

Concerning the Full-Time Minister

By Bill Willis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE CONDEMNATION	3
THE SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT	4
THE JOB OF THE MINISTER.....	8
THE RIGHTS OF THE MINISTER.....	10
THE CONCLUSION	12

THE CONDEMNATION

In November 2002, at a church in Wolf Lake, Illinois, Lynda and I were in the first night of what ended up being a three-night revival. On this night, the Lord had given me a message entitled “The Valley of Decision“. That night, I had a decision of my own to make. God had been dealing with me concerning going into the evangelistic ministry full-time. While still under God’s anointing, I announced that I would no longer be a roofer. I would obey God and serve Him full-time.

At the time, we had just moved into a motorhome and had parked on a piece of property owned by a couple to whom Lynda and I had become close. When this couple heard that we were going into the ministry full-time, their attitude toward us changed overnight. They started to pull away from us and, within a few weeks, notified us that we were no longer welcome and that we must leave. Soon after, this couple, along with another handful of people, began to condemn us for the life we now lived. Since I had quit my job and lived only on what God provided for us, I was condemned based on two fragments of scripture:

...if any would not work, neither should he eat.
(2 Thessalonians 3:10)

and

*But if any provide not for his own...he hath denied the faith
and is worse than an infidel.*
(1 Timothy 5:8)

I think the saddest part of this story was the judgmental look on the face of this man as he stood in the pulpit and made the same condemnation again (without calling my name, of course).

The next incident involved a beloved family member who used the same scripture fragments to make the same condemnation. This family member gave examples of would-be evangelists in the family who had borrowed money and refused to pay it back. Since these people are not the only ones who share this misguided doctrine, I think that it is important to explain what the Bible says on this subject. You see, no matter what man’s traditions, opinions and doctrines are, the final word must come from rightly dividing God’s word.

Since the aforementioned scripture fragments were used to make this condemnation, let’s begin by examining those scriptures, not just as isolated phrases, but in the context in which they were written.

THE SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Look with me at the first scripture fragment given above:

...if any would not work, neither should he eat.
(2 Thessalonians 3:10)

To find out what Paul is talking about in this verse, it is necessary to back up to the sixth verse and continue through to the fifteenth verse. In verse six, we read,

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.
(2 Thessalonians 3:6)

If you look around today, you will find men (and women) in churches throughout the world who spend their time causing problems and sowing seeds of discord among God's people. The same has been true throughout history. The Thessalonian church was no exception. Even though they had been taught by Paul and Silas, personally, there were still those among the brethren who were "disorderly". This is really not surprising considering the events surrounding Paul's visit to Thessalonica. The Jews in that region who did not believe Paul's teaching rose up against Paul not only in Thessalonica, but they followed him to Berea, as well. (Acts 17:1-14)

Paul was speaking here about professed believers who were "disorderly" – contrary to the teachings of Paul and Silas.

For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you:
(2 Thessalonians 3:7)

Here, Paul simply tells the Thessalonians that they know how to act because of the Apostle's example.

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:
(2 Thessalonians 3:8)

Now, there are many who would like to stop right there and say, "See there, Paul worked to support himself and every other evangelist is supposed to do the same thing." Take another look, though. Paul hasn't finished his sentence. The rest of that sentence reads:

Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

(2 Thessalonians 3:9)

The phrase, “*Not because we have not power...*” indicates that as ministers of the Word, Paul and Silas were within their right to have their needs provided by the Thessalonians. “*Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought... Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.*” They worked for their living **among the Thessalonians** to serve as an example to them. The significance here is that Paul always became what he needed to be in order to get his point across: “*I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some.*” (1 Corinthians 9:22b) In this particular case, Paul worked for his bread because this was an example that the Thessalonians needed to see – to give them an example to follow. This brings us to the one verse that is frequently extracted from this passage:

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

(2 Thessalonians 3:10)

This is the secondary point that Paul is making in this passage – the first being, “*...withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly...*” To find out what Paul means by “disorderly” in this passage, we need to look at the next verse:

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

(2 Thessalonians 3:11)

Now we know what it was that Paul was addressing in this scripture passage. There were those among the Thessalonians who spent their time meddling in the business of others instead of working. Usually, these are the ones who consider themselves to be people of wisdom and authority when the reality is that they are foolish and annoying. Paul continues to tell those who are behaving this way to mind their own business:

Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

(2 Thessalonians 3:12)

And then, to the brethren in Thessalonica, Paul describes how to handle these errant brothers in love:

But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

(2 Thessalonians 3:13-15)

This is where some people miss the boat. Usually, they will condemn a full-time minister because he does not have a job, count him as an enemy and shun him. That is not exactly what Paul said. First of all, you must treat the man as a brother. If the brother “*walketh disorderly*” and will not obey what Paul is teaching here, then “*have no company with him.*”

Let me stop here and say to those who would condemn, do not think that your point is made here. After we discuss the passage in 1 Timothy, we will discuss whether or not Paul is referring to full-time ministers when he talks about one “*working not at all.*” Stay with me while we move on to the second passage.

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

(1 Timothy 5:8)

This passage is generally used to condemn a man with a wife and children who will not work, but expects his wife to work and support his alcohol, tobacco and drug habits – many times at the expense of the children. Then, lumped into that same group are those who minister full-time. It seems that a condemning spirit does not care who is condemned, especially if it can be loosely supported by a scripture verse. Let’s see, though, if scripture supports the condemnation. To study this verse in context, we will need to look at 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

Honour widows that are widows indeed.

(1 Timothy 5:3)

As you can see from this verse, the context of this passage has little to do with someone being judged a dead-beat.

But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

(1 Timothy 5:4-6)

These passages are instructions to the widows based on their stage of life. Paul then goes on to instruct the families of the widows on how they should deal with them.

And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless. But if any provide not for his own, and

especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

(1 Timothy 5:7-8)

Taken in context, these verses instruct the men who have widows among them, especially those who have widows in their own family, to care for them under certain circumstances. Then, a man who refuses to care for the local widows, especially in his own house, “*hath denied the faith*”. Without quoting the remainder of this passage, let me just say that as you read it, you see that Paul is giving instructions concerning which of the widows should be supported and which should re-marry, giving the reasons for each condition.

Now, in order to use either of these scripture verses to condemn a full-time minister, two assumptions must be made: 1) the full-time minister does not work and 2) a minister is required to have a job. The next two sections will address these questions.

THE JOB OF THE MINISTER

The greatest minister who ever walked the earth was God in the flesh – Jesus Christ. After being tempted in the wilderness, Jesus went into the synagogue and read from the book of Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

(Luke 4:18-19)

And he began to say unto them, this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

(Luke 4:21)

The passage in Luke 4:18-19 also applies to ministers whom God has called. Notice, though, that God has a purpose for this anointing:

- 1) preach the gospel to the poor
- 2) heal the brokenhearted
- 3) preach deliverance to the captives
- 4) recovering of sight to the blind
- 5) set at liberty them that are bruised
- 6) preach the acceptable year of the Lord

You see, this is the work of a minister – his job. This is a job that is given to him by God himself. Listed above is just a portion of the job description. We can also add another passage.

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

(2 Timothy 4:2,5)

In both of these passages, the first task for a minister is to preach. We are to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. We are to be prepared at all times to minister to those who need it. We are to evangelize and to get the greatest effect possible from our ministries. That is our job. But the question remains. Are full-time ministers

required to be employed? Let's begin in the book of Matthew as Jesus sent the disciples out to minister. Jesus told them,

And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

(Matthew 10:7,8)

Again, we find that those who are called to minister have much to do. Continuing on,

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

(Matthew 10:9,10)

Here we begin to see why the full-time minister does not seek other employment. By following the instructions that Jesus gives here, we are in the position of relying fully on God to supply our needs. This brings us to the next topic.

THE RIGHTS OF THE MINISTER

Let's begin by looking at what Paul said in 1 Timothy.

Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the labourer is worthy of his reward.

(1 Timothy 5:17,18)

The word 'honour' in this passage is translated from the Greek word *timē* (produced *tee-may*). This word means, "a value, i.e. money paid, or (concr. and collect.) *valuables*." (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance) Paul is telling us that elders that rule well are to be counted worthy of double pay, "*especially they who labor in the word and doctrine*." To further explore the rights of a minister, our next stop is in the book of 1 Corinthians. In chapter nine, Paul writes,

Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.

(1 Corinthians 9:1,2)

Paul begins this passage by pointing out what it is that makes him, or better yet, defines him as an apostle. The answer is that his ministry is defined by those he ministers to. It is the same for any of us, whether we are an apostle, a pastor, an evangelist, a teacher, a prophet, etc. Paul continues,

Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as the brethren of the Lord, and Ce'-phas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

(1 Corinthians 9:3-6)

Paul speaks here as if it is understood by all that as a minister of the gospel, He and Barnabas, among others, have the right to be supported by the church, i.e. the brethren. To back up this position, he continues,

Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? Or saith not the law the same

also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shall not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

(1 Corinthians 9:7-10)

Paul here tells the Corinthians that support of ministers is first, common sense and second, God's law. As Paul continues, he tells the Corinthians that although they did not use this ordinance to receive support, it still exists in God's law.

If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power: but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorifying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

(1 Corinthians 9:11-18)

What Paul is saying here is that his ministry is not about the money. Just as in our ministry, although the provision has been made by God that his ministers should live by the gospel, we never ask for anything. We will go wherever we are asked to go and minister in whatever way we are able, but we never ask for anything. The Lord, though, has never failed to meet our every need and desire. We have been asked whether we ask for a certain amount to minister or if we will go for a love offering. Our response to this question is, "If you ask us to come, we will come. If someone gives us a love offering, we consider it a blessing. Either way, God provides for us." This is a sentiment shared by Paul and by every effective ministry we have come in contact with.

THE CONCLUSION

The most important thing to remember is that God is sovereign. He has made provision for His ministers to live by the word, but whether they are employed otherwise is His decision, not that of some well-meaning saint who has read a few fragments of scripture and created a doctrine from it.

I hope that this study has helped you to understand what the Bible says concerning the employment status of full-time ministers. I suggest that your next step on this subject is to search the scriptures to find out what the Bible says about the blessings that are promised to those who support the ministries of God's called. At the very least, remember that the word of God is not to be used to condemn those with whom you disagree. Remember that we are commanded to love one another.