vv. 4-7, 13.

- A. Paul, in arguing that he does have a right to compensation from the church, argues from precedent: the precedent of the apostles, the precedent of normal life, and the precedent of religion.
- B. Paul had a right to compensation from the church, for the other apostles received support.
 1. Paul writes, "Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?" (vv. 4-6).
 2. The other apostles received support from churches and took along believing wives; therefore, Paul argues that he had that right as well.
 - a. We know that Paul typically supported himself by making tents.
 - Paul "found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Cladius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade" (Acts 18:2-3).
 - "We labor, working with our own hands" (1 Cor 4:12).
 - b. While that was Paul's typical practice, he did at times accept compensation from congregations.
 - Paul hoped to receive compensation from the church in Rome for his journey to Spain: "I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you" (Rm 15:24). In fact, many NT scholars believe part of the reason Paul wrote Romans was to introduce himself to the church at Rome and increase his chances of support.
 - Paul wrote Philippians, in part, to thank that congregation for their generous support: Phil 4:14-18.
 - c. The other apostles likewise received compensation. This is, however, the only word we have to that effect.
 - d. We also have evidence that other workers in the church received compensation.
 - Elders are worthy of pay:
 - "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and 'The laborer deserves his wages'" (1 Tm 5:17-18).
 - That is likely the reason that elders cannot be lovers of money (1 Tm 3:3).
 - Missionaries also received monetary support in the ancient world: "They have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth" (3 Jn 7-8).
 - We need to understand that even Jesus himself received compensation for preaching (Lk 8:1-3).
- C. Paul also uses the precedent of normal life.
 1. The apostle writes: "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?" (v. 7).
 2. In the life of Paul's time, a soldier wasn't expected to fight an army out of his own pocket, nor was a vinedresser expected not to eat the grapes, nor a shepherd expected not to drink the milk from the flock.
- D. Paul also uses the precedent of temple service.
 1. He writes: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?" (v. 13).
 2. Because the congregation in Corinth was composed of both Jews and Gentiles, Paul likely refers to both the temple in Jerusalem and pagan temples.
 - a. We understand that the priests under the Old Testament would eat part of the sacrifices.
 - Lev. 6:14-17.

- We understand that not just the grain offering, but a whole host of offerings provided that the priests eat part of the sacrifice.
- b. Pagan priests would also receive part of the offering as food—What brought this whole discussion in First Corinthians about was food offered to idols, and the priests were among those who ate meat sacrificed to idols.

E. What should we make of this text?

1. We need to understand that paying a preacher is biblical.
 - a. Some of our brethren are known as the “Mutual Edification” churches of Christ.
 - Those brethren believe Scripture forbids paying a full-time preacher, so they practice “mutual edification,” ie, each Lord’s Day a different man from the congregation addresses the church.
 - That view is totally without warrant from the Scriptures.
 - b. We understand that paying the preacher is biblical, for Paul asserted he had such a right. He had such a right, for the other apostles received pay, Jesus himself received some type of compensation, and Paul, at times, received support from congregations.
2. We also need to understand that paying a preacher is fair.
 - a. Paul uses common, every day examples to make that point: the soldier in battle, the vinedresser in his vineyard, and the shepherd among his flock.
 - b. If everyone else gets paid an honest wage for honest work, why not the preacher?

III. PRECEPT, vv. 8-12, 14.

- A. Paul does not affirm that preachers are worthy of pay simply on human authority but by divine authority, vv. 8-12.
 1. The Law of Moses taught that workers deserve to be compensated.
 - a. Paul quotes an odd passage to make this point: “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.”
 - b. I say it’s an “odd passage,” for Moses is speaking about animals, not men.
 - However, this law follows the humanitarian principle of other laws.
 - Throughout the OT, we see a God who was very concerned about how his people treated others, and many OT laws forbade the Israelites from taking advantage of their neighbors. The most famous, of course, would be: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:18).
 - Such concern, as we see in this text, even applies to animals.
 - In other words, even though animals were given to man for food and work, man does not have a right to mistreat an animal just for the sake of mistreating an animal.
 - Interestingly, most farmers in the ancient world did not own oxen, so the oxen they used were either borrowed from wealthier individuals or loaned from kings. Thus, God is teaching here that even if you do not own the oxen you use for threshing, you must still provide part of your profits to the oxen.
 2. While God demonstrates concern for the oxen, his primary concern was not for the oxen, but for his people. Paul writes: “Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop,” vv. 9-10.
 - a. Just as were other OT texts, this text was written for our instruction that we might learn the principle of providing fair compensation for workers.
 - b. Those who work agriculturally should expect to share in the bounties of the harvest.
 - It would be morally repugnant to use animals in the field and allow them to starve to death.
 - I’m sure many of you have used animals to plow fields and harvest crops in the past; I’ve heard some of you tell of doing so, and my grandmother kept a journal in which she wrote about doing so.

- How many of you never allowed that beast anything to eat? You may not have allowed it to eat while you were working in the field as the Israelites were commanded, but I have no doubt that you provided for it.
 - Paul applies this principle spiritually to preachers and churches.
 - The apostle had a right to compensation from the Corinthian church since he had established the congregation.
 - Preachers likewise have a right to compensation for the work they do in modern congregations.
3. Paul declares, “If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more?” (vv. 11-12).
- a. In verse 11, Paul makes clear that what he has just written is to be understood spiritually, not literally.
- It is both a spiritual and physical law that what is sown brings forth a harvest—if I plant corn seed, I can expect to reap a harvest of corn.
 - When we were living in Kentucky, one of my elders made his living by farming.
 - He grew tobacco, Kentucky’s main *legal* cash crop. He would take special care to keep his tobacco crop free of disease and pests.
 - He would then harvest the tobacco, sell it at auction, and then provide for his family from the income he received.
 - In a spiritual sense, as preachers sow the word of God they should expect to reap a harvest of material goods.
- b. From what Paul writes in v. 12, it seems apparent that the brethren in Corinth supported other preachers financially, but did not support Paul.
- Paul did not want monetary support from Corinth—“I have made no use of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting” (v. 15).
 - While it is not certain, it’s quite likely that the more sophisticated brethren in Corinth believed that Paul was not on equal footing with the other apostles, because the other apostles regularly received monetary compensation and Paul did not.
 - In fact, many aristocrats in the ancient world despised manual labor and believed it was beneath any person.
 - Thus, the aristocrats in Corinth may have felt that Paul was demeaning himself and the office of an apostle by laboring with his hands rather than taking money for his teaching like the other apostles and most philosophers.
- B. The point of all Paul has been saying is nicely summed up in v. 14: “The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.”
1. God’s design was for preachers to be supported by the church and to labor in preaching and teaching.
 2. Obviously, that does not mean that preachers must receive *all* their income from churches or that churches can’t hire part-time preachers. In fact, Paul was something of a part-time preacher. Yet, this does mean that whether preachers are full or part time workers in a congregation, the church needs to pay them.

IV. CONCLUSION.

- A. I was taught very early how rude it is to talk about money.
1. No one likes to discuss his or her salary publicly. I’m sure many of you public employees cringed last year when your salaries were posted on the Internet for all to see.
 2. Therefore, it’s been quite awkward for me this morning to stand here and discuss the preacher’s salary. We’ve done so in spite of any awkwardness we might have, for the Word of God speaks to the issue.
- B. Although there is awkwardness concerning this issue, it is an issue to many.
1. In the 1970’s, just over 12% of preachers who left preaching did so in order to provide more adequately for their families.
 2. The October issue of *The Christian Chronicle* had a quite disturbing article on ministers in churches of Christ.

- a. According to the article, research was conducted in Texas concerning preachers and retirement.
 - b. The researchers found only 25% of preachers intended to retire fully.
 - Twenty-nine percent had no desire to retire, while forty-six percent plan to retire partially.
 - The reason for those numbers was that most preachers had received such poor pay that they were not able to have anything for retirement except Social Security.
- C. While this congregation takes good care of me and my family, that's not the case across our brotherhood.
1. As a brotherhood, we need to think far more seriously about fair compensation for preachers than we have in the past.
 2. We need to think seriously about fair compensation for church employees, for that's what Scripture teaches.
 - a. If we are to be God's people, we need to seek to be biblical in all our ways, including the paying of preachers.
 - b. How biblical are you in your life?
 - In a very real sense that's what this all boils down to.
 - I really thought about skipping this section, because I was afraid people would say, "He's wanting a raise" or "He's mad" or whatever.
 - I didn't preach this sermon for any such reason. I preached it only because it's found right here in Scripture. In our allegiance to Scripture, we need to be just as faithful to this passage as to any other passage.
 - I don't mind to tell you that I'll take my stand with Scripture—to preach every word and to strive to live every word.
 - Will you make that same pledge this morning—to believe and act on every word of Scripture?
 - Do you need our help in believing and following every word of Scripture? If so, come as we stand and sing.