

9. Full Time Church Workers

Introduction:

Finish this quote: “It is more blessed to give than to _____.”

Who originally said this? Jesus.

Where would you normally expect to find these words of Jesus recorded? Normally one would expect the sayings of Jesus to be found in one of the four Gospels.

Amazing: These words of Jesus are found *only* in the book of Acts (20:35) and were quoted by Paul. He was speaking to the elders of Ephesus (Ac 20:17-18).

Why would Paul remind the Ephesian elders that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Ac 20:35)? The elders of a local church are, generally speaking, to be in the position of giving gold and silver to the church, not receiving from it. (We’ll come back to Jesus’ words later).

******1. Based on 1 Corinthians 9:3-7, what “right” does every apostle (missionary) have?**
See Acts 6:1-4, Titus 3:13. They have the right to be supported by the church (9:4, 5, 6).

— 9:4-5 —

2. What obvious answers are expected to each of the questions in 9:4 and 9:5? (Answer in the form of a sentence).

Review: What is an apostle (9:5)? The word apostle is from *apostolos*, “envoy, ambassador, messenger, sent one” (Brown, *NIDNTT*, 126). The verb *apostello* carries the idea of “to send with a particular purpose” (*NBD*, 57-60). It was rendered in the Latin *Vulgate* using the root *missio*, basis for our word “missionary.” See previous lesson on “Apostles”.

Based on 9:5, who besides the apostles were supported by the church? The Lord’s brothers, who were not apostles.

— 9:6 —

3. What can we learn about Paul and Barnabas’ work situation from 9:6? See 9:12a & 15, Acts 20:34, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9. They were bi-vocational.

— 9:7—

4. What three examples did Paul cite in 9:7 to illustrate his point about an apostle’s right to financial support? He cited the examples of a soldier, a vineyard keeper and a shepherd (“human authority”, 9:8)

What is the answer to each of the questions in 9:7?

How long would you be able to stay at your job if there was no pay?

— 9:8-10 —

******According to 9:8-10, how does the Law of Moses say the same? See Deuteronomy 25:4 (the oxen principle).**

What is the answer to the question in 9:9? God's greater concern is for people, 9:10a

What is the inspired application of Deuteronomy 25:4 (about not muzzling the oxen)?
Church workers have the right to be supported by the church.

— 9:11-12a —

******5. How would you answer the two questions of 9:11-12a?**

6. Why did Paul ask, "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you" (1Co 9:11)?

What general principle can we derive from 9:11?

ESV **Romans 15:26-27** . . . Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

7. Based on Romans 15:26-27, what do you owe to those who have brought you a spiritual blessing?

— 9:12b —

******What additional information are we given about Paul and Barnabas in 9:12b? See also 9:15.** Even though they had the right to be supported, they did not exercise their right.

8. How could using this right have hindered the gospel in Paul's case (1Co 9:12)? See 1 Corinthians 8:9, 10:32-33, 1Thessalonians 2:1-10.

— 9:13 —

******9. What Old Testament example did Paul offer in 9:13? See Deuteronomy 18:1-8, Luke 1:8-10, Numbers 35:1-5, Joshua 21:1-42 (esp. 21:1-3, 41-42).** Old Testament priests made their livings from temple sacrifices.

Technical Note: Some Old Testament priests worked at the temple only on rotation. That is, their time of service at the temple was limited; compare **Luke 1:8-10**. While they did live off the sacrifices while on duty, it was not necessarily a permanent career for them. When not working at the temple, they were farmers. Land for the Levites to use was set apart around each of the Levitical cities that were scattered throughout Israel. See **Numbers 35:1-5, Joshua 21:1-42**.

— 9:14 —

10. According to 9:14, what has the Lord Jesus commanded? See *Ecclesiastes 3:13*, *Matthew 10:9-11*, *Luke 10:7*. He commanded that evangelists be supported by the church.

Where do you suppose Jesus intended this money for evangelists to come from? It obviously comes from God's people, the church.

11. Overview:

What examples were given in 1 Corinthians 9 of those who made their living from the church? We thus see that at least three groups made their livings from their ministries when Paul wrote this: **1.)** Apostles, **2.)** The Lord's brothers, and **3.)** Evangelists.

What arguments were given to justify this support?

- 1.) A human point of view (soldier, vineyard keeper, shepherd); "human authority".
- 2.) The Law of Moses (oxen, temple priests).
- 3.) Spiritual principle/logic (spiritual seed/material harvest, (9:11)).
- 4.) The words of Jesus (9:14).

12. Application: How have you personally obeyed the Lord's command of 9:14? It takes two to tango! Each believer should give of his means to help support qualified church workers. We share with them in their work when we give.

13. Important: Since Paul did not write this in hope that the Corinthians would give him support (9:12b, 15), then why did he write this? In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul took the principle of evangelists being supported by the church and extended it to apostles. Amazingly, 1 Corinthians 9 is a parenthetical remark. Paul's main topic began in 1 Corinthians 8 and concerned not being a stumbling block to others (re: food sacrificed to idols, 8:9). Paul's waver of his "right" to full time support (1Co 9) illustrated just how far Paul was willing to go to avoid hindering the gospel (**9:12b, 15**). Then, in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul continued on with his main topic, concluding with "Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God" (**1Co 10:31-32**). **Thus, Paul's objective in writing 1 Corinthians 9 was neither to limit nor extend the categories of those who had the "right" to support from the church.** It was merely an illustration. As such, it reveals that Paul had a very liberal approach to supporting church workers ("Is it about oxen that God is concerned?" "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?").

14. What in the following texts suggests that Paul didn't always support himself by making tents? *Romans 15:24*, *1 Corinthians 16:5-6*, *2 Corinthians 1:15-16*, *11:7-9*, *Philippians 4:10-19*, *Philemon 22*.

15. How do these verses show that the apostles asked the churches to support their ministries (and those of their fellow workers)? *Romans 15:23-24, 1 Corinthians 16:5-6, 16:10-11, 2 Corinthians 1:16, Titus 3:13-14, 3 John 5-8.*

16. Upon whom did Paul not depend for support? Why not? *Acts 20:32-35 (compare 18:1-4), 1 Corinthians 9:1, 18, 2 Corinthians 12:14-18, 1 Thessalonians 2:6b-9, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10.* Paul did not look for support from those he was evangelizing or ministering to on site. This was so that his motives would be above question. He seems, however, to have gladly accepted support from places that he had already been. Also, there seemed to be some unique situation with the Corinthian church that caused Paul especially to not look to them for much assistance. Their lack of interest in supporting Paul said volumes about their spiritual maturity level.

Summary: Paul did not generally look to those he was currently evangelizing/training for support. However, those he had already ministered to did support him.

Transition: According to 1 Corinthians 9, both evangelists and apostles have the right to make their living from the church. Is it reasonable then to extend this “right” of support to pastors also? We shall see as we examine other passages dealing with this subject!

******In Acts 20:17, to whom was Paul about to speak?** To the Ephesian elders; Acts 20:17-38 constitutes the essence of his instructions.

Famous are words of Jesus that it is “more blessed to give than to receive.” Not so well known is the context in which those words were spoken. Found nowhere in the Gospel accounts, these words of our Lord were quoted by the Apostle Paul at this pastor’s conference.

Rhetorical:

Did Paul quote Jesus to encourage the church at large to give, or was Paul’s point that elders were to be in a position of giving financially to the church, rather than receiving from it?

That is, should pastors make their living off of the church?

Shepherds live off their flocks of sheep, why not elders?

Since Levitical priests ate of the animals offered at the temple, is there not a principle to apply to church overseers?

The laborer is worthy of his hire, is he not? Should this apply to elders?

******A person’s last words are often his most significant. What, in Acts 20:33-35, were Paul’s final instructions to the Ephesian elders regarding money (20:17)?**

According to 20:34, how did Paul meet his operating expenses?

Exactly how had Paul's hands supplied his own needs (20:34)? See Acts 18:1-3.

How many traveling companions did Paul support (20:34)? See Acts 20:4-5. He supported eight (including Luke).

According to Acts 20:35, all things Paul did with respect to supplying his own needs was designed to show the elders something — what? It was to show them the importance of giving!

From the immediate context, what is it that Paul wanted the elders to be giving rather than receiving (20:35)? It was to help support the weak (widows, orphans), 20:33.

17. What does 20:32-35 indicate in general about whether an elder (Acts 20:17) should make his living from his ministry? It would seem that elders are generally to be in a financial position of *giving* silver, gold and clothing to the church, not *receiving* from it!

18. How can 20:32-35 be harmonized with 1 Corinthians 9? (Isn't what's good for the goose also good for the gander?) Based on the principles expressed in 1 Corinthians 9, it would not be committing the unpardonable sin for an elder to make his living from the church! Based on solely on Acts 20, it would seem most elders will not receive financial support for their ministries. However, Acts 20 is not the only passage dealing with this subject!

******Based on 1 Timothy 1:3, where was Timothy stationed when Paul wrote this letter to him?** He was in Ephesus, the same city that the elders of Acts 20 came from to meet Paul in Miletus.

******19. According to 1 Timothy 5:17-18, which Ephesian elders were worthy of double honor?**

20. In 1 Timothy 5:3-16 (re: widows), what did Paul mean by the use of the Greek word *timé* (“proper recognition”, NIV)? See Mark 7:9-13. The Greek word *timé* fundamentally means “respect.” However, it is obvious from its usage in several New Testament passages that it can entail giving material support to those who qualify for it. Here it obviously refers to material support.

Insight: Not all elders are equally skilled (or motivated) at management and/or teaching.

21. In 1 Timothy 6:1-2 (re: slaves), how did Paul use *timé* (“respect”)? Here it *clearly* has nothing to do with money, and means merely respect.

22. Putting 1 Timothy 5:3-16 (widows) together with 1 Timothy 6:1-2 (slaves), what does it mean to show double honor to some elders (5:17-20)? See Acts 28:10. At the very least it would refer to esteem, but most probably it refers to something above and beyond mere respect: financial support, an “honorarium”.

23. What similarities are there between 1 Timothy 5:18 and 1 Corinthians 9:9-10? See also Deuteronomy 25:4, Luke 10:7. The same argument is used in both places as to why church leaders have a “right” to make their living from the church (see De 25:4, Lk 10:7). Notice Paul’s logic: Just as an ox deserves grain, just as a worker deserves wages, so also apostles and qualified elders deserve double honor (not only esteem but also material support).

How does 1 Timothy 5:19-20 logically follow 5:17-18? See 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. 1 Timothy 5:19 follows 5:18 awkwardly if “honor” refers only to monetary compensation. However, it follows perfectly if half of the “honor” refers to respect.

Review: Where was Timothy when Paul wrote this letter to him? See 1:3. Ephesus.

Review: To whom was Paul speaking in Acts 20? Paul called a pastor’s conference of elders from Ephesus.

24. The elders of 1 Timothy 5 are the same men who heard Paul in Acts 20. How can Acts 20 (elders to supply their own needs) be reconciled with 1 Timothy 5 (double honor)? Acts 20 is addressed to elders in general. In general, elders are to be bi-vocational and will thus be in a position of giving monetarily to the church, rather than receiving from it. The exception to this generalization is **1 Timothy 5**, written with reference to those elders who not only “rule well” but who also “labor in the word and doctrine” (NKJV). Though all elders are worthy of honor (**1Th 5:12-13**), some elders are worthy of double honor. This “double” honor most likely is a reference to financial support from the church. And, regardless of how an elder earns income (secular or sacred), he is to give generously to the needy.

Blending Acts 20 with 1 Timothy 5 would also suggest that even those elders worthy of double honor (financial support) be willing and trained to work some secular vocation if local conditions require it (i.e., times of economic depression, poverty-stricken third world countries, very small churches, etc.).

Synthesis: First, Jesus commanded that those who preach the gospel (evangelists) should make their living from the gospel. **Next**, Paul, in an illustration, applied this same principle to apostles (1Co 9). **Finally**, it was applied at least partially to qualified elders (1Ti 5), using the same arguments found in 1 Corinthians 9.

Practical Considerations: Suppose a man trained as a physician and moved to a remote part of some third world country where there were no doctors for a hundred miles. Yet, this doctor had the conviction that it would be wrong to make his living as a doctor, and instead got a job there as a ditch digger. All day long people would come to him, begging for medical aid, but he would have to turn them away, explaining that he had a secular job to do, and to come back that night after he had put his kids in the bed. This scenario is ludicrous, but that is the situation that exists in some circumstances where a Christian worker insists on working a secular job, turning down ministry opportunities and pleas for help. Similarly, elders who work full time secular jobs and who are the kind of husband and father that God desires will not have much time left over for Bible study nor ministry to the church. Yet, the Bible and the church are far too important to be relegated to mere hobby status! See **Acts 6:1-2**. Just to properly understand and teach the Bible requires hours upon hours of diligent study and preparation. Factor in the time needed to teach those studies and to counsel people needing advice and at least a part-time ministry is easily created. Paul paid his own way where necessary, but when the funds were available, he stopped tent-making and ministered.

25. There is a specific Greek word for “wages” (used in 1Ti 5:18, *misthos*). Why do you suppose Paul used *timé* (“honor”) instead of *misthos* in 1 Timothy 5:17? Perhaps it was because the elder’s relationship to the church is not to be as a hireling. Nor is he to “charge” for his services. Jonathan Campbell has wisely stated, “There is a difference between being paid to do a job and being released to do a work.” Concerning voluntary giving (an honorarium) versus a salaried position, Dan Walker has warned, “The widows of 1 Timothy 5:3-16 weren’t earning a salary, they were receiving charity. And “the laborer is worthy of his hire” quote in Luke 10 referred obviously not to disciples receiving a salary or wages, but hospitality (eat and drink what’s set before you, etc.). The word “wages” in the Old Testament quotation (1Ti 5:18) is obviously metaphorical (just like the unmuzzled ox eating straw is metaphorical). If you push that metaphor too far, we’ll have Christian workers eating straw! Another example of the metaphorical use of “wages” is where Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he had robbed other churches so as not to accept wages from Corinthians. Vines states that the word “wages” in 2 Corinthians 11:8 is clearly metaphorical, which it, of course, is. I don’t think it’s anybody’s business to complain if a Christian worker (whether apostle, prophet, elder, teacher, or whatever) receives voluntary offerings from anybody for whatever reason. But the minute a salary or wages is paid, the principle of voluntary giving of service to the body is violated, the principle of clergy-less Christianity is violated, the priesthood of all believers is violated, etc. I’m not getting on that train, because it’s heading over the cliff. The number one stench in the institutional church is money, plain and simple. It is an abomination, a disgrace not only to God, but to the human race. And once we open the door with a hireling clergy, we are finished. In conclusion, if Paul had meant “double wages” in 1 Timothy 5:17, why didn’t he say “double *misthos*,” or “double *opsonion*”, two perfectly clear words which mean “wages” and would have conveyed what he meant? And if he meant wages, why didn’t the early church follow his example? I challenge anyone anywhere to show me one case where the early church paid wages to Christian workers.”

What is the difference between a pay check and an honorarium?

****26. How does 1 Peter 5:1-4 imply that receiving money occasionally went along with the ministry of elder?

27. What did Peter mean when he exhorted the elders to shepherd God's flock voluntarily and not for sordid gain (1Pe 5:2)?

28. How might someone who was "greedy for money" (1Pe 5:1-4) have used the office of elder to get money? Not just because the church gave monetary gifts to qualified elders, but also because the office of elder could be used to advance one's secular business. For instance, someone greedy for money might desire the position of elder in order to increase his social contacts, which would result in more clients if he was a dentist, doctor, insurance salesman, grocery store owner, etc.

On the flip side, it may be possible that most elders would be well established in their line of secular work and at the peak of their earnings potential. Peter could have been telling these successful businessmen elders to spend more time in church work and less in business, even though it might mean less income.

Word Study: In 1 Peter 5:2, "greedy for money" is from *aischrokerdes*; *aischros* means "shame, disgrace" and *kerdos* means "gain." Thus, the NASV renders it "not for sordid gain." Also used in Titus 1:7.

A Tamed Cynic: Reinhold Niebuhr was a pastor who published *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, extracts from his diary. The following is his reaction to news in 1924 that a church was hiring a new pastor for a salary of \$15,000 (an exorbitant amount in 1924. For instance, in 1930, a new Model A could be purchased for about \$500):

"I don't know whether that was the factor which finally solved their problem, but at any rate they have the man they want. I suppose it is not easy to get a combination of Aristotle and Demosthenes, and on the current market, that ought to be worth \$15,000. Nevertheless there must be some limit to this matter of oversized salaries.

There ought to be some questioning too about the growing tendencies of churches to build their congregations around pulpit eloquence. What kind of fundamental ethical question can a man be eloquent about when he draws that much cash, particularly since a Croesus or two usually has to supply an undue proportion of it? I don't know anything about the prophet of the Lord who accepted this call, but I venture to prophesy that no sinner in that pagan city will quake in his boots in anticipation of his coming.

This idea of a professional good man is difficult enough for all of us who are professionally engaged as teachers of the moral ideal. Of course, 'a man must live' and it is promised that if we seek first the kingdom and its righteousness 'all these things shall be added unto us.' But I doubt whether Jesus had a \$15,000 salary in mind. If the things that are added become too numerous they distract your attention terribly. To try to keep your eye on the main purpose may only result in making you squint-eyed. I hope the new prophet won't begin his pastorate with a sermon on the text, 'I count all things but loss'."

29. The typical New Testament congregation was no bigger than would fit into a Roman home's atrium or courtyard (a house church). From a practical perspective, how could an elder make his living from such a small church? See Ephesians 4:7-16, Titus 1:5.

Roman house churches may have been much larger than a typical Western house church. Modern churches no bigger than can meet in someone's home are doing well to have even one elder, much less a plurality of elders, and much, much less an elder who is worthy of "double honor." Roman house churches were large enough to have not only a plurality of elders but also to support qualified elders. Since the ministries listed in Ephesians 4:11 are largely itinerant, some have concluded that the ministry of "pastor-teacher" is also itinerant, touching the lives of multiple house churches within the same city. If so, such an elder could more easily make his living from his ministry as he ministered to the city-wide church as whole (rather than in a single, isolated house church).

Cautions:

1.) Suggesting that the church is obligated to support those elders deemed worthy of "double honor" does not mean that these elders are somehow higher in rank than the other elders. One elder may be more gifted than another, or more influential, but there is no such thing in the New Testament as an official "senior" elder, nor of a hierarchy of elders.

2.) The "pastor-teacher" mentioned in Ephesians 4 is not somehow "over" all the churches of a city. Instead, he is the servant to all the churches of the city.

3.) Despite the evidence that qualified elders may make their livings from their ministries, there is to be no clergy-laity distinction. Authority resides in the church as a whole, not with its leaders. The leaders are to be humble servants, not lords. Rusty Entrekin warns: "Although we know that pastor-teachers are supposed to be servants and not in a special 'clergy' class, those who are not pastor-teachers will still have a tendency to regard them that way, especially because of our modern institutional church mind-set regarding professional pastors. Even if the pastor teacher doesn't think that way about himself initially, if he doesn't watch himself, he could very easily begin to gradually, perhaps imperceptibly, adopt that mind-set. Since the godly, sincere, and vibrant believers of the late first century and early second century church fell victim to this mind set, just think of how easily we could today, with the peer pressure of conventional "wisdom," centuries of traditions, and lukewarm spirituality encouraging us to do so! We need to be very, very careful not only to guard against the priesthood being robbed of their God-given rights, but also to exhort them not to give their rights away."

Some hold that "elders" should indeed work at a secular vocation, but that a "pastor" is different from an elder in that the pastor is permitted to make a career of his ministry. How does such a distinction square with the Biblical usage of these two words? This distinction is in common use today. For instance, in the book, *A Guide To Hospital Calling*, the subtitle is "For Deacons, Elders and Other Laypersons" (thus implying that elders are, by definition, laypersons). However, such a distinction between elders and pastors is both artificial and confusing. The only New Testament warrant for this notion that pastors are professionals and elders are mere amateurs is extracted from Ephesians 4:11 (see question 18, above), but really it is an unbiblical distinction.

30. What can be concluded about the idea of ministers who are fully supported by the church?

1. The New Testament clearly teaches that apostles and evangelists are to be supported full time by the church
2. There is no historical pattern in the New Testament either for or against full time elders. It is silent.
3. There is a general command in **Acts 20** for elders to follow Paul's example of supplying their own needs so as to be in a position of giving silver and gold and clothing to the church, rather than receiving from it.
4. All elders are worthy of honor (esteem), **1 Thessalonians 5**.
5. Qualified elders, those who rule and teach well, are worthy of "double honor" (financial support, **1Ti 5**). Whether this infers full time support seems to be an area of freedom.
6. Elders are not to be motivated by the desire for "sordid gain" from their ministry (i.e., not just in it for the money, nor using the office to gain sales contacts or clients), **1 Peter 5**. Peter's warning could also be for the elder to be willing to forgo potentially lucrative business ventures to instead give their time to serving as elders.
7. We need to financially support those who are evangelists, apostles, teachers, and elders, **1 Corinthians 9**. Along these lines, it is the New Testament pattern to give to support people, not property. Give your money toward areas that God thinks are important.

******How does Galatians 6:6 relate to the concept of career church workers?** (*Study the context, 6:1-6*). "All good things" does not necessarily refer to money. The context (6:1-5) suggests that what is to be shared is the spiritual progress of those fallen ones who were counseled back to spiritual health. However, based on the principle of sowing spiritual seed and reaping a material harvest, giving voluntary monetary gifts to a teacher/counselor is certainly an appropriate thing to do.

31. Please explain how you personally have obeyed Galatians 6:6?

32. What cautions do 2 Corinthians 2:17 and 1 Timothy 6:3-5 hold for full time ministers? Clearly, they are not to charge a fee for their services nor are they to be motivated by greed.

******33. What principle did John establish in 3 John 5-8?** See *Nu 31:27, 1Sa 30:24-25*. Those who contribute to the support of a church worker are fellow workers for the truth.

34. In *House Church*, read the chapter entitled, "The Ministry of Giving". To which types of worthy recipients do you give your offerings?

So What?

How much should you give? God asked the Hebrews under the Law to give 10%. No such requirement is repeated in the New Testament. The operative principle is:

ESV **2 Corinthians 9:6-7** . . . whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

If I tell someone he must tithe else he is robbing God, how is that doing anything but placing him under compulsion? The real issue is *How much do you want to reap?*

Maybe God wants you to give 20%.

We have tremendous blessings under the new covenant. Would God really want you to give less under grace than the Jews gave under Law?

The greatest text on giving is John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave . . .” Your love for God and His kingdom will necessarily be reflected in how much you give.

*All *House Church* Discussion Questions are from the chapter “Full Time Ministers”.

*****Ask this question before having someone read the verse.

Next Lesson: E-mail the next set of discussion questions out to the class (or print them up and hand them out at the end of this lesson). Ask everyone to consider the issues, answer the questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

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