

God's Heart for the Nations
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Lesson 19
Part 1. Missions & Money

Introduction

Missionaries are free to receive or refuse financial support but every missionary should test his motives for receiving such support. Refusing support does not prove a lack of apostolic characteristics. Receiving money should never be a stumbling block to spread the Gospel, and greedy acceptance of funds can expose the receiver as a false apostle. Paul disliked receiving support from people among whom he ministered, but gladly accepted it from churches outside his ministry area. He gladly asked money for others, but never for himself or his team.

Scripture reference

After this, Paul ... went to Corinth. There he met ... Aquila ... with his wife Priscilla ... Paul went to see them, and because he *was a tentmaker* as they were, he stayed and worked with them (Acts 18:1-3).

The story

This topic had to come up sooner or later: the tricky issue of missionary finance. Paul hadn't brought it up for the simple reason that he didn't hide the slightest selfish motive behind his ministry. On the contrary: some Corinthian Christians interpreted the *visible result* of Paul's highly integer financial policy, his tent-making, as a sign that he was *not* a real apostle. They hadn't understood why Paul did this, and often we also have a hard time to correctly esteem the value of his extremely selfless support principles. Below we will explore some of these.

Not only did Paul meet opposition in this from Corinthian Christians, but also from so-called colleagues who had started ministering among the Corinthians on their own initiative. And yes, you can guess already what sort of people these men were. They were Jewish Christians who insisted on keeping the law and requiring circumcision. Paul calls them 'false apostles' for that reason. These people, present in Corinth, set off their ministry to that of Paul – who was absent. Mockingly he calls them 'super-apostles' in his next letter. Paul exposed these men for what they were: finance-greedy wolves.

Comment

Why were the Corinthians apparently insulted that Paul had not made use of their willingness to support him financially? Why did they despise a preacher that made tents to support himself, and sometimes even his co-workers, like the Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who had been expelled from Rome?

The reason was that Corinthians, before they became believers, were used to support philosophers in their *cultural* context and pagan priests in their *religious* context. Now that they were Christians it was natural for them to support Paul who was God's worker. The latter's refusal to accept this proved to some that he was no true apostle because he did not use his apostleship rights. They took Paul's refusal as insult to their generosity.

In his defense, Paul stated that they were right: apostles who sow spiritual seed *do* have a right to material harvest. The word 'right' can, based on the original Greek text of the New Testament, better be translated as 'authority'. Paul argues that he has the apostolic authority to *accept* support, but also the liberty to exercise that authority to *refuse* it.

Scripture reference

If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with *anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ* (1 Cor. 9:12,13).

We put no stumbling-block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited ... poor, yet making many rich ... (2 Cor. 6:3,10).

Comment, continued

His reasons are *firstly*, that he did not want to burden the Corinthians or put a stumbling block in their way, so that the spread of the Gospel would not be hindered. *Secondly*, the Gospel had been given free of charge and should be passed on for free. Paul demonstrated that by his own way of ministering. He thus bases his principles of receiving or refusing monetary support on *what is good for the spread of the Gospel* and *not* on his apostolic right or authority. *Thirdly*, he used his authority to refuse financial support to expose false apostles who were all too eager to accept it. So his refusal became a seal of sincerity and genuineness.

Scripture reference

I robbed *other churches* by receiving support *from them* so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for *the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed*. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so (2 Cor. 11:8,9).

Comment, continued

That he did not refuse financial support all the time, becomes clear in his second letter to the Corinthians. Macedonian churches supported Paul when he worked in Corinth. Apparently he had followed the same principles when ministering in Thessalonica, where he provided his own support as well. The church in Philippi seems to have been the only one that regularly supported Paul.

The pattern was that he did *not* accept support from a church *as long as he ministered in its midst* but that he had no problem receiving it when he started to work *somewhere else*. Neither did he mind accepting help when he traveled and visited for a short time.

Scripture reference

... you *Philippians* ... not one church shared with me in respect to giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need (Phil. 4:15,16).

We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you (1 Thess. 2:9).

Comment, continued

Paul had no problem talking about money in itself. Gathering a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem was one of his major projects and he was not hesitant to receive the Corinthians' money for that. He saw no problem in asking money for others – although he did not even do that for his own co-workers – but was extremely reluctant to mention his own needs. This presents a great example of integrity to those who exercise their ministerial rights in an unashamed way, as is seen in many parts of the world.

Paul was not alone in following these principles; he expected his co-workers to do the same. Then why do some think they can follow more materialistic ways with impunity? Is our main concern to live from the Gospel as is our *right* or is it *rather* never to hinder its spreading by *attaining* to that right? Preaching the Gospel free of charge is a reward in itself. There is nothing against receiving *unsolicited* gifts – in fact, allowing people to give adds to their spiritual accounts. Also, as Gospel ministers we should be the first to testify by our own experience that ‘God is able to make *all* grace abound ... so that in *all* things at *all* times [we] have *all* that we need ...’.

Discussion & dialogue

In your study group, compare Paul's financial policy with that of yourself or your church

Think of more reasons why it could be expedient to receive funds from other areas than from the field of ministry

Explain how theme six features in this chapter

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Lesson 19

Part 2. Resurrection: the Central Message

Introduction

The resurrection of Christ is the central pillar of the Gospel, and without this message of the Gospel is empty and futile. There is a difference between resurrection and resuscitation. A resurrection body has many capacities, different from our present ones. Resurrection and instantaneous change yield the same glorified bodies. Eternal life is not a prolongation of earthly life, but a total renewal of it. There is a beautiful first, and a terrible second resurrection still to come.

Scripture reference

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith ... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men (1 Cor. 15:13,14,17-19).

The story

Paul spoke a lot to his younger colleagues about the resurrection of Christ. It had been a matter of agreement among the apostles to preach about Christ's resurrection wherever they went. Peter did it in Jerusalem; Barnabas and Paul did it often wherever they were. Paul wrote about it to the Thessalonians and the Corinthians. With the resurrection faith in Christ Jesus stands or falls. If people do not believe, it is usually because their faith breaks on the rock of the resurrection doctrine. Few have problems with 'God' – as long as it doesn't become too personal. Behind 'God' – as an impersonal force – people can hide. More people have problems with God having a Son; even His existence is being doubted. Telling that Jesus was once dead but is now alive is something that most people willfully reject. If they still listen after the truth of the resurrection has been presented to them, they will believe all the rest as well.

Comment

Belief in a literal bodily resurrection, first of Christ, then of His people for salvation and finally of all other people for condemnation is a non-negotiable of the Gospel. Denying Christ's resurrection is not smart: it is a historical fact, witnessed by too many people to be a fake. Denying a future resurrection for all people who expect their salvation from Christ takes away the core of the Gospel and makes faith futile. Denying the resurrection means: having nothing to believe in. Either one has the Gospel, including the resurrection, or one has nothing. The resurrection should have a prominent place in Gospel preaching, in local evangelism as well as in cross-cultural missions, according to examples we are given in the whole New Testament. Here are some more facts:

The word *resurrection* should not be confused with the word *resuscitation*. The latter word means only a *temporary* coming back from the dead after having died. People who have been *resuscitated* do still have a mortal body and will eventually die again. Biblical examples of these are Lazarus, the young man from Nain and Jairus' daughter. There are also some Old Testament examples: both Elijah and Elisha raised people from the dead. The function of such resuscitation is the glorification of God, as the Omnipotent One, Who has power over death. Resuscitations still occur, e.g. in frontier mission contexts.

Resurrection on the other hand means, that a person will never die again. Jesus was the First and until now is the only One Who was resurrected. When He rose from the dead He received a resurrection body, which differed from His former body in several ways. It was a real body that could be touched and fed, and it could be recognized by His disciples. It was a body of flesh and bones; without the blood that He had shed at Calvary. His body was no longer bound to time or space and was of such spiritual solidity that it could pass through walls. Jesus could now travel with the speed of thought.

Not only was His body unlimited by time or space, it also no longer depended on things that human bodies need, like food, drink and sleep. In theory He could even move under water, because His life no longer depended on oxygen. The quality of His body was such that it *could not possibly* be hurt or die. At the same time, Jesus did not stop to be human. Seated on God's Throne sits a Man – Who at the same time is in essence God.

Scripture reference

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven ... and *the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air* (1 Thess. 4:16,17).

Comment, continued

When Jesus comes back, the people that died with faith in Him will be resurrected. This means that they who were already in Heaven with Him, will then receive their new, glorified resurrection bodies that are of the same quality as Jesus' body. This is called the first resurrection. Right after that happening, the believers that are still alive on earth will be changed in an instant, and also receive their resurrection bodies. That is the moment, that the Church of all times and all places will be united as the Bride of the Lamb, standing before Him, radiant, without spot or wrinkle, ready to rule with Him for ever.

Eternal life in a resurrection body can not be compared to life on earth. For many, the latter is miserable and eternal continuity of it sounds like bad news. Eternal life in the biblical sense *starts* when a person is born again, and is *completed* at the moment of resurrection or instantaneous change. *Such* life will know no more suffering, pain, grief, tears or death; it will always be joyful, happy, enthusiastic, energetic and in fellowship with God. It will never be boring. We will have tasks that will be fitting for us, with challenges that we will be eager to meet. No assignment will be too difficult or impossible. We will be the doctors and lawyers of the nations, going around healing,

abolishing unrighteousness and injustice, for thousand years of peace, under Christ's rule on earth. During that whole period the devil will be locked up in the bottomless pit.

Scripture reference

... there is now *no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:1,2).

“Well done, my good servant!” his master replied, “Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge ...” (Luke 19:17).

Comment, continued

Many wonder about the judgment seat of Christ and fear to appear before it, but that is not necessary. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We, Christians, will not appear before His judgment seat to be sentenced, but to be appraised and rewarded. The only people that have to fear the judgment seat of Christ are the ones that refuse to believe in Him.

There is not only a first resurrection, there will be a second one as well. As beautiful as the first is, so terrible the second will be. That one takes place at the end of the thousand years of peace. When this second resurrection will take place, all damned people will be raised eternally, not for life, but for death. They had died once, now they die for the second time. This means that, based on the works of their lives as they are recorded in God's books, they will be condemned.

When all the damned have been judged and sentenced they will forever be removed from God's presence. After that last dramatic exercise a new era will start, which the Bible calls the New Heaven and the New Earth. Once that era has started, there will never ever be anything that will even vaguely remind us of sin, or the suffering as its consequence. By that time, the sin that had started in the heart of Morningstar, will have been abolished totally and completely, never to appear again.

Discussion & dialogue

Discuss with your study group how the doctrine of the resurrection can best be explained to Folk-religionists, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, in a contextualized way, that is, in a way that is understandable and relevant for them

Which seven of the ten themes feature in this chapter, and how? (Answer is in the Teacher's Guide)

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Lesson 19

Part 3. Apostolic Suffering

Introduction

Like Jesus, Paul had a distinct theology of suffering. No missionary on the field will last long without having adopted the same. Much of Paul's suffering came from strained relationships with church members. Other suffering came from the interference of false apostles who tried to break down Paul's work. Paul emphasizes God's compassion rather than the harshness of suffering. He welcomed God's comfort, with which he could comfort others. The Kingdom can not expand without apostles suffering for it innocently. Apostolic suffering serves eternal purposes and yields eternal rewards.

Scripture reference

[Paul] sent ... Timothy ... to Macedonia ... About that time there arose a great disturbance [in Ephesus] ... When the uproar had ended, Paul ... set out for Macedonia (Acts 19:22,23; 20:1).

... we go hungry and thirsty, ... are in rags, ... brutally treated, ... homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when ... persecuted, we endure it; when ... slandered, we answer kindly ... we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world (1 Cor. 4:11-13).

The story

When Paul met Timothy in Macedonia, months after they had parted company, he shared his heart with the younger man about his concerns with regard to the church in Corinth. He told how Demetrius the silversmith had caused problems in Ephesus that had ended in a riot, but that before the man could bring the case to court, Paul had decided to leave town. Before he left he had addressed the church in a good-bye speech. He then explained to his younger disciple that he welcomed his suffering rather than trying to run away from it.

Comment

What Paul explained to Timothy may be called his 'theology of suffering'. Any missionary will do well to study that aspect of the ministry thoroughly before he starts cross-cultural ministry.

Paul addressed many controversies in his first letter to the Corinthians. There were many tensions in the relationship with some church members. Paul shed many tears over this painful situation. On top of that there were the false apostles that opposed him and his ministry. The theme of apostolic suffering is a major feature in his second letter to the Corinthians. In its first chapter he gives a blueprint of this.

He emphasizes God's compassion and comfort, *not* the harshness of suffering. Paul leaves no room for complaints about his suffering anywhere in his letters. He does not fight, withdraw from, seek to escape, or rebuke the devil for it. The only thing he did was pray, and encourage others to do the same. This is the mature way of dealing with suffering: to accept it so that it can form and shape you.

Scripture reference

Praise be to the God ... of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God (2 Cor. 1:3,4).

Comment, continued

Receiving comfort from God served for Paul the higher purpose of being able to better comfort *others* in *their* suffering. The Corinthians themselves faced suffering, which Paul saw as a normal part of the Christian life of disciples. He had no affinity with the 'other gospel' of a trouble-free health-and-wealth message.

Their apostolic suffering in Asia Minor had been beyond human ability to endure, to the point of near-death; only God's miracles of grace could still save them. (We must not confuse apostolic suffering – sometimes beyond human ability to endure – with temptations, which are never heavier than we can deal with). Paul equates apostolic suffering with Christ's suffering, as he would write to the Colossians later.

Scripture reference

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church (Col. 1:24).

Comment, continued

In the light of suffering Paul maintained his eternity-perspective. He never fell in the trap of complaining about his bad temporary circumstances, because he always kept in mind that these merely served good, eternal purposes.

Later in the second letter to the Corinthians he elaborates on the contents of his suffering. If we add these all up, we see an impressive list that mentions troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, hunger, stoning, shipwrecks, all sorts of danger, thirst, cold, and nakedness. There are also texts in his first Corinthian letter and the one to the Romans where he speaks about suffering.

A major part of Paul's suffering consisted of the necessity to defend himself, his ministry, his apostolic authority and his doctrine against his opponents. Second Corinthians gives us the strongest example of this. We saw already, that these opponents were Jews who tried to lure Gentile Christians into Jewish legalism and circumcision. These Pharisees opposed Paul and ministered on their own initiative. Paul combated these so-called

believers, whom he ironically called ‘super-apostles’. In fact they were ‘false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ and servants of Satan, who also masquerades as an angel of light’.

The fervor with which Paul opposed them can be compared with how he defends the new covenant at the expense of the old. With that principle the whole Christian faith would stand or fall.

Paul’s suffering is the mark of his apostolic calling from the moment that Ananias had spoken with him in Damascus. Yet, this suffering was the very thing that, in the eyes of his opponents, disqualified him as an apostle. He was mainly criticized for three reasons: preaching free of charge, his sufferings and his refusal to boast about his spiritual experiences.

The consequence was that Paul’s very *lifestyle* called the legitimacy of the ‘ministry’ of these false apostles into question. They acted entirely differently from him. For Paul, weakness – not strength – was the sure sign of true apostolic ministry. An important difference between the problems in both letters is that those of First Corinthians were in the church and those in Second Corinthians had to do with the authority and legitimacy of Paul as an apostle, which caused strained relationships.

Discussion & dialogue

Tell your study group some of the ways in which you have experienced apostolic suffering yourself, and how the Lord helped you to endure it or saved you out of it

Discuss how a biblical theology of suffering can be taught to a younger generation of missionaries: how can today’s ‘Pauls’ teach this to today’s ‘Timothys’?



Lesson 19

Part 4. From Aroma to Persuasion

Introduction

Display of Christian character is of vital importance for every missionary, and learning your people group’s language and culture shows your respect for them. In this learning process new missionaries should become ‘like children’, as Jesus said; it helps a missionary, when he can laugh about himself, instead of being insulted. Being an ‘aroma of Christ’ is an indispensable missionary quality, but we also need to learn how to persuade people of the truth of the Gospel.

Scripture reference

But thanks be to God, who ... through us spreads everywhere the *fragrance of the knowledge of him*. For we are to God *the aroma of Christ* among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, *the fragrance of life* (2 Cor. 2:14-16).

The story

Traveling through many countries as Paul did, he came across people groups whose language he knew and others whose tongue was unknown to him. When we see him ministering in Athens we see the tremendous advantages of his knowledge of the Greek language, culture, history, religion and literature. It helped him to address the Greeks at an academic level. That his success in Athens was limited may have had other reasons, but certainly not his lack of knowing the language and culture.

Yet, what did he do when he came through areas where he did not know the language? Well, he did not give us very direct advice, but there are a few things that can help us to successfully guess his approach. One of these is his encouragement to ‘be an aroma of Christ’. He wants us to ‘smell like Christ’, even when we can not yet ‘talk about Christ’. We can radiate the character of Christ, even to those whose language we don’t master.

Once you have become Christ’s disciple, He starts to change your old sinful life into a new life, that He lives through you. His presence in your life becomes visible. Your character changes to a friendlier one than before. Where you used to hate, you now love. Your selfish attitude He changed to a selfless one. All that can be seen by people, whether you speak their language or not, *because you smell like Christ!* Long before you can speak someone’s language, you can love him, help him, and be kind to him. People will start to love you because you become a representation of Christ to them that they’ve never seen before.

Learning a language is not a waste of time, because during the period you learn the native tongue of the people you want to share the gospel with, you can get to know them and their habits. The better you know these, the easier it becomes for you to tell the Gospel in a way that will really speak to their hearts. Not only do you need to learn their language, you need to learn their culture as well. A new language is best acquired in the country where it is spoken. Have somebody who is a native speaker help you with the language for a few hours a day. Go to the market place daily (that was probably where Paul made his tents) , rehearsing and exercising the small sentences you have learned. You will be surprised how fast you pick it up then.

Scripture reference

I tell you the truth, unless you *change and become like little children*, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3).

The story, continued

In the beginning you may feel like a small child, when you try to speak that new language, especially when people laugh at you. But Jesus told us to become like little children, in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Becoming like a small child is also what you need to do when you go to the mission field. On that field, in that new culture, you are as a child again. We must be so childlike in our attitude that we won't be insulted when people laugh at our failures, when we try to speak their language. Let's rather laugh with them. Maybe it is even true to say that 'Whoever does not go to the mission field as a small child will not *help others* to enter the Kingdom of God!'

Scripture reference

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, *known and read by everybody*. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3:2,3).

The story, continued

Paul gave the Corinthians yet another analogy, when he compared them with a letter. He wrote the teachings of Christ on their hearts with the invisible ink of the Holy Spirit. When they meet unbelievers, the latter 'read' their Christian character from their lives. Such reading doesn't require language knowledge either.

That does not mean that missionaries don't have to learn the language, on the contrary. It only means that they don't have to be concerned about wasting their time as long as they haven't yet mastered the new language. Missionaries may also be comforted by the fact that usually their target population will be very impressed about the efforts to learn their language. This will help to earn the missionaries the right to be heard later. They must learn to walk the walk before they can talk the talk.

Becoming an effective missionary is a process. Once you have reached the stage in which you are no longer considered a foreigner, it is not enough to just live among your people group or even to preach at them collectively. Most important of all is to talk to people personally, one to one, trying to persuade them of the truth of the Gospel.

Comment

There is comfort for missionaries in their first term who are struggling to learn a local language and are not yet able to express themselves in it. Being the aroma of Christ is the solution. If our attitudes are right, our characters friendly and our behavior loving and compassionate, we can make people 'smell Christ' in our lives before we can explain about Him and His work in words. We can be 'a letter of Christ ... read by everybody'. This conveys the same message: *being* precedes *doing* and your *walk* precedes your *talk*. The work of the Spirit in your heart will not be lost on people, even without words.

Scripture reference

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men ... For Christ's love compels us (2 Cor. 5:11,14).

When Paul speaks about 'persuading men' he plays down 'compromise outreach'. *Presence-evangelism*, which means being around as Christians, will not do the job. Neither is *proclamation-evangelism* ('preach at them') enough. Relationship-based *persuasion-evangelism* is needed. This is dialogue, almost arguing with people while trying to persuade them into the Kingdom. Obviously it is only the Holy Spirit who can really persuade people in the depth of their being. But if we fear the Lord – that is, if we are really convinced of the justness of His case – we will try harder to save people from His judgment. Paul adds that Christ's love compels us: He died for us and therefore we should take evangelism and missions more seriously, imploring people to become reconciled to God through Christ. This ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to us.

Discussion & dialogue

Compare in your study group your plans for cultural- and language preparation with those, indicated in this chapter, and see if you need to apply modifications

How can you 'smell like Christ' to your target-population, as long as you do not yet speak their language fluently?

Assess the benefits – or disadvantages – of studying the religious writings of the people group you want to share the Gospel with. For instance, could reading the Koran contaminate you spiritually, or could your Koran knowledge help you to 'persuade' Muslims of the superiority of the Gospel message?

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