

WELFARE MENTALITY

By Steve Stutzman

I have had a lot of questions over the years concerning the conferences/seminars we do across North America. One of these questions, and I might add, criticisms, that comes is the idea and concept of charging a fee for participants. I would like to write a brief column on this; not as a defense, necessarily, but as a way of communicating WHY we have chosen this route, and to invite discussion and thought about these topics.

Allow me a bit of background: I was raised in a cornfield in Iowa. We worked, all the time. I do not have many memories of free evenings that we lollygagged about. I do remember driving tractors and combines into the wee hours, and occasionally around the clock; and in those lonely hours, never once dreamed of doing seminars, that I can recall. I was engaged to a sweet young thing at about 23yrs old, when she 'crashed' mentally and physically. Many doctor and psychiatrist visits later, they condemned her to pills for the remainder of her visit to planet earth. We married that way, and 2 children later, with my wife unable to function 5 days per week at least, we stumbled across some real answers in a local revival meeting. To condense the story, we were freed from occultic involvements, among other things, and my wife was instantly healed from all the maladies.

10 years later finds us in trouble, swamped with people begging for help, unable to parent correctly or focus on business successfully. We were offered an opportunity to address some of the things we were learning to the public, and we took it. We simply thought it would save one-on-one teaching time, and be more efficient. As we prepared for the first event, several realities began to emerge:

1. This is going to take a LOT of time and effort.
2. This is going to be very intensely focused, and folks will need to 'get it' or it will be a waste of time.
3. This is going to take money from somebody, somewhere.
4. When this is done, it will likely be misunderstood.

All of the above proved to be correct. (What an understatement.)

The first one we held actually became somewhat of a shock to us. People came, they heard, they were understanding about the lack of professionalism, they understood much of the content. But the shock was, it began to change them. People wept and repented on their own, and found their very lives changed without extensive "counseling". Hearts came into alignment with Christ, and miracles happened.

When it was all said and done, 1,2,3, and 4 also happened.

The coffers showed up woefully short. People registered, and did not show up. Others showed up some of the time, then left angry because it "didn't make sense. In the mean time, another one was being planned, and long meetings/discussions ensued. How should all this be handled?

None of us wants to charge for the gospel. Jesus didn't, Paul didn't, we don't want to either. On the other hand, SOMEONE is going to pay the bills for this. Who should it be..... those receiving help from it, or others? We faced the same thing in the counseling office.... WHO should pay the bill here?

Below are some of the conclusions I have come to, concerning these issues today.

A. There are no seminars in the NT. I am assuming this is because God did not really intend for us to have them. I simply cannot find another way to address all the wounds, and wounded, in church and society today. I would to God this thing of counsel and prophecy were returned to the church, so the hurting might be healed there. Until then.....we will likely keep trying to hear frn God and follow as well as we know how.

B. People's heart follows their money. Jesus was pretty clear about that, and following that idea, people will engage their hearts, and SHOW UP, if they pay for something. This is perhaps the main reason for deciding to charge for events we do..... people show up for the classes.

C. Someone is going to pay for it, and it seems Biblical to me that the ones receiving the benefit do the paying. While Jesus had several wealthy people who followed Him and payed the bills, they were also folks who had been helped. (Luke 8:1-3) Paul endeavored to work to pay his way, but he commanded that it not

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be so to others. (1 Tim 5:17-18) He also pointed out that this is not necessarily the way God ordained it to be. (1 Cor. 9:1-18)

D. We have, in our traditional approach, created a welfare mentality among God's people. This is not of God.

Recently at an event we did, we provided the meals for folks who attended. Hearing the continual braying of critics, (who hate both fund-raisers and charging), we placed a bucket at the end of the line and invited donations to cover the food costs. There was \$340 in the bucket..... and the cost of groceries was over \$3,800..... not including time, energy, travel, or loss of income for the cooks. I see this stuff, and wonder, how exactly do all my critics expect this to get paid? This again cemented in my mind, that we have indeed created a welfare mentality among christians.

Think about it: If someone comes to your place and builds a retaining wall.....plumbs a sink.....fixes a furnace..... lays tile.....anything.... do you expect it to be done for free? If he is gifted in that line of work, and is the best in the community, is the charge lowered? Is there not a corresponding charge? Does anyone think that is immoral or somehow bad? There is not a question, not even if the person is a member of your church.

Yet somehow, if someone comes and listens to your woes, takes delicate effort to take your life apart, find the things out of line, bring them to the Balm of Gilead, find healing, and re-assemble, THAT must be done for free. Because, after all, it was God Who gave them the gift..... so if they are gifted, it must be free. Who thought that up?

I blame much of it on the approach taken in churches to preachers/pastors. My late father, also a Bishop, had a saying he used; "We have rejected a salaried ministry, taught a supported ministry, and practiced a neglected ministry." A bit too true for comfort, perhaps. In our concepts of "saving" and "conserving" and "not wasting", (copper wire was invented when 2 of us got ahold of the same penny..) we have violated Scripture and created a welfare mentality. I realize, that statement may be offensive to some, and I apologize for your pain. But, unfortunately, it is true. Among Christians, especially conservative ones, today, if something has spiritual benefit, they demand that it be free. I believe this mentality to be wrong, and to be a serious violation of Kingdom principles and real law. In fact, the violation is so serious that spiritual benefit is curtailed by an unwillingness to compensate. (see Phil. 4:15-19)

Allow me to insert here, two things: That I am against the notion of hired preachers from seminaries, salaried to minister among those they do not know.... And, I remain unconvinced that "full-time ministry" is a superior model to be sought after and pursued.

Because of all this, we have chosen to charge for conferences we hold. If you have a superior idea, I would love to hear it. I am especially interested in things that are demonstrated to work; arm-chair quarterbacks who have all the answers, but are doing nothing, have little weight in this (or any) matter. We do attempt to help folks in dire straits. People who want to attend, but cannot due to financial duress, can sometimes get help from their church or a scholarship. Often others who have been helped will sponsor someone to go thru the event. No one is turned away simply for lack of funds. However, I find that people usually have money for what they WANT to do. Some seminars end up cash +... and some cost us more than we collect. All of this may look like some hasty, arbitrary, unprincipled decision to those uninvolved, but the decisions have been labored over in prayer by more than a few men. Our Source of supply is Christ, regardless of how currency is accumulated. Again, I invite other perspectives, especially as they relate to Kingdom Economy.

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