

Financial Obligations

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Date: 19 March 2006

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[0 : 00] It's good to be able to pray like a Christian. I have to begin today with an apology.

Last Sunday at the 915 service, I used an analogy in my sermon. And afterwards, as the rest of the service was going on, I really felt in my spirit that I had not told the story correctly.

And I might have given some people the complete opposite impression from what I had intended.

And so I apologize for my lack of clarity in expression.

One of the things that you folks could pray for me is please pray that as I read God's Word, that I will be able to see God's Word with increasing clarity. And with, of course, increasing clarity, increasing humility.

And that I be able to speak clearly here in the congregation. One of the stories or one of the analogies which people use against Christians, because Christians believe what Jesus says in John 14.6.

[1 : 09] Jesus in John 14.6 says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me. And we Christians are ones who believe that.

And we are learning to believe it. Or should believe it if we haven't believed it yet. We might feel uncomfortable with that. But it's what Jesus teaches. And Jesus teaches the truth.

But in our culture, it's very common to think that there are many ways to God and that they're all equal. They're all equal. And so, in fact, a story which is often told against us, you know, if I was to say I believe, you know, what Jesus teaches, that he is the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father but through me. People will tell us, you know, human beings are like blind men coming to meet an elephant for the first time. And human beings are like blind men.

They've been blind all of their life. And they meet an elephant for the first time. And so one person touches the elephant's tail and says, oh, you know, God is, you know, the beast that I'm, you know, what I'm touching is like a snake.

[2 : 16] It's, you know, it's short and it's wiggly. And then somebody else touches the trunk of the elephant and comes up with some ideas to what the beast is. And other creatures touch the leg and come up with an idea about what the creature is.

And then others touch its big tummy and come up with an idea of what the creature is. And the person telling this story says, you know, and that just goes to show all of them get the thing completely and utterly wrong.

They just have their limited little experience of the elephant and they get the, what, they just miss what the elephant really is because they just extrapolate from their little experience.

And therefore, George, to say that Jesus is the way and the truth and the life is just showing that you're blind and you're only touching one part of the elephant. Now, the problem with that analogy is that the analogy actually, that little story proves the opposite of what the person telling the story thinks it proves because the person telling the story knows that it's an elephant.

You see, they're trying to say that all of our knowledge of God is partial, that all of our experience of God is partial, and that our problem is that we extrapolate from that which is partial and unknown to think that we know what the complete and perfect is.

[3 : 35] But the analogy only works because the person telling the analogy knows that it's an elephant, that in fact, the person is smuggling into the story really, ultimately, an arrogant claim to have perfect knowledge of God.

In fact, you see, often in life, attempts to show that belief in God is foolish ends up being foolish itself. You make an absolute claim that all things are relative.

You know, you make an absolute claim that all truth is partial. And in this particular case, you make an absolute claim that nobody knows absolutely about what God is really like. And in contrast to the

elephant story, the Christian way is actually very humble because Christians should be the first ones to acknowledge that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

A Christian should be the first to acknowledge that I don't know anything about God because of my particular wisdom or my particular... I'm not particularly special. I'm not particularly wise.

I'm not particularly learned. We Christians are ones who say, you know, in fact, I agree with you. If God, in fact, hasn't taken the initiative to make himself known, we can know nothing.

[4 : 49] And the Christian claim is the humble claim that God loved us, and God has spoken and made clear to us the way to himself. And all I can do is pass on to you what God has said.

And God's truth is not some private revelation that has come to me as if I am some type of special seer, but it is something which is public. Jesus' ministry was public.

The word of God is public. And our great opportunity is in humility to share what God has spoken, not bringing attention to ourselves, but to Christ the Savior and to his word.

Now, that's what I should have tried to say last week. Some of you are probably scratching your head, can't even remember the elephant story. That's fine. Supposedly, we only remember 10% of what we hear.

So someday I'm going to preach the same sermon 10 Sundays in a row. And that way, by the end of the 10 Sundays, we've all heard it once. And it's saving you a little bit of work.

[5 : 53] No. The other thing, another brief little caveat, if someday we get that big screen up here and, you know, the fancy projector, there'll be a little parishioner's advisory notice that would come up at this point in time.

You know, I'd like to have that so that if I preach on hell, there's a little advisory notice. And, you know, you preach on sex, there's an advisory notice. And when you preach on money, there's an advisory notice. And the text today touches on money.

And so I want to say this to those of us, those of you who are here who are our guests. If you are here today as our guest and you're a spiritual seeker and you have not yet come to give your life to Jesus, then I want you to know that you should not put a single penny on the plate.

Like, I want to be as serious about that as I possibly can. I don't want you to put even a penny on the plate when the plate goes around. The plate is for Christians.

You're our guests. You are a guest who is a spiritual seeker and we don't want you to put any money on the plate. In fact, we want you to go downstairs and have four cups of coffee all on us and have extra cookies all on us because you are our guest.

[7 : 11] And we don't want you to put any money on the plate. So, Paul today in 1 Corinthians 9, and you might want to turn in your Bibles to page 992.

Page 992. And you'll notice today that my... Today I'm going to be using the... Today's New International Version.

It's the latest version of the Bible that I'm using for my personal devotions. And so I'm going to be quoting from that. You might notice some differences in the words, but we'll be looking at 1 Corinthians 9.

And Paul today is going to be setting forward to us a spiritual principle that I have to confess I feel uncomfortable talking about. Jill and I have joked about how it's hard to talk about money when it maybe potentially touches yourself.

Like in an ideal world, you know, I would go around trying to raise money for other people and other people would go around raising money for the church and then we could sort of do it with a clean conscience or at least not feel any type of embarrassment about it.

[8 : 19] But Paul here talks about the Christians having an obligation to financially support gospel ministry at home and abroad.

The thing which sort of motivates this text, if we don't understand this spiritual principle, we won't understand the text. And Paul spends 14 verses trying to drive home using analogies from nature, using analogies from just, you know, sort of speak men and women of the world who know how the world works and, you know, what makes things work in the real world.

And even using scripture, he spends 14 verses to try to drive home a particular spiritual principle that Christians have an obligation to financially support gospel ministry at home and abroad.

A couple of weeks ago, Bill Clinton spoke in Ottawa. And I can't remember now, was it \$100,000 or \$150,000 he got paid for his short little speech? Either one was way too much.

But he got paid \$100,000 or \$150,000 for a short speech. And the place was packed. People paid from \$2,000 each. Actually, in most cases, it was probably their company paid.

[9 : 39] But, or somebody paid between \$2,000. I think the cheapest tickets were \$140. I might be wrong about that. I might have even been higher than that. And you got to hear Lance Armstrong and a few other people.

But the big draw was to hear Bill Clinton. And I believe he got paid. I know it was six figures. I just can't remember if it was \$100,000 or \$150,000. And the thing which amazes me is that people would pay that much money to go hear Bill Clinton.

And I'm not saying anything about my politics. I can tell you right now, none of the party leaders in Canada would I pay that money for, nor any current president or past president would I pay so much money to go hear them speak.

And it just amazes me that people were just, they would so much want to hear Clinton that they would pay that amount of money and that he could, with a straight face, ask for \$150,000 plus expenses and get it.

Paul here, in the first 14 verses of chapter 9, he's not saying that he's like Bill Clinton. He's not saying, you know, it would be like me going somewhere in the States and said, you know, if you only knew how great a speaker I was, you would pay \$2,000 to come hear me and give me \$150,000.

[10 : 52] Paul isn't trying to puff himself up and make it look like he should be getting money. It's in fact completely opposite. It's not at all like Bill Clinton. It's more like Paul is saying that a Christian has a financial, has an obligation, a spiritual obligation to financially support gospel ministry at home and abroad.

It's in a sense more like me with my children or you with your children, those of you who have children, that of course, a mother or father has obligations to provide for their children.

Like, you know, a little baby comes into the world, you don't just start instantly saying, well, I'm going to loan you the money, Johnny. You don't know this, but you know, when you're 18, I'm going to give you a bill.

And you know, you get a little palm pilot and every time you give them some formula, you make a little record and then at 18, you give them the bill and you expect, you know, you say, you know, I've been pretty generous with the interest, you know, only 2% and it's been compounding for all these years and this is what you owe and we'll keep running the tab until you've paid me back. You know, that's not how it works with a parent with their children. Of course, a parent with children, you know, I wish I had far more money to shower my kids with gifts, you know, and of course, it's my obligation to provide for my children financially and Paul, in a sense, is saying it's that type of an obligation which a Christian has to financially support gospel ministry.

[12 : 32] Let's just look at the end of verse 14 is on 1 Corinthians 9, 14. That's sort of the end of those first 14 verses. It's, in a sense, the concluding part of his trying to argue this case of the spiritual principle of Christians having an obligation to financially support gospel ministry at home and abroad.

He says, in the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. And in a sense, the command is to the congregation.

Paul is saying, in a sense, if you understood the Lord's command, you would understand that you have a financial obligation. That's what command means, to financially provide for me as I preach the gospel.

In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. But then look at verse 15. But I have not used any of these rights, and I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me, for I would rather die than allow anyone to deprive me of this boast.

The commentaries tell us that in Greek, almost always this text is not translated properly because in verse 15, Paul is overcome with emotion, and he begins to speak a sentence, and he breaks off the sentence right in the middle and moves to a different sentence.

[14 : 00] That he's, in a sense, overcome with emotion on this particular point. And so Paul moves from teaching this first, or reminding the congregation of this first spiritual principle, and now he, in a sense, is returning to his overall theme.

Those of you who were here last week remember that in 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10, Paul is dealing on one level with the issue of certain Christians who think they're so spiritual and so elite that one of the things that they do is they can go to the temple of Aphrodite or the temple of Zeus or the temple of Apollos, and they can have their animal sacrifice there, and they can eat with the other people and lounge around and just, and they say to Paul, some of you remember Paul, we all know that it's just a stone, that it's not just a bunch of bricks, that there's no real idols, and that we are free in Christ and that we can do this.

And so in 1 Corinthians 8, 9, and 10, Paul is trying to chip away not only with the issue but with the underlying spiritual issues which the Corinthians should understand.

You see, Paul could just say no. He could just say, okay, dudes, the answer is no. Don't do it anymore. Next topic. He could do that. But Paul isn't just wanting to give you a simple yes or no answer.

He's trying to spiritually form the Christians and the Christian community in Corinth. So last week, we saw how Paul said, yeah, the answer is no, and one of the reasons the answer is no is because we have an obligation to not do anything that will obscure the gospel message.

[15:39] And the other thing he said, the other reason it's no is that because we have an obligation of love towards those who are weak. And in fact, super spiritual Corinthians, the entire way that you should be motivating your life is thinking not what can I do because I am free, but how can I use my freedom to build other people up?

That's what should be going through your mind. And now Paul, teaching this spiritual principle, reminding them of the spiritual principle of a Christian's obligation to financially support gospel ministry at home and abroad, he now teaches them an even deeper spiritual principle of purpose. He says, you know what, I had this, you guys should be paying me, I have worked for free here. Why have I worked for free in Corinth? Why when I was there did I work for completely and utterly free and not even ask once for a penny, even after I had formed the church?

He said, it's because we are to be proactive in sacrificing our rights and freedoms and even our money to further the proclamation of the gospel.

We are to be proactive in sacrificing our rights, our freedoms, and even our money to further the proclamation of the gospel. Money gets our attention.

[17:02] Okay, money gets our attention. You know, it's easy for the spiritual life to be about warm fuzzies, it's easy about the spiritual life to be our comfort zone, it's easy for our spiritual life to, you know, that what we seek in our spiritual life is I just want to go where I am blessed, I want to go where I am fed, I want to go where I am filled, I want to go where I am accepted, I want to go where I can get, I can get, I can get, I can get, I can get, and it's very, very possible for the spiritual life to descend into a series of warm fuzzies.

In a sense, it's an inexpensive form of Prozac that you can just sort of come into the room, I can come into the room, I just want to be blessed, I just want to be blissed, I just want to receive, and I just want to be free, and I just want to be left alone, and I just want to do my own thing, and what could be possibly wrong with that?

You know, for us who like contemporary music, it might be, you know, we want the band to be a better band, you know, and if you're people who like the 11 o'clock service, the complaint would be, you know, all I want, George, is just, you know, it used to be when people complain about children, I just want an hour of peace and quiet on a Sunday morning, and I don't like it when kids make noises and bother me, I just want an hour of peace and quiet, you know, what's wrong with that?

A few spiritual and uplifting thoughts. Money gets our attention, and so Paul is saying, listen, I'm not just talking about doing something emotional, in a sense, Paul is saying, I sacrificed, I mean, in today's dollars, you know, he had a ministry for two years in Corinth, he said, I gave up \$150,000, I gave up \$200,000, you know, whatever you think the appropriate pay would be, \$120,000, I gave up \$120,000 because I believe this is important.

Whoa, that's a lot of money. Okay, I'm not just talking spiritual stuff, folks, I'm saying, I gave up six figures.

[19:12] I was at a church in, now this guy had some other sources of money, but I was at a church a couple of years ago, and they wanted to go into a building campaign, and the minister said, you know, I've talked this over with my wife, I really believe this is important for the church, and I want to share with you, for the next three years, while we're in this building campaign, for the next three years, I am giving up my salary.

That got everybody's attention. Now, he had some other source of money, he wasn't going to just live on, you know, Kraft dinner and crackers for the next three years, but saying he was going to give up his salary for the next three years because he really believed in this, that got everybody's attention.

So Paul uses an analogy that gets people's attention, doesn't matter what culture you're in, doesn't matter what it is, giving up money gets our attention. And Paul is saying that we are to be, you know, you're concerned about your freedom, you're concerned about what you can do, you're concerned about your friends.

In fact, folks, we are to be proactive in sacrificing our rights, proactive in sacrificing our freedoms, proactive in even sacrificing our money to further the proclamation of the gospel.

Paul had discerned that in Corinth money would have been a barrier and so he didn't want any. He had discerned that in Corinth money was going to be a really, really, really big issue so he didn't want any.

[20 : 53] I spoke at Ottawa U Christian Fellowship on Thursday night. That's where Jill from the band, Jill from the band, she's the intervarsity staff worker there.

It would be wrong for her to get money from the people that she ministers to there. It would be wrong for her to do that. It would be a barrier to the gospel.

Katrin from our congregation ministers to the poor. It would be wrong for her to try to get money from them, even though they have a spiritual obligation. They are to win them for Christ and money would be a barrier.

That's why it's important for people like us to think of ways and to be financially generous so we can provide money in these particular ministries so that the gospel message will not be hindered.

It's why I shared with you folks that if you're here and you're a spiritual seeker, you're our guest.

You're not a revenue source. In fact, to emphasize that we don't want you to put a penny in here.

[21 : 56] In fact, if for the next, it takes you five years of spiritual seeking and you come here, I don't want you to ever put any money in the plate because the plate is for people who have given their lives to Jesus Christ.

That's what the plate is for. It's one of the reasons, folks, why every church that I've been in, I've stopped yard sales and cranberry fairs and stuff like that because I don't believe that the community should be supporting St.

Albans. people who have a yard sale or a rummage sale, it should be to raise money for missions or something like that. It should be to give to the poor.

It should be for something like that, but it shouldn't be to keep our doors open because the plate is for Christians. And we should not look at the world as a revenue source.

We should look at the world in terms of how can we share the gospel and how can we move barriers that hinder the proclamation of the gospel and people coming to know Jesus Christ.

[23 : 01] Paul is in effect teaching us to use our freedom to enter into the big purpose, big purposes which come from God, which are to give shape to our lives.

We are to use our freedom to enter into the big purposes of God, which are to shape our life. life.

And then finally in this text, Paul talks about yet another spiritual principle, another deep spiritual principle of purpose.

And it is to pray that our church is never without people who will cross cultural divides to speak the gospel. Pray that our church is never without people who will cross cultural divides to speak the gospel.

Look at verse 22. Actually, we'll look at verse 19, this last spiritual principle in the text. Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible.

To the Jews, I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those under the law, I became like one under the law, though I myself am not under the law. So as to win those under the law, to those not having the law, I became like one not having the law.

[24 : 15] Though I am not free from God's law, but I'm under Christ's law. So as to win those not having the law. To the weak, I became weak to win the weak.

Here's the thing. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I might share in its blessings.

Verse 22 again. To the weak, I became weak to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. Hudson Taylor in the 19th century caused a huge

scandal.

He felt called to bring the gospel to the Chinese. And he went to China. And earlier missionaries had lived like Englishmen or like Americans in China.

And Hudson Taylor went there and quickly realized that he had to do something different. So he grew his hair long and he put it in a ponytail so he would look like Chinese men of the time.

[25 : 18] And he wore Chinese dress and he ate Chinese meals and he crossed the cultural divide. It wasn't just enough that he had left England to go to China to share the gospel.

But he didn't want to have people become English. He wanted to have people come to Christ. And so because he wanted people to come to Christ, he realized that he'd come all the way from England to China.

But on one level he hadn't yet come to China. And so he grew his hair long, he learned the language, he dressed Chinese, he ate Chinese, and he shared the gospel in Chinese.

And so Paul here is not saying that he's saying, he's not saying here that we have to change the message. You know, he's not saying, gosh, you know, the idea that Jesus died for our sins, that he is the one who, you know, who opened the door to heaven, opened the way to heaven, that he is the one who can, you know, transport us to the Father's side, that, you know, he bore our sin and rebellion.

Paul isn't saying that's a complicated message for the world today, so go ahead and change it and do whatever you want to have. You know, Paul is saying the message doesn't change at all. The gospel is unchanging.

[26 : 33] He's also saying, he's not saying that we should be immoral. He's not saying if you want to evangelize bank robbers, start robbing banks. He's not saying that at all. He says, you don't change the message, you don't become immoral, but listen, be willing to change your location.

Be willing to change the way you dress. Be willing to change the type of music you use. Be willing to learn a different language. Be willing to change your hair.

You know, if some of us feel an obligation, you know, if we feel a calling to evangelize goths, then you know what? We should look like a goth. Some of us might be called to look like a goth, to enter into that goth subculture so we can meet people and befriend people and share the gospel with them.

We don't sit in judgment and say, look at those silly and ridiculous people. Look how they dress and look down our noses at people. Anytime we look down our nose at a person like that, we are not speaking as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And we should pray that we as a congregation are never without people who are willing to cross the cultural divides to speak the gospel. The Christian faith is a go-to faith, not a come-to religion.

[27 : 52] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, I confess before you, I like being comfortable.

I confess before you, I don't like making sacrifices. Father, I confess before you that I like comfort zones and I don't like to be stretched. And I confess to you at the same time, Father, that I acknowledge that these things can become great sins in me and great sources of rebellion against you.

Father, may your Holy Spirit fall upon us afresh. Fall upon us afresh so that we might know your purpose for our lives.

Father, grant us a heart for other people, a love for other people, an ability to pray for other people. Grant us, Father, an ability not only to make good money, but to be very, very generous in furthering gospel ministry and gospel outreach, not only amongst our neighbors and those who are our friends.

Father, help us to pray for them. But, Father, grant us a heart for those who are in different cultures that are across a divide from us. And, Father, show us the ways that we can prayerfully support and financially support and maybe even physically go across those divides to share the gospel.

[29 : 25] Father, give us such a heart. This we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.