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THE MANY COMPENSATIONS FOR FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN SERVICE

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It is innate in the thinking of men that service deserves reward. To put the matter as an objective fact, "The laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7). Therefore, the structure of society is arranged about this central idea, and so far as history reveals, it has always followed this principle. The only exception is the slave, and even here there was a measure of consideration given to the provision for his keep.

It is current in the thinking of today that reward is computed in terms of material things. Within the context of a highly developed monetary system this is generally identified as money. This medium of exchange makes it easy to shift from one sort of substantial goods to another with the least difficulty. Even the servant of God finds it more convenient to compute his services in terms of money.

It is amazing, however, to discover that compensation ranges far beyond the material rewards, and these outweigh monetary worth. There are few who give sufficient attention to these to realize that these provide the driving force for the most faithful service, and provide spontaneity and fragrance for the ministry. When I began to itemize the length and breadth of these as they relate to my own service, I began to realize how much these must mean to others.

In the course of this discussion, I want to discuss seven. And this discussion must of necessity be brief.

I. THERE IS THE COMPENSATION CENTERING IN THE PREROGATIVE FOR SERVICE

In a context dealing with the right use of Christian liberty, but at this point focusing on remuneration, the Apostle Paul declares, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible

crown; but we are incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:23-27).

The subject of salvation is not under consideration in this passage. It is addressed to saved people. But the subject of service is the focal point. The privilege of service the Apostle Paul counts as his highest possession. And he does not want to do anything that would disqualify him so that it would be necessary to lay him on the shelf.

This means that appointment to service is a divine function. A dispensation of the gospel had been committed to him (1 Cor. 9:17). The Lord Jesus Christ had enabled him, and counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry (1 Tim. 1:12). He found himself, therefore, by this appointment "a preacher and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles" (2 Tim. 1:11). He soon learned that no man taketh this to himself, but only as they are called of the Lord are they inducted into such a high and holy place of ministry. But he also learned that appointment to service is only the first step in this program.

There is also the apprehension of service which devolves upon the servant himself on the human side. As he pursued this ministry and experienced the things which God wrought through him (1 Cor. 15:10; Acts 14:27), he began to prize more highly the value of this ministry. He even contemplated what it would mean to have this ministry taken from him. He reached that place where he was willing to undergo any hardship or any stringency of self-discipline that he might not be disqualified for ministry and be laid on the shelf. He found in this ministry a compensation all its own. Here was a compensation dearer than life itself. This was his life. To have it taken from him would have converted him into a human derelict. He could not countenance the thought.

II. THERE IS THE COMPENSATION CENTERING IN THE PROCEDURE OF OPERATION

The function of the ministry is twofold. It consists first of all in performing the function of a depository for the conservation of the truth, and in the second place that of a broadcaster for the communication of the truth. These are really two sides of one thing. For what you communicate you conserve; and you conserve only by means of communication.

The conservation of the truth is one of the important functions of the ministry. To Timothy Paul declared that the glorious gospel had been committed to his trust (1 Tim. 1:11). In turn he said to Timothy, "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies

which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare, holding faith" (1 Tim. 1:18-19). "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust" (1 Tim. 6:20). Into the hands of the faithful few this charge is laid. Whereas this message is recorded in the Bible, the Word of God, it is not conserved in the fullest sense of that word until it takes shape in the mind and heart and consciousness of a man. There it takes on vitality and breadth and reality.

But coupled with conservation there must be the communication of the truth. Paul established this connection. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained" (1 Tim. 4:6). The good minister is therefore urged to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). Conservation will acquire a genealogy when the minister follows the injunction that "the things that thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The consciousness of performing this function brings its own compensation that cannot be duplicated in any other way. Books will grow old with age and be counted of little value to a modern and changed generation. But there is nothing antiquated or out of date in the message of life that is conserved and communicated by the living voice of one who has experienced it.

III. THERE IS THE COMPENSATION CENTERING IN THE PURPOSE OF THE MINISTER

This deals with the motivation for the ministry. And it strikes at the heart of ministry which differentiates it from the calling of God and a mere professionalism. Mere professionalism will degenerate into dead formalism and at last into liberal pretense. May God deliver us from that. But motivation which is divorced from any form of selfish aggrandizement and sees two focal points, the first disappearing into the second, will be a ministry that will be dynamic and enduring.

The motive of serving the Church is the nearest to our experience and far reaching. Paul declared, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). It is clear that every phase of salvation is in view: past, present, future. This means that he had one controlling passion, and that was that his life and ministry would contribute to men and women everywhere, so that those among them who were the elect would be enabled to move forward to that phase

of salvation which they had not yet experienced and reach that final phase of eternal glory with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This meant ignominy, hunger, deprivation, imprisonment, defamation, peril to life. Hence, men among the intelligentsia were moved by this man; men in high political station, men who belonged to the military, men who were among the class of slaves.

The motive for glorifying the Lord is overshadowing and basic for the ministry. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). This motive is all consuming. There is no area of experience where it cannot be applied. With this as the guiding principle in life, the path appointed of the Lord at times may seem most narrow and rock-strewn. It leads to Calvary. That is where the journey ended for Christ. It led to the crucifixion of Peter upside down. It led to the chopping block for the Apostle Paul. It has meant the silent contempt and the open persecution of many for Christ's sake. But over that way those saints have traveled, there was joy that they could suffer for Christ. As Paul put it to those who were attempting to dissuade him from the path he knew to be right, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). It was this man who near the end of his life could face the Sanhedrin and exclaim, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1).

This is compensation in its own right.

IV. THERE IS THE COMPENSATION CENTERING IN THE PRODUCT BEING DEVELOPED

The rewards of the servant of God are closely associated with the actual experiences that go into the ministry. It is impossible to initiate the procreative process without finding in the child a compensation in its own right. This is just as true of the ministry. In the nature of the case, there is the travail to bring to nativity, and this is followed by the process of nourishing to bring to maturity.

The nativity of a human soul in the Christian faith led the Apostle Paul to exclaim, "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (I Cor. 4:15). It was in the midst of deep travail that this birth took place. "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but

in the power of God" (I Cor. 2:3-5). He was in the midst of a foreign population, the marks of paganism stamped on every area of life, in the shadow of intellectualism, confronting the loathsomeness of immorality, menaced by political foes, in the most populous city of Greece. And yet his straightforward testimony brought some souls to the birth. This was compensation in itself for all that he had ventured for the Lord.

The nurturing of a human soul to maturity in the faith follows the same pattern. In stirring language the Apostle Paul describes the time and energy spent over the saints in Thessalonica. "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory... For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy" (I Thess. 2:7-12, 19-20).

V. THERE IS THE COMPENSATION CENTERING IN THE AREA OF PERSONAL SATISFACTION

The thing I am about to discuss is in some sense related to all that I have said. And yet there is a sense in which, if all the other things that could be classified as compensation were suddenly nullified, this one thing would be sufficient compensation in itself. I am talking about something that is totally apart from position, procedure, purpose, and product. I am now talking about something that is intensely personal. Is there not something about being set aside for ministry that brings its own inner satisfaction, and that satisfaction leads you to say to yourself, I wouldn't trade places with any other man? Let me suggest three aspects of this truth.

There is that personal satisfaction of being a recipient of the truth. In the three personal accounts of Paul's conversion he lays special emphasis upon this fact. He revels in the fact that the God of his fathers has chosen him to see the face of the just One, to hear His voice, and to know His will (Acts 22:14). There is something about that that is utterly staggering to the imagination; that God in His grace should select him out of the multitude, and then reveal Himself to him, when the milling multitudes of men go on their blind and uncertain way. You cannot

read these accounts of Paul's conversion, nor the intimations appearing in Paul's writings without being convinced that he cherished this revelation. Lest he be lifted up overmuch, the Lord had to send a messenger of Satan to buffet him. But even in physical affliction, there was no diminution of gratitude for this privilege (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

There is that personal satisfaction for comprehension of the truth. This cannot be complete comprehension, for that would argue for an infinite mind. One must exclaim with Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33). But there is a revelation of wisdom that the Spirit of God gives. This is a "wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory: But, as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:6-10). This brings the believer to that place where he is able to examine all things (I Cor. 2:15).

The compensation of inner satisfaction that he has a grasp of truth, he comprehends the movement of the times, and he realizes his own place in that grand system of the ages is overwhelming. It is the conviction born of this comprehension that leads one to say in life's darkest hour: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

VI. THERE IS THAT COMPENSATION CENTERING IN THE AREA OF RECIPROCATING GRATITUDE

There has never been invented anything to take the place of expression of gratitude from a human heart for benefit received. It is a fragrance rising from an appreciative heart in which there is no merit and where no merit is intended, but by virtue of its very nature it becomes an overflowing compensation to him upon whom it is conferred. It is the return of grace for grace received, and takes a large place in the life and ministry of the servant of God. It does what money can never do.

Gratitude in expression for conversion is one place where the minister is the recipient. In one of the testimonies of Paul he refers

to the ministry of Stephen. "And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him" (Acts 22:19-20). That is Paul's way of expressing gratitude for the human instrument that led him to salvation. He remembered his invincible exposition of the Scriptures in the Alexandrian Synagogue, the inescapable indictment of his apologetic before the Sanhedrin, that face which shone like that of an angel, and the perfect willingness of Stephen to suffer death for the Lord Jesus, even though innocent. And here in this testimony before the Jews he pays tribute to this man as having such a large part in leading him to conversion.

The necessary exhortation to continue in the faith has aroused the gratitude of many a saint. Over and over again Paul exercised this ministry in behalf of those saints he had led to the Lord (Acts 13:43). He urges Timothy more than once to continue in those things which he learned and was assured of, knowing of whom he had learned them (2 Tim. 3:14). There is no recorded word of response. But it is a fair assumption that if there are any records, they will reveal the often-repeated expressions of thanksgiving that Paul was used of God to help them over the hard places, to encourage when the going was rough, to explain the confusing situations that produced frustration. Many can recall instances when they have been encouraged by those whom they have helped. Is not this a compensation of inestimable value?

Commitment to the ministry also comes in for its share of compensation when traced to a human agent. It was a pastor who put the matter to me so that I could not escape the issue. For this I shall be eternally grateful. Perhaps every ministerial reader can trace his experience back to a time, and a place, and a person who was used of the Lord to bring him into the place of ministry. Surely you are grateful. And perhaps you have in turn had that experience with others. Does it give you an inner satisfaction, more than that, a reward for the privilege of being used in that way? Here is something that cannot be computed in terms of material gain. It is something that compensates for all the rigors and toil and the hardship of the way. Barnabas served in this capacity for Paul. After his conversion, it was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28). When there was need for a teacher in Antioch, it was Barnabas who sought out Paul and inducted him into service (Acts 11:22-26). And then, at last, it was Barnabas who joined with this man at Antioch and there began the first great missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). Surely Barnabas will never cease to find reward as the agent in reaching and directing Paul.

VII. THERE IS THE COMPENSATION CENTERING IN THE AREA OF PERMANENT REWARD

In some sense, all that has been discussed up to this point has its realization in the present life, at least partially so. But now I want to dwell on that which reaches beyond the present age into the unending ages of eternity. Two things militate against the fullest realization of compensation in the present. The one is the human limitation in estimating worth. The other is the personal limitation in appreciating the compensation. But both of these will be removed when the present age passes away and the perfection of the future ages is ushered in.

Divine approval will greet the minister beyond this present life. The race will have been run. The tasks will have been finished. The fight will have been fought. There remains then the organization of all the facts and the estimation of their worth. Then the righteous Judge will take account of His servants and their worth, and will render righteous judgment. He will be able to assemble all the facts for this evaluation. This will include the motives that moved the heart, the means that were employed to accomplish the ends, and the results that proceeded from the efforts. He will have a clear picture of the task He committed to His servant. He will understand the ability of His servant to produce. And where there is merit, in His sight, there will be that word of commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

Accurate computation will bring reward that is commensurate. Two guide lines will be followed by the Lord. The first will deal with the difficulty through which His servant toiled. For "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (I Cor. 3:8). The word "labor" lays its emphasis upon the hardship, toil, difficulty, misunderstanding, and heartache His servant had to undergo in order to accomplish a task for the Lord. The second will deal with the enterprise itself. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (I Cor. 3:14). But even in this case, it will not be mere magnitude, but the quality that will be examined. For "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (I Cor. 3:13). The word "sort" lays emphasis upon quality, and such quality that will endure the rigorous test to which it is subjected. But the minister can be assured that this will extend to the minutest detail, even the cup of cold water given in the name of the Lord (Matt. 10:42).

Personal exaltation will be experienced in proportion to the quality and quantity of ministry. Paul was convinced that there was a crown of righteousness laid up for him, and not for him only, but for all those that love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). A number of crowns are alluded

to in the Scriptures, which probably are only representative. But it is a way of saying that every energy and effort expended for the Lord will be properly rewarded. It is a way of setting forth a most important fact, namely, that there is moral responsibility in the Christian life, and that this responsibility has been intensified with the bestowal of grace. It is a way of emphasizing the fact that we live now in a passing order of things, and therefore the strictest of logic should impel one to set his affections on things above and beyond that never pass away. By this method it is possible to see the present in true perspective as that which is relative, and concentrate on that which is real, absolute, and eternal.

For what it is worth, it should be noted that the crowns received will at last be laid at the feet of Him who sits upon the rainbow-circled throne. This is probably an indication that these crowns were actually acquired as a result of His grace, and therefore in all deference belong to Him as a proper recognition of His worth (Rev. 4:4, 10-12).