

Should Ministers Be Paid?

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I have had a number of saints write to ask me questions regarding ministerial compensation, so I thought it would be good to make these responses available to all by posting an article on this matter. As many are seeing the abuses of a Babylonian religious system and are coming out of it, many of the abuses of this false system are being highlighted. One particular aspect that is often scrutinized is ministerial pay. It is certainly evident with all of the emphasis on prosperity doctrines, and the absence of shepherds who have hearts for their flocks and integrity before God, that many ministers view their calling as a means to acquire worldly gain.

The backlash against the abuses of ministers has led some to go too far in the opposite direction and to place burdens and restrictions upon true ministers that are not found in Scripture. One man who has written a book on the harlot church system has argued that no minister should be paid, or should receive material support from the body of Christ for the children are not responsible to meet the needs of the parents. I have encountered a growing number of saints who are proclaiming such things, and I have found them to be overlooking and misinterpreting many Biblical instructions and admonitions.

Also, a few years back the Spirit called me to a period of 18 months where He asked me to not work outside of the ministry of the gospel, and some have asked if this is a Scripturally supportable thing to do. The Spirit has once more called me to such a walk, and some have wondered How I know such a thing is from God. Should a man who has a wife and children quit his job and look to the Lord to supply the needs of his family? Is this something that any saint might do? What do the Scriptures reveal about such an activity? I will also answer these questions in this writing.

I believe that it is not for everyone to quit their job, and the following Scriptures are the basis for this belief.

II Thessalonians 3:6-12

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because

we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: *if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.*

I Thessalonians 4:10-12

But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

Ephesians 4:28

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

What Paul wrote above was written to the body at large. The body is to work to support their own needs, and to have the means to help others out as well. It should be a desire of every saint to minister to others thereby demonstrating the principle that it is more blessed to give than to receive. No man should just quit his job and then become idle, expecting others in the body to meet his need. The above verses state this plainly, and I will list one other verse that has often been quoted to say that a man should not quit his job, though this verse is taken out of context and is misapplied.

I Timothy 5:8

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

I have had some quote this verse to condemn my obedience to Christ in quitting my job and looking to God to meet my needs as the Spirit was directing. Yet this verse in its context is speaking about support of widows, which any will plainly see if they look it up. It is not specifically speaking to the issue of a man not working to support his own family. However, Paul did issue such instructions in the other verses listed above.

So we see that the apostles clearly taught that a man should work and not be idle.

This would seem to condemn my own actions in leaving my place of employment, as it would also condemn the actions of many others including Christ, the apostles, and various other saints down through time including George Muller and Rees Howells. These verses would seem to be condemning such a walk, unless one observes one very clear exception to this rule. The exception, which is stated clearly and given much attention in Scripture so that we need have no doubt, is that if one is giving himself to the ministry of the gospel he has a right to receive support from those who are receiving of his ministry, or from others who desire to send support. If you look at the above passage quoted from II Thessalonians 3, you will see that Paul has stated that he had this right, but he chose not to exercise it so that he might set an example to those who were being idle. Paul gave this same instruction to Timothy, indicating that ministers were worthy of compensation:

I Timothy 5:17-19

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

Yet Paul's most explicit teaching on this matter was to the Corinthian church.

I Corinthians 9:3-18

My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things that it may be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but

if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

There can be no mistaking that this passage is written to specifically address the issue of compensating ministers. It is also a lengthy passage that has much to say on the issue. It should therefore be given great weight when considering the matter of ministers obtaining a living from the gospel. We cannot let what seems to be implied in another scripture violate what is plainly spoken here. In examining this passage we see many things.

First let us examine what Paul is speaking about when he says that ministers have a right to obtain a living from the gospel. In verse 4 he says, "Do we not have a right to eat and drink?" In this we can clearly see that Paul includes food and drink in his understanding of "living from the gospel." Furthermore he says, "Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife?" In this we can see that support for a spouse is also included in "living from the gospel." In fact, Paul argues that all the other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas are making use of this right. He says, "Are Barnabas and I the only ones who do not have this right?"

So we see that Paul is revealing that it is the practice of the church to share their material substance with those who are providing spiritual sustenance to the body, and not only with those ministers, but with their spouses as well.

Paul then goes on to give three separate arguments to substantiate the validity of ministers receiving their living from the gospel. The first argument is taken from what I would call common sense and common practice. Paul says, "Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?"

Paul's assertions here are straightforward, and they have clear parallels to the kingdom of God. First he says, "Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?" At this time of the Roman Empire we know that soldiers received pay. They did not serve for free. John the Baptist told the soldiers to be content with their wages. The soldiers wages came from Rome, and Rome's money came from taxation of the people's of the Empire. It can be substantiated that the very money the soldiers earned came from the people of the area in which they were stationed.

In a similar way, those who serve in God's kingdom are frequently compared to

soldiers. Paul told Timothy, "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Messiah Yahshua" (II Timothy 2:3). Should the soldiers of Christ serve at their own expense? This is Paul's question and argument. His question is rhetorical. He implies, "No soldier serves at his own expense, and this is true of the soldiers in the kingdom of God as well."

Secondly, Paul says, "Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it?" It is certain that there is a plethora of scriptures that relate the church, the body of Christ, to a vineyard. Yahshua spoke in this way,

Matthew 20:1

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to *hire laborers* for his vineyard."

Matthew 21:33

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and *rented it out to vine-growers*, and went on a journey."

These parables of Yahshua are revelatory in that in both cases He spoke of the laborers in the vineyard being hired, or renting the vineyard with the intent of partaking of the fruit of the vineyard. The question could be asked by Paul, "Who plants a vineyard, *or tends one*, and does not eat the fruit of it?" In another place Paul told Timothy, "The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops" (II Timothy 2:6).

Again we see that Paul is using examples of common practice to support his assertion that ministers have a right to obtain a living from the gospel. In the natural realm men do not plant or tend a vineyard without an expectation of obtaining a return from their efforts. In the Kingdom of God the principle is the same. In I Corinthians Paul compares a minister's work to planting and watering a vineyard. He states, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God brought the increase." Should Paul and Apollos labor in God's vineyard without partaking of the substance of the vineyard? Should they be required to labor with no return? Paul's answer is a resounding "No!" They have a RIGHT to such a return and even common practice reveals this to be the case.

In a third common example Paul states, "Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?" Once again, this is a very popular analogy of the Kingdom of God,

Yahshua was called the good Shepherd, and Paul spoke to the elders of the church and instructed them to "shepherd the church of God" (Acts 20:28).

In these examples Paul clearly establishes the principle that the one doing the soldiering, farming, and shepherding receives things in return from that which they are laboring in or tending. The soldier receives wages that come from the people among whom he is stationed; the farmer or vine-dresser receives fruit from the vineyard he is tending; the shepherd receives milk from the flock he is tending. In each case the laborer is receiving a return. The relationship of the laborer to that which he labors in is not one way. It is clearly a two-way relationship. Paul defines this relationship in the words, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?"

Lest some should question the validity of Paul's arguments from such common practice examples, he states, "I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I?" These examples could appear to be just a common sense human judgment, so Paul does not stop here. Paul is well aware of the principle that all things must be established by two or three witnesses, so he proceeds to a second witness, "Or does not the Law also say these things?" Paul's next witness will be the law of God.

So, what does the law say about ministers receiving a living from the gospel? "For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.' God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops." If God shows concern even for an ox that is threshing grain, does He not also have concern for those ministers who labor in the Kingdom? Of course He does. Paul says this instruction was written for the sake of such ministers. In another place Paul says,

I Timothy 5:17-18

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

If anyone should have a doubt that the "double honor" spoken of here is speaking of material compensation, he needs only relate this passage in Timothy to the message we are looking at in I Corinthians. This is an important linking because, lest some should contend from the passage in Corinthians that only apostles are worthy of

compensation, they can clearly see in the passage in I Timothy that elders are also included, and especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Paul, however, does not stop at providing two witnesses. He has mentioned two witnesses thus far, common practice and the Law, next he gives the witness of the priesthood. "Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar?" Are those who labor in the gospel, this labor including preaching and teaching, are they not performing a sacred service? Indeed they are. This is clearly Paul's assertion. Even as the priests in the temple received food and a share of the sacrifices brought to the altar, and even a tithe, so Paul states that ministers of the gospel share the same right.

I should clarify one thing here. In this passage Paul mentions the priests receiving food and a share of the altar, but we have to go to another passage to see that he states that they also received tithes.

Hebrews 7:5

And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.

In sticking to our original premise, however, we cannot assert that ministers are to receive compensation from tithes because the Scripture in Hebrews is not written specifically to address tithing in the church age, nor was it written as an instruction on compensating ministers. We merely mention this to show that God's ministers from the previous covenant received material support in this manner, and we note that Paul is using the earlier covenant and its provisions as a witness to support the minister's right to obtain a living from the gospel.

Paul concludes this last example and witness of the priesthood and their material support by saying, "So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel." Where did the Lord give this directive? The following scripture is certainly a very likely candidate.

Luke 10:7

"And stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; *for the laborer is worthy of his wages*. Do not keep moving from house to house."

Why do I think this is the passage to which Paul is referring? It is in examining the following statement of Paul. "For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "*The laborer is worthy of his wages*" (I Timothy 5:18). Paul tends to repeat his instruction to different individuals. In this passage in I Corinthians we have seen that Paul has already quoted the passage about not muzzling the ox that threshes the grain. Now he alludes to the Lord giving a direction concerning ministers getting their living from the gospel. To see what command Paul is speaking about we can simply cross reference the passage in I Corinthians to the passage in I Timothy where Paul quotes the Lord's words "For the laborer is worthy of his wages." We find this statement of Jesus in Luke 10:7.

Now, without a doubt, Paul has established the fact that a minister has a RIGHT to obtain his living from the gospel. The rest of this passage in I Corinthians mentions this as a right many times. The minister has a right to receive material things from those he has sown spiritual things unto. We cannot allow any other Scripture anywhere in the Bible to violate what is clearly stated here, for this passage is specifically written to address the issue of ministers obtaining a living from the gospel. What is clearly stated here cannot be annulled by what seems to be implied elsewhere. However, other Scriptures can bring a greater clarity to what it means to obtain a living from the gospel.

Before we look at other Scriptures, let us look at a few more statements from this passage, to establish some things that are certain. In this manner we will be kept from erroneously reading something into another passage that is not written in such a pointed manner to address this issue.

In this passage in I Corinthians Paul states, "Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working?" We can glean some insight from this statement. Paul is speaking of a minister having a right to not have to work in an occupation outside of the gospel. Paul has already stated that it was the practice of the other apostles, of the Lord's brothers, and of Cephas to not work, but to receive their living from the gospel, and this extended as far as their having a believing wife to travel with them and to be supported as well. Paul has specifically mentioned that food and drink are two areas in which a minister can expect to receive support. However, Paul in no way is limiting support to food and drink.

Paul has said that a minister can expect to receive a "living" from the gospel. Whatever is required to meet the necessities of life is included in this statement. This would certainly include clothing and a place to stay. Even the Lord in His

instructions to his disciples mentioned lodging and clothing as things in which they could expect to be compensated. We read the following from Matthew.

Matthew 10:9-10

"Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support."

Why did Yahshua tell them not to take extra money, a bag, extra clothes, sandals, or staffs? It was because when the worker had such a need arise, he was to be considered worthy to receive such things from those to whom he was ministering. The minister need not worry about taking along extra provisions in anticipation of replacing that which would wear out. Those he ministered to were expected to supply all his need. If his shoes wore out, those he ministered to should supply him with other shoes, etc.. This was also the reason why they were told not to accumulate gold, silver, or copper for their money belts. If they had a need arise, those they were ministering to should supply their need out of their own resources.

Does this mean that ministers are never to receive money from people? Again we can look at the example of scriptures to see if this is the case. While once more speaking to the Corinthian believers Paul shares this.

II Corinthians 11:8-9

I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.

How did the brethren from Macedonia supply Paul's need. They may have brought him food and clothing, but most likely they took up a collection and sent him money. Paul had other needs in the ministry besides eating and clothing. We are told on one occasion that he rented a house for two full years while a prisoner in Rome (Acts 28:30). On another occasion he used the school of Tyrannus for two years as a location from which to teach (Acts 19:9, 10). This most likely cost money as well.

In the epistle to the Philippian believers, Paul spoke of them sending him such support.

Philippians 4:10-18

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity... Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

We see in the life of Paul that he practiced the principle that whenever people would complain about his exercising his right to live from the gospel, receiving material support, he would work with his own hands and support himself, not receiving anything from the complaining church. However, he did not always support himself. On numerous occasions he received support from churches and from individuals, such as the house of Stephanas (I Corinthians 16:17), and the house of Lydia (Acts 16:15).

Likewise, the minister today has needs beyond food and covering. He has a need at times for a place to minister from. He may need a vehicle to travel, with its associated expenses. He may have need of many different things. One thing he needs to be free from, however, is a desire for gaining the things of the world. How does one define when a brother has crossed the line and is asking for more than God would have him to be content with? This is often difficult to define, for it involves issues of the heart. We have these instructions.

I Timothy 3:8-9

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine *or fond of sordid gain*, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

Titus 1:7

For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, *not fond of sordid gain*...

I Peter 5:1-2

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and *not for sordid gain*, but with eagerness...

I Timothy 6:5-10

and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

What is clear from these passages and many others like them, is that the minister must be free from the love of the things of the world and the love of money. The minister must not entangle himself with the pursuit of the things of this world. The minister should be an example of godly contentedness to all people. He should be free from a desire for sordid gain, and he should clearly be one who is laying up treasures in heaven, and not here on earth. If a minister learns to be content in lack or abundance, then he will find himself approved by God. If he can be just as happy when he knows meager supply as when he is amply provided for, then his heart will be right.

Unfortunately, there are few ministers who are in this place today. As a backlash I have seen many who are coming out of the corrupt church and they are going too far in saying that there should be no support for any ministers. Some have argued that the greatest single thing that perpetuates the harlot church system today is the church's financial support of ministers. Although there are many grotesque abuses in the area of ministerial support, many are erring in going further than God has directed them to go. There is a clear and well established right in scripture, and even in the New Testament, for the minister to obtain a living from the gospel. Many in their zeal to correct what they rightly perceive as abuse, are themselves abusing the Scriptures to support their own point of view.

This is an area of caution for all saints. The most righteous and godly saint can become so frustrated by the abuses and carnality that he sees, that he will like Moses

strike the rock when God has not said to strike it. There is much that is being done in the ranks of Christianity today that is detestable and which should stir us to separate ourselves and stand apart from the abuses, but we are also cautioned against excessive anger "for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).

Some men in their anger against the flagrant marketing of the gospel and the peddler mentality of many ministers, have asserted that no ministers should receive their living from the gospel. They have said that all ministers should be self-supporting. In asserting this, they go against the very plain teachings that have been established in the Scriptures regarding honoring ministers. The pendulum of man's ways swings one direction, and then another, but God's path goes straight down the middle.

When some have written or spoken that children are not responsible to support their parents so ministers shouldn't be compensated by those they minister to, they are making an argument from human reasoning. When Paul gave his arguments for ministerial compensation, he gave three separate witnesses so that none could say that human reasoning was his sole witness. Some have not been so careful in bringing forth multiple witnesses, and they have entered into error.

We have seen then that both Yahshua and the apostles made it plain that the worker was worthy of his hire and that they had a right to support as they labored in the gospel, especially those who worked hard at preaching and teaching. Yet how should the minister go about acquiring this needed support? Should he make his needs known, expecting assistance from the saints? Should he employ the marketing tactics of the world to solicit support as many ministries do? Should he establish a system of tithing so that he will have a steady source of income? Or should he make his needs known only to God and look to the Father to supply his needs?

I believe that the best answer is the last. The Spirit has led me to this place of conviction through trial and error. There have been a couple of occasions when I made a need known through sending out a public e-mail, and both times have been great failures. Yet when I have made my needs known only to God I have seen miraculous results. In this pattern I have the example of godly men whose reputations are well established among the saints. Among those men who never solicited for funds, and never broadcast their need to any but God were Bill Britton, George Muller, Rees Howells and numerous others. What fellowship and communion with God they experienced as they daily pressed into the throne room with their prayers and petitions, attended with thanksgiving, and they saw God answer in one miraculous manner after another. Their faith was increased as they looked to God and did not rely upon their own abilities to get things done.

I cannot give a high enough recommendation for the following books:

'Rees Howells - Intercessor' by Norman Grubb

'Release the Power of Prayer' by George Muller

'The Autobiography of George Muller' by George Muller