

“Double Honor” – An Examination of the Scriptural Principles for Compensating Called Workers

The Issue – The Lord of the Church has graciously instituted on this earth the ministry of the Gospel. By means of this ministry, the Lord wills that all nations hear the Good News of the saving work of Jesus Christ, believe it, and finally be saved. This ministry of the Word is carried out by God’s people. All have a share in this work. But some will be called by God through His Church to do this work full-time as representatives of Christ and the body of believers who has called them to use Christ’s Keys publicly. The question then arises: *What compensation should full-time, called workers receive?* For guidance in answering this question, we will look to God’s timeless Word.

LUKE 10:7

⁷Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

The context – Jesus is preparing to send ahead of Him 36 two-man teams (or 35 teams) to the towns and places Jesus intended to visit. They can expect opposition (Luke 10:3). They are not to go home and pack a big suitcase to take along (Luke 10:4). They are not to become distracted on the way (Luke 10:4). If they find a welcome in any home, they are to remain in that home, working from there in that place (Luke 10:5). In this home they are to accept the food and drink provided to them (they have not brought along purse or bag, i.e. money or provisions, Luke 10:4). Jesus states the reason they are to accept this support: *[T]he worker deserves his wages.* Here Jesus clearly states the principle of material support for those who preach/teach the Word.

Why the prohibition from moving around from house to house?

Answer: These workers in the Lord’s Kingdom were not to “hunt around” for the most comfortable accommodations, nor seek the most lucrative support they could find. They were to be satisfied with their basic needs being supplied.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:4-14

⁴Don’t we have the right to food and drink? ⁵Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas? ⁶Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? ⁷Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? ⁸Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn’t the Law say the same thing? ⁹For it is written in the Law of Moses: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman

plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹²If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. ¹³Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

The context – Paul has just written to the Corinthians about being willing to yield their right to do something out of love and for the good of another (Chapter 8). In Chapter 9, Paul puts forward an example of this in what he had done when he had first come to Corinth. He had not made use of his “right” (v. 4, 12) of receiving material support from the Corinthians.

Notice Paul calls receiving support a “right” of those laboring in the Word. What is a “right”?

Answer: A “right” is that which is due to a person by virtue of a given status. A person has a just, moral claim to that which is their right. We might even say rights are “existential.” To exist as a certain thing means certain rights accrue to that individual. Paul's point is that being (existing as) an apostle meant having the right of material support.

Nature and human experience teach the principle that laborers enjoy the fruit of their labors. What examples does Paul cite in this section?

Answer: Soldiers receive compensation for their duty (One thinks how soldiers were quartered in the homes of those they served to defend). Vintners enjoy some of the grapes they harvest. Shepherds enjoy some of the milk from the sheep/goats they tend. Farmers and farmhands enjoy the produce they have worked to plant and harvest.

Not only do nature and experience teach this principle, God does, too, in the Old Testament. In what unlikely verse from the Old Testament does Paul see God teaching the principle of the right of a Gospel preacher/teacher to be compensated for their labors?

*Answer: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.”
(Deuteronomy 25:4)*

What other example from the Old Testament does Paul also cite?

Answer: Paul cites the example of the priests at the Temple who received their food from the gifts and sacrifices the people brought.

The principle (Paul even calls it the command of the Lord Jesus - v. 14)

(ANSWER) THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOSPEL SHOULD RECEIVE

THEIR LIVING FROM THE GOSPEL

For further discussion: In verse 5 Paul made the point that the Gospel preacher has the right to take his wife with him. How does this affect our understanding of the “right of support” (v. 12) for those who preach the Gospel?

Answer: Understanding that the full-time preacher/teacher has the right to be a “family man/woman,” calling bodies would want their support to be sufficient so the worker can provide for family.

Paul freely yielded his right of support in Corinth. Is it right to expect a called worker to labor in “tent-making” to make a living wage?

Answer: At certain times and in certain places, “tent-making” ministries may exist. (“Tent-making” ministries are understood as those where a person is called and compensated for part-time Gospel ministry, with the understanding they will seek gainful employment elsewhere to earn a “living wage.”) It would be important in these circumstances for both the calling body and the individual called to know the parameters and expectations of the Call. “Tent-making” calls will exist where and when circumstances and careful stewardship determine this is the wisest way to carry on Gospel ministry. Congregations that would “expect” their called worker to get a second job because they simply don’t want to pay “so much,” or who want to do ministry “on the cheap,” should reexamine their motives and the principles this Bible study seeks to review.

GALATIANS 6:6

⁶Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.

Who has the primary responsibility to compensate the instructor of the Word?

Answer: Those who directly receive the benefit from that instructor. This is not to suggest that subsidy in the cause of opening missions is wrong, but as a general practice it is only fitting that the recipients of the Gospel ministry compensate the Gospel minister from whom they receive the Gospel.

1 TIMOTHY 5:17-18

¹⁷The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."

How do we know that the "honor" of which Paul speaks in these verses is not merely an attitude in the abstract but compensation in the concrete?

Answer: To buttress his statement that elders who serve well are worthy of double honor, Paul quotes (again) the passage from Deuteronomy where oxen are allowed to eat as a result of their treading, and he quotes Jesus' comments about workers and their deserved wages.

What significance is it that compensation is called not only a wage (v. 18), but also an "honor" (v. 17)?

Answer: In the world, compensation may be simply a calculation of the "market-rate" or even a tool to motivate and retain workers. Not so in the Church. Compensation for those who are called to serve in the Gospel ministry is also a way God's people show them honor.

How should the word "double" be understood in this verse? (the literal formula or calculus by which to set the salary of called workers, a general guideline, other?)

Answer: Interpretations vary. Some believe elders deserve the attitude of honor (this would be one honor) and also the honor of wages (the second, and thus, "double" honor). There is a Scriptural use of the idea of doubling that simply connotes "much more." (e.g. the double blessing for Jerusalem in the place of her sin, Is. 40:1-2; the double destruction spoken of through Jeremiah, Jer. 17:18; the double portion of judgment for the harlot, Rev. 18) Perhaps the best way to bring out the idea in this verse is: Whatever you have come to think of as normal honor, the well-serving elder is worthy of much more! And this abundance of honor will be evidenced in the elder's compensation.

Notice again that the basis for Paul's point regarding compensation is Old Testament Scripture (*Do not muzzle the ox...*) and the command of the Lord Jesus (*The worker deserves his wages*).

For further discussion:

Nowhere does Scripture mandate an exact amount or formula for determining compensation for called workers. That in itself is instructive. How so?

Answer: The setting of compensation is an area in which Christians move about in the freedom of the Gospel, guided by the counsel of God's Word. The determination of compensation is not a legalistic chore for a calling body nor a mindless picking of a number, but a thoughtful, prayerful, Gospel-motivated exercise of love.

The compensation provided a full-time called worker has been called "freedom." In what sense is compensation "freedom?"

Answer: The full-time worker should be free to concentrate on the work for which they have been called, and not have to unduly concern themselves with matters of food and clothes. Of course, this is first and foremost a matter of trusting the Father in heaven who knows our needs and well provides us. However, a congregation's compensation should not lead a worker into temptation, either.

Based on what Scripture says, what questions might a calling body ask itself when determining the compensation of its called worker(s)?

Answer: Answers will, of course, vary. Some questions that flow out of this study might be:

- *Does this compensation demonstrate double honor?*
- *Does this compensation adequately provide for this man/woman/family?*

Summary – In the Church, the Gospel is everything. It is God's pardon of the sinner for Jesus' sake. It is the creative word of God that calls the Church into existence and will preserve her in the world until Christ comes. While Christ will always and rightly be our dearest Treasure, Christ's people will also honor those who bring them such Good News. Part of that honor will be demonstrated in the compensation we provide those bringers of the Gospel. *How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those of those who bring good news. (Isaiah 52:7)*