

Christians Gone Wild!
1st Corinthians, week 20
Paying Your Pastors (1 Corinthians 9:1–18)
June 4, 2006
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“...those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.”
1 Corinthians 9:14

For some reason, pastoral ministry remains for some a glowing, naïve, dreamy life idealized as hours of Bible reading, prayer walks with Jesus, and days spent singing worship songs and smiling. But statistically, being a pastor is the spiritual equivalent of being a kamikaze pilot, thanks to the heartbreak of caring for people, emergencies, criticism, and long hours. The following statistics are rather sobering and prove the point:

Pastors

- Fifteen hundred pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout, or contention in their churches.
- Fifty percent of pastors' marriages will end in divorce.
- Eighty percent of pastors and eighty-four percent of their spouses feel unqualified and discouraged in their role as pastors.
- Fifty percent of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of making a living.
- Eighty percent of seminary and Bible school graduates who enter the ministry will leave the ministry within the first five years.
- Seventy percent of pastors constantly fight depression.
- Almost forty percent polled said they have had an extra-marital affair since beginning their ministry.
- Seventy percent said the only time they spend studying the Word is when they are preparing their sermons.

Pastors' Wives

- Eighty percent of pastors' spouses feel their spouse is overworked.
- Eighty percent of pastors' spouses wish their spouse would choose another profession.
- The majority of pastor's wives surveyed said that the most destructive event that has occurred in their marriage and family was the day they entered the ministry.

Paul experiences the pain of ministry firsthand. He planted the Corinthian Church only to find that they had become an ungrateful and disrespectful bunch, questioning his spiritual authority and his worthiness to even receive a paycheck. This is all despite the fact that he had worked at no charge to found the church and introduce them to Jesus. So, he speaks rather pointedly about a proper relationship between a pastor and a church and gives us three broad principles.

Principle #1 — A pastor is not worth respect unless he produces results.

¹Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?²Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Paul begins by stating that he is not worth respect just because he is in ministry, but rather because God has enabled him to be both faithful and fruitful.

Principle #2 — A pastor worth respect is worth a decent wage.

³This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. 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?

Sadly, our day is filled with “prosperity” theology where a church is led by a team of husband and wife pastors who each receive enormous incomes, abusing the kindness of their people by taking excessive salaries for themselves. Equally sad, however, are churches with a “poverty” theology who pay their pastors so little that their family is under constant strain that results in debt and mounting frustration with the disrespect they are shown. Such pastors are often told by their church that they should simply work for little or nothing and trust the Lord when their hypocritical congregants happily enjoy the stability of a steady income. The answer is simply a reasonable salary for a pastor depending upon such things as his performance, tenure, family size, cost of living in his community, extenuating needs, and comparable wages for pastors with similar ministries.

Principle #3 — Sometimes a pastor lays aside his wage for the sake of the gospel.

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. ¹⁵But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. ¹⁶Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. ¹⁸What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

Although Paul had the right to a fair wage, the Corinthian Church so disrespected him that he chose to preach free of charge so that the gospel would continue to spread throughout the city.

During the early years of Mars Hill, I did not receive a salary because we were a young, poor, and struggling church. As our church has grown and matured, we have been able to pay our pastors a fair wage according to national standards for churches our size. Today we have 17 paid pastors who enjoy reasonable salaries (averaging just over \$70,000) and benefits packages that allow each of their wives to not work an outside job but instead devote their time to their family and ministry in our church. The result has been no turnover in our pastoral staff, generous tithing from our pastors back to the church, and a deep commitment by our pastors and their families to continually go beyond the call of duty to serve our church and produce incredible fruit in our city, making us one of the 60 fastest-growing and 25 most influential churches in America.

Appropriate compensation has also allowed our pastors to do some free ministry like Paul mentioned. For example, I speak to thousands of pastors each year at conferences around the country, we give away our teaching and worship music for free online, Pastor Jamie is the president of the Ballard Chamber of Commerce, and our pastors help to invest some coaching time in the more than 100 churches planted through the Acts 29 Network. So, on behalf of the elders, thank you Mars Hill for taking care of us and our families as we take care of you. We love this church family very much and praise God that we don't have to say the kind of things that Paul had to say to the church he led because we are not disrespected or taken advantage of as he was. Lastly, please keep your elders and deacons in prayer as the pace of our growth is daunting at times and lately we are all feeling the strain and looking forward to the summer to reload for the fall push and our ten year church anniversary.

Verses for next week: 1 Corinthians 9:19–27