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The Tentmaking Ministry of Apostle Paul and its Replication in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria

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Abstract

Insufficient remuneration is given to gospel ministers in many Nigerian churches. Some churches may not even pay their ministers regularly. Undoubtedly, many churches have fallen short of their financial support commitments to their clergy. However, Apostle Paul renounced his claim to receive financial assistance from the church and chose to work with his hands to protect the gospel's integrity lest the gospel be hindered. This paper, therefore, addresses the tentmaking ministry of Apostle Paul and its replication in the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria. The paper adopted the historical-critical exegetical method to explain the chosen biblical texts and the ethnographic method to elicit data from respondents in the RCCG, Oyo Province 9, Oyo State, Nigeria. The study reveals that many RCCG pastors adopted the tentmaking method of Apostle Paul, labouring diligently to expand the church of Christ without taking remuneration from the church after the order of Apostle Paul.

Introduction

Ministers of the gospel in some contemporary Nigerian churches receive inadequate salaries. Not all churches give their ministers sufficient pay, and some do not even pay regularly. Many churches, undoubtedly, have not provided their ministers with the necessary financial support. When

considering the necessities for himself and his family's subsistence, a full-time minister's monthly wage is insufficient (Boyo 1994). Many Nigerian churches have been impacted by many issues resulting from this phenomenon such as financial scandals concerning many gospel ministers, the splitting of churches, and a lack of integrity in many ministers, just to mention a few.

Wiersbe (2007:490) asserts that, from the early church era to the present, a misguided view of money has had a detrimental impact on the gospel. Overemphasis on money by many ministers through the receipt of improper gifts and emoluments from the hearers of the gospel has tended to water down the message of the gospel in recent times, which has led to some forms of hindrance to the gospel, but Apostle Paul disassociated himself from such by repudiating his claim to the church's financial assistance 'lest the gospel be hindered' (1 Cor. 9:12, KJV throughout). The majority of preachers and missionaries may appear to the unconverted to be merely engaged in so-called religious rackets designed to defraud innocent people of their money. So, people who use religion as an instrument to manipulate and take advantage of others are undoubtedly widespread in the contemporary world (1 Tim. 6:3-16). However, by maintaining his financial independence and the integrity of the gospel, and by offering the gospel 'free of charge' (1 Cor. 9:18) based on his labours in the church as a tentmaker, Paul was able to reach many people for Christ (Barton 1993:897). So, Paul worked to provide for his necessities. The same hands that were working for God to spread the gospel were equally working to provide for his necessities so that he would not covet any man's silver or gold, nor be a burden to the church.

Besides, this is an age when those who are expected to support the ministers are even expecting to be supported by the ministers themselves. Therefore, to avoid ministers of the gospel living at the mercy of the church, this study focuses on a 'tent-making ministry' (Witherington 2008). It advocates an approach for ministers of the gospel, who – with this approach – are encouraged to have other sources of income besides the church and thus not depend on the church for their total welfare, since members of the church may be limited in totally providing for all the needs of ministers of the gospel. However, some critical questions need to be asked. Why did Paul need to engage in tentmaking ministry to support himself instead of relying on financial support from the churches he planted? Did God direct Paul to adopt the

tentmaking style of ministry? To what extent can ministers not do God's work on a full-time basis and yet fulfil God's call upon their lives? Can a tentmaking ministry make a minister deviate from the call of God upon his life, or make him less effective for the kingdom of God? Besides, how can this study help the ministers to be financially independent and not be a burden to the church? Can Paul's tentmaking ministry in the first century have relevance for twenty-first-century ministers of the gospel? How has the tentmaking ministry strategy helped believers in any way to fulfil God's call upon their lives and also to expand the frontier of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) within Nigeria and abroad? These questions form the basis for this study and scholarly examination, to gain a holistic understanding of the tentmaking ministry of Apostle Paul and its replication in the RCCG.

Methodology

The paper adopted the historical-critical exegetical method to explain the chosen biblical texts, while a contextual approach was applied to analyse how the paradigms of the tentmaking ministry of Apostle Paul are understood and appropriated in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Ukpong (2001:151) affirms that the contextual approach is

a hermeneutic that involves engagement in the practical issues of society with the social, cultural, political, economic and religious realities of the interpretative community as operational parameters.

A descriptive research design was adopted in this study to portray accurately the tentmaking ministry of Apostle Paul and its replication in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Oyo Province 9, Nigeria. Observations of the study were described and discussed objectively. A purposive sampling technique was also used in this study. This necessitated the deliberate selection of RCCG ministers from Oyo Province 9, Oyo State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling was also used to select randomly ten interview respondents (pastors) across three zonal headquarters out of eighteen within Oyo Province 9, because the study could not capture all the ministers in those places.

Concept of Tentmaking Ministers

According to Siemens (1992:246-247), tentmaking ministers are mission-oriented believers who, like Paul, earn their living through secular jobs and use their free time for cross-cultural ministry at work. She goes on to say that a tentmaker might increase his/her pay through donations, and a missionary might work a second job to increase his/her income from donors or to get more exposure to unbelievers. Therefore, tentmakers are full-time ministers of the gospel despite their secular jobs. Their secular jobs only serve as avenues to spread the gospel of Christ as they interact with many people from different walks of life. Siemens' opinion is remarkable, for it exposes the life of a good tentmaking minister; however, ministers of the gospel engaging in tentmaking ministry is a voluntary act of sacrifice, not compulsion. Paul willingly chose to be a tentmaking minister, not because he did not have a right to welfare from the churches to whom he ministered but just not to be a burden to the church of God, hence the focus of this study.

McKnight (2010) defines a tentmaking minister as a leader or pastor who is both pastoring a church and working at another job. He cites the case of Paul who laboured 'night and day' to meet his own needs in order not to burden the church. With a similar perspective, Barclay (1981:135-136) describes Paul as a tentmaking minister owing to the nature of his former life as a Jewish rabbi, for every rabbi in Judaism is required to have a trade, refrain from accepting payment for sermons and teaching, and earn a living by working with his hands. He argues further that Jews glorified labour and loved it; hence they believed that 'He who does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery' (Barclay 1981:136). Thus, the rabbis were always aware of what it was like to be a working-class person and never withdrew themselves from society as teachers. In this regard, Barclay (1981:135-136) describes every minister who is both teaching and preaching the word of God as a rabbi and yet doing a secular job as a tentmaking minister. He concludes that this helps Paul to always boast about the fact that he was not depending on any man for his sustenance. In the words of Winter (2002:1-2), tentmaking missionaries do not only use tentmaking as just a means to be self-supported but also as a creative strategy to enter foreign countries for missionary work. He argues further that tentmaking for Paul was a strategic plan for him to enter various cities and regions to preach the gospel to both common and influential people. Winter

concludes by saying that many of the early missionaries after the Reformation were tent-making missionaries themselves.

Whitlock, Arnold, and Ellis (2004:41) point out that an individual called to the ministry whose primary source of income comes from sources other than the church is known as a tentmaking pastor. Citing Paul as a prime example from the New Testament, they rename a minister who makes a living from other sources as a 'bi-vocational minister.' This research subscribes to these scholarly views on the meaning of tentmaking. However, a tentmaking minister may not repudiate his right of support from the church if he is being compensated by the church for his work, for the workman is worthy of his wages; but when it is not convenient for the church to support him fully for his welfare, to avoid being a burden to the church, tentmaking should be the option.

Jewish and Hellenistic Backgrounds to Paul's Tentmaking Ministry

If Paul was influenced by two worlds in which he lived – the Greco-Roman and the Jewish worlds – then, since culture and religion are interwoven, Paul's tentmaking ministry needs to be evaluated via the cultural backgrounds that might have influenced it. His Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds, among others, have to be examined and clearly understood to gain a holistic understanding of his tentmaking ministry. In Jewish society, there was a rule that all rabbis must learn a trade so that they would be in touch with the ordinary life of the people they taught (Hargreaves 1990:170). According to Marshall (1980:293), rabbis were expected to carry out their legal and religious duties without charging for them; therefore, it became necessary for them to have additional sources of revenue. Besides, in ancient Jewish culture, Jewish parents were obligated to ensure that their sons learned a trade so that, in the event of adversity, they would not be dependent on others but would be able to provide for their basic needs through the learned trade. This tradition may have influenced Paul's choice to renounce financial support from the Corinthian church.

According to Atowoju (2004:47), this reveals the rationale behind Paul's tentmaking and Jesus Christ's carpentry. In addition, because Jews were

against indolence, Paul, along with Aquila and Priscilla, learned how to make leather from the hair and skin of goats, a process known as ‘cilicium’ which is used to make sandals, tents, and carpets. Therefore, Paul supported himself and his team members by working as a tentmaker during his mission across the Mediterranean world, refusing to be a burden to any church. No wonder he was bold to say to the Corinthians thus: ‘We labour working with our own hands’ (1 Cor. 4:12); ‘for I seek not what is yours but you’ (2 Cor. 12:14). Besides, Paul was aware of the rabbinic tradition that it was improper for a scribe or rabbi to get paid for their instruction; hence, many of them also pursued other careers in addition to studying and imparting the law. Rabbi Gamaliel III comments on this fact thus:

An excellent thing is the study of Torah combined with some secular occupation, for the labour by them both puts sin out of one’s mind. All the study of Torah which is not combined with work will ultimately be futile and lead to sin. (Quoted in Bruce 1981:367-368)

From the above views, it is observed that Paul must have learned the trade of tentmaking from his youth as part of his Jewish education, which later influenced his decision to be financially independent in the work of ministry and not to be a burden to the church of God while he carried out his mission passionately.

The city of Tarsus was known to be one of the largest trade centres and a rich city on the Mediterranean coast. The city attracted many traders from all over the Roman Empire (Bruce 1981:234). However, merchants from Tarsus were renowned for their passion for their trade. So, Paul who grew up in this famous city probably inherited the craft of tentmaking from his father and later became highly skilled in it as a young man. This skill of tentmaking, therefore, provided him immediate credibility and employment wherever he went to preach the gospel, and it became a major financial support for him during his missionary career (Atowoju 2004:47). Paul refused to conform to the cultural norms of his days in the Hellenistic world which disparaged manual labour as demeaning. Tidball (1993:884) opines that Paul probably imitated the Cynics, who, instead of viewing manual labour as demeaning, adopted it as an ideal way of life and as how a teacher could model his philosophy to his disciples.

No wonder Paul admonishes the church of Thessalonica to imitate him by working with their own hands and not being lazy (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Diessmann (quoted in Hock 1998:4-5) refers to Paul as 'Paul the tent-maker who worked at his trade for wages which were the economic basis of his existence'. They argue further that Paul was a man of noble birth who came from a wealthy family. However, choosing to work as a tentmaker seems inconsistent with his family status. The reason for his choice could be traceable to the rabbinic tradition of combining the study of the law with learning a trade for 'the Jew who intended to devote himself to the service of the law learnt a trade for the sake of his independence' (Coutsoumpos 2015:69).

This view is supported by Garland (2003:417) who rightly observes that Paul identified with persons from lower social classes because of his sense of purpose and support system despite having a background that placed him on par with members of the upper classes. He chose to be financially self-supporting through his trade of tentmaking while preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. According to Blomberg (1994:173), this was intended to preserve the integrity of the gospel in the world then lest he should be mistaken for one of those Greek philosophers or religious teachers who went about to exploit people in various ways through their teaching profession. Many of those philosophers refused to work at a trade because it was a demeaning source of support for people of their category in that society, for it denotes choosing the lower status of a common labourer (Fee 1987:399), but Paul ignored the shame of working as a common labourer because he wanted to be financially independent of the church. Though, as an apostle, he had the right to receive financial support from the church, he chose not to use that advantage for the sake of the gospel's integrity.

In addition, the conversion experience of Paul gave him an unusual zeal that made him see the necessity to endure any condition for the sake of Christ's gospel. He said, 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel' (1 Cor. 9:16). Apparently, his trade gave him a significant opportunity to preach the gospel in the marketplace for free and in the churches that he planted, so he became an independent influence on all institutions or groups that could have supported him monetarily (1 Cor. 9:18). He also preached the gospel while he was in prison (Phil. 1:12), while sailing, and when shipwrecked (Acts 27:23-26).

So, it may be concluded that Paul's use of his trade to support church ministry was intentional and expedient because he was influenced by his passion to spread the gospel of Christ at all costs. His farewell statement in Acts 20:22-24 lends credence to this fact.

Besides, when Jesus was sending out the disciples on a mission trip in Matthew 10:8, he said: 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons: freely you have received, freely give'. The words of Jesus to his disciples: 'Freely you have received, freely give,' (NKJV) which implies not to take pay for preaching the gospel, might have also influenced Paul's decision to preach the gospel 'free of charge' and to relinquish his undeniable right that the progress of the gospel might not be hindered. Jesus did not want his disciples to be a burden to the recipients of their message. This instruction of Jesus may imply tentmaking, that is, working to make a living and thus being able to support themselves (Jones 1999:183). Barclay (1975:367-368) posited that a rabbi was required by law to impart his knowledge freely and without compensation. It was against the law for the rabbi to accept payment for imparting the law that Moses had freely chosen to learn from God. It is also stated that a rabbi could only take payment under one condition: that the rabbi teach a child. This is because raising a child is a parent's responsibility, and no one else should be expected to put in the time or effort to teach a child. However, higher education has to be provided without charge.

However, it is pertinent to note that tentmaking ministry was Paul's missionary policy and practice to be financially independent (1 Cor. 9:12, 15, 18), not the early church tradition. Paul pointed out that some other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas enjoyed financial support from the Corinthians' church (1 Cor. 9:5). The early apostles adopted the practice of accepting gifts and hospitality from the community to which they preached. This raised a question in the mind of the Corinthians when Paul refused financial support and they probably asked:

If it is the apostles' right to get their living by preaching the gospel, why did Paul refuse to accept support for preaching unless he considered himself inferior? (Harris 1994:693)

So, not all the apostles engaged in tentmaking ministry but only Paul and Barnabas.

Overview of Paul's Tentmaking Ministry in Acts 18:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 2:9-10

Paul's tentmaking ministry is evident in all three of his missionary journeys. Although Paul makes no mention of tentmaking during his first missionary voyage (Acts 13-14), he does mention it in 1 Corinthians when he discusses his rights as an apostle: 'Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?' (1 Cor. 9:6). This implies that, when Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary tour, Paul laboured to support himself. Siemens (1999:737) posited that Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in the Galatian-Phrygian region and on the island of Cyprus during their first missionary journey. According to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 9:6, they were already financially independent at the time and carried on with this practice until they split up into two different groups.

Acts and the Pauline epistles both provide proof of Paul's tentmaking endeavours during his second missionary tour. He made references to his manual labour at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9), at Corinth (Acts 18:3; 1 Cor. 4:12) and also at Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12, 20:34). Therefore, history attests to it that the cited passages refer to the second and third missionary journeys of Apostle Paul. Hence, it is evident that Paul adopted the policy of self-sustenance by working with his trade during all his missionary journeys (Hock 2007:26). According to Hock (1998:5), Paul was using his trade as a means to attract new friends in any city he went to.

Acts 18:1-3

Μετὰ ταῦτα χωρισθεὶς ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ἦλθεν εἰς
Κόρινθον.

καὶ εὗρών τινα Ἰουδαῖον ὀνόματι Ἀκύλαν, Ποντικὸν τῷ
γένει, προσφάτως ἐληλυθότα ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας καὶ
Πρίσκυλλαν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ διὰ τὸ διατεταχέναι

Κλαύδιον χωρίζεσθαι πάντας τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης, προσῆλθεν αὐτοῖς,

καὶ διὰ τὸ ὁμότεχνον εἶναι ἔμενεν παρ’ αὐτοῖς καὶ ἡργάζετο, ἦσαν γὰρ σκηνοποιοὶ τῇ τέχνῃ (SBLGNT).

And after these things having departed from Athens, he came to Corinth.

And having found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who recently came from Italy and Priscilla, his wife because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome, he came to them;

and because they do the same trade he stayed with them and he was working, for they were tent-makers by craft. (Acts 18:1-3)

The phrase ‘And after these things having departed from Athens, he came to Corinth’ (‘Μετὰ ταῦτα χωρισθεὶς ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ἦλθεν εἰς Κόρινθον’) points to Paul’s missionary itinerary leading him from Athens to Corinth, having completed his work in the former place. His Athenian ministry was short-lived; he did not spend a long time there. In Athens, Paul had encounters with Greek philosophers and he was able to appeal to their intelligence and thus reveal the truth of God’s word to them. Hence, he gained some converts there (Richards 2004:790). On getting to Corinth, he met with a Christian couple, Aquila and Priscila. *Κόρινθον* (Corinth) was placed strategically to the west and south of the short isthmus that connects the Peloponnesus to the northern portion of the continent. Being a city that developed into a distinct senatorial province and a global city renowned for business, manufacturing, opulence, and immorality, it was a natural crossroads for land and sea travel and was among the Roman Empire’s largest and most important commercial centres. As the primary route between Rome and its eastern provinces, Corinth attracted traders from all across the Roman Empire at the time Apostle Paul arrived there for his missionary work. As a result, a large number of Corinthian citizens were so affluent that their ostentation and wealth became emblematic of the city (Coutsoumpos 2015:35-37).

Verse two of Acts 18 says, ‘καὶ εὗρών τινα Ἰουδαῖον ὀνόματι Ἀκύλαν’ or ‘And having found a certain Jew named Aquila’. This implies that, at Corinth, Paul met with a couple named Aquila and Priscilla who were tentmakers/leatherworkers who had just arrived from Rome. According to Bruce (1980:390), it appears that Luke and Paul often bring Priscilla’s name first before her husband’s rather than vice versa (see verses 18 and 26); hence, many scholars inferred that she might be of higher rank than her husband. Luke makes a similar introduction in Acts 5:1 of ‘a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira’. According to Acts 16:19, Paul stayed in Corinth for one and a half years with Aquila and Priscilla, who were tentmakers. As Witherington (2012:36-37) rightly asserts, Priscilla was a renowned lady from Rome and Aquila her spouse was a native of Pontus. Before they met with Paul at Corinth, they had been followers of Jesus while living in Rome. They joined Paul as tentmakers upon their arrival in Corinth. Emperor Claudius must have expelled the couple from Rome due to the dispute in synagogues and the Jewish community over the identity of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Witherington (2012:538) notes that the New Testament constantly mentions this couple together, and Priscilla’s name usually appears first (see Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19). According to Suetonius, the ancient historian, as cited by Kurz, the incident was connected to an internal Jewish conflict over a particular ‘Chrestus’ – possibly a mispronunciation of the Latin name for Christ *Chrestus* (Suetonius refers to *impulsore Chresto*) – and thus led to the expulsion of the Jews (Kurz 2013:357). Paul spent several months working with this couple while he was at Corinth, where he spent one and a half years. He later makes reference to his tentmaking which helps him to support himself financially in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:12).

However, Paul shared the same trade and faith with Aquila and Priscilla; hence, they were compatible. The Bible says:

and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them,
and they worked, for by trade they were tent-makers. (Acts
18:3)

Aquila and Priscilla were likely prosperous and operated a sizable tentmaking or, more broadly, leatherworking business. Their homes were big enough to accommodate the neighbourhood churches (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19). Hence,

they were capable of partnering with Paul in their tentmaking business (Dunn 1996:86). Marshall (1980:293) noted that Luke most likely would have mentioned the couple's conversion if there had been signs that they were not Christians before meeting with Paul. The phrase *καὶ ῥηγάζετο* ('and he was working') echoes Luke's opinion that Paul was always tentmaking to support himself financially so that he could be a good example and set himself apart from religious and philosophical instructors who sought personal gain and charged for their instruction (Kurz 2013:356). This is in obedience to rabbinic tradition that religious instructions should be free. Bruce (1980:391) cites Hillel who said, 'He who makes a worldly use of the crown of the Torah shall waste away'. In addition, *ἦσαν γὰρ σκηνοποιοὶ τῇ τέχνῃ* ('for they were tent-makers by craft') points to their occupation being tentmaking. Johnson (1992:322) posits that in the Hellenistic culture groups and clubs founded on common occupations were prominent. Paul's friendship with this couple served as an illustration of this; since then, they had grown close and were a vital component of Paul's team even in the ministry. The term 'tent-maker' could more broadly apply to a 'leather-worker', which appears to be the case here. Tents were produced in Paul's home province from goat's hair cloth, known as *cilicium*, or else out of leather (Marshall 1980:293). Luke identifies them as *skenoipoioi* which means 'tentmakers', but it could include a range of leatherworking (Johnson 1992:322).

Bromiley (1985:1044) points out that the word *skenoipois* is a combination of two Greek words *skene* and *poieo*. It seems to imply 'tentmaker', and, as tents are sometimes constructed of leather, it might also indicate 'leather-worker'. However, it refers to pitching a tent generally. Polhill (1992:483) asserts that some interpretations have proposed that Paul might not have worked with leather at all but rather with *cilicium*, a fabric made from weaved goat's hair that was frequently used to make tents. Given the origins of *cilicium* and its name, Paul most likely learned the craft in Cilicia, the province of his birth. However, as Kurz (2013:356) posited, Paul may have constructed tents during the week, or even at night (see 1 Thess. 2:9), but he visited the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day to convince Greeks and Jews alike of the truth of the gospel of Christ. In this way, he distinguished himself from religious hucksters and Greek philosophers who were charging people for their teachings.

In Acts 20:33-35, Paul gave his example of manual labour as a ministry model to encourage the Ephesian elders not to be a financial burden to the church or focus on monetary gains in their ministerial work but to be a blessing to the church instead by working with their hands (Peterson 2009:572-573). He meant to admonish the Ephesian elders to do ministry with their minds on helping the weak and the needy without any expectation of financial or material reward. Kruger (2020:32) asserts that

Paul is telling them that in all things, including his self-support, he is showing them that believers should work hard in order to be in a position to help the weak and follow Jesus' command to give.

Peterson (2009:572) lends credence to this view by saying that Paul's intention in this passage

is to warn leaders of the dangers inherent in their position and to commend his solution to the problem of greed.

By his statement, 'I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing', Paul's perspective on wealth and belongings demonstrated the impact of Jesus' teachings (see Luke 12:13-34, 16:1-15). Therefore, it is very clear from these views that Paul chose to support his missionary enterprise through manual labour to use his example to teach the Ephesian church leaders to use their leadership position to help others. However, the reasons given to other church leaders in Corinth and Thessalonica differ (Kruger 2020:36).

This attitude, however, distinguished Apostle Paul from traveling philosophers and religious quacks who profited from their teachings during the Greco-Roman era (Peterson 2009:572-573). Therefore, as Kruger (2020:163) rightly asserted,

If biblical tent-making is going to be rightly practiced, then the minister may not accept payment, in any form, from the church where tent-making is being utilized. Tent-making must be practiced utilizing complete self-support.

1 Thessalonians 2:9-10

Μνημονεύετε γάρ, ἀδελφοί, τὸν κόπον ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν μόχθον, νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐργαζόμενοι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαί τινα ὑμῶν ἐκηρύξαμεν εἰς ὑμᾶς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ.

Ὑμεῖς μάρτυρες καὶ ὁ θεός, ὡς ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐγενήθημεν (SBLGNT)

For you remember brothers our labour and toil, working night and day, in order not to burden any one of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and God also, how holily and righteously and blamelessly we were toward you believers. (1 Thess. 2:9-10)

Paul asks the Thessalonian Christians to remember his toil and hardship. Paul could have claimed his rights as an apostle and requested the church support him (1 Thess. 2:6), but, instead, he sacrificially laboured with his own hands to minister to the church. The two nouns, *κόπος* and *μόχθος*, have a similar range of meanings. The first might point to the fatigue of manual labour while the latter points to the hardship involved. While one could focus on the first as often describing missionary activity (1 Thess. 3:5), several considerations point to the terms as a formula for the fatigue and hardship of labour (Richard 1995:84). Bromiley (1985:453) points out that, in secular Greek, *κόπος* implies ‘beating’, ‘weariness’, or ‘exertion’ from physical labour which may result in fatigue or stress. He adds that the word also describes Paul’s strenuous labour in 1 Corinthians 4:12, in which he engaged to finance his ministry and, since it was done voluntarily, which he counted as part of his kingdom service for Christ (Bromiley 1985:453). Thayer (1974:419) opines that *μόχθος* means ‘hard and difficult labour’, ‘toil’, ‘travail’, ‘hardship’, or ‘distress’ (see 2 Cor. 11:27; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). However, these two words were used by Paul to explain the kind of toil and hardship he went through by working with his own hands to support himself in Thessalonica. Hence, it is understood that combining preaching with such a strenuous kind of labour might have been stressful for him.

The expression ‘night and day’ (*nuktós kaí heméras*) is identical in form and function to its usage in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, namely used in the genitive to express ‘time within which’ and hyperbolically stresses the endless, exhausting hours devoted to one’s task (Richard 1995:84-85). Weima (2014:220) posits that Paul describes himself and his fellow missionaries as working nights and days. His letters contain several instances of the word pair ‘night and day’, which are two nouns (1 Thess. 3:10). However, Wallace (1996:124) asserts that Paul is not suggesting here that he and his colleagues were working twenty-four-hour shifts among the Thessalonians, but that they laboured both in daytime and nighttime. He adds that the stress of the words here is not on the duration but on the kind of time in which they worked. Wallace (1996:124-125) further argues that the phrase ‘in order not to burden any one of you’ in verse 9 shows Paul’s reason for the long hours of work apart from his proclamation of the gospel. This is also emphasised in 1 Corinthians 9:12. He would not want his hearers to see him as one of those itinerant teachers who go about with greed collecting money for teaching people (Weima 2014:223). The construction *πρὸς τὸ μὴ* with the infinitive gives credence to this fact.

And when he says, ‘while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God’, Paul employed the verb *kerysso* (‘announce’ or ‘proclaim’) as a synonym for ‘declaring or speaking the gospel’, which suggests a general meaning for the term as describing the apostolic mission or work of preaching (see Rom. 10:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:11). Richard (1995:102-103) argues that the tandem construction of verse 9 regarding working and preaching can be interpreted as suggesting that Paul was preaching while working, which we call ‘tentmaking’. Besides, the word *ἐργαζόμενοι* implies not only the financial independence of Paul and his colleagues but also their desire to give their labour as a way of sharing their lives (verse 8) and to present the gospel without selfish gain or apostolic ulterior motive. This agrees with his last words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:34 – ‘You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions’.

Paul and his colleagues fearlessly preached the gospel and freely and generously shared their time and efforts with their converts without being a burden to them, and the Thessalonian Christians were witnesses to what Paul had said. Paul affirms thus: ‘how holily, righteously and blamelessly we were toward you believers’ (1 Thess. 2:10), or *ὥς ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως*

ὕμῃν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐγενήθημεν'. At first the ὥς ('how') statement describes the apostolic mission by the use of three unusual adverbs: ὁσίως ('holily', 'devoutly'), δικαίως ('righteously', 'uprightly'), and ἀμέμπτως ('blamelessly'). The first, ὁσίως, occurs only here in Pauline usage; the second, δικαίως, in its adverbial form, appears one other time in his letters (1 Cor. 15:3); and the third, ἀμέμπτως, is slightly more frequent in his writings (adverb: 1 Thess. 2:10, 5:23; adjective: 1 Thess. 3:13; Phil. 2:15) which summarises his conduct vis-à-vis God and the Thessalonian Christians (Richard 1995:102-103). Bromiley (1985:734) asserts that ὁσίως refers to deeds that are viewed as 'sacred', 'lawful', and 'dutiful', which are right from the perspective of ethical behaviour and faith, regardless of whether they are founded in heavenly precept, ordinary law, longstanding custom, or inward character. Hence, Paul presents his manner of labour and conduct as a model for the new converts to emulate.

Paul's Reasons for Tentmaking Ministry

The fact that Paul's self-supporting apostleship is for him a matter of deeply held conviction is clear not only from the exemplary significance he makes of it (2 Thess. 3:7-10) and the rigour with which he defends it (2 Cor. 11:7-15, 12:13-16; see also 1 Cor. 9:1-18) but also from the simple fact that he chose this way for himself. The reasons for this way of life and why he did not make use of a right to church support, which he acknowledges he could claim (2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Cor. 9:4-17), may have been due to several factors. The main motivation for Paul was financial independence. Bruce, as cited by Steffen and Barnett (2002), asserts that Paul's repeated proclamations in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9:9:12, 15, 18) and his last words to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:33-34) that he refused to take financial support from the church but instead worked with his hands to support himself and his team members financially affirm that it was a voluntary decision, as against some people's opinion that he was making tents only when he had no money in his hand. Byun (2023:88) also supports this opinion thus: 'Paul's general missionary policy was that he maintained financial independence'.

In addition, Bruce, as cited by Steffen and Barnett (2002), clearly stated thus:

Paul scrupulously maintained this tradition as a Christian preacher, partly as a matter of principle, partly by way of

example to his converts, and partly to avoid giving his critics any opportunity to say that his motives were mercenary.

In addition, Ogereau (2014:4) argues that Paul's choice to build tents appears to have been motivated by his adherence to the orthodox Jewish principle that states that a rabbi who has not inherited the wealth of his family must support himself by trade if he must teach the Torah because it is considered improper for a rabbi to receive payment for their services. In a similar view, Byun (2023:88) observes that Jewish instructors would teach the Torah while earning a living through a trade, a practice that dates back to the time of Jesus. He argues further that Paul's financial strategies were comparable to those of Cynic philosophers, who frequently worked hard with their own hands to maintain their financial independence.

Steffen and Barnett (2002) further asserted that Paul combined tentmaking with ministry to be able to identify with the unsaved people to whom he was sent to minister the gospel so that he could 'become all things to all people'. Similarly, Zuck (1998:22) asserts that Paul's self-employment and his refusal to depend on the church for his financial support was to help him preach the gospel at no cost. Paul wished to steer clear of anything that would impede the gospel's advancement. He said:

we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:12)

Bromiley (1985:453) argues that the fundamental notion conveyed by the Greek word *enkope*, meaning 'obstacle', is 'blocking the way'. Paul perceived that he could become a barrier to the gospel if he exercised his right to support, appearing as though he was working for his gain, or if he scared off the underprivileged. His top priority, therefore, was to ensure that the gospel was not hindered by his conduct.

Hock (2007:25-26) asserts that Paul may have eventually used tentmaking as a method of support throughout his missionary journeys because it appears to be a mobile enterprise. He, therefore, relied mostly on this trade to support himself while on his missionary travels, staying in different places (see Acts

18:3, 19:11-12, 20:34; 1 Cor. 4:12). On the contrary, Kruger (2020:161) argues that tentmaking was a deliberate decision made by Paul, but he applied the tentmaking 'method selectively based on the missiological and evangelistic context'. However, this was not because the churches could not support him financially for he had argued that ministers of the gospel have the right to support from the church (1 Cor. 9:3-14); he intended to explain his 'free of charge ministry' to believers (Hock 2007:31).

Replication of Tentmaking Ministry in RCCG

Although the authority of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) strongly believes in the teaching of the Bible on ministers' right to welfare, as argued by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:3-15, they equally subscribe to the Pauline strategy of tentmaking ministry to enhance the rapid expansion of the church and to enable many believers to fulfil God's purposes upon their lives. Besides, it is to enable the church to reach the unreached souls and win them for Christ. However, it is not all ministers in the Redeemed Christian Church of God who are being paid by the church. Some ministers are working for the church, shepherding the flock of God and planting churches, yet they are not receiving any salary from the church. These ministers are called 'tent-makers' (or part-timers). They are fully recognised by the church authority as ministers who have the call of God upon their lives and faithful team members of the General Overseer, just like Aquila and Priscilla to Apostle Paul. They are 'lay ministers' who give their spiritual and financial support to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and expand the frontiers of RCCG. These preachers have contributed to the full realisation of the Redeemed Christian Church of God's mission by offering their hands, hearts, and resources to the work of God.

The vision of RCCG is to spread like wildfire by planting the parishes of the church in every street within a five-minute walk distance and to have the members of this church in every family in the world. So, to accomplish this vision, the church employs more tentmaking ministers who have the call of God upon their lives and who have been part and parcel of the church, having gone through a series of biblical training organised by the church to equip them spiritually and to help in fulfilling this vision. Many of the respondents asserted that about 65-70% of the ministers (pastors) in the Redeemed Christian Church of God are tentmaking ministers. However, like Paul, the main motivation of

these tentmaking ministers goes beyond financial or material gain but is the gospel. They insisted not on their rights to financial support from the church and refused to be remunerated monthly by the church because their motivation was not money but service. These tentmaking ministers have different professions where they earn their living, from which they spend their money on the work of God in the church. Hence, they help reduce the administrative costs of the church (Ajayi 2024). Just like Paul, they are not a burden to the church of God. Even some church members look up to them for financial assistance (Ajayi 2024). They wanted to maintain financial independence. This idea of independence is highly valued in today's society, where many men of God are financial hucksters, always reaching out to potential churchgoers for donations. By not burdening the churches with their needs, they could fulfil their pastoral care responsibilities without compromising their ministry through the demand for their welfare (Francis 1998:48).

According to Pastor Olukayode Oyeniyi (2024), aged 53, their main motivation is to fulfil the call of God upon their lives. He adds that he sees the church work as the main assignment God gave to him and that he only does secular work to earn a living like Paul. This view is also supported by Pastor Olufemi Adebowale (2024), aged 54, among other people. He argued that working for God is a calling, and one is only using one's talent for the Lord. However, being a tentmaker does not affect one's effectiveness in the work of God. These tentmaking ministers help in planting more parishes and spreading the church of God every year through the annual church evangelistic programme tagged 'Let's Go A-fishing', which comes up every Easter and Christmas period and mainly focuses on planting more churches in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. However, only those tentmaking ministers whose workplaces are outside the town where their parishes are situated are not always on the ground for mid-week services, but they make themselves available for Sunday services and some other major services of the church. According to them, one can hardly see the difference between the work of a full-time minister and a tentmaking minister in the church. Both of them are effective, productive, and fruitful in the work of the kingdom.

Pastor Olufemi Adebowale (2024) asserted that one did not have to be paid for the work of God before one could be effective in it. He said that it is all

about the fulfilment of God's purpose in one's life. This agrees with Paul's motivation for preaching the gospel free of charge. Paul says: 'For necessity is laid upon me. Woe unto me if I do not preach the gospel' (1 Cor. 9:16). Like Paul, these gospel ministers believe that sharing the gospel brings rewards with which the exercise of other rights and privileges is not comparable. So, they are passionate about preaching the gospel 'free of charge'. However, this suggests that, whether they are supported by the church or not, they must preach the gospel, for it is a divine commission given unto them to carry out. In addition, any of these tentmaking ministers can rise to the level of Special Assistant to the General Overseer, which is a rank very close to the rank of Assistant General Overseer. This is to show that they are well recognised and utilised by the church (Ogunsola 2024).

Recommendations and Conclusion

Paul wanted to preach the gospel 'free of charge' to be able to live out the message that everyone is entitled to God's grace via Christ. However, as for the unimpeded sharing of the gospel, this study advocates that gospel ministers should seek financial independence for their welfare and withdraw from total dependence on the church, like Paul, just for the sake of personal integrity as ministers of God and the integrity of the gospel that they preach. People who believe that serving 'full-time' will increase their effectiveness ought to consider Paul's 'part-time' ministry which was highly productive for the kingdom of God. Paul worked to provide for his welfare lest he became a burden to the church.

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