

## **FIRST CORINTHIANS**

### **The Right Of The Minister To Receive Wages I Corinthians 9:1-14**

When I was in my first pastorate and preaching through First Corinthians, I came to chapter nine and felt very strange about preaching on the paying of a pastor for his labors. I was only twenty-six years old, so I went to an old ex-pastor in the church and asked him to preach on the subject for me. He said, "You teach them. You are the Pastor not me. They are your flock and this is part of God's Word." I packed my bags before I came to preaching that Sunday just in case they ran me out of town. They didn't. In fact, they were blessed.

It is always difficult to speak on finances no matter how old the pastor is because it is such a touchy subject.

There was a county church in North Carolina which had an advertisement in the Saturday newspaper which said, "Mt. Moriali Church. The Rev. John Obediah preaching. In the propagation of the gospel, three books are necessary: The Holy Book, the hymn book and the pocketbook. Come tomorrow and bring all three."

My desire is that this message will be informative to you and will increase your desire to give in a biblical manner to the Lord's work and His workers. This section of Scripture is about the minister's right to receive financial remuneration for his labors.

As I preach this message some of you might be saying under your breathe, "The pastor is trying to get a raise." I want you to know up front I am not complaining about my salary at HBF. I do, however, get a little concerned about the small salary we give our Assistant to the Pastor, but by God's grace we will get that up in the future.

By way of background, in chapter eight, the Apostle Paul dealt with the subject of doubtful things or questionable practices. In the case of the Corinthians, it was meat offered to idols. Paul's conclusion was that a Christian had the liberty to eat the meat but it became a sin if the eating of that meat caused a brother who was weak in conscience to sin. He also pointed out that the mature brother should set aside his liberty in love to help the weak brother not to stumble and to enable him to grow up and understand the grace of God. The strong brother is not to insist upon his rights, giving up that which is alright to practice for the unity of the body of Christ. Love always causes the Christian to forego liberties and privileges. In chapter nine, Paul deals with those in the Corinthian Church who had difficulty setting aside their rights. They probably said, "I'm not going to give up my rights for any legalistic, narrow-minded Christian." In effect, they were saying, "We are too mature, too advanced in our knowledge of Christian doctrine to make that kind of adjustment" Perhaps they had said to Paul, 'Do you practice what

you preach? Do you give up your liberties? Do you sacrifice your own rights?" In this section of Scripture Paul uses his own life as an example of one who gave up all kinds of rights to be effective for Christ. He demonstrates how he, as a minister of Christ, had a right to financial support from the local churches, but because of love for the Corinthians and for the purity of the gospel, he set that right aside, taking up secular employment to finance his preaching.

#### THE RIGHT OF AN APOSTLE TO RECEIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT 9:1-2

Am I not free? Paul had liberty just like any other Christian, but he didn't always use that liberty. Of all Christians, Paul understood the liberties and rights of God's children.

Am I not an apostle? He not only had the same rights as other Christians, he also had apostolic rights. He was probably defending his apostleship. There were some in the Corinthian Church who, because of their carnality, did not like Paul and they challenged his right to be an Apostle. They said, "Why doesn't he have a wife? Why doesn't he have a family? Why doesn't he take a salary like the other Apostles?" They were not sure Paul was a qualified Apostle and they refused to follow him or submit to his authority.

Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? One of the requirements for an Apostle was that he had to have seen the resurrected Christ, and Christ had appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus where he was converted. That was when the feisty, arrogant, belligerent Jewish evangelist met the resurrected Christ and became the zealous, humble, submissive servant of Christ, the greatest Christian evangelist who ever lived.

Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Others might question Paul's apostleship but not the Corinthians. He was God's instrument in leading them to the Lord and getting their church started. Their changed lives were proof of his apostolic authority.

#### THE RIGHT OF THE MINISTER TO RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM THE CHURCH 9:3-6

This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? The context would demand that we interpret this to mean Paul should eat and drink at the church's expense. He had the right as a minister of the gospel to be taken care of by the church, a right to have his material needs met. Notice carefully that the emphasis is on "needs" not "wants." It is the God-given right of every minister to have his needs met by those to whom he ministers.

Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles. It was the practice of the Apostles to take their wives and children with them when they traveled and ministered to various churches. This verse tells us that most of the Apostles were married to believing wives, and they were not separated from their wives and families when ministering. It also tells us that the church supported the Apostle, his wife and his family; therefore, we might conclude that the woman was not required to work for money outside the home. This verse certainly refutes the idea that men in the ministry should not be married.

... and the Lord's brothers. This is a reference to the half-brothers of Jesus. Mary had other children by Joseph after she bore Christ (Matt. 1:25; 12:46; Jn. 2:12). This obviously refutes the superstition that Mary was always a virgin. This more importantly tells us that the privilege of being financially supported in the ministry applied to those who were not Apostles, for the half-brothers of Christ were not Apostles, except James.

... and Cephas? Even Peter and his wife were supported by the church in the work of the ministry. Peter was a married man (Matt 8:14; Mark 1:30). Again, this refutes the whole idea of the celibacy of the clergy. Furthermore, if Peter was the first Pope (as some erroneously claim) then that Pope was a married man.

Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? Paul and Barnabas were two Apostles who did not refrain from earning their living while preaching. They sometimes worked in secular employment and preached on the side, but it appears Paul was saying the custom was that most of the Apostles did not work at secular employment while preaching.

Paul cannot be held up as the supreme example for paying a pastor or Christian worker. He and Barnabas were exceptions rather than the rule when they made tents on the side. Paul was an evangelist, not a pastor-teacher, and as a pioneer missionary there were different methods for gaining financial support, one of which was part-time secular employment (I Thess. 2:7-9; II Thess. 3:7-8; II Cor. 11:9-12; Acts 20:33-34). Paul had the right not to work but he set aside that right for a specific purpose of not bringing scandal upon the gospel of Christ as a pioneer missionary in a pagan culture.

Bi-vocational ministry has numerous advantages—freedom from human "strings," not imposing a financial burden on any group of believers, and exemption from charges of mismanaging funds or ministering primarily for financial gain (Craig Blomberg, I Corinthians).

There are many people who think nobody works in the ministry. They say, "You have such an easy life. You work only one day a week and then for only a few hours. You have so much free time from Monday to Saturday." These folks do not understand the hours logged in sermon preparation, administration, letter writing, phone calls, counseling, visitation, evangelism, sanctified socializing, attending endless meetings and many other things. A pastor never feels that his work is finished. In fact, he knows it is not done, and how desperately he needs help. Almost everything a pastor does is ministry, and the only way he can get free time is to leave town.

#### THE RIGHT OF THE MINISTER TO RECEIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT AFFIRMED BY SCRIPTURE AND LIFE 9:7-14

Principle of Society (9:7): Who 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? A soldier does not earn a living by working at a trade or business; yet, he is supported by the government for rendering a service to his country. Whatever it takes materially to support a soldier is given so he can be effective in battle. The minister of the gospel, who is a soldier of

Jesus Christ, renders a service to the church; therefore, he should be paid by the church. The farmer who owns and plants a vineyard eats from the vineyard. If a minister plants and waters a spiritual vineyard by teaching the Word, then those who are recipients of the spiritual teaching should support him. The shepherd who keeps a flock of sheep drinks the milk from the sheep. A minister feeds the sheep spiritual food and the sheep should supply the minister with physical food.

The point of the soldier, farmer and shepherd is that all three are fed and sustained from their own work, so the minister is to live by those to whom he ministers. Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor (Gal. 6:6). When you give money to Howell Branch Fellowship, do you think you are paying my salary or sharing with me because I minister to you?

Principle of the Old Testament (9:8-10): Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For 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? Surely 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. Paul does not use just secular, human illustrations but goes to the Law of Moses to make his point. He quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 which speaks of literal oxen. The ox was used in treading out the corn for threshing. The ox trampled the corn, shaking the grain loose from the husks. The mixture was then tossed up in the breeze and the wind blew the chaff away while the heavier grain fell straight down. The ox was not muzzled while he trod the grain which means he could eat some if he chose. The plowman and thresher do this in the confidence (hope) that they will eat, so the minister preaches with the confidence the people will give him support.

Paul uses the Old Testament metaphorically, even spiritualizing the Law. What was originally written about an ox was applied to men who preach the gospel. Paul does not mean ministers should be treated like animals or fed from the leftovers in Christian earnings. In the Old Testament, the first fruits of every crop were given to support God's work and workers. Paul's point is that if we reap the benefit of someone's ministry, we ought to have a part in it in a material way. This is why we take offerings in local churches and why finances are an important part of the life of the church. Money is one of the ingredients which makes the ministry possible.

Principle of Gratitude for Spiritual Help (9:11): if we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? When we are blessed and helped by someone, simple gratitude and thanksgiving would dictate that we do something in return to show our gratitude. If we have been blessed and helped in our spiritual life, and our family changed, and our life enriched, should we not support the minister with our material things? It is far more important to receive spiritual things than to give physical things. There is no dollar value you can place on the person who sows in you spiritual realities. Every congregation needs to understand that the pastor does not live by bread alone, but he cannot live without bread either.

Principle of Teaching in General (9:12): If 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. The Corinthians paid big money to hire teachers to educate themselves and their children. How much more should they be willing to pay ministers of the gospel, who are giving the ultimate truth? Yet, Paul refused to take any money when he preached. Why? At this time there were traveling bands of philosophers and teachers who would teach people if they would give them money. Paul simply did not want the stigma of having the unsaved make the connection of receiving Christ and giving money.

In the local church or when preaching evangelistically to the lost, we should never ask the unsaved to support the work of the Lord. The issue is not money but Christ. The unsaved should never think we are begging for their money.

In my first church, I had an old, Mennonite elder who opposed my viewpoint of never asking the unsaved for money. He had no Biblical support for his position. His rational was, "If the church does not get their money, the devil will!"

Principle of Priests in the Old Testament (9:13): Don'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? All the priests in the Old Testament were supported by the tithes and offerings of the Israelites. They also received a portion of every offering whether it be meat, wine, flour or oil. The Israelites gave their offerings to support the Old Testament ministers. If this were true in the Old Testament, how much more so in the New Testament?

Principle of Christ's Teaching (9:14): In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. Nowhere is it recorded in the Gospels that Jesus made this statement. Apparently Paul knew of some direct saying from Christ which is not recorded in Scripture that said, "Those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." We know the Lord Jesus taught a laborer is worthy of his hire.

Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you (the seventy-two disciples), for the worker deserves his wages (Lk. 10:7). The norm for paying all ministers is that those who preach the gospel are to live by the gospel. The teaching of our Lord ought to lay to rest forever those who say ministers are parasites who live on other people. It is true that there are those ministers who are lazy, giving in to self-indulgence and who are takers and not givers. However, faithful ministers are generally highly educated, overworked and underpaid which often causes subtle frustrations. You have heard about the congregation who prayed, "Lord, you keep the pastor humble and we will keep him poor." That, of course, is not the Christian way to view the paying of the pastor.

## REALISTIC THOUGHTS ABOUT PAYING A PASTOR

First, if ministers are required to support themselves, the danger is that they will be forced to become men of the world when they should be men of prayer and the Word. Ministers ought not to go into real estate, investments, gold and silver, playing the stock market or whatever. These distract a man of God from his number one task which is to pray and minister the Word. The normative principle is that a minister is never to seek support from a secular occupation unless it is a particular, special case such as Paul and Barnabas.

Second, a minister should be paid well enough so as to keep his mind from worldly things such as where his next dollar is coming from. He should receive an amount of money which would make him free from the basic cares of the world. He should not be rich nor should he live in poverty simply because he is in the ministry.

Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God (Prov. 30:8-9).

We are not told how much any minister should be paid but there are some hints from the Bible and common sense. According to the Bible, there are ruling elders and teaching elders. It says in I Timothy 5:17-18, The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." In the New Testament church, there were ruling elders who were not paid, ruling elders who were paid, and teaching elders who were always paid because they labored in the Bible, preaching and teaching. Apparently these teaching elders are to be paid according to the quantity and quality of preaching and teaching work they did.

Other considerations for paying a pastor are: 1) types of people to whom he ministers; 2) the size of the congregation to whom he ministers, and 3) his own particular needs as a pastor. Pastors are not to be paid with the same criterion as the secular world. Several ways to determine a pastor's salary might be: 1) pay a little above the average of the congregation; 2) pay the average of the elders, throwing out the highest and the lowest, and 3) pay the same as a school teacher with a Masters or Doctors degree plus experience.

Third, When a local congregation hires a pastor, they commit to take care of all of his needs which includes housing, food, transportation, hospitalization, education of his children, retirement and other basics of our American culture. However, no money should be given to any pastor if he is not feeding his people the Word of God and caring for their spiritual needs. A church must not call a man to be their pastor and expect him to trust God for his finances when the congregation is not willing to trust God for their pastor's finances. It is the responsibility of the congregation to meet those needs. As one dear old pastor said, "A minister cannot eat without prayer, but he can't eat prayers either!"

In my first pastorate, my elders pulled me aside the first week at the church and said to me, 'Pastor, we expect you to trust God for your finances so we are committed to pay all of our bills at the church first and then we will pay your salary if there is any money left.' I thought for a minute and said, "Why don't you pay me first as the Bible declares and then you as a board of elders trust God for the bills? It is biblical for pastor, elders, deacons and congregation to trust God for all financial needs, paying the pastor first not last."

Fourth, the first responsibility of every congregation is to meet the financial needs of the pastor or pastors whom God has placed in their midst to feed them spiritually and to train them for ministry. A local church is made up of a congregation with its rulers, teaching and ruling elders. A local church is not buildings but people, although a building may be helpful to the furtherance of the ministry.

Fifth, a congregation must be aware of how difficult it is for a pastor to preach to people who pay his salary. There may be a tendency for a pastor to protect his ministry by compromising truth or not addressing certain subjects because he knows there are people in the audience with big bucks who oppose what he is saying. The pastor more than anyone else realizes that in many churches and Christian organizations it is not the Almighty God who runs them but the almighty dollar.

Sixth, congregations need to try to sense the frustration of many pastors who are poorly paid for the amount of education they possess. This has caused many pastors to play up the ministry as a profession rather than a calling from God. The result is that the ministry becomes professional and the emphasis is placed on education, administration, counseling, public relations or whatever. Quite often these things are substituted for preaching and teaching the Word of God.

"Occasionally, Christian ministry has elicited an unusual amount of prestige and financial reward, usually when the gospel has been compromised by political entanglements. But for the most part, believers who have chosen paid ministry as a career have foregone higher salaries and more comfortable lifestyles that other occupations or careers could have afforded them. Yet those who are truly called with the compulsion Paul felt will confess that no other line of work could have proved so satisfying, notwithstanding all the obstacles they have encountered" (Blomberg, I Corinthians).

Seventh, a congregation must not lump all faithful ministers with the few unfaithful ones. It is true that one of the great scandals of Christianity is the huge sums of money some of the pastors of mega-churches and televangelists receive. They are looked upon as corporate executives. If Christ were physically here today, I do think he would in righteous indignation drive them out of the visible church.

"Large segments of the well-to-do, non-Christian world, highly influenced by sect education and media, remain convinced that most conservative Christians are racketeers, seeking to bilk the rich out of their money for self-serving ends. Radio and television ministries that constantly harangue their audiences for donations do little to dispel this stereotype. Numerous televangelists keep phone numbers constantly on their viewers' screens, distracting from any message they might be trying to preach other than "we want your money." Questionable spending practices of the money they do receive often add fuel to the fire" (Blomberg, I Corinthians).

## CONCLUSION

Are you without salvation? Are you devoid of any personal relationship with Christ? Would you like to become rich? I'm not talking about financial riches but spiritual riches.

Christ can make a person rich. The Bible says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9). Christ, who was infinitely rich, went to the depths of spiritual poverty by dying on the Cross so that He could make us, who were in dire spiritual poverty, rich in Christ. Christ died to make men and women spiritual millionaires.

How can you become spiritually rich? Trust in Christ, believing He died for your sins. Bow to Him as Lord, acknowledging His right to rule over you. Infinite spiritual riches are at your fingertips if you will just reach out in faith to receive the Lord Jesus Christ.