

“A FAIR TRADE”

First Corinthians 9.11

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I recall watching a PBS program featuring a Harvard Law School professor lecturing several hundred students in a large and magnificent lecture hall. The lecture hall appeared to be very old and was paneled throughout with polished wood. Very beautiful. However, it was the substance of the lecture that really caught my attention.

Although I did not see the beginning of the lecture and was unable to watch the conclusion, in the portion I viewed, the professor discussed ethics and contracts in law, as well as the obligation of one party to a contract that arises from deriving a benefit, even when no formal agreement has been established.

The illustration he used to convey his point was one of 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume, who owned a house that he leased to a man to live in, who in turn rented the house to someone else, a third party. Badly needing a paint job, the third-party renter hired a painter to paint the house and billed the owner, David Hume. Though Hume argued in court that he had no obligation to pay the painter for painting his home, since he had not hired him, the court ruled that he had to pay because he enjoyed the benefit of the painter's performance, whether he had agreed to it in advance or not.

I have no idea whether that principle in contract law still holds, or whether it applies in our country at all, considering the amount of time legislators and courts have had to influence such issues. However, the case did prompt some serious reflection on our response to God's blessings in our lives through the Lord Jesus Christ.

On one hand, we are all aware that God is to be worshiped and adored for who He is, as well as for what He has done. Revelation 4.11 makes it very clear:

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Specifically, what the Lord has done is create all things.

I want to provoke you to consider your duty, obligation, and responsibility as a beneficiary of some blessing you have received. It is recognized as a principle in the laws that govern our relations with one another, and it certainly holds with respect to our relations with God. While some argue that no one should be obligated to discharge any duty, obligation, or responsibility they did not consciously choose to undertake, the Bible is obvious regarding God's expectation that His creatures display gratitude.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he levels a withering series of accusations against sinners to establish beyond doubt their culpability regarding the sins they commit, and their guilt. Listen, as I read the first portion of Romans 1.21:

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful”

Thus, sinful humanity's guilt extends not only to our unwillingness to glorify God for being God, regardless of what He does or how He blesses, but also to our ungrateful unwillingness and stubborn refusal to show thankfulness for God's many and varied blessings.

Allow me to stipulate that God is worthy to be worshiped, to be praised, to be adored, and to be glorified for no other reason than His unsurpassed majesty and greatness. However, I would like to present to you three

responses to God that are called for as a demonstration of your thankfulness and gratitude for God's blessings in your life.

Think of it as a fair trade for what God has done:

First, PROPER GRATITUDE WITH RESPECT TO CREATION

Notice what we find in Genesis 2.7:

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Now, drop your eyes down to verses 15-16, where we read,

“And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man”

Never mind at this point what God commanded the man to do. The critical observation at this point is that God created the man, and then God commanded the man. Read further and you will find that conditions are attached to the man's response to God's commands, with the warning that disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit of a particular tree was punishable by death.

Hold on a second. I see no evidence here of God asking Adam if he agreed to any of these conditions related to the commands issued to him. Do you? It is almost as if Adam was expected to obey God without agreeing in advance to any binding relationship with God.

On what basis did God demand that Adam obey Him? On what basis did Adam agree to obey Him, even though we know he ultimately failed? The point that I make is that it was right for Adam to obey and wrong for Adam to disobey, and Adam made no complaint about that arrangement. He exhibited no sense of entitlement, whereby he pretended that he had a right to do as he pleased.

Why, then, did Adam comply with God's wishes, at least until the serpent tempted Eve and Adam followed her in the transgression? There are two reasons: First, of course, Adam knew that God is to be obeyed for no other reason than because He is God. God should be obeyed because He is God. However, there is another reason God should be obeyed, should be worshiped, and loved. It is because of the benefit Adam derived from existing, having been created by God. Psalm 100.3:

“Know ye that the LORD he *is* God: *it is* he *that* hath made us, and not we ourselves.”

I submit to you that you have a high and holy obligation to worship God, to love God, and to obey God, not just because He is God, but also because you enjoy the great benefits of existing, of simply being one of His creatures. By reason of your debt of gratitude, you comply with His wishes and obey His commands, and being ungrateful, being unthankful, is therefore a terrible sin worthy of punishment.

Thus, everyone should worship and obey God, simply because he exists, because he is God's creature, and because he will be rightly and justifiably punished in the extreme for not obeying Him.

Next, PROPER GRATITUDE WITH RESPECT TO SALVATION

Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome is a missionary letter. His letter sets forth certain profound truths related to sin, salvation, God's dealings with the Jewish people, and the way a believer is instructed to live his life after coming to faith in Jesus Christ. The basis of Paul's letter, of course, is much more than people being creatures who ought to obey God for no other reason than He is God.

Though he wrote to believers who embraced a biblical view of Jesus Christ, and knew Him as their personal Savior, Paul's initial goal was to clarify who Jesus Christ is and what is His saving work accomplished on Calvary's cross. To bring that clarity, Paul made some important points in the very beginning of his address to the Roman Christians:

- In verse one of chapter one, Paul set forth that he is "a servant of Jesus Christ."
- In verse 2, Paul reminded his readers that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies:
"Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures."
- Verse 3 reminds the reader that Jesus Christ is God's Son, that Jesus Christ is our Lord, and that Jesus Christ is heir to the throne of David:
"Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh."
- Verse 4 informs the reader that not only is Jesus the Son of God, but that He was also raised from the dead:
"And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."
- Verse 5 shows the Lord Jesus to be the source of grace and of Paul's apostolic calling.
- Verse 6 reminds the Romans that their effectual call to salvation was "of Jesus Christ."
- Verse 7 shows that the Lord Jesus is, with God our Father, the source of grace and peace.
- Verse 8 shows that Paul's relationship with God was through the mediation of Jesus Christ:
"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."
- Finally, throughout this opening passage in Romans, Paul's identification of the Savior as "Jesus Christ" no less than five times shows Him to be the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah.

So, you see, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the payment for our sins is the bedrock foundation upon which this letter to the Romans was written. The Lord Jesus is the Savior Who died for men's sins. He is the Savior who saves sinners who have faith in Him,

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,"

Romans 5.1.

Thus, we know who Jesus Christ is, to whom Paul referred, and we see not only what He has done but also how sinners come to benefit from what He has done. It is by, or through, faith in Jesus Christ that peace with God is made, where before there was only enmity.

So, how is the Christian to **respond** to this great benefit of now possessing eternal life through Jesus Christ, being justified before God and having the standing of one who is righteous, and now being indwelt by the Spirit of Christ? Romans 12.1, a truly pivotal verse in Paul's letter to the Romans, tells us what is expected of us as a result of the great benefit of our salvation:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service."

What does that mean? It means you serve God whether or not it is convenient, whether or not you are tired, whether or not you can afford it, whether or not someone offends you, whether or not you are frustrated or discouraged.

Based upon the benefit to you of God's great mercies mediated to us through His Son, the reasonable response that is appropriate from you is ... everything you've got. Your body as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which* is your reasonable service." It is your proper gratitude for the salvation you have in Jesus Christ.

Finally, PROPER GRATITUDE WITH RESPECT TO INSTRUCTION

May I shift gears a bit?

My first main point pertains to your response. I refer to the gratitude that you should show owing to the benefit you receive from existing, from being one of God's creatures, from having been born, not to mention having been born in the USA! The proper response, wherein Adam failed, was obedience, though he never questioned or challenged that it was right and proper for him to obey God's commands and fulfill His expectations.

My second main point also pertains to your response. This is in reference to the gratitude that you should show owing to the benefit you receive from your salvation, from being one of God's children through faith in Jesus Christ, and from having been graciously saved from the sins that otherwise condemn your eternal and undying soul to eternal damnation. It is reasonable to be grateful for such a wonderful and undeserved salvation, even to the extent of presenting your body as a living sacrifice to God. To do less is ingratitude. It is to be unthankful.

Creation has to do with your existence. Salvation has to do with your redemption. Both of those realities are profound in unparalleled ways. Now, I would like to turn your attention to something that is important, but in no way approaches the significance of your creation or your salvation. Please turn to First Corinthians chapter nine.

Most of you are already familiar with two key aspects of our topic this morning: the carnality of the Corinthian congregation and the vocation of the Apostle Paul. The Corinthians were the most carnal, which is to say the least spiritual, of those early Churches we know of Paul dealing with. Perhaps only the Church in Laodicea, in Revelation chapter three, was comprised of less spiritual people, which is to say, more carnal. Coupled with that, it is essential to recall that Paul supported himself as a professional tent maker by trade when he was settled for any length of time and not in prison. That being the case, and perhaps because he knew what kind of people he would be dealing with in the corrupt city of Corinth, Paul was bi-vocational while he was in that city. Paul did not train the Corinthian Christians to be faithful givers for the support of the Gospel ministry. He did that so his motives would not be questioned, thereby hindering the progress of the Gospel. He did not want the Corinthians to think he was in the ministry for the money.

The problem, of course, and I am sure Paul knew this would be an issue he was willing to face after bringing those folks to Christ. Those who do not feel compelled to show gratitude for hearing the Gospel sometimes think they have no holy obligation to express gratitude after having heard the Gospel. Or, to put it another way, folks sometimes feel they do not need to demonstrate their gratitude for having benefited from the teaching and preaching of God's Word.

The Corinthian problem was that they misread Paul's motives entirely. Thinking that since he did not receive offerings from them, he had no right to receive offerings from them, they were profoundly mistaken. However, now that Paul had moved on to another city and had installed a pastor to oversee the Corinthian con-

gregation, the time had come to set them straight. Paul reminded them that it has been the case since Old Testament times, as well as in every pagan religion,

“that they which minister about holy things live *of the things* of the temple.”

Paul used several lines of reasoning to establish this principle to the Corinthians, including his power to receive material support and the precedent for receiving material support. However, I only want to draw your attention to the propriety of Paul and others in the Gospel ministry receiving material support. First Corinthians 9.11:

“If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it* a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?”

Do you see the basis of Paul’s reasoning? It is based on the same foundation that we have already examined regarding creation and salvation. It is appropriate to express gratitude for the benefits that are enjoyed. God created you; you derive benefit from existing, so you are obligated to obey Him. The Lord Jesus saved you; you derive benefit from your sins being forgiven and being indwelt by the Spirit of God, so you present your body as a living sacrifice. Now, here, enjoying the benefit of the Gospel ministry, being preached to and being instructed from God’s Word, you are therefore privileged to give materially to support the ministry.

You enjoy existing, don’t you? Sure, there are ups and downs, but existing is better than not existing, and now that you exist, living is preferable to dying. You believe that, or you would take your own life. Well, the proper response to benefiting from existing is to exhibit gratitude by obeying God.

Those who are Christians certainly enjoy the benefits of Christ’s saving work. Our sins are forgiven, we have eternal life in Christ, we are God’s children, and the Spirit of God indwells us. Over time, we even enjoy the renewing of our minds. And what is our demonstration of gratitude for this great blessing? We present our bodies as a living sacrifice because it is only reasonable that we do so. The Apostle Paul instructed as much.

The third demonstration of gratitude we looked at today is the response the Apostle Paul directed for a group of people who had received the benefit of Gospel preaching and Bible teaching. Though they may not have realized it at the time they heard it, God had blessed their lives through the teaching and preaching of the men He sent to minister to their spiritual needs, therefore they should display gratitude by faithfully supporting such men’s ministry efforts through their giving.

Thus, we see that this is a well-established principle in God’s Word. God expects people to demonstrate their gratitude for the blessings they receive, for the benefits that are derived. Beyond expecting such gratitude, in Genesis chapter 2, Romans chapter 12, and First Corinthians chapter 9, we see that God calls for displays of gratitude by actually instructing people on how they ought to respond.

How do you respond to waking up in the morning and enjoying your existence, benefiting from your life? Do you even think about obeying God? How about the salvation Jesus Christ provides for those who come to Him? Have you presented your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him, which is your reasonable service? Finally, how do you respond to the benefit you receive when you are taught God’s Word? Do you, as Paul directed, support the Gospel ministry through your giving? Do you give at all?

Today is PayCheck Sunday. For 2000 years, the world, and throughout your life, you have benefited from God, the Savior, and the Spirit’s many blessings in one way or another. How do you propose to express your gratitude to God? How do you demonstrate that you are thankful? What God wants for what He does, and what He has shown that He insists upon, is a fair trade.

He blesses you, then you show Him in the way that He calls for, that you are grateful. Consider showing your gratitude, after the fashion you display how grateful you are to be alive, to be a Christian, and to be instructed from God’s Word.

My recommendation is that you prayerfully consider beginning to do that with your PayCheck Sunday offering.