

Question: I don't read in the Bible about Jesus being paid to teach and minister to people. Would he approve of paying church ministers like churches do today?

We do not read of Jesus receiving a regular “support check,” but he did accept financial and other support during his earthly ministry. When he was in this world, even our Lord needed life’s basics like food, clothing, shelter and money to buy these things. Let’s take a closer look at how Jesus survived during his earthly ministry.

Although Jesus may have often slept out in the open, his friends also opened their homes to him. Along with James and John, Jesus stayed in the home of Peter and Andrew where he healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever (Mark 1:29-35). Matthew had a dinner for Jesus in his house (Matthew 9:10). Jesus often visited in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany just outside of Jerusalem (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-2). On another occasion, a Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner in his home (Luke 7:36). It may not have been in the form of money, but providing homes and food did constitute a kind of support.

In addition, we are told of actual financial support that Jesus and his disciples received. A group of women supported Jesus and his disciples out of “their own means” (Luke 8:3 NIV). Judas served as treasurer for Jesus and the disciples as they went about preaching and teaching. Although Judas was not always honest in handling money, we are told that he “had charge of the money” (John 13:29) and that he “was keeper of the money bag” (John 12:6; 13:29 NIV).

When Jesus sent his disciples to preach in the villages, he told them not to take money or extra clothing and food. Instead, they were to stay in homes that welcomed them. As an explanation for these instructions, he said, “The worker deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7). Years later the apostle Paul quoted this statement from Jesus along with another from the Old Testament scripture, saying: “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’” (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

On another occasion, Paul gave a lengthy defense of people who benefited spiritually while supporting materially those who preached the gospel to them. Paul chose not to exercise this right in Corinth but supported himself by making and selling tents. But he wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: “If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? . . . 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? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:11-14).

The fact that Jesus did encourage the support of preachers and teachers does not mean that he would endorse the extravagance, greed, and financial dishonesty that some preachers have practiced at the expense of God's church. Instead, Jesus taught his disciples to seek bread for each day as it comes and trust in God to provide for their needs. I think he would take the same attitude toward preachers who improperly exploit the church today as he did toward the money-changers whom he drove from the temple. He said to them, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!” (John 2:16).

Yes, Jesus would approve of Christians and churches providing a reasonable wage for those who devote time and effort to preaching, teaching and the ministry of the gospel. The problem in today's world is not the right to support them but the abuse of this right.

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