

SHOULD CHURCHES HAVE PAID MINISTERS?

John 10:13

By Raymond White

Some churches believe they should have no paid ministers. Other churches believe they should. On one side, maybe they're just in it for the money. On the other side, you get what you pay for. The problem is that the bible argues both ways.

Here are my lists of verses. You pick whichever verses you like best, but be tolerant with people of the opposite opinion. The bible is on their side too.

[1] PAY THE PRIESTS

***Numbers 18:12** All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee.*

***Numbers 18:21** And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.*

***Numbers 18:31** And ye shall eat it in every place [wherever you want], ye and your households: for it is your reward for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation. :32 And ye shall bear no sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved from it the best of it.*

***Deuteronomy 18:3** And this shall be the priest's due from the people...:4 also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thin oil, and the first of the fleece of they sheep, shalt thou give him.*

***2 Chronicles 31:4** Moreover he [Hezekiah] commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the LORD.*

***2 Chronicles 31:19** ...to give portions to all the males among the priests...*

***Nehemiah 10:37** And that we should bring...the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.*

No one expected the priests and Levites to work for free.

[2] DON'T PAY THE PRIESTS

***Numbers 16:15** I have not taken one ass from them.*

***Judges 5:19** The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money.*

No one would have blamed these courageous soldiers to take their rightful spoil from the vanquished. That they didn't, that this battle was strictly a response to their passion for their nation and their God. This was a response above and beyond the call of duty. No one can question the intent of the person who does it for free.

There is no harsher story in the bible than the story of Elisha's servant who accepted remuneration for a service rendered.

2 Kings 5:27 The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from the presence a leper as white as snow.

This is a tragic end to a servant of God who had, up to that point, been very helpful to the prophet. Remember, he's the one that suggested to Elisha that maybe what the widow really wanted was a baby. He was a good servant, until he got greedy.

It's natural to think that the best place to be is near God. That's true if you are devoted to him. But if you're there for the goodies and to take advantage of your station, then you're really much safer somewhere else.

Jeremiah 32:9 And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. :10 And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances.

How Jeremiah makes his living is not mentioned. He is not a priest so he doesn't live by the sacrifices. But he is not a pauper either because he has enough money to buy real estate. So, somehow he makes a good living doing something.

Ezekiel 34:2 ... Woe to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

Micah 3:11 ...the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money...

John 10:13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

Acts 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. :21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Peter has a dim view of money buying ecclesiastical authority.

Acts 18:3 ...by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Paul had a career, a livelihood. He was a tentmaker.

Acts 20:34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

Paul was a working man and paid for his own missionary expenses, and others.

Romans 10:21 ...I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

Preach for hire. Their heart isn't in it. They just do it for the money.

1 Corinthians 4:12 And labour, working with our own hands...

1 Corinthians 9:14 Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. *:15* But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me...

Paul points out (*:7-18*) that ministers and priests have a right to make their living from the gospel. But Paul doesn't. So his service is a double sacrifice.

2 Corinthians 11:7 ...I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? *:8* I have robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service.

Now this verse argues both ways. Paul does accept support from some churches but not others. So it is a conundrum,

Colossians 2:9 ...we would not be chargeable unto any of you...

2 Thessalonians 3:8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. *:18* For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

Titus 1:11 ...teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

1 Peter 5:2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

2 Peter 2:3 ...with feigned words make merchandise of you...

3 John 1:7 Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

***Jude 1:11** Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.*

This final verse pertains not to ministers but to governors. Now what a concept that would be: congressmen serving for free just because it's the right thing to do.

***Nehemiah 5:14** Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor...I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. **:15** But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God.*

[3] IN CONCLUSION

The Bible definitely allows ministers to make a living by preaching. But the Bible also gives the moral ground to ministers who teach without remuneration because that is the undeniable proof that they really are sincere. They would not do it for free otherwise.

Here is the tension.

First: People who work for free generally do a less substantial job than full time dedicated personnel. That's the cold hard truth, and that's why the church does pay a great many people. It's also why in Mormon sacrament meeting, the speakers are rarely interesting and their talks rarely scripture centered. A Sunday school teacher asked a child, "Why should you be quiet in church?" And the child answered, "Because people are sleeping." That's par-for-the-course in Mormon sacrament meeting.

Second: Churches that have paid ministers get good sermons, well usually, and the people learn a lot. But the sincerity of paid pastors really is in doubt. Are they just in it for the money?

So you can't have it both ways; there is no absolute answer. Even the Mormon church pays some people. They pay their institute teachers and seminary teachers, and their accounting and technical staff, and their B.Y.U. professors (which is why their "Know Your Religion series is so good because teachers actually know what they're talking about), and their service workers like marriage counselors and employment counselors. And the church certainly pays its general authorities a hefty stipend. Well, of course. General authorities devote their entire lives to the cause and travel the world endlessly. It wouldn't do for apostles to starve, and the church shouldn't have only rich people become apostles. So there has to be remuneration of some kind.

Since the Mormon church pays so many people, would it be so terrible if bishops and stake presidents were paid? Mormons would be horrified at the thought, but there is no right answer as far as the Bible is concerned. Sensibly, however, there is this answer (harsh as it may be): You don't pay people if you can get them to work for free. But you do pay people if you have to have a quality and consistency that you can't get for free. That's the tie breaker.

It is unfair to criticize churches that pay their ministers when you consider how many people in the Mormon church are paid for their time and work.

On the other hand (and there's always another hand) a non-paid ministry has worked very well for the Mormon church: they have an endless pool of willing bishops, stake presidents, and missionaries who will work for free (which other churches envy), which leaves the Mormon church a large pool of money (they are the second wealthiest church in the world) with which to build chapels and temples everywhere. That economic model works well. Of course it's a little rough on the now-and-then stake president who loses his job, can't find work, but still performs his church calling for free. I've known two in that situation: one in Santa Clarita and one in Santa Cruz. And that seems unfair.

Finally the question: Is an un-paid ministry a good thing or a bad thing? For the Mormons their un-paid ministry certainly seems to be the right fiscal balance. The only downside is that their meetings really are not so interesting, and attendance and membership do suffer, more I think than the church will admit. One inactive man in La Cañada (whose name many would recognize) said this: "There's nothing there for me."

So, should there be paid ministers or not? You have the verses, you know the consequences either way, you decide.