

How Much Should We Pay The Preacher?

John Isaac Edwards

This question has been asked by brethren over the years, and it is worthy of our consideration.

1) Preachers Are To Be Paid. Some are of the mindset that preachers ought to do their work gratuitously. A preacher who refuses financial support of brethren is perceived to be a more dedicated and spiritual man than those who take wages for their work, in the mind of at least a few. Yet, such a man is really doing the church a disservice! In fact, Paul did not take support from the church at Corinth, but “...robbed other churches, taking wages of them...” (2 Cor. 11:8). He later wrote the Corinthians an apology saying, “For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches...forgive me this wrong” (2 Cor. 12:13). The Scriptures affirm the right of preachers to be paid for their service, and the responsibility of those among whom they labor to provide their needs. The Lord sent out His disciples to teach with the instruction, “Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes...And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire...” (Lk. 10:4-7). The provisions of others would supply what they needed. Suppose a man came to preach

today without any money, a traveler’s bag, or extra clothing! In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul asserted the right of gospel preachers to eat and drink, to be married, to forbear working and have their needs fully supplied so as to “live of the gospel” (v. 14). As soldiers do not go to warfare at their own charges, the husbandman who plants a vineyard eats of the fruit thereof, and flock-feeders eat of the milk of the flock (v. 7), we shouldn’t expect gospel preachers to support themselves! The law of Moses says the same. It is written, “Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn” (Dt. 25:4; 1 Cor. 9:9). Some have been guilty of ox-muzzling, by not supporting gospel preachers like they should! Do you know why that is said? “For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?” (vv. 10-11).

2) Preachers Have Needs. A preacher is a human being and he and his family have needs just like the rest of us. He and his family need to eat and drink. According to recent government estimates of food costs, it might

cost \$404 per week for a family of 5 to have a nutritious diet where all meals and snacks are prepared at home. This does not take into account added expense of being given to hospitality, and being invited to dine out with brethren from time to time where he is left to foot the bill. There is the cost of providing a living place, whether rented or owned. The median home price is now \$188,900. A down payment of 20% would require \$37,780. A monthly mortgage payment might be \$850 or more. Plus you have home owner’s insurance, real estate taxes, utilities (electric, water, sewer, gas), waste removal, repair and maintenance expenses. He needs to be reached and able to reach others so there is phone and communication costs. They aren’t giving away free residential internet service most places either. And these costs aren’t fixed — they are always increasing. Some have faced electric hikes of 50%! Preachers and their families aren’t immune to sickness or disease either. There are doctors bills, hospital visits, prescription costs, eye exams, oral care, therapy, lab work, and the like. He is required to provide health insurance for himself and his family. He has the cost of educating his children. There’s college tuition

to think about. It might cost upwards of \$20,000 per child per academic year for an in-state university! Whether owned or leased, he needs to have a reliable vehicle in most places. Add to that excise tax, auto insurance, fuel costs, repair and maintenance expenses. What about retirement? How many churches provide a retirement plan for the preacher? Circumstances may become such that he is not able to preach. What then? He ought to have some life insurance to help with his final expenses and provide for his family after he is gone. He and his family have clothing expenses. He lays by in store upon the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2). Now, add all that up and we haven't even mentioned any expenses related to doing the work of an evangelist! Study materials and tools, computer, software, printer, copy expenses, supplies, visiting and teaching, and the list goes on.

3) **Other Fields.** Millions of dollars are given to a fellow to play sports. The president of the United States is paid \$400,000 a year while in office, and earns a substantial pension for the rest of his life. Do you know what a former president might earn for just ONE speech? \$100,000 or

more! Would it be too much to give a man of God that amount for a year's work in preaching the gospel? The median pay for a physician is \$187,200. Which is more valuable — your body or your soul? One might work for a company and receive a handsome salary with benefits, bonuses, stock options, awards and other compensation in excess of his annual salary. Ever have to pay legal fees? We had to secure the services of an attorney to get court-appointed guardianship of our oldest son, who has special needs, when he reached legal age, to continue doing for him what we have been doing since his birth. They only charged \$200 per hour! Every office visit, email, phone call and paper copy was billed! What is a preacher's time worth?

4) **We Ought To Do The Best We Can.** Paul asked, "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:13-14). It is written, "And every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel,

which they bring unto the priest shall be his. And every man's hallowed things shall be his: whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his" (Num. 5:9-10). A reading of Numbers 18:8-20 finds the priests and Levites being given the best portions. "All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the first-fruits of them which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee" (v. 12). This shows God's estimation of their work. As God provided His Old Testament ministers the best, we ought to do the best we can to take care of His ministers today!

I've been blessed to work with brethren who have treated me far beyond anything I deserve, for which I am eternally indebted and grateful. As Paul asked, "...how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?..." (Rom. 10:14-15). Thanks to God for churches like those of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8) and Philippi (Phil. 4:15-18) and brethren like Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3), Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:15-18), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-30), and Gaius (3 Jn.).

The Terre Haute **SPEAKER** is published weekly by the church of Christ at Terre Haute, Indiana.

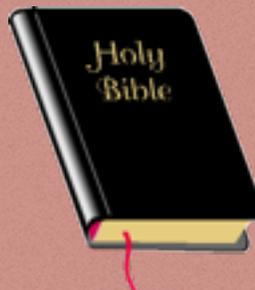
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