

CONTRACTUAL CONSIDERATION

By Charles Mwewa

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, "You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So, they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You also go and work in my vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first." The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So, when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. "These men who were hired last worked only one hour," they said, "and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day." But he answered one of them, "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go." (Matthew 20: 1-14).

Introduction

In this sermon, we consider the true meaning divine apportionment by drawing from the common-law principles of contract law. In law, generally, a valid contract should have at least three binding elements. These elements are an offer, acceptance, and consideration. (Other factors, such as capacity, *consensus ad idem*, formality and legality, are presumed, at least for the purposes of this sermon). The central thesis of this sermon is consideration, and the idea that consideration need not be adequate or sufficient. In short, once an agreement has been made as to *quantum* (amount), its value is irrelevant. To develop this thesis further, the following points have been identified: Offer accepted; consideration expected; and contract respected. The points will be dealt with in the above-mentioned order, before a conclusive application and a related prayer are offered.

1. Offer Accepted

Just like in legal contracts, an offeror makes an offer to the offeree. In the Bible passage under discussion, our Lord, made an offer to five sets of people at five different hour-periods for the consideration of "a denarius for the day." Once an offer has been made and accepted, the adequacy of consideration is not an issue for the Courts. This principle has been respected for generations upon generations. What the Courts respect is what was agreed upon, and not the value of what was agreed to. In our case scenario, one group began work, say, at 6:00 a.m., another at 9:00 a.m., another at 12:00 p.m., and yet another at 3:00 p.m. The last group agreed to began work, say, at 11:00 p.m., with only an hour remaining before the end of the day. All the groups agreed to be paid a denarius¹ for the day. At the point of contract, all the groups accepted the offer. The Bible says, "Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."² The word, "receive," means to accept. We find a similar injunction: "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."³ Those who will enter the Kingdom of God, have accepted the offer God gave, that of His Son.⁴

¹ Probably \$2 worth in those days

² John 1:12

³ John 3:16

⁴ See John 3:3

2. Consideration Expected

In contract law, consideration is anything of value that is exchanged between parties in a contractual negotiation. It can be any amount, of any value. Consideration itself does not need to be sufficient, what is sufficient is the fact that the parties, willingly and without coercion, agreed to the exchange.⁵ In our story under review, all the five sets of individuals accepted our Lord's offer, volitionally, and agreed to its terms, unequivocally. Specifically, they all agreed to a denarius for the day, no matter how many hours they worked in that day.

In Christianity, we entered into a special contract with God called a Covenant. As indicated before, a valid contract must have at least three elements of offer, acceptance, and consideration. In our covenant with God, offer and acceptance are required. However, only God gave consideration – His only begotten Son, and we gave Him nothing of value in return. It is still a contract based on an exception in law called a contract under seal. An agreement without consideration is known as a gratuity or gratuitous promise. When a gratuity is offered and accepted under seal, it becomes enforceable at law as a contract.

The new covenant was contracted and sealed in three steps. First, Jesus Christ secured redemption by means of His own blood.⁶ Second, Jesus Himself became a seal approved by God: "For on [Jesus] God the Father has set his seal."⁷ And third, those who accept Jesus are sealed with the Holy Spirit as guarantee: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."⁸ Thus, even without humanity's providing a valid consideration, God sealed the agreement, and in that act, He also transformed what would have been a mere gratuitous promise into a valid contract. And this is the basis of God's promises to us – they will always be fulfilled – because they are based on an eternal contract: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so, through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."⁹

3. Contract Respected

Our belief in the Lord Jesus is rewardable. In other words, we do not enter into a contract with God without consideration. God will reward the fact that we accepted His offer of salvation and redemption, and their attendant rewards. The rewards vary, and they range from mundane, to heavenly glory, and to eternal life. There is a reward of answered prayer.¹⁰ Those who give or are generous or hospitable, will be rewarded with a good and expansive measure.¹¹ The reward of a ticket into the Kingdom of God.¹² In addition, there is a great reward in Heaven for those who suffer or go through trials for the sake and name of Christ and truth, and love for the enemy or who endure in ministry.¹³ There is a reward for quality work, for both earthly

⁵ In law, undue influence, unconscionability, fraudulent misrepresentation, or duress, may render contract void ab initio (defective or of no legal effect from the beginning).

⁶ Hebrews 9:11-15

⁷ John 6:27

⁸ Ephesians 1:13

⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:20

¹⁰ Matthew 6:6

¹¹ Luke 6:38; Luke 14:12-14

¹² Matthew 25:20-23, 37-40

¹³ Luke 6:22-23, 35; 2 Corinthians 4:17-18; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 2 John 1:7-8

employers and our heavenly Father.¹⁴ Moreover, there are five crowns available for those who accepted God's covenant of love. There is a crown that never perishes.¹⁵ A crown of rejoicing.¹⁶ A crown of righteousness.¹⁷ A crown of glory.¹⁸ And finally, a crown of life.¹⁹

Implicit in the Bible, is the adherence to common-law principles of consideration, even in the final analysis. For example, the Bible says, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will then repay every man according to his deeds.²⁰ God will not give rewards equally; He will award each person a reward with equity and fairness.²¹ This is what in our passage is referred to as, "I am not being unfair to you." The degree of fairness is based on the gift each person received and what they did with it. Some, indeed, will escape with a whisker – those people will, surely, enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but without other rewards or crowns. Those who put their gifts to good use here on earth, will have their rewards multiplied. Our value on earth is tied to our purpose; once we discharge our purpose here on earth, death is a welcome partner: "Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep."²²

Conclusion & Application

There is a misconception that every believer will receive the same reward. The truth is, everyone who believes in Jesus and accepts the free gift of eternal life, is, and will be, saved. However, salvation is merely the entry point. What you do with the degree of grace God has given to you, is very important. If you sit on potential or neglect your gifts, abilities, and talents, you will not receive the same reward as those who invested into their gifts. Remember that your gift is to the world – not to a church or a congregation. Pastors, evangelists, teachers, prophets, and apostles are the gift to the church. Every believer in Christ is a gift to the world. Your singing, writing, dancing, politicking, accounting, leadership, parenting, making money, and etc., are all respective gifts to the world. You will not receive rewards for what you will do in Heaven, only for what you did on earth. As the writer to the Hebrews admonishes: "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment."²³ Repentance, faith, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection, and judgment, are all elementary concepts. In other words, they are for spiritual primary school. Most churches preach these, week after week, year after year, thereby creating spiritually immature believers. Move on – participate in politics, learn a trade, reach out to the vulnerable, create jobs, invent money-making ventures, write poetry, publish books, discover ideas and technology, change courses of history, leave behind legacies, and etc., with the gifts God has given you. Here on earth, you shall be fulfilled, and in Heaven, great shall be your reward.

¹⁴ Colossians 3:23-24; 1 Corinthians 3:11-14; 1 Corinthians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 9:6

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 9:24-25

¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 2:19

¹⁷ 2 Timothy 4:8

¹⁸ 1 Peter 5:4

¹⁹ Revelation 2:10

²⁰ Matthew 16:27

²¹ The concept of equity stands on the assumption of fairness. Equality stands on the position that all, regardless of value brought forward, are rewarded the similarly.

²² Acts 13:36

²³ Hebrews 6:1-2

Related Prayer

Oh, Lord, our Father, grant us grace to overcome lethargy;
But for great exploits here on earth, grant us authentic energy;
Thank you, Lord Jesus, Thy blood has made all things new;
Thy seal, Spirit, spur our works, in quantity, and quality, too.

In the name of Jesus, our Lord,
Amen!