

## Should We Hire a Pastor?

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Submitted by [William MacDonald](#) on Fri, 08/19/2005 - 05:00

### Organizational Issues

#### William MacDonald

While a salary is a suitable method of payment in most professions, there are peculiar dangers connected with it for those who minister the Word of God.

Doubtless it is for that reason that the idea of a salaried ministry is foreign to the New Testament. While the Lord Jesus taught quite definitely that "the laborer is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:7) and Paul confirmed that "those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14), there is no suggestion that these men should receive a stipulated amount each month.

One of the potential problems is that those who control the salary can often control the preaching. It does not always happen that those who pay the piper insist on calling the tune, but it has happened and can happen. Those who hold the purse-strings may be very carnal, yet they can insist on suppressing any preaching that does not suit them.

It is also true that those who pay the salary can require certain standards of achievement. For example, they might require an increase in church membership, either through conversions or transfers from other churches. This might put a subtle pressure on the Lord's servant to lower standards in order to increase numbers. It is not in his power to produce true conversions: it is God who gives the increase. But he can produce shallow professions that look good in an annual report. Also he can speak softly on matters of discipline so as not to lose anyone.

Even apart from pressure from others, there is a temptation for the teacher to soft-pedal truths that might offend his congregation. If the people are wealthy, he might not think it expedient to speak on "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth" (Matt. 6:19), or "Command those that are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim 6:17). The preacher must be the Lord's free man, free to declare the full counsels of God, free to be a mouthpiece of God, free to speak as the oracles of God. Anything that hinders this is a great tragedy in the work of the Lord.

In times of declension and apostasy, there is often a tendency for preachers to side with those who control his finances rather than to stand true to the great fundamental doctrines of the faith. Concerning a denomination that is now riddled with liberalism and apostasy, David O. Beale writes, "There is a perennial 'joke' which pastors tell at each annual meeting: 'If the Convention splits, I'm going with the Annuity Board!' The Board does appear to be the 'cement' of the empire." Financial considerations have a powerful way of taking priority over faithfulness to the Word of God.

A fixed salary could very possibly weaken the life of faith. The servant of the Lord should be an example to others of one who walks by faith and not by sight. His life should be a perpetual crisis of dependence on the Lord. G. H. Lang gave his testimony: "I have lived and worked in happy fellowship with workers in the gospel in many lands through fifty years and am satisfied that a guaranteed or regular income, because it dispenses with direct and constant faith in God as to temporal supplies, is certainly a spiritual loss, not by any means a gain." <sup>1</sup>

In the ecclesiastical world, it is not uncommon for men to shop around for bigger salaries. They mistake material advancement for the guidance of God. It is all too easy to conclude that the offer of an attractive salary is an indication of God's call.

In the Old Testament economy, a bondservant was worth twice as much as a hired servant (Deut. 15:18). In other words, one who served because he belonged to his master was more valuable than one who worked for what he got out of it. Does this have a message for us today?

Of course, the question arises, "If not by a salary, how is a servant of the Lord to be supported?"

First of all, the believer must have absolute confidence that the Lord has called him to serve on a full time basis. This cannot be overemphasized. And he must not only be sure himself, but must have the confidence of his spiritual guides that he has received the divine tap on the shoulder. After all, no man is an adequate judge of his own gift.

Second, he must be thoroughly assured that, as Hudson Taylor said, "the Lord pays for what he orders." He can then step forth without any visible means of support, but with unwavering trust that the Lord will provide for his needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. That should certainly be sufficient.

But how will God do this? He will do it through His people. Someone has described the process as follows: "God can place an idea in a person's mind. He can cause someone to feel a strong 'urge' or 'conviction' to do something. So when we pray for a certain amount of money, God can cause one person to reach for his check book and send that amount, or he can cause a dozen people to send odd fractions of that amount, causing the total to be exact. You may not believe that He does this, but I am simply saying that when I talk about praying for money, this is what I mean."

This is the thrilling part of the life of faith - to see income increase as needs increase, and conversely to see income decline when it is not needed. And it serves as a valuable system of checks and balances: As long as I am doing the work of God, I know that He will supply, quite apart from any publicizing of needs on my part. If I am serving according to my own wisdom, I cannot expect Him to pay for what He has not ordered. Wrote Ray Williams in Echoes magazine, "I believe this is the way. If not, how could we rely on His guidance? If I say to myself, 'I want to do

this' and say to my friends, 'Can you provide the money to help me to do this job?', I might want to do it and my friends might want to help me, but I would not know if it was the Lord's will. If I only tell the Lord that I want to do this thing, and the finances to do it appears without anyone but the Lord knowing about it, then I know that this is the Lord's will for me." <sup>2</sup>

Hear the testimony of Silas Fox: "In 1926, feeling that it would be better for me to look directly to the Lord for support, and be more free to take the calls that would come in for special meetings, I launched out, with a wife, and five children, and to the glory of God, after a quarter of a century, can give testimony that without a mission to support me, and without a deputation secretary to make known our needs at home, and without appeals, or on my part taking up collections...and without having my name on any 'list,' yet the Lord has graciously, wonderfully, faithfully met all the needs for these twenty five years, and we praise Him, and in this give testimony in this way." <sup>3</sup>

Finally, Dan Crawford adds his spiritual insight: "A society missionary friend expostulated with me as a married man not claiming a fixed salary - something sure was his idea. It was then that God spoke to me out of His Word. What settled the matter as to faith being the only definite thing was the following truth of God: 'The promise was by faith that it might be sure!' The only sure thing is faith!" <sup>4</sup>

#### Footnotes

1. Anthony Norris Groves, p. 66.
2. Echoes Magazine, February 1984, p. 75.
3. The White Fox of Andhra, Donald S. Fox, p. 153.
4. Assembly Annals Magazine, June 1959.