ABOLISH

the Jesus Trade

Abolish the Jesus Trade: Spread the Joy of Freely Giving
By Andrew Case, Conley Owens, Jon Here, and other contributors

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Its leaders give judgment for a bribe;
its priests teach for a price;
its prophets practice divination for money.
Yet they lean on Yahweh and say,
"Is not Yahweh in our midst?
No disaster shall come upon us."
— Micah 3:11

For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.
— 2 Corinthians 2:17

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FOREWORD

This book comprises a curated compilation of articles published on sellingJesus.org from 2023 to 2025. The *Selling Jesus* initiative was established by three men who shared the conviction that the commercialization of Christianity needed to be addressed thoroughly and biblically. They decided to combine their gifts to serve the Church with comprehensive teaching on the subject in as many convenient formats as possible (video, audio, etc.). The aim was to maximize thoughtful engagement with a simple biblical message: *ministry should be supported, not sold*. Two years later, this compendium of their labor represents part of that ongoing effort.
The articles in this book have been arranged as follows:

1. **Conversations**: fictional conversations that introduce key foundations and ideas in a simple, dynamic style.
2. **Freely Giving**: discussions of Jesus' command to freely give in Matthew 10:8, addressing common objections.
3. **Supporting Ministry**: how the Bible defines Christian ministry, as well as how it instructs us to fund it.
4. **Selling Ministry**: essays on different ways Scripture condemns the sale of ministry, buying ministry, and the use of ill-gotten gain from the sale of the sacred.
5. **Specific Passages**: exegesis of passages with great relevance to this topic.
6. **History**: what the Church has taught about the sin of simony throughout the centuries, and how Bible charity in America evolved into big business.
7. **Application**: from conferences to counseling, these articles address many concrete scenarios wherein the monetization of ministry prevails.
8. **Copyright & Licensing**: information and guidance on how to navigate intellectual property law biblically.
9. **Contemporary Commerce**: investigations into modern commercialization of the sacred, from Bible gatekeeping to blood donation.

While any chapter should be reasonably understood on its own, later chapters will be easier to follow in the context of the logical arguments built up from the beginning. For further foundations and explanations of the biblical basis for this book, we recommend reading *The Dorean Principle* by Conley Owens, available for free at thedoreanprinciple.org.

Main Contributors

Andrew Case

Andrew is a graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Canada Institute of Linguistics. He serves as a Bible translation consultant, and produces a podcast about his field called *Working for the Word*. He spent seven years doing Bible translation work in Equatorial Guinea (Central Africa), and now he and his wife Bethany

work in Mexico. Together they founded freehebrew.online where they teach Hebrew to the world. They have two children. Listen to the music he produces and read his books at hismagnificence.com.

Conley Owens

Conley is a software engineer, a pastor at Silicon Valley Reformed Baptist Church, and the father of nine kids and counting. He is the author of *The Dorean Principle: A Biblical Response to the Commercialization of Christianity*, and lives with his family in Sunnyvale, California.

Jon Here

Jon is the founder of Gracious Tech, a company that produces apps for global mission. He also serves as a pastor part-time, and completed his MDiv at Sydney Missionary & Bible College. While serving as a missionary in south-east Asia, he discovered just how commercialized Scripture had become and created *copy.church* in response, to advocate for the free giving of Scripture and other ministry resources.

We pray that this book serves to edify, challenge, and enlighten you through the scriptures. Our ultimate aim is love, "which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim 1:5) — a love for Christ and his Bride, that we might all freely share the grace, truth, and blessing given by God's Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

A Christian Dystopia?

Andrew Case

I remember a number of years ago when *The Hunger Games* books started coming out and the whole world was ablaze with excitement. Copies of the books were stacked at the front of every bookstore, and Hollywood was scrambling to exploit the hype with some movie versions. Since then the world has become fascinated by and enamored with the idea of a dystopian future. And I've wondered, *what would a Christian dystopia be like*? Let me describe a possible scenario.

In a Christian dystopia the first thing you might notice is that everything is done for money, and everyone has a thousand seemingly good reasons for maintaining this status quo. There is nothing too sacred to be sold as merchandise. The peddling of God's Word has become so standard that no one would ever question it. The sale of the gospel in all forms is highly respectable. A limited number of rich Christians hoard their abundance of biblical resources, tools, and teaching, refusing to share with the rest of the Church unless they sign agreements and pay fees and do not share with their neighbors. The words of the prophet Micah ring more true than ever when he says, "Its leaders give judgment for a bribe; its *priests teach for a price*; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on Yahweh and say, "Is not Yahweh in our midst? No disaster shall come upon us" (Mic 3:11). It's even considered normal to pay for your friendships. If you want someone who seems trustworthy, will listen to you for hours, offer advice, make you feel loved, point you to Christ, and encourage you with the truth of Scripture, you have to pay for it…by the hour.

Christians are constantly threatening each other with lawsuits for using each other's artwork, writing, or music. Beautiful songs written to exalt Jesus are bought and sold as investments and monetized like any other secular hit. Churches cannot even sing these songs without risking legal action against them unless they pay. Christian blogs, websites, podcasts, YouTube channels, and other media are constantly monetized with ads. God's translated Word is claimed by men as their property and then restricted from being shared. Even ancient manuscripts of the Bible are greedily monetized and forbidden from being copied and displayed.

Every spiritual thing and every ministry that leads to Jesus is blocked by a paywall. If you're too poor, you're denied access. And so most of the world's marginalized cultures who can't understand English or who don't have a credit card are told to make do with less. They are not important enough to share in the bountiful theological feast rich westerners enjoy, simply because they're poor. They are not important enough to grow from robust commentaries and discipleship resources, because they're poor.

The Jesus trade is for the wealthy, and it's not allowed to be criticized because it's so comfortable and convenient. Anyone who dares challenge it is immediately silenced by a barrage of twisted interpretations of Scripture and excuses born out of pragmatism and

expediency. The words of our Master, "Freely you have received; freely give," (Matt 10:8) are explained away as irrelevant. We claim Jesus as Lord, but treat him as commodity. We've cleverly turned our greeds into needs. Christ has become our great high product.

So is this dystopian hellscape really just imaginary? No. It is with deep sadness and regret that I present this as a portrayal of our present reality.

Our Purpose

I say all of this by way of introduction, to explain what this book is about. Our purpose here is to highlight and exalt the radical generosity of God's heart, confront the commercialization of Christianity, and promote the biblical teaching that *ministry should be supported but never sold*. We want to explore the history of how we've gotten to the point where it's the respectable default to monetize ministry, and take a deep dive into the Scripture's teaching on the subject. We believe our evangelical cultural moment has a serious blind spot in this area, and we hope to be a voice of reform. Overall, we seek to take seriously the many things the Bible has to say about the relationship between money and ministry.

Spoiler alert: we're not going to be telling people they should be poor if they serve God. And we fully believe that the worker is worthy of his wages. Nothing we're going to share is new, nor is it some kind of fringe bigotry or legalism. We simply want to encourage people to do what the local church has done to support ministry for centuries —rely on the free generosity of God's people. It's simple and beautiful. Christian ministry of all kinds has been supported in this way since the time of Jesus. We know it's possible, but people refuse to follow that biblical model for various reasons, which we'll be addressing in turn.

The Beauty of God's Generous Heart

It's important for you to know that at the core of all of this we want to take the time to *revel in the beauty of God's generous heart*! The very fabric of Scripture sings with the glory of a God so radically generous that he *freely* gave us life, a universe of splendor, rain and sunshine, the laughter of children, the sweetness of his Word, and even *his only Son*. All without charging us a subscription fee. We want God's example to be our north star. He is our joy and treasure.

We're not here to tell people they're going to hell and burden people with the traditions of men. We've all failed and learned along the way as we sought to reflect God's heart and love him. We completely understand that most people have simply never thought about these things.

Also, we're not here to address the prosperity gospel and the more extreme forms of manipulating believers and Scripture for the sake of getting rich and buying private jets. That has been confronted already by a lot of good people, and we're grateful for it. Instead, we're here to ask hard questions of what most of us perceive to be the normal faith-based market. Questions like, "Should Christian podcasts run ads? Should the Word of God be sold for profit and locked down by copyright? Should biblical counselors

charge fees for helping people find healing in Christ? Is it God-honoring for a preacher to sell his digital sermon recordings? Does Scripture permit a scholar to profit from a commentary they wrote on a book of the Bible?" These kinds of questions and much more.

Two Categories & a Definition

There are two main categories of people who engage in the sale of Christian ministry: those who have bad intentions and those who have good intentions. In our experience, many, if not most, have good intentions, so we'll be focusing mainly on those people and the different ways they've been deceived.

Let me take a moment to unpack what "selling Jesus" refers to. First, let me define what I mean by "selling," and also what I don't mean. We all know that to *sell something is to exchange it for money*. This means that you deny access to it unless someone pays you. This is *not* the same as giving it to someone with no strings attached and no expectation of remuneration. This is also *not* the same as receiving donations to enable you to freely give as much as possible to others: that's what's typically called *support*, not selling.

Now, let's talk about what I mean by "Jesus." I'm referring to Jesus as the end goal of all Christian ministry. We sing songs like, "It's all about you, Jesus" for a reason. The spiritual gifts that God bestows on his children are designed to build up the body of *Christ*. Their end goal is to magnify Jesus and extend his reign over all the earth. So if I offer someone biblical counseling, ultimately my goal is to point them to Jesus, to lead them to him as the only healer and fountain of all riches of wisdom and knowledge. If I write a book about the gospel, my ultimate purpose is to lead people to Jesus, to trust him, follow him, abide in him, treasure him. If I teach someone biblical Hebrew, my goal is to get them to Jesus through the deeper study of his Word, because I believe that learning Hebrew helps people see Jesus better, more clearly and accurately, and with more certainty. Again, if I write a worship song, my ultimate intention is to offer a means to exalt Jesus, to enter into his presence with thanksgiving and praise. So Christian ministry of all sorts has that end goal: get people to Jesus, to know him better, to magnify his name, to be closer to him, to walk and talk more like him.

So when we *sell Jesus*, we put a paywall between others and whatever blessing God might have in store for them through our spiritual gifts. In other words, we deny people access to the ministry we are called to bless people with—unless they pay us for it. To sell Jesus is, by extension, to turn him into a product, a commodity, that can be bought, sold, controlled, and kept from those unable to pay.

As disciples of Jesus we believe that one of the most fundamental joys we have is to *imitate him*, even when it comes to how we fund ministry. To copy him is to honor him, especially since he had more to say about money than love and heaven and hell combined. It was a big issue to him, so we believe we should think carefully about it as we follow him. Jesus got deeply emotional about mixing commerce with spiritual things when he drove people out of the temple, so we think this issue is something that should

move our hearts to zeal in the same way and cause us to speak up and make radical changes. We pray that this book will start a movement to *decommercialize Christ*, and make it unthinkable for future generations.

A Haze of Confusion

My desire is to help people understand the difference between *selling* ministry, which Scripture condemns, and *supporting* ministry which Scripture commends. Increasingly I've found that Christians seem to be caught in a stranglehold or dark cloud of misguided ideas regarding the commercialization of Christianity. In my conversations about this within the scholarly world I've found a shocking level of poor thinking in this area, even to the point that some people say that the Bible has nothing to teach us about money and ministry, and that it's wrong to look for biblical principles to guide us in this area. Others have gone so far as to say that every ministry can be monetized—such as the selling of prayer and baptism—and that it would be biblical and glorifying to God. Maximizing profits from the sale of Jesus is often called "good ministry stewardship" to make it sound better. Things like this have revealed to me the desperate need for more concerted efforts toward promoting reform and abolishing the Jesus-trade in our cultural moment.

The Jesus Trade

It has become increasingly clear that we are living in a time like the antebellum United States, where the vast majority of ministers of the gospel regularly defended slavery from the pulpit, and even great men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were not without their own blind spots in this area because of its ubiquity and pervasiveness in their cultural moment. If you read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (one of the most beautiful books ever written and one of my all-time favorites), Harriet Beecher Stowe paints detailed portraits of a broad sampling of people who justify the slave trade in different ways, with very complex reasoning in order to make themselves feel better about the status quo. Most of them are well-meaning, many of them are Christians, but they all have one serious blind spot in common—that economic expediency triumphs over biblical principles. Let me say that again. Most people back then were influenced by the belief that *economic expediency was more important than biblical principles*. In other words, we must do everything in our power to make the Bible bow to or cater to the economic forces of our day. Slaveholders simply couldn't give up the convenience and labor saving comfort that the slavery system provided, which gave them a higher standard of living. And we are in exactly the same position today regarding the Jesus trade. Modern Christians sell ministry because it's too convenient, too ubiquitous and pervasive and *respectable*, and promises a standard of living many idolize. They eagerly find complex and clever ways to make God in their image—a god of economic expediency. Because in their heart of hearts they believe that money is more powerful than Yahweh for getting things done and spreading the gospel.

One of the things I appreciate about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is that it doesn't paint cartoon, two-dimensional portraits of people who were deceived by the culture around them into defending the slave trade. Instead, the author brilliantly depicts the genuine complexity that you find in real people who have mixed emotions, complex and varied resources of self-justification, across different social classes, both men and women, and how deep and nuanced people can be who are often full of good intentions—but also carry their own inventory of respectable sins. Which is exactly what we find in people involved in the Jesus trade today who monetize ministry in different ways with the best intentions, but who ultimately compromise the sincerity of ministry and go against biblical principles.

Perhaps we can broadly describe the Jesus trade this way: *Jesus gave his life so you could know God, but the Jesus trade takes your money in exchange for the knowledge of God.*

The Evangelical Industrial Complex

We now live in a world where we find it impossible to imagine anything else than a vast evangelical industrial complex with shiny products of all kinds ready to meet our consumerist mentalities. But this is a relatively recent development in history, and we want to explore why it happened, and how we can fix it. Modern western countries are the richest, most materialistic countries in all of human history by an order of magnitude, so we think it's no surprise that the Church has suffered a series of compromises in the area of money and ministry, and cannot see its sin because the Jesus trade is the ocean it's swimming in.

And we need your help. We need your help to spread the word and pray for us. Freely giving ministry is a pathway to immeasurable joy. No one has ever regretted it. Our desire is to see Jesus exalted, and no longer belittled as a commodity. The siren song of pragmatism has drowned out all clear thinking about money and ministry. Let us instead fill our ears with the music of Christ.

A Historical Blind Spot

If you're like most people, you might struggle to point to something specific in Scripture that would explain *why* charging for baptism, entry to church, or the Lord's supper would be wrong—why it would undermine the gospel and dishonor God. But these are the kinds of questions we keep asking biblical scholars and church leaders, and so far we haven't heard a good answer that shows from Scripture why it's not ok to charge for these things. Asking payment for such sacred parts of our faith feels instinctively wrong to most of us.

But the idea of charging rent for seats in church definitely didn't feel wrong to most people a couple centuries back. It used to be common practice in the English-speaking world to rent out pews in churches in order to pay the bills. The belief was that you couldn't really depend on people to give offerings freely in order to cover church expenses, so the pew rent system became the standard for a long time.

Entire books were written to argue that it was unbiblical to give people seats in church based on payment, but it still hung on for at least *two centuries.* You might have heard of "Free Methodist" churches and wondered what was "free" about them. Well, it was because these were the first Methodist churches to offer their seats to everyone for free! A man named Benjamin Titus Roberts opposed the idea of pew rents as unbiblical, and he was expelled from the Methodist church because of it, and so *Free* Methodism was born in 1860.

One of the churches that held onto this system the longest was St. Matthew's Anglican Church in Australia, which didn't stop charging for seats until 1956. So this was a serious blindspot that the Church had for a couple centuries that we think is absolutely bizarre and embarrassing today. And if you read the arguments for renting out pews, you'll see that many of them are the same as the arguments people use today to defend the Jesus trade—charging for bibles, Christian teaching, worship, biblical counseling, seminary training, and more. The blind spot has just shifted to a new set of things that are justified in the same way. Instead of being biblically rational, we rationalize.

Indirect Association

This is a classic example of turning *direct* association into *indirect* association in order to justify something we normally would think is wrong. For example, some researchers did an interesting experiment where they put a six-pack of cokes in a communal fridge and waited to see if people would steal them. Within 72 hours all the cokes were gone. But when they put a plate of six one dollar bills in the same communal fridge, after 72 hours no one had touched the money. They did other similar experiments and concluded that people are much more likely to steal *indirectly* than *directly*. The cokes were each worth a dollar, but people were able to justify taking them more easily because they were an indirect representation of monetary value.

So what does this have to do with the Jesus trade? Evangelicals believe it's fine to sell Jesus as long as it's indirectly. In other words, as long as most Jesus sales take place outside the local church, it tricks us into feeling like it's ok. Most of the commercialization of Christianity happens in *parachurch* ministries. So it's a lot easier to swallow when it's not on Sunday or not within a local gathering of the church. This sleight of hand makes our conscience believe that it's not inappropriate to charge for entry to a worship event when it takes place in a stadium, or when it's not directly connected to a local congregation. We don't recoil as much when someone charges us for biblical counsel in an office that looks nothing like a church building and that feels more like a doctor's office.

The point is, the more steps removed the Jesus trade is from things we still (arbitrarily) consider sacred, like the local church, the more we are prone to overlook the true reality of what we're dealing with: sin. That's one of the reasons why so many Christians are completely comfortable with someone selling *a book about the gospel*, but simultaneously find the idea of charging someone before sharing the gospel with them

utterly revolting. We might be horrified to hear Jesus accused of charging an entry fee to hear him preach the sermon on the mount, and turning away those who couldn't pay. But when it comes to selling a commentary on the sermon on the mount, and locking it down by copyright restrictions so that it's illegal to share it with those who can't afford it...well, that's perfectly fine.

The heart has such ingenious ways of deceiving itself and sugar-coating sin by making it more indirect or giving it nice-sounding labels. You see, this is one of the hallmarks of a dystopia: everyone slavishly, even robotically, follows the status quo, refusing to think critically for themselves. They accept a hellish world around them as normal, and even defend its legitimacy.

The Primacy of Scripture

But Scripture must always come first and form our foundation; and scriptural principles should be supremely more important than practical concerns. In other words, *let's figure out what God requires of us, and then work out the practical details later*, rather than squeezing God and the Bible into the mold of our own opinions.

So let's start with what we see clearly in Scripture as the reason we believe Christian ministry and spiritual things should be supported, but never sold. (Conley Owens has written about this at length in his book *The Dorean Principle*, which is completely free and in the public domain. It is meant to be read as a complement to what has been published in this book.) In Matthew 10 Jesus sends out his disciples on a ministry assignment, and he gives them some instructions: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. Don't get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts: no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff. For the worker deserves his food."

It's important to read Matthew 10 along with the parallel passage in Luke 10 in order to get the full picture of what's going on here. In Luke 10 Jesus describes the disciples' mission as the work of "harvesting." "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

So the question is: how can we obey Jesus' command to freely give and still pay the bills? If the worker deserves to eat, how can he eat if Jesus instructs him to give freely? It's not really hard to answer, but it's hard for people to accept and apply. The simple answer is that when ministry is supported by the free generosity of God's people, the servant of God can give freely and still have money to live on. In other words, he doesn't have to sell Jesus to make ends meet. Instead, Jesus himself will faithfully provide for him through the people of God. In Luke 10:5-7, Jesus makes it clear that there will be people of peace along the way who will give shelter and food to the disciples as they do ministry. In other words, God will provide people to support them as they freely give the spiritual blessings they have freely received.

One of the key issues many miss here is that the worker is worthy to *receive wages from the Lord of the harvest*. That's totally different from charging *the harvest itself* for our

labor. So the biblical principle is that our living should be provided for *by God*, through his people freely supporting ministry. And they should give out of obligation and gratitude to *God*, not out of a sense of obligation to us. Our job is to trust the Lord of the harvest to provide for us, and do the work our Master has set before us.

Can you see how it would be wrong to say, "Maybe the Lord of the harvest won't provide my wages, so I'll charge people for the ministry I do for him"? Or, "The Lord of the harvest isn't giving me a high enough paycheck, so let me take the money he gives me and also require payment of the people he sent me to bless"?

At this point I want to make it crystal clear that the issue is NOT whether a worker is worthy of his food. We're all in agreement that you shouldn't muzzle an ox while he treads the grain. Of course ministers of the gospel should have enough to feed their families. The question is whether people who labor for Christ will rely on *him* to provide for their needs, or whether they will rely on *their own understanding* and put a price tag on the grace, truth, and blessing they're called to impart.

The impulse to make God's work sustainable and see it funded well is a good impulse, and we should let it drive us to follow Christ's command to reflect the free nature of the gospel by giving generously so that ministries can flourish and give everything away. It should drive us to trust God to provide in the way *he* wants to provide. But if we take this good impulse and let it incite us to invent unbiblical ways of funding ministry, we end up undermining the ministries themselves and reflecting the world's commercial mentality rather than God's radically generous heart.

Christ's command is not an isolated verse that addresses the biblical way ministry should be funded. Paul spends entire chapters on this, the prophet Micah speaks out against monetizing spiritual teaching (3:11), and much more. And what do we have to lose if we, who claim to be followers of Jesus, take his command at face value and reflect the free nature of the gospel and the generosity of God that knows no bounds? Proverbs gives us an idea of what might happen: "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want" (11:24)

Many people who sell Jesus try to make you feel sorry for them by saying that they barely have enough to live on, and then argue that the only way for them to survive is by selling Jesus *more*. But we're here to offer a better solution: stop selling spiritual and sacred things, obey what Jesus says, embrace what the Church has done for centuries already, and see if God doesn't bless you beyond what you can ask or imagine. Sadly, many people aren't willing to step out in faith and see if God will reward obedience. Will you be one of them, or will you take God at his word and experience the incredible, liberating and rewarding joy of giving ministry freely? As a well-known verse says, "Yahweh is my shepherd; *I shall not want*" (Ps 23:1).

Conversations

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SELLING JESUS

Andrew Case

The following two chapters are fictional conversations. The first is between a young man named Tim and his pastor. Their conversational format and style is intended to help to make them more readable. We hope it serves as a simple introduction to some of the foundational topics of this book. Formal articles will follow, examining Scripture at greater depth.

Our Lavish God

Tim: So, I've been doing a lot of thinking lately about generosity, and I'm convicted. I've heard that God prospers us mainly to raise our standard of giving, not our standard of living, but I haven't been very good at that.

Pastor: You're not alone. We all fail in this area. But it's rare that people in rich countries like ours ever come to this conviction.

What do you think helps produce change towards more generosity?

I would say that we have to start with beholding the best example of generosity in the universe: *God himself*. If we start with guilt or some other motivation, our attempts to change will be short-lived. But if we anchor ourselves in a God-entranced view of giving, driven by marveling at the beauty of God's lavish heart, we'll be empowered to escape the pattern of this world and be transformed.

I like that approach.

It's important to remember that the goal of our giving is ultimately to reflect God's generosity, so that people will see our good works and *give glory to our Father* (Matt 5:6). The obvious place to start is with a focused meditation on God's generosity in Scripture. Do you mind reading 1 Timothy 6:17-19?

"Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be conceited and not to put their hope in the uncertainty of wealth, but in God, who richly provides all things for us to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, and to be generous and ready to share, treasuring up for themselves a firm foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

It's clear in that passage that God richly provides all things for us to enjoy. So God's generosity is the foundation for us to be generous and ready to share. And one result of such generosity is being able to "take hold of that which is truly life."

That part about being "ready to share" bothers me, because I'm usually not ready. I get fixated on earthly goods instead of looking around for opportunities to share what I've received. I think I have more of a natural selfishness than an eager readiness to be generous.

I've felt the same way many times. I have to keep reminding myself that my generosity must begin with *gratefully receiving* from a great God. The simple statement from Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:7 has to be at the forefront of my mind: "What do you have that you did not receive?" I don't want to miss out on taking hold of true life.

That's a good word. What other verses should I consider?

Well, let me read Luke 12:32-34: "Don't be afraid, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide yourselves with purses that will not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Notice that right before Jesus tells his disciples to sell their possessions and give to the poor—which sounds really hard—he says, "your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom."

That's really helpful. So I guess that when we struggle to be generous and lay up treasures in heaven, we have to remember that we have a Father who has adopted us and is delighted to give us his kingdom.

Exactly! The King himself is holding an unimaginable inheritance for his children, and most importantly, *he himself* is our inheritance. He gave his only Son to make it possible, and loves us as a devoted father. And if we are his, 1 Corinthians 3:21 says all things are ours, whether the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

What about that verse in Acts that talks about God giving mankind everything?

Yeah, Acts 17:25: "He isn't served by human hands, as though he needed anything, because he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else." Everything we enjoy comes from him *freely*. He didn't create the world and then make humanity take out a loan to be able to live in it. He has showered us with innumerable priceless treasures in his creation.

True, and yet we often take those amazing blessings that we've received freely, and then treat our own brothers and sisters with stinginess.

I'm afraid so. James 1:17 is another verse worthy of meditation: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights." God is constantly giving magnificent gifts—both material and spiritual—to his children. It's incredible how Romans 8:32 puts it: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, *freely give us all things*?"

That's so powerful. But it doesn't seem to be reflected in how Christians commercialize their faith these days. I see it more than ever—everything you can imagine to do with God, truth, Scripture, or worship is somehow turned into a product and sold in a way that doesn't really reflect the generosity of the God who gave us everything.

You're absolutely right. It's ugly and tragic when the children of God receive everything freely from their Father, and then turn around and refuse to share with their neighbors or brothers unless an exchange of money happens. I'm talking mainly about spiritual things here like the things you just mentioned—Scripture itself, truth (whether that be exposited in books or audio sermons), or even songs written to exalt Christ. We live in a world where it's rare to find those things freely shared. The default is to monetize ministry of all kinds.

I've heard some people refer to modern western evangelicals as being sick with affluenza—they're so affluent that they've become entranced by materialism, and white-wash the sin of greed and serving money—even at the level of ministry.

I'm afraid that's exactly what's happened. God is a marginal reality for so many, and there are others who have good intentions but are stuck in a system that keeps people focused on the wrong things and never forces them to reevaluate what they're doing. As I said before, the only way change will happen is by a God-entranced, Bible-saturated view of all things, including money and ministry. We must endeavor to see everything through the lens of eternity and truth, rather than the lens of pragmatism and fear. Maybe we can talk more about that next time.

Sounds good.

Pragmatism vs Principle

Tim: I heard someone say recently that evangelicals are often driven more by pragmatism than by biblical principles. Do you think that's true?

Pastor: I think it's very true. Especially when it comes to issues of money and ministry over the last century.

How so?

Well, first we should probably define *pragmatism*. As I understand it, it's the idea that meaning or worth is determined by practical consequences. It overlaps significantly with utilitarianism, which is the philosophy that things are deemed good by their usefulness.

So basically, it's a way of thinking that judges the goodness of an action based on its outcome. Like "the ends justify the means"?

Yes, that's it. Obviously not all pragmatists would go so far as to say that the ends justify the means, but that's sometimes where people end up.

So there are different extremes of pragmatism?

Right. On one end of the spectrum you have people who define truth by how useful or helpful it is at reaching a certain goal. At the other end of the spectrum you might have those who simply want to get good things done, and find practical solutions to the problems they see.

So pragmatism isn't always a bad thing.

Exactly. But it can become bad when it shifts to becoming the primary guide to life, ministry, and theology rather than Scripture. An obvious example might be the avoidance of verses in the Bible that might offend people. Let's say your end goal is to grow your church, which you perceive to be a good thing, and if you preach certain passages, you may turn some people away. That's pragmatism taken to a harmful extreme, in the name of good intentions.

Yeah, that makes sense. Basically you're saying that it's dishonoring to God to accept or reject what he's told us to do by whether it "works" or not.

That's it. If we do that, we'll find that lies from the devil can be quite effective and produce impressive results. And on the other hand we know from Scripture that the gospel often produces negative responses.

Like what?

Well, remember what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:23? To preach Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. A bad application of pragmatism would be to remove any talk of the crucifixion from your preaching so as not to be a stumbling block to Jews. But that would be a grievous sin for the sake of accomplishing what seems to be a good thing. I mean, who wants to offend Jews, right?

Yeah, that's a hard one. I feel the tension.

Obeying God often involves deep discomfort. It's *hard* to be perceived as a fool when you preach Christ crucified. It doesn't feel good to have people respond negatively.

It would be painful to keep doing that and see no good outcomes, and then see your friend reaching many people by being more practical.

Definitely. I've found I have to guard my own heart and remind myself that prosperity is not a measure of truthfulness, and just because most people are doing something does not mean it's pleasing to God.

It seems to be a hallmark of modern evangelicals to just do whatever works, or experiment until they find something that gets the job done, whether it's in evangelism or church services or whatever.

Yeah, and people are playing the numbers game all the time. Whatever attracts or impacts the most people is justified, even if it goes squarely against Scripture's teaching.

I guess you might say that theology has been forced to bow to methodology.

For sure. And this has been around forever. In the last century we saw it in people like Dwight Moody who was driven by an urgent desire to "get the job done" and optimized his presentations of the gospel to get as many decisions as possible. And Moody wasn't a bad guy, but rather someone who perhaps took pragmatism to extremes for the sake of his good intentions and the urgency he felt to lead more to Christ.

This seems like a particularly Western tendency, and very close to the American spirit.

Absolutely. So much of our industrial revolution was driven by letting practical concerns dominate over principles. And then there are the horrific examples of what was done to Native Americans and Africans in the name of pragmatism or "economic expediency."

Wow, that is a brutal legacy. So how does this all connect to money and ministry?

Well, you can imagine that, when you're full of ambition and have big, urgent goals to accomplish for God, you might be tempted to do whatever works best at a large scale. And money is a powerful ally for that. But if you can't get enough money to do huge things for God, you might be tempted to get that money however you can, as long as it's not flagrantly immoral.

Like going into debt?

Well, that's one way, but I'm thinking more along the lines of beginning to sell ministry so you can do bigger and better ministry.

What would be a real-world example of that?

Let's say I write a book about missions, which is clearly an act of ministry to edify the Church through biblical teaching. I plan to give it away freely online, but then I start thinking, "If I sell this book, I can use that money to promote my book and get it to more people. Many more people might be blessed that way. And if I sell a lot of copies, I can use that money to live on while I write another book to bless the Church!"

Sounds pretty standard.

It is, but do you see the problems with that approach?

I guess it breaks Jesus' command to freely give in Matthew 10:8. Since it's clearly some kind of spiritual gift you're exercising for building up the Body, it should only be supported, but not sold.

Exactly. And don't miss the fact that my decision would be driven purely by pragmatism rather than biblical principles. And that's just one scenario in a thousand we could imagine.

That makes sense.

In a way, selling spiritual things is similar to going into debt. Many people go into debt because they refuse to wait on God to provide the money for some big expenditure they think they need. Like a new church building, for instance. That's not a horrible thing to spend money on, but when you build it on debt you've trusted the bank more than God to supply.

And you've taken away the option of God directing you by *not* providing. Maybe he doesn't want you to build a new building, and the way he's going to make that clear is by not providing the offerings needed to do so.

Very true. We blur God's leading when we go into debt. If the money isn't available for a specific need, our first action should be to *seek provision from God through the free generosity of his people*, not a bank loan, and certainly not by selling God's gifts. In John 14:13-14 Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do." And I think we need to take these words seriously.

So are you saying that your example of selling a book on missions is like depriving God of the chance to bless an even greater amount of people if it were free?

Yep. And if I rely on the book sales to determine whether or not I write another book to bless the Church, I take away the option for God to make that clear through the free generosity of his people instead.

But couldn't God guide you equally as well through the sales of your book?

He could. But it would be forcing God to salvage your disobedience to his word. He's incredibly patient and gracious with us, but that's never a license to sin, which is what Paul taught in Romans 6. When we sell ministry, we show our allegiance to money and pragmatism, and leave God to pick up the pieces. In his grace he often brings beauty out of our ashes, but we miss out on the full fruit and blessing of what might have resulted from obedience.

There must be so many authors who remain mostly in obscurity and have very little impact because they're stuck in the pragmatism mentality of selling their books. And I can't help but wonder what amazing things might happen if they did things more in line with Scripture and gave their books away with no strings attached.

Amen to that! It's so hard for many believers to give up that addiction to "whatever seems to work for others." They see big authors who have reached best-seller status and have impacted millions through the sale of their writing, and they think, "If it worked for them, it could work for me. There's no way it could be bad to sell books, because God seems to be blessing them so much."

That sounds like the same reasoning that goes with the prosperity gospel. "Those prosperity preachers must be speaking the truth because look at the private jets and mansions God has blessed them with!"

You're right. It's exactly the same reasoning. And this reminds me of something Mark Noll said about American evangelicalism in one of his books. He said that it's a form of "culturally adaptive biblical experientialism." If that's true, we have to be careful that our eagerness to adapt to our culture for the sake of making a bigger impact for Christ doesn't end up making Christ into a product. Because that's what the world does. If the world worships something, they turn it into a product. Think about all the celebrities that have been turned into profit funnels. The world often sets up objects of worship, encourages people to idolize them, and then exploits people's adoration. But followers of Christ should never reflect such darkness. We should be distinguished by the opposite approach: that of freely giving, even to the point of losing our lives for the sake of others—and all out of joy in a beautiful God who is *not* a piece of merchandise.

The Command of Christ

Tim: Lately I've been a little unsettled by the commercialization of Christianity around me. A friend of mine charges $5,000 for preaching at Christian conferences, and my brother charges even more than that for leading worship events with his band. Then there's my uncle, who's a biblical counselor, and he charges $200 an hour. It also bothers me that the Christian publishing industry seems to be more and more about the money, especially when they charge really high prices for digital copies of their books. Am I crazy? Or is this just the way God wants his Church to be? Couldn't all of this operate on donations?

Pastor: I feel the same way, actually. You're not crazy.

If I ever bring this up, people just say the same thing over and over: "The Bible says that the laborer is worthy of his wages." And I get it. The Bible does say that, but that doesn't make me feel any less unsettled about monetizing ministry.

You're not alone. What I usually do is take people to Matthew 10:8-10, where Jesus says two important things that may seem contradictory on the surface: 1) give freely, without pay, and 2) if someone is working, they deserve to be compensated for their labor.

Yeah, those two things do seem to clash.

Most people completely miss this issue or ignore it. There's actually a fairly simple way to resolve these two seemingly contradictory notions of refusing pay and receiving pay.

Cool. So how does that work?

Simply that Jesus forbids the disciples from demanding or requiring payment but allows them to receive food and lodging. The disciples are to rely on God to provide for them through the free generosity of others. This is the difference between buying ministry as a product and supporting ministry.

So the disciples should trust the Lord of the harvest to provide their wages, rather than demand their wages from the harvest itself.

Exactly! That's what I was just about to say. Jesus is the Lord of the harvest. He will pay a minister's wages through the means he chooses. But he doesn't allow his servants to minister in his name in exchange for payment from those receiving ministry.

Isn't this kinda like how friendship works? As soon as someone starts treating your relationship to him as a way to manipulate you for money, it stops being a friendship.

Yep. When we sell ministry, it stops being ministry and becomes a mercenary commercial transaction. As soon as payment is demanded, there's no way to be sure that the ministry you're receiving is sincere, or simply out of desire for money. Your example of friendship is spot on, because if I tell you that we can hang out, but it'll cost you $15/hour, it strips the sincerity out of our time together. You'll never know whether I spend time with you because I like you, or because I like the money. It doesn't even matter how much I charge. Even at 15 cents/hour, it's no longer a real, sincere friendship.

So let me think this through. If an author writes a book about suffering and the sovereignty of God in order to edify the Body of Christ, but then denies anyone access to it unless they pay, he compromises the sincerity of his ministry…

By making it impossible to know whether he's just writing for money or for the edification of other believers and out of love for God. Everyone knows that people throughout history have used God to make money; even unbelievers do that. So when you introduce a paywall into the mix, you open up the real possibility that you're just covertly turning God into a commodity.

Makes sense. So you're saying that the Bible is clear that ministers of the gospel deserve to be able to eat and pay the bills, but that their compensation should come from God, through the free generosity of his people?

Exactly. As 1 Corinthians 9:14 says, "The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." Most people completely misinterpret this verse to mean that we have permission to sell the gospel as a commodity in order to "get our living by the gospel." But notice that it doesn't say that at all. It simply says that they should be able to get their living by the gospel. That requires us to go back to Matthew 10:8 and listen to Jesus in order to understand how we should be compensated for our work of gospel proclamation. And it's clear that Jesus forbids selling our work, and instructs us to receive support from God's people.

That's helpful. But shouldn't it be obvious that charging someone to hear the gospel is wrong? It doesn't seem that it should even be a question in people's minds. It doesn't even make sense to me.

You're right. But most people compartmentalize these things in their hearts and then copy the way the world does things.

What do you mean?

Here's an example. Someone might read Paul and Jesus and say, "Ok, maybe it's not a good idea to demand payment from someone on the street before I share the gospel with them. But if I write a book called The Gospel Explained, I can charge money for it and profit from it like every other author does."

I see. But is Jesus' command in Matthew 10 to give freely actually something that applies to us today? Wasn't it just something specifically for the disciples in that evangelistic situation?

Good question. Let's look more closely at the passage. The specific actions Jesus directs his disciples to perform are "preach", "heal/cleanse", "raise the dead", and "drive out demons" (10:7-8). These are all spiritual activities that are broader than just evangelism. Now, if this were a command only for those disciples, Paul wouldn't have applied it to his own ministry as he does in two places. The first is 1 Corinthians 9:18, where he says: "What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge." Then he says in 2 Corinthians 11:7, "Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?" In this last verse Paul uses the exact same Greek word for "free" that Jesus uses in Matthew.

I guess I can see that. But how can we be sure that the command still applies to us today? Most people have told me it was just for the first-century apostles.

Well, first of all, it's not a command that's intrinsically bound by culture and time. It can be applied in all cultures in every century. Second, if we look at Church history, it was applied beyond the time of the apostles. And third, this command is perhaps the only guardrail we have that prevents us all from becoming like the prosperity preachers who monetize the sacred and treat spiritual things as commodities. In other words, if the command no longer applies then it would open the door to selling prayer, baptism, communion, entry to church, you name it. And I doubt many people would be excited about a world where nothing is too sacred to be monetized.

Yeah, it sounds like something out of a dystopian movie! I guess I might add another thought to your argument: It seems to me that being a follower of Jesus means, at the most basic level, seeking to be like him. So, if he was teaching and training the disciples for long periods of time as a free ministry, shouldn't we imitate him by offering spiritual instruction for free?

Amen! I couldn't agree more. And a key underlying issue I forgot to mention here is that of obligation. The question we Christians should be asking is: am I giving under obligation to man or obligation to God? We don't reflect the biblical model until we support a minister/ministry in a spirit of partnership out of a sense of obligation to God. The giver should feel indebted to God rather than man.

So when we charge people money for ministry, we force them to give out of indebtedness to man?

Yep. That takes God out of the picture. Like, when you buy a book of Christian teaching (which I would classify as ministry), is your heart directed to feel grateful to God and indebted to him when you look at the price tag?

Nope.

And do you feel like it's distinct in any way from how the world operates? Does it feel like something beautiful and sacred is being preserved from mercenary motives?

Nope. It's kinda sad.

So what I call "colabor" is when the giver feels duty-bound to give to a minister as part of serving God. In other words, in the Body of Christ we labor together, side by side, to advance his Kingdom. But our present problem is that the spiritual advancement of the Kingdom is hindered by all of us charging each other money for the very gifts God has given us to serve him and spread a passion for his supremacy.

I see that, but how do we know that the support Jesus describes is colabor and not some kind of transactional reciprocity?

A few reasons. First, the disciples are instructed to receive support from only one person in each city, instead of collecting support from everyone they minister to. Second, those who support the disciples are described as sharing the same Master—God. Jesus tells the disciples to find someone "worthy" and "a son of peace" (in Luke 10:6), indicating that person is already qualified to colabor for the Kingdom of God.

But what about when Jesus tells the disciples to carry moneybags in Luke 22:36? Isn't that contradictory?

Not at all. Jesus was preparing the disciples for their imminent journey into a hostile environment. Previously, they could expect to find fellow servants of God to colabor with them. But now they would face opposition, and the expectation of support would change. Jesus' instructions in Matthew and Luke follow the pattern of colabor, emphasizing that they should receive help from those who serve a common Master and not request a commercial exchange from the masses.

That makes sense. And the more I study the teachings of Jesus, the more it's apparent just how seriously he took the issue of money and ministry.

Absolutely. In all four gospels Jesus is recorded chasing money changers out of the temple, objecting to the misuse of God's things for personal gain. He also rejected Satan's offers of material gain and said, "You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13).

Yeah, this is challenging. Thanks for your time, Pastor, and I hope we can talk again soon.

My pleasure! I'm more than happy to talk further about these things.

History - How We Got Here

Tim: So how did we get to this point in Christian history where commercializing Christianity is so normal and accepted? Was it always this way?

Pastor: It definitely wasn't always this way. The dorean principle of freely giving, based on Matthew 10:8–10, has been practiced since the first century, and we can find evidence of it in the second century church as well. Possibly the oldest extra-biblical Christian writing we have is the Didache, or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. It functioned as a manual of church practice and was highly respected by the early church. In the Didache 11:4-6 and 12, we read: "Let every apostle, when he comes to you, be received as the Lord… but if he asks for money, he is a false prophet. … And whoever says in the Spirit, 'Give me silver' or anything else, you shall not listen to him."

Wow, that's pretty serious.

Very. And there's more. Another early Christian writing, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, also warns against greedy prophets and ministerial reciprocity. It argues that a divine Spirit cannot "receive money and prophesy" in chapter 43 verse 12. Then we have the writings of Apollonius of Ephesus.

What did he write?

Here we go. Listen to this: "Does not all Scripture seem to you to forbid a prophet to receive gifts and money?... If they are convicted of receiving them, they are not prophets." Then he quotes Christ's words from Matthew 10: "For although the Lord said, 'Provide neither gold, nor silver, neither two coats,' these men, in complete opposition, transgress in respect to the possession of the forbidden things. For we will show that those whom they call prophets and martyrs gather their gain not only from rich men, but also from the poor, and orphans, and widows."

That's pretty clear.

Indeed. Tertullian, one of the most important second-century theologians, agreed with this as well. He wrote, "There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God."

What about the Protestant Reformation? Did they try to recapture this principle?

Absolutely. The Reformation was sparked by Martin Luther's opposition to the commercial treatment of salvation, such as the sale of indulgences. He believed that ministers should receive regular support, but not sell the message of salvation. Other Reformers shared similar concerns.

But Luther published a ton of books. Didn't he profit from the sales?

Good question. If you read Eric Metaxas' book on Luther, he writes the following: "Luther received no income from his torrential publications because even though the publishers made a mint from them, Luther refused to take a penny, nor did he take money for all of his preaching. He simply wanted to spread the Word and trust God would provide."

Woah, that's incredible.

It's surprising to us in this cultural moment, but it should be normal for anyone who has spent any time reading the Bible. And keep in mind that copyright law didn't exist back then, so the Reformation writings were able to go viral in a way that would never happen today. If contemporary Christians followed the model of the Reformation, the impact for Christ would be exponentially larger than anything we see right now.

That makes sense.

And also keep in mind that until the middle of the eighteenth century it was considered bad manners to write for remuneration instead of for reputation. There's a book called Five Hundred Years of Printing that talks about this, and the author writes: "Up to that time only a few writers had ever received a fee from their publishers; and if they received it they were anxious to hide the fact. Erasmus, for instance, was deeply hurt when some Italian colleagues hinted that Aldus Manutius had paid him for a book; and he violently defended himself against similar insinuations on the part of Hutten and others."

I've never heard that before! That's completely opposite to what we see today.

Yep. But in spite of all the good the Reformers did, unfortunately they didn't fully articulate a comprehensive ethic that distinguished between the rightful and wrongful receipt of money in ministry. They managed to address and counter the extremes of greed and neglect that had crept into the church, but they didn't go quite far enough in drawing clear lines for maintaining the integrity of ministry or spiritual things.

So what happened after all that in America to get us to where we are today?

It's a complex story, but let me give you some highlights. Much of what I've learned about this comes from the excellent historical work edited by Mark Noll called God & Mammon.

Cool. I'm all ears.

First of all, you have to understand that America was founded on two principles: freedom and commerce. The colonists wanted to escape from the religious oppression and economic exploitation of Europe. They wanted to practice their faith freely and pursue their own interests in a land of opportunity.

Sounds good so far.

Yes, but there was a downside. Without the state financing churches, churches began to experiment with alternative ways to get the money they needed. And without a regulated economy, money became the measure of success and influence. These two forces created a competitive and consumerist environment for religion.

How so?

Well, churches began trying things like renting pews, soliciting subscriptions, or even holding lotteries.

Lotteries? That sounds like gambling.

It was. And it didn't work very well. Most churches abandoned it after a while, along with pew rents. But the point is that churches sought to adapt to the market forces of supply and demand. They had to attract and retain customers, or members, by offering them something they wanted or needed.

Like what?

Like doctrine, worship style, social status, moral guidance, or spiritual experience. Different denominations appealed to different segments of the population based on their theology, liturgy, class, ethnicity, or region. And they often competed with each other for market share by criticizing or condemning their rivals.

Wow.

And it got worse as the nation grew and diversified. Money and religion became increasingly intertwined, and money often got the upperhand when it came to deciding how to do ministry.

So what you're saying is that Christianity in America was shaped by its commercial culture?

Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. And it still is today. That's why we need to be careful not to confuse our faith with financial pragmatism. Jesus was clear that we cannot serve both God and money. And he said that for a reason. Biblical principles have to shape our relationship to money and ministry, not capitalism.

Amen. So churches tended to adapt to the market forces of supply and demand.

Yes, and Protestantism also played a key role in promoting and legitimizing the market revolution in America.

The market revolution?

It's a term that refers to the rapid economic and social changes that took place in America between 1815 and 1848. It involved the expansion of markets, transportation, communication, industry, banking, and commerce. It also involved the rise of new classes, such as entrepreneurs, professionals, and wage workers.

I see. And how did Protestantism promote and legitimize this revolution?

Well, one way was by preaching themes that aligned with the values and goals of the market culture. For example, many ministers taught that Christians had a duty to prosper, and that piety was an asset to success. They also encouraged thrift, industry, discipline, and charity as Christian virtues.

So they basically blessed the pursuit of money and materialism?

Not exactly. They still warned against the dangers of greed, covetousness, and idolatry. They still affirmed that God was the ultimate source of all blessings. But they also saw wealth as a sign of God's favor and a means of advancing his kingdom.

I see. So why is that a bad thing?

Because many people were unwittingly heading toward compromise and a contradiction between their spiritual mission and their worldly interests. And this contradiction became more evident as religious organizations became more involved in the business of publishing and distributing books.

What kind of books?

Mostly bibles and tracts. You see, one of the main goals of Protestantism in America was to spread the word of God to everyone. And one of the main ways to do that was to print and distribute bibles and tracts as widely as possible.

Good goal.

It was. But it was also expensive. They were urgently trying to usher in the millennial reign of Christ, according to the dominant eschatology at the time. And they reached a bottleneck where they didn't have enough money to print at the speed and scale they wanted.

So they decided to let the ends justify the means and get the money however they could to fund their grand vision?

Pretty much. At first they had relied on donations from individuals and churches. And they gave away bibles and tracts for free to all. But soon they realized they needed more revenue to fund their aspirations and produce more books.

So let me guess: they decided to *sell* some of their books instead of giving them all away for free.

Yep. To anyone who could pay for them. They argued that selling bibles and tracts was not contrary to their charitable mission but rather a way of enhancing it. They claimed that people would value the books more if they paid for them and that selling some books would generate more funds for giving away others.

So they followed pragmatism instead of biblical principles?

The irony is that the American Bible Society's founding slogan was from Revelation 22:17, which says, "let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." But then they changed their tune around 1830, and a lot of people got mad about it.

I can imagine.

So their switch to a profit model worked in some ways but not in others. On one hand, it did increase their revenue and circulation. On the other hand, it created some problems and controversies. It compromised their integrity as charitable organizations, and thrust them into a competition with secular publishers and booksellers. And it favored those who could pay over those who couldn't.

Wow. How tragic.

It was. And it showed how difficult it was for religious organizations to balance their spiritual mission with their worldly interests in a commercialized culture.

I can imagine.

You know, it's telling that during this same time Christians were not just defending the selling of ministry on economic grounds. They were also defending the slave trade in the same way. They argued that slavery was necessary for the prosperity and stability of the nation. And they used the Bible to support their opinions.

Sounds exactly like the way people defend the Jesus trade today.

Precisely. It showed how Americans could have serious blind spots when large amounts of money are at stake that could potentially fund ministry and other good things. Once again, biblical considerations took the backseat to pragmatism and convenience.

So what about the twentieth century?

Well, since Bible societies and others had already made serious compromises in the way they funded their ministry, they just kept expanding their systems for generating profit, and nearly everyone followed suit. Once they jumped into the river of capitalistic market forces, they were swept along by currents outside of their control and continued to make more compromises until they ended up looking nearly identical to the world.

I see. But didn't anyone call for reform during the twentieth century?

Yes and no. Some things were confronted, like charging rent for pews. But no one ever challenged the sale of bibles and Christian books. Everyone became increasingly enamored with the materialistic progress around them, and they were witnessing the birth of the American ultra-consumerist culture. Then there were two world wars, and after that came a massive economic boom that made evangelicals more concerned with how to manage money than about whether ministry should be sold as a commodity.

Manage money?

Yeah, more in terms of stewardship. Larry Burkett became the number one voice on Christian financial stewardship, and he had wonderful things to say. But his teaching was mostly limited to issues of giving and managing money, rather than confronting the selling of Christian teaching and God's word. Randy Alcorn followed in his footsteps and published Money, Possessions, and Eternity in 1989, but he was also focused mainly on combating materialism and challenging the Church to be generous.

So confronting the Jesus trade basically slid under the radar as people scrambled to help American Christians think more biblically about generosity and debt and tithing, and those sorts of things?

Exactly. Meanwhile, evangelicals became increasingly convinced that more money means more ministry, and however you get that money is essentially morally neutral. Most of them didn't go so far as to promote the prosperity gospel, but they still thought like American capitalists when it came to selling spiritual things. They grew to believe that God cares about the numbers, and if more money leads to more ministry, that means more success for God's kingdom. So they learned to judge themselves by how big their ministry was. The ones who had millions of dollars for their ministry were praised as having God's approval and blessing, whether they obtained that money through the sale of ministry or not.

Wow, that's really enlightening. It really helps make sense of where we are today. We sure have become complacent about the status quo of how money is accumulated for ministry purposes.

Yeah, it's the age-old mistake of believing that the ends justify the means. If you sell bibles so that you can have bibles to give away to the less fortunate, most people would say that's a commendable thing. No one stops to think about whether it's biblical to sell bibles in the first place. And obviously I would say that it's a serious violation of biblical principles. And at the end of the day God is looking for faithfulness and obedience rather than big ministry numbers.

Wasn't it Hudson Taylor who said that "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply"?

Yeah, and it's so true. What we're seeing all around us are ministries that don't trust God to supply what they need through the free generosity of his people. Many of them don't even give God a chance to provide. And there are plenty of people who aren't doing God's work, so God doesn't supply what they need, so they look for worldly ways to get that money. Then there are people who are doing God's work, but not in God's way, so when God doesn't provide, they resort to their own ideas for financing their aspirations.

It seems as though no one stops to think that maybe God doesn't only work through multi-million dollar parachurch ministries. People forget that Jesus and the apostles didn't establish massive ministries with CEOs making six figures, luxurious office buildings, and thousands of members. Jesus only had twelve main disciples, which most ministries today would say is too small to really make a big impact for the Kingdom.

Preach it. When we force growth through ill-gotten gain, that growth is more like cancer than a fruitful tree. Sadly, most of the people who maintain the status quo are well-meaning, sincere believers who've been deceived. They're simply following the way things have been done now for a century. They're unable to imagine any other practice than selling ministry in order to do ministry and expand their impact.

Thanks, Pastor. This helps put everything into perspective.

Anytime. And if you want to go deeper into some of these things I also recommend the book Faith in Reading by Nord, and More Money, More Ministry edited by Mark Noll.

What's up with Paul?

Tim: I've been looking more closely at 1 Corinthians 9 and 2 Corinthians 11, and I'm a bit confused about Paul's views on preaching for pay.

Pastor: You're not alone! Most people are confused by it. As we've talked about before, in both passages Paul says that he preaches the gospel free of charge. We should probably read both of those verses together. Here's 1 Corinthians 9:18: "What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel." And in 2 Corinthians 11:7, he asks, "Did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?" Paul doesn't want to accept anything in direct exchange for his ministry work.

Some people think Paul refuses Corinthian funds to maintain his independence, though I guess that's just an assumption. So, what could be his actual motivation?

You're right. Paul never explicitly states that he's trying to maintain his independence. It's most likely that Paul rejected support because he realized that the Corinthians were immature in their thinking, and they wanted to pay Paul as reciprocity instead of colabor.

Okay, but Paul doesn't always reject financial support, does he? He talks about being sent to Macedonia with the Corinthians' help in both Corinthian epistles.

That's correct. In 1 Corinthians 16:6, Paul says, "Perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go." And in 2 Corinthians 1:16, he mentions, "I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea." The Greek word for "help" and "send" in these verses is *propempo*, which implies financial support for the journey.

So, I guess Paul *did* accept payment for ministry at times then for some reason?

Well, if you look closely, Paul makes a distinction between accepting direct payment, which he refuses, and receiving support as a form of colabor. He views this *propempo* support as colaboring with the Corinthians in spreading the gospel, rather than as payment for his ministry. For example, in 2 Corinthians 1:24, he calls himself a colaborer. So, once again, the Corinthians were trying to send him money as an exchange or payment for the spiritual blessing they received from him, which he refused to accept. But he was willing to accept support from them for his travels, since those travels would mean supporting his work of ministry towards others, rather than paying him to receive some kind of ministry themselves. Does that make sense?

I guess, but I'm still struggling to wrap my mind around it.

Let me use an illustration. Let's imagine you have a ten-year-old daughter who sees her mother pay the babysitter for playing with her, so she concludes that if you play with her, you're doing it for money just like the babysitter and that she should pay you. It's kind of a silly scenario, but stay with me.

I'm with you, and I think I know where you're going. I need to make it clear to my daughter that I'm not like the babysitter, and I play with her simply because I love her and love God.

Exactly! So you reject the money she offers you and tell her why. But then another situation arises: you hear about a widow in your church who got robbed, and you decide as a family to help her. In that situation it would be perfectly appropriate to invite your daughter to contribute to the money you're going to give to the widow. In that context it would be perfectly clear to your daughter that she's not paying you for something you did for her, rather she's colaboring with you to bless others. She's participating freely in God's work, not out of a sense of obligation to you, but rather to God.

Ahhhh, ok. That definitely helps. So in this illustration I'm Paul, the Corinthians are my immature daughter, but who is the babysitter?

Well, that's where the analogy breaks down a bit. We can imagine the babysitter as the false teachers, but obviously Paul didn't pay them. The Corinthians had learned that these false teachers normally charged money for ministry, so they expected Paul to do the same. Or at least they thought that Paul would expect payment from them.

I see. But how do we know that the Corinthians were really that immature and misguided?

That's easy. Paul says it directly in 1 Corinthians 3:1, "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ."

Ok, I guess that's pretty clear.

Good. And let me give one more illustration. Let's say you share the gospel with a friend and he decides to become a follower of Christ. A few days later he sends you a text and says, "Hey, I'd like to give you some money for sharing the gospel with me! What's your PayPal?" After you ask him a few questions it becomes clear to you that he wants to repay you in some way for the newfound joy in his life. So you tell him, no. He's a baby Christian, and he still needs to learn the importance of giving money as support for ministry rather than as payment for ministry, and only out of obligation to God, not man.

That makes sense. So, if someday down the road he offers to help pay for my trip to do evangelism in another city, then I should accept his money?

That's a perfect example, yes. In that case it would be biblical and appropriate, because it's clear that he's not trying to pay you for some spiritual good that you blessed him with.

Got it.

Again, the key difference lies in the nature of the support. When Paul accepts support in the form of colabor, it's a shared effort in spreading the gospel. It's not just about the money; it's about working together in service to God. This is seen in how Paul uses the term *propempo* in the New Testament, where it refers to assistance in the form of travel, companions, and other resources. This kind of support fosters unity and shared responsibility in the mission.

So it's about the intention behind the support?

Exactly. When believers give sacrificially to support Paul's ministry, they're sharing in the hardship and suffering for the sake of the gospel. As Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." In this sense, those who support Paul are co-laborers with him, working for the same Master.

So, Paul doesn't reject all money. He only rejects money that would compromise his free-of-charge proclamation of the gospel. Is that right?

That's correct. The main idea is to prioritize one's duty to God over any perceived debt to a minister.

It's starting to make more sense now. So, the main takeaway here is that Paul is willing to accept support, but only if it comes in the form of colabor and doesn't compromise his commitment to preach the gospel free of charge?

Yep, that's the essence of it.

So, just to make sure I understand the implications of this, is it wrong for pastors or church leaders to receive a salary?

No. Receiving a salary for serving in ministry is not inherently wrong, as long as it is given as colabor, and not as a form of reciprocity or an exchange of money for spiritual blessing. A pastor's salary should be a way the congregation bears his financial burdens with him, which is different from the pastor saying, "I will deny you ministry unless you pay me."

Ok, that makes sense. Thanks again for helping me think through these things!

Always a pleasure.

Obligation and Compulsion

Tim: I was having trouble explaining to a friend what it means that we should be obligated to God and not to man in our giving. Could we talk about that some more?

Pastor: Of course! Imagine you finally get to meet your grandfather–your mom's father–for the first time. You're an adult now, and he has always lived in another country. And let's imagine that your mother died when you were young. So when you finally meet your grandfather, he showers you with gifts and love, even though he knows almost nothing about you. He tells you that, out of love for your mother, he feels like he owes it to her to show you extravagant generosity and kindness. He has a duty to you, but not because of anything you've done, but rather because of his relationship to your mother.

So that's an example of mediated obligation?

Exactly! And the application is obvious: We should be generous to fellow believers out of love for God. We should feel duty bound to God, and express that in generosity to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

That makes sense. So where do we see this in Scripture?

Let's take a look at 1 Corinthians 9:7-14. Paul talks about how to keep ministry going, and he uses several analogies to illustrate the principle of co-labor and reinforce the notion of mediated obligation. Do you want to read the first part of the passage?

Sure. "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop."

Let's take these one at a time and see where the obligation falls in each case. First, a soldier. Who is obligated to pay the soldier's wages?

Well I guess his superiors are, but the actual money is going to come from the government, and in those days that would be the king?

Right. In those days it was the king who ensured his soldiers were paid, but he himself received money through taxation. So when citizens give taxes, they do so out of obligation to the king, who then pays the soldiers their wages. The soldier needs money to keep doing his job, but if he circumvents the king and demands payment from citizens directly for his work, it's wrong. That's called extortion.

Gotcha. Citizens are obligated to give to the king who is obligated to give to the soldiers, but soldiers aren't to take directly from citizens. That makes sense. But what about the person who plants a vineyard? He supplies his own needs right?

Well no, it's more likely that someone else owns the vineyard he's working in. Remember, these are all metaphors for those in service to God. So it's the owner of the vineyard who employs a vinedresser. But part of that employment would involve workers being able to enjoy some of the fruit of their labor. The vine produces grapes for the owner, and the owner is obligated to look after the workers in his field by sharing some of the grapes.

I see. So grapes belong to the owner, and he gives some to the vinedressers. But vinedressers can't just take whatever they want without permission. So the next one where Paul talks about the shepherd would be that the animals are obligated to produce milk for the owner, and the shepherd then gets to share in that?

Exactly, and the same with the ox. The ox doesn't own the grain that it's treading, but the owner of the grain allows for the ox to share in the grain.

Ok, but I guess those last few examples don't seem as clear to me as they could be.

Yeah, I understand. And I think that's why Paul's next example in verses 13 and 14 serves to make it more clear. Here's what he says: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."

So people give offerings out of obligation to God, rather than the Levites.

Yes, exactly. The law of Moses permits the priests to receive colabor–that which is offered to the Lord–but forbids reciprocity.

So, just as the Levites were supported by the Israelites, modern-day pastors are supported by their congregations?

Right. And the key is that the support is provided voluntarily and out of a desire to honor God and support the work of the ministry.

Makes sense.

And another thing I should mention: Paul speaks to this very issue in 2 Corinthians 9:7, where he says, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." This verse emphasizes that giving to support the work of the ministry should be done freely and willingly, without any sense of obligation or pressure.

Yeah, when he says "not under compulsion" that speaks volumes about what we see today. There is so much compulsory payment for ministry or spiritual things that it keeps people from obeying Paul.

Exactly. When we sell Jesus, we force them to give to the ministry of the Body under compulsion. But sadly we've all gotten used to it. It's so normal.

Yeah, lots to think about. I need to talk to more people and raise awareness. Thanks for the conversation.

Thank you for asking good questions!

CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS

Conley Owens

In an alternate universe where Paul and the Corinthians had access to cellular infrastructure and could text each other...

AD 55

Corinthians: So even though we have freedom in Christ—even to eat all kinds of food—we shouldn't use that freedom to eat food sacrificed to idols?
(1 Cor 6:12-13; 8)

Paul: That's right! Consider my own example. I'm free as well. As an apostle, I have a right to financial support, and even particularly from you since your conversion is a result of my ministry. Yet, all the same, I will not take from you any payment.
(1 Cor 9:1-2; Gal 6:6)

Oh, well that's interesting. When we offered you money and you refused it, we had sort of thought it was because you determined you had no right to it. That wasn't the reason?

Definitely not. We both have similar rights here. Just as you have a right to eat and drink all kinds of food, I have a right to the financial support that would allow me to eat and drink.
(1 Cor 9:3-4)

We're trying to put all this together because this is challenging several assumptions. For example, why don't you or Barnabas have wives? Isn't that because you don't have a right to the kind of support that would be needed for a family? Were we wrong about that too?

I don't have a wife because I am gifted for ministry apart from a wife. Your assumption is unwarranted; it should be obvious that I have the right to the kind of support needed by a whole family. I'm an apostle and many of the other apostles are married. For example, Cephas (aka Peter) is married. Naturally, Barnabas and I have a right to be married to believing wives as well.
(1 Cor 7:7; 9:5-6)

Yes, you are an apostle, but you are a special sort of apostle. You and Barnabas do church planting work while most of the others do not. Isn't your work of church planting something special that precludes a right to support? After all, you go to hostile lands where people aren't ready to support the gospel.

Sure, our work is special, but that doesn't change the basic fact that workers should be supported for their work. Soldiers are paid by the king. The vineyard worker gets to enjoy the wine. The shepherd gets to enjoy the milk. Etc. Examples could be multiplied.
(1 Cor 9:7)

With all due respect, after all your talk about the wisdom of God, that seems like a lot of human reasoning.

I don't say these things on my authority, but on God's authority. The law of Moses says the same thing. "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out grain."
(1 Cor 9:8-9)

We're not getting the connection. How does a law about oxen relate to church-planting apostles?

The law isn't written for the sake of oxen, but for the sake of the ones it was given to: God's people. These laws are illustrations of greater truths. The law teaches that the ox should not tread without hope of being fed, and neither should the plowman or the thresher. If an animal produces fruit and receives some of the fruit, men who produce fruit should receive some of the fruit. Knowing that the law is for mankind, the crown of God's creation, this is the certain implication of this law about lowly beasts like oxen.
(1 Cor 9:10)

There seems to be a problem in your analogies since putting in physical labor is naturally rewarded with physical fruit. If you till the ground, a harvest will come from the ground. But does this so directly apply to spiritual work? You have made a spiritual investment and done spiritual labor, how does that relate to having a right to physical things?

Spiritual things are greater in value than physical things. If I have done spiritual work and you can grant that such work should be rewarded by spiritual things, doesn't that necessarily entail a right to lesser, material things?
(1 Cor 9:11)

We see your point, but hopefully you understand why we were confused. We had thought the nature of your ministry must exclude you from such material support since you have so far excluded yourself from such things. Other teachers receive from us, but you don't. We thought you must be different.

Not at all. If others have a right to your support, then Barnabas and I certainly do: even more so since we planted your church!

So now the obvious question: why didn't you take our money?

The reason is simple: In order not to put any obstacles in front of the gospel.
(1 Cor 9:12)

We're not really sure what you mean there; could you explain more?

Think back to what we were just talking about: If you were to eat food sacrificed to idols, you would tempt your brothers into idolatry, leading them away from the truth. If I were to have accepted your payments given to me when I founded the church, I would have done the same!

That seems like a massive non-sequitur. Accepting payment for the work of ministry leads people into idolatry? How? You are going to have to spell that out more.

Consider the priests. They make their living from the sacrifices at the altar. People come and give sacrifices to the Lord, and then he—of those sacrifices—gives to them. They receive meat from the altar and tithes. This is what Scripture means when it says the Lord is their inheritance. They have a right to that particular support, a portion of those things which are sacrificed to the Lord.
(1 Cor 9:12)

All that's very good. The priests promote right worship that way, receiving from what is offered on the altar. But how is the inverse of that true? How would accepting payment tempt people into idolatry?

The priests receive from the Lord, not from men. That is, they receive directly from the Lord and only indirectly from men. Because the Lord is their inheritance, he supplies them. Consider how odd it would be for the people to give directly to the priest rather than to God. If the priests received directly from the people rather than receiving from that which is offered to God, they'd be idolatrously elevating themselves to the level of the Lord. The sacrifices and offerings would be made to man rather than God.
(1 Sam 2:13-17)

Hmm, that's a lot to think about.

Think back to the analogies I gave a second ago. A soldier receives from the people through taxation and the payment of the king. But let's say he receives directly from the people, forcing them to give to him rather than the king—what would he be called?

An extortioner.

Right. And then there's the worker in a field who gets to enjoy the harvest. But let's say he were to take the crop himself without the owner giving it to him—what would he be called?

A thief.

Exactly. So the priest has a right to the inheritance from the Lord, but it would still be wrong to take the sacrifices directly. In fact, it puts an obstacle in the way of the truth, because it suggests that these things are not owed to the Lord. The same is true of the preacher. He has a right to material support, but it would put an obstacle in the way of that gospel if he were to take directly from men rather than the means God has ordained. If he did that it would suggest that the Lord is not owed thanksgiving for the gospel but that man is. And yet, even despite all this, material support remains a right. Those who proclaim the gospel should make their living by the gospel.
(1 Cor 9:14)

OK, we're still processing all this, but we think we get the basics now. You have a right to our support. …Does that mean you now want those funds we originally offered you?

Never! I would rather die! That would deprive me of my ground for boasting.
(1 Cor 9:15)

Your ground for boasting? You said earlier that he who boasts should boast in the Lord, so we assume that's what you're talking about here. In other words, you would only boast about God working through you. Isn't the fact that he works through you to proclaim the gospel sufficient reason for boasting, regardless of whether or not you receive money?
(1 Cor 1:31)

Definitely not. My reason for boasting isn't merely God working through me in some abstract sense. God works through all kinds of people, both evil and good. The thing that distinguishes the righteous from the unrighteous—and gives the righteous a ground for boasting—is whether they're doing God's will.
(1 Cor 9:16)

By "God's will," do you mean doing things in the way that God commands?

Yes, I mean it must be according to his prescribed will. The preacher who has grounds for boasting must be subject to the commands of God. He must preach as a servant rather than as a free man.

What would it look like to preach not as his servant; that is, what would it look like to preach of your own will?

Just as a business owner is free to set his prices, a free agent who proclaims the gospel may charge whatever he wants for the gospel. So what would it look like to preach of one's own will? It would look like one who charges his own set price for the preached message.
(1 Cor 9:17a)

What would it look like to preach as a servant of the Lord; that is, what would it look like to preach of his will?

Just as a clerk must simply administer sales with the goods the business owner has set, one who proclaims the gospel as a servant may only charge the price his master has set. So, it would look like someone who charges the Lord's set price for his message.
(1 Cor 9:17b)

And what is that price?

You must be joking; I hope you already know! The gospel is free! It's offered without money and without price. Do you now see how it would put an obstacle in the way of the gospel to charge for it? We'd be suggesting that the grace of God is not abundant and free. Or worse, we'd be suggesting that mere men like me are the source of that good news.
(Isaiah 55:1)

So if your reward isn't money, what is your reward?

It is to have this honored position as a steward of the gospel. That is why I don't make full use of my right. The one who charges for it places himself elsewhere, outside of such an honorable stewardship. Because he has operated as a free agent, he can't boast in the Lord's work through him, though it may be the case that the Lord has indeed worked through him.
(1 Cor 9:18)

What about Peter and the others? If you are so wise not to accept our funds, are they mistaken then in "making full use of their right in the gospel?"

Consider the context of any other apostle or teacher who has visited you and compare that to my visit. Do you see a difference?

You planted the church and they built on that work.
(1 Cor 3:10)

Do you see how an exchange in money in either context may communicate something different?

Well, when you were here we offered you money in exchange for the work of conversion that had happened in us. Putting together what you've explained here, it would have suggested that you were the source of the gospel or that the gospel is not offered freely by God.

And why did you offer money to the others?

Well, now that we're believers and are more established as a church, we want to work together with faithful teachers who will continue to advance the kingdom here in our city of Corinth.

So do you see the difference? It's not as though I go above and beyond while others are doing the bare minimum, making a full use of their right. Peter has reason to boast as I do; I would never suggest he doesn't. Instead, those teachers who came to you were free to receive your funds because you were not paying them for the gospel. Rather, out of thanksgiving to God, you were applying those funds where you knew that the Lord would be pleased to have them applied. Peter receives from God what had been offered to him, just as the priests do at the altar.

That seems like a pretty big sacrifice that you have been called to.

I am a servant to Christ by being a servant to all. In order to serve the Jews, I took the 39 lashes rather than renounce Judaism. And in order to serve Gentiles, I eat with them and become like them in many ways (something other Jews would never do). I often go hungry for the sake of the gospel, making myself weak for the sake of the weak.
(1 Cor 9:19-22)

So you are imitating others in order to appeal to them? Would you be strong for the strong or rich for the rich?

No, you're missing my point. I'm not imitating others; I'm serving them.

So you weren't being poor because we were poor?

No, and obviously that's not the approach the other apostles took among you either. Besides, you are perhaps the richest church I've planted. You even have some people of noble birth.
(1 Cor 1:26; 4:8)

So you weren't avoiding taking our money as a way of making the faith as easy as possible?

Certainly not. I haven't even started to tell you about the collection for Jerusalem I'm expecting you to give to sacrificially.
(1 Cor 16:1)

And you weren't trying to make the faith as palatable as possible?

That would contradict everything I've said before. The gospel is foolishness to the world. I'm counting on the Spirit to make it wisdom to you rather than my own rhetoric or machinations.
(1 Cor 1:18; 2:4-5)

Let us rephrase that: you weren't at least trying to make the faith as attractive as possible?

Ha, if only that were attractive to you! In all our interactions, it's become quite evident that you're more impressed by wealthy teachers who charge than by poor teachers who don't. If I had wanted to make the gospel attractive to you, I would have charged for it!
(2 Cor 11:7)

Then did you reject funds from us so that you wouldn't feel obligated to speak in a flattering way that compromises on the truth? That is, were you trying to keep us from lording over you as some patrons might?

I suspect no such things of you. In fact, just the opposite is true. You've exhibited a divisive sort of tribalism, claiming various ministers as your own to the exclusion of others, puffing yourselves and dividing the church. I'm far more concerned about your desire to have status under teachers than your desire to have status over them.
(1 Cor 1:12; 2 Cor 11:20)

So you did it all for the sake of the gospel?

Yes, that I might be a partaker of the gospel.
(1 Cor 9:23)

What does that mean? Don't you become a partaker of the gospel just by believing?

I'm not speaking of the gospel itself, but of the proclamation of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. I am a fellow partner in the work of the gospel. This blessing is far greater than whatever material things I might be able to receive in exchange for it.
(*συγκοινωνός* is the word that is often rendered as partaker)

Would it really be a big deal if you were to just take what we had offered?

I'm in a spiritual race here, and that's no way to run it. I don't run aimlessly, and I don't box the air. Rather, I maintain complete self-control, so that I am not disqualified for the prize that awaits faithful proclaimers of the gospel.
(1 Cor 9:23-27)

OK, so you have a right to support, but you won't take a payment that is in exchange for the gospel. What about other kinds of support? Is there some other way we can give to you?

Absolutely! In fact, I look forward to your financial partnership. I'll be coming during the winter before I go to Macedonia in the spring. I'll be anticipating your full support so that I have everything I need for my stay with you and my trip to Macedonia afterward.
(1 Cor 16:5-7)

Roughly a year and a half later, AD 56

Corinthians: Hey Paul, will you be visiting us again soon?

Paul: Alright, well, due to a number of circumstances, I was only able to come for a short visit, but I'm still hoping to have a longer stay with you all, and I'm counting on you to be able to support me in my journey. I'm also hoping to collect what you have pledged to the Jerusalem collection.
(2 Cor 1:16; 9)

Thanks for the heads up. Just so you know, there have been some other apostles here, and their practice doesn't match what you've said. They seem to have their act much more together. They don't miss their planned itineraries and they aren't living in poverty. They are giving us ample opportunity to pay them for their teaching, and frankly, it seems a lot better that way. These new apostles…we think they're super.

Well that's disappointing to hear. Just as I was previously concerned about you saying "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," I suspect you're simply eager to place yourselves under their "glorious" status. But regardless, these apostles that you think are super—these super apostles if you will—are false apostles.

How do you know?

Well, for starters, they're peddlers of God's word. To sell the word demonstrates they have an ulterior motive. If they have ulterior motives, they are not men of sincerity. They have not been commissioned by God. Rather, they are sent out by themselves. This is what I spoke to you about before; this is what it looks like when someone acts as a free agent.
(2 Cor 2:17)

Sure, they charge for their message, but it's only fair. It's clear that this is owed to them. Besides, they were a big part of planting this church.

And now they're taking credit for what the Lord accomplished through me? The Lord commissioned me to do that work, not them. For the record, the Lord actually did that work through me, not through them.
(2 Cor 10:13-18)

Setting that aside for a moment, we think there are other reasons they deserve payment. For example, they're really skilled in their work . You have to hear these guys! They're very excellent speakers!
(2 Cor 10:10; 11:6)

Turn this around and think about what you're saying: "They did excellently in preaching and charging you for the message." Does that mean that I sinned in humbling myself so that you would be exalted? Did I sin in offering you the gospel free of charge?
(2 Cor 11:7)

Well, we wouldn't call it a sin, but it doesn't seem like the smartest thing to do. Just compare results. They've accomplished so much! How else would you get the work done that they have done unless you charged for it?

I've managed to acquire finances just fine without those methods, and I did it all for your sake. I robbed other churches in order to help you! That is, I received support from churches whose financial condition was way worse in order to come to Corinth and plant your church.
(2 Cor 11:8)

Well see, this is the sort of thing we're talking about. That seems so foolish. Why would you do that?

I did it so that I wouldn't have to burden you. In fact, even when I was with you I didn't take anything from you, but those from Macedonia came to me to keep me supplied.
(2 Cor 11:9; Act 18:5)

What do you mean? We have money! It wouldn't be a burden to us.

My point isn't that you would have trouble bearing it *financially*. I know you've got plenty of money. My point is that I should not be laying any financial obligations on you.
(1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7–8)

You just got done telling us about the Jerusalem collection and how we should give cheerfully and even follow the example of the Macedonians of giving beyond our means! We don't know what you're talking about; you've laid some pretty heavy financial obligations on us!
(2 Cor 8:3; 9:7)

You misunderstand; that's not an obligation to me. Such giving to the Jerusalem collection is out of an obligation to the Lord, is it not? It's an offering and a service *to him*.
(Rom 15:16)

So are you saying that you're fine with us giving money to others, but not to you?

No, I'm saying that I'm fine with you giving money *to the Lord*, but not to anyone else. If the money that you give to the Lord supplies the poor in Jerusalem, I rejoice. If some of that money you give to the Lord supplies me, I will be most grateful. But so far, the funds you have offered me have only been *in exchange* for the gospel.

And what's the problem with that again?

I am NOT the source of the gospel. The Lord is! You're not obligated to me but to him.

Well what if we offer it to God, like you said, and in giving it to him, give to you?

That would be excellent, but that can't happen in the context where you have offered previously. You have offered in exchange for the gospel…that's a problem because the Lord has said his gospel is free.

Is this still about your boast that the Lord is working through you as a servant, instead of you operating as a free agent?

Indeed, it is.
(2 Cor 11:10)

That seems selfish.

Being concerned about my godly grounds for boasting is not selfish at all. In fact, it is out of love for you! Otherwise the message of the gospel would be muddied. It would appear to be of human effort, something not given by the grace of God.
(2 Cor 11:11)

Is this just a practice you are trying out? Is it maybe something hyper-contextualized that could change in some months? Are you going to continue on this way?

Absolutely, I'll never stop. I must distinguish myself from these false apostles.
(2 Cor 11:12)

Couldn't you pick some other way of distinguishing yourself? Like wearing a different colored hat or something?

That would not distinguish me as true, only as different. It is necessary that a true teacher not charge for the gospel. I do not charge to make it clear that I am a true teacher.

So once they leave Corinth and you don't need to distinguish yourself anymore, you wouldn't start charging for the gospel then?

True ministers will always need to distinguish themselves from false ministers, and not charging for the gospel is a mark of a true minister.

Hmm, well this all has implications for your next visit. When are you coming here again?

Soon! And I plan on dealing with those false apostles when I get there.
(2 Cor 13:1)

That sounds difficult…having had such a hand in building our church, they are like fathers to us.

They've done no such thing and they are no such thing. As the one commissioned by Christ to first preach the gospel to you, I'm your true spiritual father. And here's the proof: I won't be burdening you then when I'm there.
(2 Cor 12:14a)

How is that proof?

It is the duty of parents to save up for their children, not children for their parents. I do not seek what is yours, but you.
(2 Cor 12:14b)

Even though when you come we may give to the Jerusalem collection and financially support you and your journey?

Correct! Anything done in partnership for the gospel is rendered to the Lord, even if it supplies me.

This money stuff has been quite the headache…for both us and for you! Do you really still think it's a good and helpful policy?

Your souls are at stake! I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.
(2 Cor 12:15a)

We suppose…No offense, but these super apostles are a lot easier to deal with than you can be sometimes!

It's all out of love for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?
(2 Cor 12:15b)

We guess not!

Freely Giving

THE COMMAND TO FREELY GIVE

Jon Here

Two sins that are thoroughly condemned in Scripture are sexual immorality and greed. The church has rightly spent a lot of time and effort debating sexual sin, and we have some clearly defined boundaries as a result. But what about greed? What clearly defined boundaries do we have to stop it seeping into ministry?

While Sunday services all remain free to attend, many other forms of ministry are reserved for paying customers only. Books are sold well above printing costs, modern worship music requires a licence to sing, and even Scripture cannot be freely shared due to the copyright of most modern translations. There seems to effectively be no limit to what you can sell and profit from in Christian ministry, as long as it's done with good intentions.

But Scripture does already provide us with a clearly defined boundary for ministry...

Freely You Have Received, Freely Give

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to minister to Israelite towns, he commanded them to "freely give":

> As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. (Matt 10:7-8)

Let's consider some options for interpreting this command of Jesus:

1. **Is it hyperbole?** No, there is nothing wrong with taking this command literally.
2. **Is it aspirational?** Not this either, as giving the gospel freely is easy to achieve and millions of churches do it every week.
3. **Was it only for the twelve disciples?** If only the twelve had to freely give, then it would be permissible for modern believers to charge for evangelism, which can't possibly be ethical.
4. **Does it only apply to essential ministries (i.e. Sunday services & evangelism)?** This seems to be how most ministries currently interpret this command, but there is little in the passage to suggest it. Rather it's the opposite. Jesus' disciples weren't just to freely proclaim the kingdom, but were also to freely *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons"*. All the blessings that come with the gospel were to be freely given as well.

So this appears to simply be a straightforward command of Jesus, to freely give in the context of gospel ministry.

But the Labourer Deserves His Wages...

If Jesus' command to freely give is to be obeyed, then how do we make sense of Paul's teachings on the right to payment? Let's consider one of the most significant passages regarding this matter:

> This is my defense to those who scrutinize me: Have we no right to food and to drink? Have we no right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or are Barnabas and I the only apostles who must work for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not drink of its milk? (1 Cor 9:3-7)

While this passage (and the whole of 1 Corinthians 9) absolutely does affirm a right to financial support, that is not the take-home message Paul intended.

1. Paul's Point is that He Didn't Make Use of the Right

After giving strong arguments and numerous examples regarding the right to financial support, one would expect to hear Paul say *"and that's why I accepted support while with you."* But instead, Paul follows them with: *"But we have not made use of this right"* (1 Cor 9:12).

So Paul is not promoting the exercising of financial rights but rather modelling an ethic of free giving. He does not argue for the right to financial support to justify himself, but rather to demonstrate restraint for the sake of the gospel.

2. Paul's Intention is to *Limit* the Right

This is not the only section of the letter to talk about "rights". Paul has already discussed how several other "rights" can be misused, namely sexual rights (6:12, 7:3) and food rights (8:9). In fact, the section on finance is embedded within the teaching on food sacrificed to idols (chapters 8-10).

Paul's argument in regard to food sacrificed to idols is that while one may have a right to eat it, that right is not a permissive license to do as you please, rather it can be misused to the detriment of others:

> Be careful, however, that your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. (1 Cor 8:9)

Likewise, Paul at times didn't exercise his right to financial support because it is not a right that is always justified, it too can be misused. After declaring that he didn't make use of his right to support, he gives the clear reason why: *"so that we may not be a hindrance to the gospel of Christ"* (1 Cor 9:12).

This explains why Paul sometimes accepted support (Phil 4:18) and at other times did not, and also why he justifies the other disciples' acceptance of hospitality (1 Cor 9:5)

yet refused it himself (9:18). The right to support can get in the way of the gospel depending on the context and how it is exercised.

3. Paul's Examples Justify Support, Not Commerce

There is no question that ministers have a right to financial support, but these days many are also claiming the right to sell ministry, which includes the right to:

- Forbid access to ministry resources unless paid
- Forbid sharing resources
- Forbid modifying resources
- Forbid translating resources

Are such "rights" justified in Scripture? Let's consider the examples Paul gives in 1 Corithians 9. There are examples of hospitality (1 Cor 9:4-5), an example of being freed from secular work to minister (9:6), an example of being employed as a soldier (9:7), examples of sharing in a harvest (9:7-11), and finally some examples of serving in the temple (9:13-14). All of these examples affirm the right to financial support, but do they affirm a "right" to restrict ministry to only paying customers?

It's important to remember that these are all illustrations of those in service to God. God is the army's king, and the owner of the vineyard and flock. It would be inappropriate for a soldier to charge citizens he protects, rather he is paid by the king to whom taxes are owed. Farm hands tending vines or shepherding a flock are not owed payment from the produce itself, rather their employer is the one to grant them some of the harvest.

But the most significant example is of those who serve in the temple. As it was inappropriate for priests to directly receive payment from those they served (1 Sam 2:12-17), rather they were to receive some of the offerings from God himself (Num 18:8-20). Paul then says *"in the same way"* proclaimers of the gospel should also be supported. That is, by the offerings God's people give to God and not as direct payment for services.

A Right within the Bounds of Freely Giving

So is Paul's teaching in conflict with Jesus' command to "freely give"? We can safely say "no" because the whole point of the passage is that Paul is modelling free giving himself. None of the examples he gives are in conflict with it either.

Conley Owens, in his book *The Dorean Principle*, has very helpfully distinguished between forms of finance that are compatible with freely giving and forms that aren't. In brief, he argues financially supporting ministry is justified whereas *selling* ministry is not. And that is the pattern we see in this passage as well. It's also a pattern that churches have followed for thousands of years, freely providing ministry and financially supporting their ministers as they do so. But the last several decades especially have given rise to a plethora of ministry resources that are sold instead of freely given.

Is it reasonable to imagine Paul or any of his associates charging entrance fees, collecting royalties from books and music, or forbidding the copying or translation of ministry resources? Paul couldn't possibly have intended to endorse these modern practices when justifying the financial support of ministry, especially since copyright law didn't even exist until 1710.

There are many theological and practical matters at play here that need further elaboration and discussion. But such discussion is hard to find, which is one of the first things that needs to change.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/freely-give

DOES JESUS' COMMAND TO "FREELY GIVE" APPLY TODAY?

Conley Owens

In Matthew 10:8, Jesus said "freely you received, freely give." One modern translation says, "you received without paying, give without pay." Many, including myself, have taken this as a clear indication that no minister should ever charge for ministry. More particularly, this command continues to regulate biblical instruction today, forbidding teachers from selling biblical teaching. I do not limit this to sermons, but believe it extends to gospel conferences, seminaries, Christian literature, etc. That is not to say that ministry shouldn't be financially supported. In the next two verses Jesus explains that ministers are to be supported, "a worker is worthy of his food." However, this support is to come through generous partners rather than sales of biblical teaching. In the case of those initial disciples, it was to come through a "worthy house" (Matt 10:11-12) or a "son of peace" (Luke 10:6-7) rather than from hearers in exchange for kingdom proclamation.

Of course, there are many others who have rejected this interpretation, arguing that descriptive passages should not be read prescriptively. And it's true: a narrative passage that contains a command does not necessarily imply that the command applies to us today. In Jeremiah 13:1, the Lord tells Jeremiah to buy a loincloth, yet this does not mean that we should also buy a loincloth. So, if Jesus tells the disciples to freely give, why does this necessarily imply we must freely give? The primary key in biblical interpretation is context; does the context really indicate that this command applies to Christians today?

While narratives are definitionally descriptive, we must be prepared to recognize qualities or patterns that imply prescription. Scripture is full of narrative, and an approach that fails to find implications for the believer today in narrative fails to truly understand its message, especially given the words of 2 Timothy 3:16—"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness." For example, Acts 2:42 says of the early Christians, that "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Given that this passage describes the foundation and character of the fledgling church, the modern church should devote itself to such things as well, even if many aspects of Acts 2—speaking in tongues, mass baptisms, etc.—are not normative for the church today.

We have an obligation to follow Scripture to its logical conclusions. Consider for a moment this obligation in light of Jesus' frequent question, "have you not read?" In speaking to the Sadducees, Jesus argues for the resurrection on the grounds that God said he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that he is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Do those two portions of revelation when combined actually argue for the resurrection? Apart from Jesus' words, I think most people would be ready to say

something like "Maybe, but the safe approach is to not take Scripture too far." But according to Jesus, that's not the case. According to him, refusing to see the implication of Scripture is just as dangerous as taking it too far. Between these two ditches of finding prescriptions where they don't exist and failing to see them where they do, there is no superior ditch. So let us follow Scripture to its logical conclusions, what are often called the "good and necessary consequences" of Scripture. The good and necessary consequence of Matthew 10:8 is not merely that 1st century kingdom proclamation must not be sold, but that 21st century kingdom proclamation must not be sold.

While it may seem a bit backwards, I'd like to start with objections and then afterward build a positive case for the idea that Jesus' command regulates ministry today. That is, I'm going to begin by defending the face value meaning of Matthew 10:8 before positively arguing for it. I'll proceed in this way because I truly believe that the burden of proof lies on those who would reject its face value meaning—that when Jesus said we should "freely give," it means we should "freely give."

Objection 1: "Freely give" only applies to miracles, not preaching or teaching

In full, Matthew 10:8 says, "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give." The rest of the imperatives in this verse are commands to perform miracles. It would seem that the command "freely give" or "give without pay" speaks specifically of miracles, not preaching or other forms of ministry.

For the sake of transparency, it's probably worth mentioning that there are a host of respectable Christian theologians—especially beginning in the 17th century—who have promoted this interpretation that the command to freely give only applies to miracles. However, in my research on this matter, almost every theologian that has taken this position was contending with or trying to distance themselves from Quakers or Anabaptists more generally. Many Anabaptist groups have historically rejected the idea that ministers should have regular financial support, and they often used this verse to promote their rejection of salaried ministers. The orthodox contending with the heterodox found it easy to appeal to the miraculous context. While I support salaried ministry, ministry regularly supported by financial partnership with other believers, I do not believe this to be the best response.

Matthew 10:8 does indeed speak of miracles, but Jesus' instructions to the disciples do not begin there. Rather, he explains their activity in the preceding verse, "As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near'" (Matt 10:7). While it has a different nature than the various commands to perform miracles, it belongs in the same list. The disciples are to freely do all of the above. Just as they are to freely perform miracles, they are to freely proclaim the kingdom of heaven. In other words, they are to freely proclaim the gospel.

Objection 2: "Freely give" only applies to the first mission, not subsequent ones

Many have stated that this command of Christ is only for the first mission of the disciples.

One simple response is that this is not the only mission where Jesus instructs his disciples to freely give. At the end of the gospels, he sends out his disciples and presses this command even further. Let me explain by way of comparison. At their first mission, in Matthew 10:9-10, Jesus said,

> Do not carry any gold or silver or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics or sandals or a staff, for the laborer deserves his food.

In other words, while he said they shouldn't charge for their message, he made provisions for their support, saying, "Take no money bag." Later on, when Jesus sends out the disciples a final time in Luke 22:35-36, Jesus says,

> Then Jesus asked them, "When I sent you out without purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they answered. "Now, however," he told them, "the one with a purse should take it, and likewise a bag; and the one without a sword should sell his cloak and buy one.

In other words, while he does not repeat the command not to charge for their ministry, he goes even further by telling them to take a purse. On the first journey, they were not to charge, but they at least were to expect support, not needing a bag of money. When they finally go out, they are not to expect *any* financial assistance, so they need to take money.

Additionally, the first mission is a *prototypical* mission. What I mean is that it is designed to set the example for other missions. We should expect that where there is meaningful overlap with the concerns of subsequent disciples, this mission is particularly designed to establish the pattern for us to follow. When discussing evangelism, how often are we willing to go to this passage and glean all that it has for us? The notion of shaking the dust from our feet, the command to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, the command not to fear man, etc.—these are all commands that pertain to the first mission, yet we recognize them as applying to all subsequent missions. This is because we correctly identify the first mission as the prototypical mission. We acknowledge it as designed to set patterns for all subsequent missions. What distinguishes the command to "freely give" from any other aspect we would be willing to apply to evangelism and biblical teaching today? I would argue that nothing does.

Perhaps one might argue that the surrounding commands like "raise the dead" only apply to the first mission; but I see this as no real rebuttal to the fact that the prototypical mission must set the pattern. The Lord is free to specify some things particular to the first mission, and some to all. The famous Anglican divine Jeremy

Taylor wrote that to say "freely give" only applies to the first mission because the surrounding commands are temporal, is like saying that the Sabbath must still be on Saturday because the other nine commands surrounding the fourth are eternal.[1]

Objection #3: "Freely give" only applies to missions to the lost, not teaching the saved

One might concede that this applies to future missions, but only missions to the lost and not to believers. After all, the disciples were sent to share the good news with those who had not heard it.

Interestingly, Matthew 10 provides the perfect testing ground for this hypothesis since this first mission was *not* only to the lost, strictly speaking. In verse 6, Jesus said, "Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." It might be easy to focus on the notion of the "lost sheep", but the fact of the matter is that these were the visible people of God. They were the people who had been entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom 3:2). They were the people who had heard the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham according to Galatians 3:8. Undoubtedly, many of these people trusted in the coming Messiah and were the faithful ones the New Testament regards as awaiting the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25). Given that many in Israel were believers, this command most certainly applies to teaching believers as well.

Objection #4: "Freely give" only applies to the gospel, not all biblical teaching

Fourth and finally, one may object that this command is only for the gospel, not for other biblical teaching. I hope that my response here satisfies anything not covered in any of the previous objections.

All biblical instruction, if rightly understood, is not merely distantly related to the gospel, but directly connected. Consider that in 1 Corinthians 2:2 Paul says that he decided to know nothing among the Corinthians except Christ and him crucified, yet in Acts 20:26-27 he says that if he neglected any of the counsel of God, blood would be on his hands. Did Paul stick to only a handful of "gospel passages," or did he preach the whole counsel to the Corinthians? It must have been the latter. If that's the case, then the whole counsel of God regards Christ and him crucified. It would be improper to so distinguish the gospel and other biblical teaching such that we could charge for one but not for the other.

Consider also Colossians 1:25, where Paul says that he became a minister to make the word of God fully known. In Colossians 1:27, he describes how he makes the word fully known: by proclaiming Christ. And in the next chapter, he plainly declares that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. In other words, to make any part of Scripture fully known is to declare Christ from the Word.

1. Taylor, Jeremy, Ductor Dubitantium, 541-542.

Even Jesus himself explained that all of Scripture is about him and, more particularly, his gospel. Luke 24:44-47 reads,

> Jesus said to them, "These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and in his name repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.

Perhaps you do not come from a theological tradition that is eager to see Christ and the gospel in all of Scripture. If you need further persuasion on this point, please check out the wealth of literature on christocentric hermeneutics (my favorite of the lot is Dennis Johnson's *Him We Proclaim*).

To create a hard distinction between the gospel and other biblical teaching is to essentially commit what I call the milk/meat fallacy, the idea that the gospel is the beginning of Christian instruction, but other, more advanced teaching is needed for the mature believer. However, if you read the texts on milk and meat like Hebrews 6:1-2, it should be apparent that the milk is not the gospel; rather the milk is elemental principles (laying on of hands, washings, the notion of resurrection, etc.) while the meat is the understanding of those things in light of the gospel. That is, the more advanced Christian instruction is, the more directly it is understood in Christ. The gospel is meat, not milk. The entire argument there in Hebrews 6 is that in order to avoid falling away, you must ensure you are saturated in the gospel, the teaching of Christ.

In the end, if we say the gospel is priceless, but further Christian teaching can be offered for a charge, we misunderstand the pervasiveness of the gospel in all of special revelation, and by this, we misunderstand the pricelessness of the Word of God.

Positive Case #1: The motivation to "freely give" is eternal and applies to all biblical wisdom

My handling of objections has probably made much of my positive case, but there are still a few things to be said. First, Jesus provides a motivation to "freely give," and it is one that persists all the way to our generation.

Jesus does not merely say "freely give," but prefaces it with a rationale: "freely you received." This motivation does not apply only to the first disciples; it is still the case that we have freely received. To quote Jeremy Taylor again, "there is in [this command] something that is Spiritual, and of an eternal decency, rectitude and proportion."[2]

This does not only apply to the gospel which has been given to us freely, but to *all special revelation* which has been given to us freely. One might argue that when they teach, they are not offering what they obtained freely, but what they learned over much study and many hours of seminary. However, no true understanding of Scripture is

2. Taylor, Jeremy, Ductor Dubitantium, 542.

possible through merely natural or secular means. Consider the words of 1 Corinthians 2:12-13,

> We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. And this is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Is this not the understanding we are trying to impart? It is not an understanding that is taught naturally, but one that must be taught by the Spirit.

This observation of motivation explains why we are willing to apply other parts of Matthew 10 to Christians today. Why be wise as serpents and innocent as doves? Because we are still sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt 10:16). Why should we anticipate persecution? Because a disciple is still not above his teacher (Matt 10:24). Why should we not fear man? Because man still cannot destroy the soul and we are still of more value than sparrows (Matt 10:28-31). Likewise, why should we freely give? Because the enlightenment we are trying to impart still is not obtained naturally, but supernaturally. Even today in our modern world, the message we have comes from special revelation and the illuminating work of the Spirit.

Positive Case #2: The rest of the New Testament confirms that we ministers must "freely give"

I believe that one of the best pieces of evidence that the command to "freely give" applies broadly to biblical instruction, even in our era, is its confirmation elsewhere in Scripture. These are numerous, and it is beyond the scope of this article to go into all of them, but it is worth listing several here.

> What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not use up my rights in preaching it. (1 Cor 9:18)

> Was it a sin for me to humble myself in order to exalt you, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge (2 Cor 11:7)

> For we are not like so many others, who peddle the word of God. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as men sent from God. (2 Cor 2:17)

> For they went out on behalf of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers for the truth. (3 John 7-8)

Positive Case #3: History confirms that "freely give" was not a temporary ethic

It's worth noting that when Jesus said, "freely you received, freely give," he was not developing an entirely new paradigm for ministry, but largely affirming the pattern of

rabbinical teaching. There is a mountain of scholarly research on rabbinic views of money and ministry at the time of Jesus. Much of it is inconclusive, but scholars generally agree on the fact that there was a fairly strict ethic that regulated what a rabbi could receive, and in what context. In the Talmud, Nedarim 37a.2 offers a paraphrased interpretation of Deuteronomy 4:5: "Just as I teach you for free, without payment, so too you also shall teach for free". Bekhorot 29a.8 likewise interprets Deuteronomy 4:5 as saying "Just as I learned from God for free, so too, you learned from me for free." That same reference goes on to say that even if one paid for their own training, they should still teach for free. To summarize, the fact that there was already a rabbinic ethic that forbade charging for teaching Scripture testifies to the fact that Jesus is offering an ongoing ethic that applies to Christian teaching in general, not merely a one-time ethic or something that only applies to one aspect of the Christian message.

Additionally, the early disciples affirmed the command to freely give as a continuing injunction. The Didache is the oldest known extrabiblical Christian writing in existence, being authored in the first century. As far as the New Testament goes, it likely only incorporates Matthew. It even uses the phrase from Matthew 10:10, "worthy of his food" (Didache 13.1). Chapter 11 of the Didache says "Let every apostle, when he cometh to you, be received as the Lord; but he shall not abide more than a single day, or if there be need, a second likewise; but if he abide three days, he is a false prophet. And when he departeth let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he findeth shelter; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet. [...] And whosoever shall say in the Spirit, Give me silver or anything else, ye shall not listen to him;" (Didache 11.4–6, 12a).

Even later in Christian history, Matthew 10:8 was frequently referred to in battles against simony, the selling of ordinations. Read Gregory the Great, Hus, Wycliffe, or countless others that wrote against simony, and you will see that they almost universally appealed to Matthew 10:8. To argue that this verse applies narrowly to the presentation of the gospel and miracles, but not further Christian ministry in our era is to go against a long history of the interpretation of this verse amid an important theological controversy.

Positive case #4: The nature of the Christian message requires us to "freely give"

Lastly, the presentation of Christian instruction is reflective of the message itself. Because we have freely received, we should freely give. Because special revelation and the salvation that accompanies it has been given freely, it must be offered freely.

Isaiah summarizes what we find all through the very heart of God's revealed character:

> Come, all you who are thirsty,
> come to the waters;
> and you without money,
> come, buy, and eat!

> Come, buy wine and milk
> without money and without cost! (Isa 55:1)

The Bible itself even ends on this same note:

> The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come, and the one who desires the water of life drink freely. (Rev 22:17)

In Matthew 10:8, the disciples offer a message of free grace, and so they offer it freely. We likewise offer a message of free grace, so we should offer it freely as well.

We recognize this in so many areas: we wouldn't charge for sermons; we wouldn't charge for sitting in a pew, and we would frown on those churches in the past who have had pew rents. Why then, would we charge for any Christian teaching?

Let us not fall prey to the sort of sophistry that would see how much we can get away with or how many things we can charge for. Let us simply embrace the command of Matthew 10:8 at face value. Let us truly reflect the radical grace and generosity of our God. Just as we have freely received, let us freely give.

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THE SCOPE OF JESUS' COMMAND TO FREELY GIVE

Jon Here

When Jesus told his disciples to "freely give", what exactly were they to freely give? Just the basic gospel message? Everything they owned?

These words of Jesus are often quoted abstractly, as if they were just a wise saying or something to aspire to. But they do in fact have a clear context, and that context is crucial for determining the scope of this command of Jesus.

The context

Let's closely examine the context, and especially the lead up to Jesus' command:

> **Matthew 9:35-10:10 (Berean Standard Bible)**
> [35]Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. [36]When He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.
> [37]Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. [38]Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest."
> [10:1]And calling His twelve disciples to Him, Jesus gave them authority over unclean spirits, so that they could drive them out and heal every disease and sickness.
> [2-4]These are the names of the twelve apostles [...]
> [5]These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go onto the road of the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. [6]Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. [7]As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' [8]Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. **Freely you have received; freely give.**
> [9]Do not carry any gold or silver or copper in your belts. [10]Take no bag for the road, or second tunic, or sandals, or staff; for the worker is worthy of his provisions.

In this passage[1] we have Jesus doing his ministry, "preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness" (9:35), and then commissioning the twelve disciples to do the same. He gives them the authority to perform miracles (10:1) and tells them to preach and heal just as he has been doing (10:7-8). And straight after doing so he tells them to "freely give" because they have "freely received" (10:8).

We can therefore determine that when Jesus said the disciples had "freely received", he was referring primarily to the gospel message as well as the power to perform

1. See also Mark 6:7–13, Luke 9:1–6, and Luke 10:1-17.

miracles. And likewise, they were to "freely give" the gospel message and perform miracles free of charge. We can helpfully sum this up as "ministry". But ministry can have a broad range of meanings, so it is important to further refine exactly what it should encompass in regard to free giving.

Narrowing the scope

Some will argue that "all of life is ministry" and so Jesus' command could be taken to mean that you can't sell anything, or have to live communally as some of the early disciples did for a time (Acts 4:32). The generous spirit and dedication to the gospel is certainly something we all should learn from, but the difference between Acts 4 and Matthew 10 is that the passage in Acts is descriptive, whereas Jesus' command is prescriptive. It is an imperative (δωρεὰν δότε).

The specific actions Jesus directs his disciples to perform are "preach", "heal/cleanse", "raise the dead", and "drive out demons" (Matt 10:7-8). These are all spiritual activities.

It is important to remember that the function of healings in Jesus' ministry were not simply for him to serve as a doctor, but were a form of gospel proclamation. John describes Jesus' healing of an official's son as "the second sign that Jesus performed" (John 4:54). Jesus did not heal everyone he could see, such as when he healed only one man at a pool full of people with ailments (John 5:1-13). Healings were not just about helping the sick but "so that the works of God would be displayed" (John 9:3). So we should not confuse miraculous healings with medical work today. God does heal through both miracles and doctors, but it is the miracles that are in view in Matthew 10 and not regular healings.

Thus the instructions to preach and to heal are ministerial activities that are spiritual in nature, and Jesus' command should not be broadened beyond that. Ministry should affect all of life, but that doesn't mean the command to freely give does.

Broadening the scope

The real problem is not Jesus' command being interpreted too broadly, rather it is usually interpreted too narrowly, often to the point of making it completely obsolete. Some might attempt to narrow it as follows:

- It only applied to that specific journey
- It only applied to the twelve disciples
- It only applies to evangelism

These arguments all have common problems:

1. The command is in response to "freely receiving", which *is* true of anyone who has received the gospel of God's grace.

2. Paul applied the command to his own ministry (1 Cor 9:18, 2 Cor 11:7), not just the twelve disciples.
3. If the command no longer applies then it is ok to sell the following: prayer, baptism, communion, entry to church, etc. God forbid.

Furthermore, regarding evangelism:

1. Miracles were to be freely given, not just evangelism.
2. Jesus specifically forbid the disciples to go to gentile towns on that particular trip (Matt 10:5), so it wasn't evangelising non-believers but rather discipling existing followers of Yahweh.
3. Jesus was teaching and discipling the twelve for long periods of time as *free ministry*, which is what he was training them up to do as well as "workers of the harvest" (Matt 9:38).

It is therefore right and appropriate to apply this command to all forms of Spirit-empowered ministry (for more on this, see our article: *What Is Christian Ministry?*). This includes preaching, teaching, Scripture, worship music, ministry resources, and anything else that specifically deals with spiritual matters. Importantly noting that those who serve in these ways are to be financially supported in their freely given ministries, just as Jesus' disciples were (Matt 10:10).

Without this command of Jesus, there is nothing to stop Christianity from becoming a commercial enterprise. I really wish that was a warning for the future. It is in fact what many forms of ministry have already become.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/scope

Supporting Ministry

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN MINISTRY?

Andrew Case

When people hear the principle that "ministry should be supported, not sold," they sometimes object by claiming that essentially anything a Christian does can be considered "ministry," so it's impossible to apply the principle. Such is the perspective of "Jane the Free Thinker." Jane believes that there are no guiding principles in Scripture regarding money and ministry because "everything is ministry if it's done as unto the Lord, right? As long as we're loving God and our neighbor and seeking to make disciples, all of life is ministry! A janitor can work for the glory of God, and when he does, that's a ministry just as important as preaching. A Christian flipping burgers can be a ministry just as much as praying for someone's healing!" So Jane has concluded that, just as a janitor can demand payment for the work he is doing, a Christian can demand payment for each prayer he prays for someone.

It's common for Christians to hold some form of Jane's view. Therefore, we want to take the time to work towards a careful consideration of the limitations Scripture puts upon what should and should not be considered ministry. We hope to provide a framework that clarifies the concept so that we can discern what true ministry is and know what should not be monetized.

In this article we will see that while Christians should glorify God in all aspects of life, not all work can be classified as ministry. We'll look at how misinterpretations of biblical passages often lead to the misconception that "everything is ministry." From a careful examination of Scripture we'll show that Christian ministry should be understood as *Spirit-empowered service specifically and directly for the edification of the Body of Christ*. To add further clarity, we've included a section of affirmations and denials at the end.

Note that the goal here is not to do a formal lexical study of the word "ministry" as though it were consistently invested with a technical definition throughout Scripture. Rather, our task is to answer the questions: "Are there religious activities done in the service of God which Scripture particularly regulates or sets apart as holy? And if so, what are they?" This also means that we won't be seeking some formulaic or synthetically simplified approach to Christian ministry, but rather lay the groundwork for wise evaluation.

This article spends considerable space at the beginning tracing the different reasons for confusion around the meaning of ministry. For those who aren't interested in this lengthy background, it's recommended that you skip to one of the following sections:

- *The Roots of the Concept in Scripture*
- *A Working Definition*
- *Application*

The Challenge of Balance

One of the most difficult challenges in the Christian life is the task of *maintaining biblical balance*. The history of the Church has been marked by a tendency to extremes, swinging from one end of a spectrum to the other and seldom finding a healthy equilibrium. This is one of the reasons why debates about sacred vs. secular have often ended in confusion and misunderstanding. Conflation and misplaced generalizations often cloud this topic, which is one that requires nuance, wisdom, and careful distinctions that aren't always quick and simple. As someone aptly said, "Americans don't like to fast and pray, they like to pray fast." This propensity to rush and oversimplify is what we seek to avoid as we think assiduously and search the scriptures for answers to the important questions of what should be considered ministry, which is something traditionally considered sacred.

Background

At the root of some of the confusion about ministry is a lack of clarity regarding the biblical distinction between the sacred and secular. Scripture differentiates between holy and common things (Lev 10:10, Ezek 22:26). However, some authors tend to downplay or understate this biblical distinction while rightly emphasizing the integration of faith in all of life and doing everything for God's glory.[1] The challenge lies in balancing the recognition of traditionally sacred vocations and activities with the understanding that all work can be done to honor God, while maintaining the scriptural differentiation between holy and common.

Another factor that contributes to the confusion about what constitutes ministry is the doctrine of *the priesthood of all believers* (1 Pet 2:9, Isa 61:6, Eph 3:12, Rev 5:10). This uniquely protestant belief might understandably blur traditional differentiations, suggesting that every Christian's career is potentially sacred. In an article titled "What the 'Priesthood of All Believers' Means for Your Work" the author writes:

> How many of us feel our work is not "spiritual" enough or doesn't matter in God's grand design? Understanding this concept of a "priesthood of all believers" can help us see how all our vocations bear great importance. The priesthood of all believers is an important biblical idea that has great implications for our personal spirituality, our public life in the church and the world, and our work....
>
> When Martin Luther referred to the priesthood of all believers, he was maintaining that the plowboy and the milkmaid could do priestly work. In fact, their plowing and milking was priestly work. There was no hierarchy in which the priesthood was a "vocation" and milking the cow was not. Both were tasks that God called his followers to do, each according to their gifts.[2]

Here we can see that oversimplifications and misapplications of the priesthood of all believers can lead to a belief that *all vocations are categorically the same as priesthood*,[3] pro-

1. See, for example: John Mark Comer, *There's No Difference Between 'Spiritual' and 'Secular'*, June 16, 2021.
2. Dr. Art Lindsley, *What the 'Priesthood of All Believers' Means for Your Work.*

vided they are carried out by Christians for God's glory. Just because all believers now function as priests (offering spiritual sacrifices to God) does not mean all of our activities are priestly. The author references a saying attributed to Luther, but provides no source.[4] In other works of Luther it is clear that his primary concern is not the spiritual nature of vocations but rather the spiritual nature of all believers.[5]

A third factor that might muddy the waters of what ministry truly is and blur the lines between spiritual work and secular work is the example of Jesus. Jesus often broke traditional boundaries by interacting with people and in places considered taboo, secular, or unclean by religious leaders of his time (Matt 8:2-3, 12:11-13, Mark 2:15-17, 23, John 6:54). His teachings on the Sabbath might seem to some like a dismantling of sacred distinctions (Mark 2:27). And some may interpret his attack on the Pharisees in Matthew 23 as a dismissal of the idea that "doing ministry" is somehow distinct from anything that results in doing justice, and showing mercy and faithfulness (Matt 23:23).

Challenging Passages

Misconceptions or misapplications like the ones mentioned above tend to revolve around a small handful of biblical passages. Let's look at each of these passages in turn, see how their misuse might hinder clear thinking about ministry, and offer a more accurate perspective.

1 Corinthians 12:28

> "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues."

This verse lists various roles and gifts within the Christian community that are deemed essential for the functioning and edification of the church. For many modern readers "administrating" (κυβερνήσεις, "governments" or "leaders" in other translations) might be assumed to refer to administrative work *in general* as we see it in the business world. Therefore, some people might presume that all administrative roles, even those outside the Church, can be considered ministries (provided they are carried out by Christians).

However, in the context of 1 Corinthians 12, Paul is discussing gifts within the framework of the Church's needs and the edification of fellow believers. He is not

3. Here we are not using the word "priesthood" in the sense of the Roman Catholic conception, but always in the protestant sense of the "priesthood of all believers," wherein all Christians have direct access to God through faith in Christ, not mediated through a human priest.

4. The source could not be found after an extensive search, and there exists a strong possibility that Luther is being misquoted.

offering a broad and general definition of all administrative work as the exercising of a spiritual gift. Although the word κυβέρνησις only occurs here in the New Testament, we see it three times in the Septuagint where it clearly has the sense of giving "guidance." Here it means "acts of guidance" both to the individual and to the community of believers,[6] specifically in terms of the organizational and leadership abilities bestowed by the Holy Spirit to certain individuals to aid in church governance. This is different from general administrative skills that can be learned and applied in various secular professions.

Colossians 3:23-24

> "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

These verses are addressed to believing slaves, encouraging them to approach all their work as a service to Christ. As King writes, "People are the immediate object of their service, but not the ultimate object. It means not to work like those who are working merely for men.... They are to work as if their one employer were the Lord."[7] This directive to work "with all your heart" as unto the Lord might lead some to the conclusion that every form of work, no matter how mundane or secular it may be, can be a form of *ministry* if done in the right spirit.

The apostle Paul's instruction here is part of a broader exhortation to live a new life in Christ, which involves putting off the old self and embracing new attitudes and behaviors that honor God (Col 3:1-17). It is about the attitude and quality with which one should approach all labor, rather than designating everything as ministry.

Again, this passage primarily addresses work ethic rather than defining what constitutes ministry. The main purpose is to encourage Christian slaves to perform their secular duties with the same commitment and dedication they might offer in explicitly spiritual roles. While all work done in a manner that honors God can have spiritual significance, not all work directly edifies the Church or advances the gospel. As we will see below, ministry work usually has the direct goal of building up the body of Christ. For example, a job in a call center for an insurance company might be performed with integrity and as unto the Lord, but its primary aim is not spiritual teaching or the strengthening of the Church. This differs from work specifically structured around holistically nurturing a community of believers.

5. An Open Letter to The Christian Nobility – "Therefore, just as those who are now called 'spiritual' – priests, bishops or popes – are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the Word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office, so it is with the temporal authorities, – they bear sword and rod with which to punish the evil and to protect die good. A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work or office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all the members of the body serve one another."

6. Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 10–16*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2008).

7. Martha King, *An Exegetical Summary of Colossians,* 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2008).

Romans 12:1

> "I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."

Paul's call to present one's body as a "living sacrifice" is usually understood to mean that all of life should be worship. In other words, it should encompass all aspects of a believer's life, including everyday activities; worship is not confined only to liturgical or ecclesiastical settings. This could be further construed as indicating that the boundaries between sacred worship activities and secular daily activities are nonexistent or negligible at best. Let's look at the passage in detail and evaluate whether it's legitimate to conclude from it that "everything is ministry because all of life should be worship."

The consensus among commentators is that here the "body" represents the whole person. "It represents the person in his corporeal and concrete living in this world. It is a synecdoche."[8] As Moo writes, "Christians offer no bloody sacrifice on an altar; but they offer 'spiritual sacrifices' (1 Pet 2:5), such as the 'sacrifice of praise to God, which is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name' (Heb 13:15)… Paul probably intends to refer to the entire person, with special emphasis on that person's interaction with the world."[9]

Moo concludes that, "Regular meetings together of Christians for praise and mutual edification are appropriate and, indeed, commanded in Scripture. And what happens at these meetings is certainly 'worship.' But such special times of corporate worship are only one aspect of the continual worship that each of us is to offer the Lord in the sacrifice of our bodies day by day."[10]

So does living a life of worship equate to living a life of ministry? And does worshiping God during everyday situations mean that those situations are converted to ministry? No. Worship is the act of ascribing worth, reverence, and adoration to God—it is honoring God.[11] Ministry, on the other hand, as we will define it below, is Spirit-empowered service specifically and directly for the edification of the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-13). Acts of ministry can certainly be considered worshipful, since they honor God, but not all worship can be considered ministry because much of it is primarily oriented *vertically* toward God to express devotion and honor to him, rather than horizontally towards the edification of fellow believers. By way of illustration, oranges are a kind

8. David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of Romans 9–16* (Dallas: SIL International, 2009).

9. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

10. An alternative interpretation is that Romans 12:1 is primarily focused on sexual purity, as referenced earlier in Romans 1:24, 6:13, 6:19, 7:5, 8:13. These passages collectively emphasize the importance of presenting one's literal body as pure and untainted by sin. While the broader context of Romans does address the overarching theme of resisting sinful desires in general, the specific call to offer one's body as a living sacrifice seems particularly focused on maintaining purity. This interpretation is supported by Romans 6:13, which starkly illustrates the contrast: "Do not present the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and present the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness." Additionally, Romans 6:19 reinforces this theme by reminding believers of their past, when they offered the parts of their body "in slavery to impurity." The persistent call across these references is to a transformation from impurity to sanctity in physical bodies. There may be an overextension of this theme by commentators into broader aspects of life, which only comes later as a culmination of the sexual purity focus.

11. reformedbooksonline.com, *Definitions of Worship*.

of fruit, but not all fruits are oranges. To claim that everything is ministry simply because all aspects of life should be honoring to God would be like claiming that every fruit is an orange. Ministry and worship, while related in a way, serve distinct purposes and do not involve all the same activities. In short, Romans 12:1 does not support the idea that "everything is ministry."

1 Corinthians 10:31

> "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Colossians 3:17

> "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

These verses teach that all actions—even as ordinary as eating and drinking–should be done for God's glory. On the surface they appear to challenge the division between sacred and secular by declaring that all aspects of life can and should reflect one's devotion to God. This broad application might lead to confusion about what constitutes spiritual activity or ministry, since it sanctifies routine and non-spiritual things.

Paul is actually instructing believers to be discerning in everything they do. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 he is not concerned about the contents of their meal, but whether it signifies idol worship. In Colossians 3:17 he is not concerned about vocations, but about honoring Christ in our relationships with others (fellow believers, husbands, wives, children, etc.).

In contrast to the concerns in these verses, ministry often refers to *specific* roles or activities within the Christian community that are designed to *directly* facilitate worship, evangelism, discipleship, and service (see the last two sections above). Again, it's true that all believers should infuse every action with an intention to glorify God, but this is not the same as saying that every God-glorifying action of a believer can subsequently be defined as ministry. Ministerial work certainly must adhere to Paul's command, but Scripture maintains that it is unique. In the end, using these verses to argue that anything can be ministry dilutes the Bible's other teachings on spiritual gifts and ministry roles (as we'll later unpack in Eph 4:11-12). While all work done in God's name can honor him, it does not signify that there is no biblical distinction between secular work and Christian ministry.

A Confusing Semantic Range

Another significant contribution to the confusion around what does and doesn't constitute Christian ministry is the simple fact that few have attempted to define it. There seems to be a common assumption in biblical scholarship that everyone already knows what ministry is, making a definition unnecessary. This absence of a definition has resulted in a general fuzziness around the idea of ministry. It has made it a wax nose

in the minds of many, aggravated further by the fact that the technical dictionary definition of the Greek word διακονία (commonly translated as *ministry/service*) yields a broad semantic domain. For example, the Louw and Nida lexicon gives this general definition: "to render assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature - 'to serve, to render service, to help.'" The premier lexicon of New Testament Greek known as BDAG lists one of the primary definitions as the "performance of a service." Therefore, it's understandable that such a wide range of meaning might lead people to the conclusion that if they are "serving" in any capacity or context, they're doing ministry. But this is an honest mistake.

In his book *Exegetical Fallacies* Carson calls this type of word study fallacy "unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field" or "illegitimate totality transfer." This refers to "the supposition that the meaning of a word in a specific context is much broader than the context itself allows and may bring with it the word's entire semantic range."[12] For instance, one might observe that ἐκκλησία (often translated as "church") is defined most generally by lexicons simply as an "assembly" or "meeting," which is true. But that does not justify the conclusion that any assembly, regardless of beliefs or purpose, should be considered a church. And I would suggest that such lexical totality transfer is exactly what helps derail accurate thinking about what ministry is and is not. As Silva has noted, "It is easy, especially in the course of a sermon, to comment on the broad meaning of a word at the risk of obscuring its specific function in a given text."[13]

Even if we study the word διακονία within the appropriate contexts that will help define *Christian ministry* (as opposed to general service), we may still encounter a relatively wide range of meaning, since service that edifies the Church is not limited to just one or two things, and these things often overlap in different ways. Some activities may be easier to classify as ministry than others, but that does not negate the fact that there is a distinction to be found if sought with wisdom and understanding. For example, in the case with the word ἐκκλησία (assembly/church), there are many groups that call themselves "churches," but that doesn't mean they are all legitimate or true churches. There are other biblical factors to consider carefully, which may be daunting or even confusing. However, any complexity and diversity in the matter shouldn't lead us to throw up our hands and relinquish hope of ever settling on a clear idea of what constitutes a true church. Neither should gray areas cause us to abandon the quest for understanding nor simply label every assembly as a "church." Thus, defining Christian ministry requires the same deliberate and meticulous approach.

Another factor in the general bewilderment is the use of another Greek word (λειτουργία) by the NT authors that sometimes gets translated as "ministry." Hebrews 8:6 is an example of this: "Jesus has received a much more excellent ministry (λειτουργίας), just as the covenant he mediates is better and is founded on better promises." This word, and its corresponding verbal form, λειτουργέω, is used almost exclusively of religious and ritual services, particularly where the temple is concerned.

12. D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Baker, 1996), 60-61.
13. See Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* (Zondervan, 1995), 25-27.

When λειτουργία occurs in Luke 1:23 the NASB translates it as "priestly service," and other translations simply say "service." It very rarely occurs in the NT (Luke 1:23, 1 Cor 9:12, Phil 2:17, 30, Heb 8:6, 9:21), but occurs frequently in the Greek version of the OT.[14]

When we examine various lexicons, λειτουργία and its related forms carry a rich connotation of formal, usually religious service, with roots in public duty and priestly functions. In the NT, particularly in Paul's writings, this term takes on a metaphorical dimension, expanding to encompass various forms of Christian service while retaining its sacred and sacrificial undertones. The following are some of the elements in lexical definitions of the word λειτουργία: "to render special formal service of cultic or ritual responsibilities. Service of a formal or public type, often free of charge and suggestive of special or high status." The LSJ abridged lexicon includes the following range of meaning for the verbal form λειτουργέω: "To serve public offices at one's own cost.... A public duty which the richer citizens discharged at their own expense.... Generally, any service or ministration.... The service or ministry of priests, used primarily in the LXX to refer to the various duties of the Levites.... The word group appears rarely in Paul, always metaphorically of Christian 'service' of some kind, and not restricted to 'ministers.'"

Reference works like the *Biblical Cyclopedia* and the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* choose to focus on this formal office-bearing aspect of ministry when they seek to define it. That is, they narrow their definition to clerical offices held in the local church or over groups of churches, such as elder, pastor, or bishop, and activities related to the liturgy. The *Biblical Cyclopedia* provides the following definition of ministry: "Besides the ordinary applications of this term to the common affairs of life, it is specially used in the Scriptures, chiefly those of the New Testament, to denote a devotion to the interests of God's cause, and, in a technical sense, the work of advancing the Redeemer's kingdom."[15]

The Confusion within English

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ministry as: "The action or an act of religious ministration; the spiritual work or service of a minister, priest, etc. (frequently in *the ministry of the word*)." *Merriam-Webster* offers this definition: "the office, duties, or functions of a minister." This delimits the idea of ministry to something performed by

14. Some samples of its use from the NETS translation of the Septuagint: "And as for me, I have taken your brothers the Levites from the midst of Israel's sons, as a gift given to the Lord, to minister in the ministries of the tent of witness. And you and your sons with you shall maintain your priestly office according to the whole manner of the altar and that which is within the veil. And you shall minister in the ministry as a gift of your priesthood, and the alien who comes near shall die" (Num 18:6-7). "And to the sons of Levi, behold, I have given every tithe in Israel as an allotment for their ministries, as much as they minister in the ministry in the tent of witness" (Num 18:21). "This is not a small thing for you, is it, that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel and brought you to himself to minister in the services of the tent of the Lord and to stand by before the congregation to serve them?" (Num 16:9). "And you shall eat it in every place, you and your households, because this is a wage for you for your ministries in the tent of witness" (Num 18:31). "And they ministered with instruments before the tent of the house of witness until Solomon had built the Lord's house in Jerusalem, and they stood according to their rule at their ministrations" (1 Chron 6:17).

15. James Strong and John McClintock, *The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Haper and Brothers; NY; 1880).

"ministers," leading one to ask what a minister is. The following are several definitions of "minister" in religious contexts from English dictionaries:

1. *Merriam-Webster*: a) one officiating or assisting the officiant in church worship, b) a clergyman or clergywoman especially of a Protestant communion.
2. *Britannica Dictionary*: a person whose job involves leading church services, performing religious ceremonies (such as marriages), and providing spiritual or religious guidance to other people; a member of the clergy in some Protestant churches.
3. *Cambridge*: a religious leader in certain Christian churches.
4. *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*: a trained religious leader in some Christian churches.

From these definitions it's apparent that the English-speaking world mainly thinks of ministers narrowly as officially designated leaders within a Christian church, usually holding a formal office or ordained role (which may imply a focus primarily on the λειτουργία kind of ministry, rather than the more common διακονία kind). Our interest here is not primarily with λειτουργία ministry, which is unanimously recognized as something sacred that should not be sold but rather supported. Instead, we intend to understand the more broad application of διακονία ministry and seek to understand its biblical contours.

Although English dictionary definitions center on formal/liturgical duties performed by church office-bearers, the mainstream use of the word "ministry" within the evangelical world tends to be more broad, often used to describe *parachurch* organizations and other acts of spiritual devotion performed by ordinary Christians. Depending on the context (*in* versus *outside* of a local church), people may unwittingly switch freely in their minds between the function of the clergy and the service of the laity, while being unable to articulate what the difference might be.

Based on the confusion/ambiguity surveyed so far, it comes as no surprise that there are some in the English-speaking church who have taken to defining ministry as they see fit, or as whatever proves most convenient in their situation. The alternative to arbitrary definitions is functional agnosticism. For some Christians it's inconsequential how ministry is defined as long as the basic needs of the church are being met. Now that we've looked at potential root causes of a muddy understanding of ministry, let's turn to a detailed survey of Scripture to find more light and clarity.

The Roots of the Concept of "Ministry" in the Old Testament and Its Development in the New Testament

The concept of ministry has roots in the Old Testament, particularly in the roles and responsibilities of the priesthood. The tribe of Levi was set apart for special service to God, with Aaron and his descendants serving as priests (Exod 28:1). The responsibilities of the priests were multifaceted and included: sacrificial duties (Lev 1-7), temple service (Ex 30:7-8, Lev 24:1-9), teaching and judging (Deut 33:10; 17:8-12), intercessory prayer

(Num 6:22-27), and holy living (Lev 21). The New Testament expands the concept of ministry, building on the Old Covenant's foundations and introducing significant new elements. Several key developments are noteworthy:

1. **Christ as the High Priest**: The New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the ultimate high priest, fulfilling and surpassing the Old Testament priesthood. The letter to the Hebrews emphasizes that Christ's priesthood is superior to that of Aaron because he offered a perfect, once-for-all sacrifice (Heb 7:27). Jesus' role as high priest involves not only intercession and mediation but also the inauguration of a new covenant through his blood (Heb 9:11-15). He serves as our model for ministry, building up believers and strengthening their faith (Col 2:7). It's worth noting that he never sold anything he did and does not require payment for anything he continues to do for his Body.
2. **The Priesthood of All Believers**: A major shift in the New Testament is the concept of the priesthood of all believers. This idea, rooted in passages like 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6, democratizes the priestly functions, suggesting that all Christians are called to minister to one another and to the world. This stands in contrast to the exclusive Levitical priesthood and leads to a broader, more inclusive understanding of ministry.
3. **Apostolic Ministry**: The New Testament introduces the role of the apostles, who were chosen by Christ to spread the gospel and establish the Church (Mark 3:14-15, Acts 1:8). The apostles' ministry involved preaching, teaching, healing, and leading the early Christian communities. Their work also served as a foundational example for subsequent forms of ministry. Again, it's worth pointing out that the apostles never sold their preaching, writing, teaching, or healing.
4. **Variety of Gifts and Roles**: In 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and Romans 12 the apostle Paul emphasizes the diversity of gifts and roles of service within the Christian community. Ministry is not limited to a specific class of individuals but is distributed among all believers according to the gifts given by the Holy Spirit. These gifts reflect a wide array of functions that contribute to the building up of the church.
5. **Servant Leadership**: Jesus' model of servant leadership profoundly shapes the New Testament concept of ministry. Jesus taught that greatness in his kingdom is measured by one's willingness to serve others (Mark 10:42-45). This ethos of service permeates the New Testament's understanding of ministry, emphasizing humility, sacrifice, and love as the hallmarks of true Christian leadership. And Jesus did not charge the disciples for washing their feet, nor did he teach that humble service should be sold.
6. **Pastoral Ministry**: The New Testament also elaborates on pastoral ministry, particularly in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, providing guidelines for the qualifications and responsibilities of church leaders. The role of pastors and elders includes shepherding the flock, teaching sound doctrine, and providing oversight (1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9).

A Key Passage: Ephesians 4:11-16

As Scripture continues to shape our understanding of what ministry is and isn't, let's examine Ephesians 4:11-16, which is one of the most helpful passages for defining ministry.

> And it was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for works of ministry (διακονίας) and to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, as we mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ.
>
> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed about by the waves and carried around by every wind of teaching and by the clever cunning of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Christ himself, who is the head. From him the whole body, fitted and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love through the work of each individual part.

At the beginning of the passage we encounter a list of different roles (apostles, prophets, etc.). Let's consider these roles in turn and see how they "equip the saints for works of ministry." The apostles and prophets are mentioned first as the foundational component in redemptive history necessary for establishing authoritative revelation that can be built upon by all those that follow in the passage.[16] We see this clearly earlier in the letter where Paul writes,

> Therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, built on *the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. (Eph 2:19-20)

Therefore, the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry depends upon the authoritative revelation we have received from the apostles and prophets.

Paul likely mentions "evangelists" next because of their essential role in spreading the good news to people who are yet to hear it (Rom 10:17). Then, as God gathers these new believers into flocks, he raises up "pastors and teachers" who most directly participate in the equipping of the saints for ministry. The essence (but not totality) of the teachers' job is to impart the full "*knowledge* of the Son of God" (Eph 4:13). So the teaching is central and essential to the equipping of the saints, because the ultimate goal is knowledge that will lead to maturity and stability rather than gullible childishness (Eph 4:14). All five of these divine provisions for the Church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) are essential for equipping God's children for ministry (Eph 4:12).

"Equip" (Eph 4:12) carries the connotation of helping supply what is lacking in someone (training, conditioning, or preparing).[17] To be clear, pastors and teachers do not *create* the gifts in other believers, but rather help to shape, guide, sharpen, and

16. John Piper, *Who Are the Ministers in the Church?*, Sep 21, 2021.
17. Glenn Graham. *An Exegetical Summary of Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2008).

nurture them through Bible-saturated instruction. God gives the gifts that enable believers to serve, and pastors and teachers help cultivate them to maturity.

At this point it's helpful to look at 1 Peter 4:10-11:

> As good stewards of the manifold grace of God, each of you should use whatever gift he has received to serve [or *minister to*, διακονοῦντες] one another. If anyone speaks, he should speak as one conveying the words of God. If anyone serves [or *ministers*, διακονεῖ], he should serve with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

This passage shows that believers are only able to minister to others because of the grace of God, and they are expected to be good stewards of that grace. The strength needed to serve does not originate in believers but rather in *God*. It all comes as a gift by God's "manifold grace."

Piper helpfully points out that there are *many* kinds of ministries Christians are empowered and equipped to do. He uses 1 Corinthians 12:5 to support this conclusion: "there are *varieties* of service [or *ministry*, διακονιῶν], but the same Lord." From this he concludes that it would be wrong to make a list of a certain limited number of gifts/ministries that a Christian can engage in. Instead, the saints should be encouraged to "live for others," according to Christ's example in Mark 10:45: "the Son of Man did not come to be served/ministered to, but to serve [*minister*, διακονῆσαι]." Piper concludes by saying, "That's what it means to minister. Find a need and fill it according to your unique and wonderful gifts of God."[18] Later he goes on to flesh out his definition by saying, "The work of the ministry is the work of joining Jesus in humbling ourselves and becoming servants of all other Christians, seeking ways to meet their needs, especially with what we've been equipped with from the teachers."[19]

So, based on the structure of Paul's description in Ephesians 4:12, we can see the following outline:

1. *Preparation*: equipping the saints
2. *Work*: ministry of the saints
3. *Result*: the body of Christ is built up[20]

Therefore, knowing what prepares for ministry and what the result should be helps us develop the contours of a definition. In order to understand this *result* of ministry, we must gain a clear understanding of what it means to "build up" (or "edify", οἰκοδομὴν, 4:12) the body of Christ. The body of Christ is both a corporate and individual reality (1 Cor 12:27). BDAG defines *edification* (οἰκοδομὴν) in this context as "spiritual strength-

18. Ibid.
19. John Piper, *How Do Saints Build the Body?*, Sep 23, 2021.
20. It's important to observe that "the notion of building up or edifying the body had been a major criterion in Paul's evaluation of various ministries (cf. 1 Cor 14:3–5, 12, 26)." Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians. Vol. 42. Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990).

ening." Piper argues that the edification of Christ's body has at least three goals and is distinguished by at least three marks.[21] The goals of edification are to make the Body durable, functional, and beautiful. And edification must be marked by understanding, love, and grace.

Let's unpack each of these marks in turn. First we'll look at 1 Corinthians 14:2-5. As you read it, focus on the repetition/emphasis of *edification*:

> For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries in the Spirit. But he who prophesies speaks to men for their *edification*, encouragement, and comfort. The one who speaks in a tongue *edifies* himself, but the one who prophesies *edifies* the church. I wish that all of you could speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets so that the church may be *edified*.

This passage demonstrates a clear connection between edification and *understanding* (v 2). Edification cannot happen without understanding—comprehending or making sense of the message of truth—which is confirmed by the connection between the *knowledge of God* and the edification of the church in Ephesians 4:12-13.

The second mark of edification is *love*, which Paul demonstrates in Ephesians 4:15-16:

> Instead, speaking the truth in *love*, we will in all things grow up into Christ Himself, who is the head. From Him the whole body, fitted and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and *builds itself up in love* through the work of each individual part.

Speaking the truth in love is part of what it means to do ministry, and this action helps the body grow and build itself up.

The third mark of edification is *grace*, which we can see from Ephesians 4:29: "Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for *building up* the one in need and *bringing grace* to those who listen." First, notice the connection between "talk" and "speaking the truth" earlier in the chapter (Eph 4:15). Much of ministry involves communication, which harmonizes with what is called "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4, see also 2 Cor 12:19). This is why some of the activities that are most obviously classified as ministry are speech-driven or word-focused things like biblical counseling, preaching, and teaching biblical truth (in person or through books). Second, grace is one of the marks of edification because of how it appears in parallel with "building up" in this verse. Grace gives strength (2 Tim 2:1), and it is inextricably intertwined with building up the Church through the work of ministry.[22]

Paul paints a clear picture of ministry as a *spiritual* activity, empowered by the *Spirit* to strengthen other believers *spiritually*. God himself provided the *spiritual* leaders

21. John Piper, *How Do Saints Build the Body?*, Sep 23, 2021.
22. Ibid.

(apostles, prophets, pastors, etc.) to *spiritually* prepare the saints (by revealing and teaching them *spiritual* truths taught by the *Spirit*). 1 Corinthians 2:13 reinforces this idea: "And this is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the *Spirit*, expressing *spiritual* truths in *spiritual* words" (see also 1 Cor 9:11). As ministers, we are called to be conduits of Christ's "*spiritual* blessings" to one another (Eph 1:3). We are even told to address one another with "*spiritual* songs" (Eph 5:19). This spiritual characteristic is important because it helps narrow down what things might qualify as ministry. Occupations such as cashier, truck driver, food service worker, postal worker, or tax preparer would not qualify by this evaluation. They are not primarily spiritual activities given by God, directly designed for the spiritual strengthening of believers. That said, spiritual life is holistic and is affected by the physical condition of the body, as we will discuss below in the section on Acts 6.

A Working Definition

At this point we can venture a simple, working definition of Christian ministry:

Christian ministry is Spirit-empowered service specifically and directly for the edification of the body of Christ.

In other words, ministry is an endeavor to pass on to other Christians the spiritual blessing that we have received from God, which he revealed through his Word, and makes manifest through his Spirit. Because it is Spirit-empowered, it naturally follows that most ministry will be purely spiritual in nature, such as preaching biblical truth or praying for someone. However, some spiritual, Spirit-empowered work will necessarily have physical effects, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, or casting out demons (Matt 10:8). Likewise, while baptism and the administration of the Lord's Supper may be physical acts using physical elements, they are still sacred services representative of spiritual realities. Edifying the body of Christ also extends beyond internal strengthening; it encompasses expanding God's kingdom through evangelism (Eph 4:11-12).

Testing the Definition

1 Corinthians 12

Now that we have a working definition, let's turn to 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 to see how it gives further support to the idea that ministry is something Spirit-empowered for the edification of the Church:

> There are different gifts, but the same Spirit. [5] There are different *ministries*, but the same Lord. [6] There are different ways of working, but the same God works all things in all people. [7] Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for *the common good*. [8] To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing

> between spirits, to another speaking in various tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. [11] All these are *the work* (ἐνεργεῖ) *of one and the same Spirit*, who apportions them to each one as He determines.

Notice that gifts and ministries are in parallel, signifying an overlap or even synonymous relationship. These are given for "the common good" (v 7), that is, for the edification of the body of Christ. Verse 11 is clear that God's Spirit makes these gifts of ministry possible. One translation even uses the word "empowered" ("empowered by one and the same Spirit") to translate ἐνεργεῖ here, which carries the connotation of effecting something, causing it to happen, or producing an outcome. Therefore, this passage contributes further clarity and support to the definition of ministry as something given and enabled by God's Spirit for the common good of his people.

Bezalel

In Exodus 31:1-5 we read about God empowering Bezalel to do works of craftsmanship by his Spirit. Does this mean that any form of craftsmanship could be classified as ministry? Let's look at the passage and think about this question:

> Then Yahweh said to Moses, "See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of craftsmanship, to design artistic works in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut gemstones for settings, and to carve wood, so that he may be a master of every craft."

For context, God has given instructions to Moses for the building of the tabernacle (Exo 25-31), and Bezalel has been chosen to carry out the creation of various important items dedicated to the worship of Yahweh, including the ark of the covenant. "The resulting Tabernacle and equipment were thus to be the undoubted result of a divine-human partnership, but one which left by divine intention no possibility of a human error or willful aberration."[23]

Notice first that Bezalel is not Spirit-empowered with skill for *any* general task requiring brilliant craftsmanship. The purpose is specifically and directly for the edification of a place and creation of elements used to meet with and worship God. Under the New Covenant, the physical tabernacle/temple is no longer the central place of worship. Instead, believers themselves are called the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16). This signifies a shift from a physical building to a spiritual reality where the community of believers collectively forms God's dwelling place. We are called to be a "spiritual house" (1 Pet 2:5) that "builds itself up in love" (Eph 4:16) into something durable, functional, and beautiful. In order to do that, we need to be filled with the same Spirit that filled Bezalel to make the physical house of God into something that reflects God's glory.

Ephesians 2:19-22 explains,

23. John Durham, *Exodus. Vol. 3. Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987).

> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, *grows into a holy temple in the Lord*. In him *you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

Therefore, under the New Covenant, we should not expect to see instances of God's Spirit imparting skill for the building of physical objects and structures, but rather for the spiritual construction of God's Church.

Physical Needs in Acts 6

Orthodox Christianity maintains a holistic view of the value of the spiritual and material/physical.[24] Acts 6 demonstrates that a comprehensive approach to spiritual ministry encompasses both spiritual and practical components. Let's look at it carefully and consider the implications for ministry:

> [1] In those days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Grecian Jews among them began to grumble against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. [2] So the Twelve summoned all the disciples and said, "It is unacceptable for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. [3] Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men confirmed to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will appoint this responsibility to them [4] and will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." [5] This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, as well as Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. [6] They presented these seven to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. [7] So the word of God continued to spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem grew rapidly, and a great number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Here we see several noteworthy things:

1. In this context, the apostles consider it necessary to be "full of the Spirit" in order to manage the distribution of food to believing widows.
2. The men chosen for this work were officially commissioned to do it.
3. The apostles wanted to focus on two other ministries: prayer and preaching the Word of God.

The objection might arise that caring for the physical needs of others does not contribute to the spiritual edification of the body of Christ. Since it is a service that deals in material goods, can it be considered ministry?

The answer is yes, caring for the essential physical needs of the Church should be considered ministry according to the Bible's definition. The first clue is that this work in

24. Contra the ancient heresy of gnosticism which was characterized by a dualistic view of reality, sharply distinguishing between the spiritual (considered good) and the material (considered evil or irrelevant).

Acts 6 is being carried out *by Spirit-empowered believers to other fellow believers*. These men are commissioned to serve the widows who are part of the body of Christ. This makes sense in light of Scripture's view of ministry, which includes using our material goods to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ, which is what we see in 1 John 3:17: "If anyone with earthly possessions sees his brother in need, but withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God abide in him?" This is an outworking of love, by the Spirit. We have other tangible, physical examples of service to fellow believers such as Christ washing the disciples' feet (John 13:15), caring for those in prison (Heb 13:3), famine relief (Acts 11:29), and meeting the needs of the poor (Acts 9:36). This underscores that ministry is not confined to spiritual, non-physical things, although it is primarily spiritual in nature. Compassionate caring for significant physical needs is seen as part of the broader mission to build up the body of Christ. It is something integral to the Church's mission, emphasizing care for the destitute as a reflection of God's love.

This category of ministry has been labeled by some as "mercy ministry." Most Christians agree that this kind of service should never be sold, since it would be self-contradictory to charge the poor for meeting their needs (the reason they can't meet their needs is because *they don't have the money to do so*). The men commissioned to administer the care of impoverished widows in Acts 6 are not described as *selling* them food at a deep discount, etc.[25] While there are secular charities that function like mercy ministries, these are not in view for this discussion since they are outside the body of Christ.

Again, a holistic view of spiritual ministry includes practical elements. By addressing the physical needs of the community, the Church embodies the love of Christ and fosters unity and growth among believers. However, it should be emphasized that this inclusion of the physical does not necessitate the conclusion that "anything or everything is ministry." Instead, it means that Spirit-empowered service directly intended for the edification of the Body can include provision for the destitute among the saints.[26]

Christian Ministry as Stewardship

Stewardship, as we see it in Scripture, refers to the management of resources, gifts, and responsibilities that God has entrusted to his children. A steward is not the source or owner of the things he is stewarding. Just as the mailman does not own the mail that was entrusted to him, we do not own the grace and truth that has been given freely to us. It is profoundly important to understand that "doing ministry" is passing on *God's* grace as we do *God's* work. God is the owner and source of the spiritual power,

25. While God also expects believers to show mercy and compassion to the destitute outside the Church (Isaiah 1:17, Amos 5:24, Luke 10:25-37), mercy ministry, as it was practiced by the apostles and Early Church, was *focused* on expressing the communion of the saints by contributing to the needs *of the saints*. For more on this: William H. Smith, *Mercy Ministries: Two Perspectives*, May 3, 2007.

26. For example, an unacceptable conclusion would be that opening a burger chain is ministry because it involves serving food, since the apostles served food to destitute widows among the burgeoning early church. Giving away food to the destitute in the body of Christ is very different from *selling* food to those who are not destitute outside the body of Christ.

motivation, and wisdom to carry out the edification of his Church, and it's our job as stewards to carry out that work in a way that is in the *owner's* best interests. From beginning to end, Scripture repeatedly emphasizes God's ownership of everything (Deut 10:14, 1 Chron 29:11-12, Job 41:11, Ps 24:1-2, Ps 50:10-12, Hag 2:8, 1 Cor 6:19-20). Stewardship is living with the acute awareness that we are managers, not owners; we are caretakers of that which is God's, which he has entrusted to us for this brief season here on earth. How we handle ministry demonstrates who we *really* believe is the true owner and source of the work—God or us.[27]

Ultimately, ministry is an act of stewardship. Believers are entrusted with spiritual gifts and opportunities to serve. These gifts are not given merely for personal benefit. They are not given for financial gain. Rather, they're given for the common good and edification of the Body (1 Cor 12:7). We are called to faithfully and responsibly use Spirit-empowered abilities, wisdom, and knowledge to serve each other and build each other up.

Several passages in the New Testament highlight the stewardship aspect of ministry. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good *stewards* of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." Paul also identifies himself and his fellow workers as stewards of God's mysteries, underlining the requirement of faithfulness in managing the responsibilities entrusted to them (1 Cor 4:1-2). And in Ephesians 3:2 we read, "...you have heard of the *stewardship* of God's grace that was given to me for you." Here Paul indicates that his apostolic ministry is a responsibility entrusted to him for the benefit of others. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 9:17, Paul reinforces this concept by saying, "If my preaching is voluntary, I have a reward. But if it is not voluntary, I am still entrusted with a stewardship (οἰκονομίαν)." "Paul compares his work as an apostle to a steward who has been given the responsibility to manage a household. As such, he is entitled to no pay. The οἰκονόμοι were household slaves. The master did not ask for the slave's consent when he gave him a responsibility."[28] Since Paul is fulfilling his responsibility *voluntarily/willingly*, he expects a reward. "What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge...." (1 Cor 9:18). Preaching without charge is itself his reward.

> If Paul were to receive payment, his reward would be the payment itself. He would operate as a voluntary laborer setting his own fees, so he would no longer function as a servant bound by his master (cf. John 7:18). Thus, accepting financial reward would forfeit the greater reward: godly stewardship.[29]

As we've written about at length elsewhere,[30] Jesus provided one of the consummate examples of what ministry should look like when stewarded properly. As he sent out his

27. Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* (Tyndale House, 2003), 152.
28. Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 1–9* (Dallas: SIL International, 2008).
29. Conley Owens, *The Dorean Principle,* "The Reward of Servanthood".

disciples to do ministry he said, "You received without paying; give without pay" (Matt 10:8). This directive underscores the principle that spiritual gifts and service, which are received from and empowered by God freely, should also be *given freely*. The disciples were to offer their ministry without expecting financial compensation from those to whom they ministered, modeling the grace they had received from God. Ministry, as a form of stewardship of God's free grace, carries the fundamental responsibility of reflecting God's generosity and grace in how we serve others. And charging for Spirit-empowered service contradicts the principle that what has been freely received should be freely given.

When we think about how ministry should be done, we must ask ourselves, "Am I acting as if I were the owner, source, and power behind this work, or am I acting as the Lord's trustee[31]? Am I passing it along as freely as it was given to me, or am I inventing reasons to get something back for it in exchange?"

Illustration

Consider a scenario to help illustrate what a *betrayal* of ministerial stewardship would look like. This example emphasizes that stewardship involves managing and distributing gifts and resources in alignment with the *giver's* intentions, particularly when those gifts are meant to be free. Selling what was entrusted freely not only betrays the confidence of the giver but also undermines the intended blessing for others. In Christian ministry this principle is crucial, ensuring that the grace and gifts received from God for the common good are shared generously and without cost, reflecting the nature of God's free grace and intention.

The Financial Manager

Alex was hired as a financial manager by Mr. G, a philanthropic billionaire. Mr. G tasked Alex with managing a fund dedicated to providing free educational resources to underprivileged communities. Mr. G emphasized that these resources were gifts to be distributed freely, and that Alex was merely a steward, not the owner of the fund.

Initially, Alex diligently managed the fund, ensuring resources reached intended recipients without charge. However, over time, he began to deviate from Mr. G's desires. Alex started charging small fees for the educational materials, claiming it would "increase perceived value." He kept these fees for himself because he felt that his labor for Mr. G was worth more than he was getting paid. He also diverted funds to flashier but less impactful projects that brought him personal recognition.

One morning, Alex received a message from Mr. G: "Your service is terminated. You've forgotten these gifts were meant to be free, and that they are mine."

30. See *The Dorean Principle*, "The Command to Freely Give," "Does Jesus' Command to 'Freely Give' Apply Today?"

31. A person to whom legal title to property is entrusted to use for another's benefit.

No Easy Formulas

Arriving at more biblically informed contours of what constitutes ministry does not necessarily mean that it will always be easy to apply the definition to every situation. The Bible is not a book of simplified formulas for modern life, but rather the source of divine wisdom for navigating the diverse complexities that present themselves to each new generation. There will be an increased amount of ambiguity the more an activity is disconnected from the local church. And all of this is aggravated by the fact that for years Christians have labeled activities as ministries arbitrarily or simply because they have a gospel-sharing moment at the end (even if it's a sports tournament that costs $75 per person to enter).

Part of the discernment process involves another angle of evaluation: we should ask ourselves, "If I'm charging money for this and treating it like any other business, should I be calling it a ministry?" It's wonderful to have businesses that glorify God and benefit the Church in some way, but is it necessary to call them ministries? Our goal should be to respect things that are specifically and directly set apart for God's purposes as distinct from other worldly works of service. The authors of the New Testament used particular language to describe ministry, and this article has sought to honor and show deference to their choice of some words (διακονία and λειτουργία) and not others. Paul could have easily used the word "merchants" (ἔμπορος, cf Matt 13:45) to describe ministers if he had wanted to associate Christian service with commerce. But he intentionally used other language and went out of his way to clarify that his ministry was not to be confused with making merchandise (καπηλεύοντες) of God's Word (2 Cor 2:17). The biblical writers also could have used a word like "business" (πραγματεύομαι or ἐργασία, cf Acts 19:25, Luke 19:13) to describe the exercise of spiritual gifts, but they didn't. The choice of words and their context is meaningful, and this intentionality on the part of the biblical authors should be respected, while at the same time not turned into a synthetic formula.

Application

If Christian ministry must be done in a way that honors the Giver of grace, and is Spirit-empowered service specifically and directly for the edification of the body of Christ, how do we apply this litmus test to find out what should not be sold? Let's look at some examples, beginning with obvious ones and moving to less obvious ones. This way of evaluating diverse situations is not a formula, but rather a basic starting point for a process of discernment that may require much prayer, wise counsel, careful deliberation, and a heart ready to err on the side of freely giving.

Teaching a Bible Study

Let's suppose you're leading a group in studying the Bible, providing insights, explanations, and facilitating discussion.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: Teaching the Bible relies on the Holy Spirit for understanding and imparting God's truth (John 14:26, 1 Cor 2:13).
- *Edification of the Body*: Bible studies build up the faith, knowledge, and maturity of believers (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Conclusion: Leading a Bible study is ministry. And Ephesians 4:11-12 lists teaching as a gift given for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry and building up the body of Christ. Faithful stewardship requires freely giving the teaching so that God is honored as the source of the free grace provided to perform this work.

Working as a Stockbroker

Let's suppose you work in the buying and selling of stocks and other securities on behalf of clients.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: The profession focuses on financial transactions and market strategies, not Spirit-led service.
- *Edification of the Body*: The goal is financial growth for diverse clients, and does not have the primary purpose of directly edifying the Church.

This is not to say that the Spirit isn't at work in the believer as he does these tasks; we are commanded to walk in the Spirit. Likewise, this is not to say that there isn't some secondary sense in which the man's work edifies the Church. We are to work in order to bless other believers (Eph 4:28). However, edification is not what is *directly* accomplished by these activities, and God has not assured us of any special work of the Spirit as he has with other things like biblical teaching.

Conclusion: While the Bible speaks to principles of stewardship and investment (Matt 25:14-30), working as a stockbroker is not ministry.

Biblical Counseling

Let's suppose that you provide counseling services based on Scripture to help individuals find healing from non-medical problems.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: Biblical counseling operates by and seeks the truth, guidance, wisdom, and healing power from the Holy Spirit (James 1:5, 1 Cor 12:8).
- *Edification of the Body*: Biblical counseling aims to restore believers to spiritual health and strengthen their walk with God, and lead unbelievers to conversion (Eph 4:11-16, Gal 6:1-2).

Conclusion: Yes, biblical counseling is ministry.

Hosting a Cooking Show

Let's suppose you produce videos focused on cooking techniques and recipes.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: A cooking show can provide enjoyment and education, but it is not inherently a Spirit-led activity for serving the Church.
- *Edification of the Body*: The primary purpose is entertainment and culinary instruction, not spiritual edification.

Conclusion: While the Bible acknowledges the importance and value of food and hospitality (Rom 12:13), hosting a cooking show is not ministry.

Worship Leading

Let's suppose you lead your local congregation in worship through music and singing.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: Leading worship (and worship in general) is not merely a musical experience, but rather a response to God grounded in the sacrificial work of Christ, and enabled by his Spirit (John 4:23–24, Eph 2:18, Phil 3:3).
- *Edification of the Body*: Worship constitutes a central activity of the Church (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16), brings the congregation into the presence of God, and encourages communal spiritual growth (Ps 22:3).

Conclusion: Worship leading is ministry.

Running a Christian School

Let's suppose you're the principal of a private high school that provides academic education with a biblical worldview and operates according to biblical principles.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: While there may be some classes on purely spiritual matters in a Christian high school (such as a Bible course), most of the subjects would not necessarily be categorized as requiring the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (such as mathematics, English literature, foreign language, chemistry, physics, drama, etc.). Because of this characteristic, leadership of the high school would not be considered by some people to be something that relies directly on the power of the Spirit to be carried out. Others may argue that such a position is similar to the situation in Acts 6, and should be treated as dependent on the Spirit for wise and competent leadership, especially since some Christian high schools incorporate a strong emphasis on prayer, biblical teaching, and spiritual formation.
- *Edification of the Body*: On the one hand, it could be argued that equipping young people with academic knowledge, a biblical worldview, and spiritual maturity

contributes significantly to the edification of the Church. On the other hand, it could be argued that the purpose of a high school education is not *primarily* or *directly* the edification of the Church. Any edification might be considered a secondary benefit, but not necessarily the central, essential, or integral goal or intention. In short, the edification is incidental.

Conclusion: Running a Christian high school is not as easy to categorize as things like those already discussed above. To some it may be an obvious yes or an obvious no. Others might suggest distinguishing biblical classes from ordinary classes and not including them in school fees. This calls for wisdom, humility, and a willingness to submit the dilemma before God and ask for direction. We must ask, "Am I grasping for any excuse to treat this Christian high school like a business and charge tuition like the rest of the world does, or am I genuinely open to the leading of God to operate the school purely on donations if that's what he calls me to do?" Each school will be different in its focus and stated mission, so this is more of a case-by-case situation that requires considerable prudence and a disposition to err on the side of grace and freely giving. Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35), so we must trust that he will reward those who give freely for the glory of God, whether or not God himself would label their service as ministry. At the judgment, our Father will not be waiting to slap the wrists of those who gave away things that God would have permitted to be sold. Rather, he will be eager to say, "Well done!" to those who reflected his own radical generosity (John 3:16).

The Church Plumber

Let's suppose you're a Christian plumber and you help fix your church's plumbing.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: The skills, knowledge, and ability necessary to fix plumbing problems do not require the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
- *Edification of the Body*: Although this service to the church is helpful and necessary, it is not something that *specifically* and *directly* contributes to the spiritual strengthening of the Body. One might argue that it frees up time for the leadership to focus on prayer and other things which build up the Body, but this is an indirect or incidental result. Again, the primary purpose of plumbing work is not the edification of the Church, even though it is good and can glorify God. Now suppose you, as the plumber, say, "But I fixed my church's plumbing for free with the intention of blessing my brothers and sisters in Christ." That is admirable and honoring to God. As we've seen above, many things can and should be done to bless others and honor God, but that does not equate them with the biblical definition of ministry.

Conclusion: Plumbing work, even if done for a church, is not ministry, but it might be classified as an act of colabor if done for free to help and bless the church.

The Church Web Designer

Let's suppose you're a Christian web developer who volunteers to set up your church's website.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: The skills, knowledge, and ability necessary to write the code and use design tools to create a website do not require the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This may be likened to the person who builds a pulpit for the preaching of the Word. It's a functional and practical aid, and could be seen as an act of colabor, but is not Spirit-empowered. That said, if you also wrote God-centered, Bible-saturated, Christ-exalting content for the website, then that would certainly qualify as Spirit-empowered service.
- *Edification of the Body*: Like the plumber example, this service to the church is helpful and commendable, but it's not something that *specifically* and *directly* contributes to the spiritual strengthening of the Body. Any edification that results is indirect or incidental. But in the case that you wrote biblical content for it, then the edification of the church would be direct and specifically intended by that work.

Conclusion: Designing a website for your church (without creating biblical-instruction content for it) should not necessarily be understood as ministry.

The Tract Printer

Let's suppose you have a print shop that prints tracts and other Christian literature on occasion in addition to other non-Christian content. In other words, Christians sometimes come to your shop with biblical content that they or others have written, and they want to have it reproduced in physical form.

Litmus Test:

- *Spirit-empowered service*: Like the example of the web designer above, doing the physical work of printing materials is not primarily a spiritual task requiring the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
- *Edification of the Body*: Once again, like the plumber example, this service to the church is helpful and commendable, but it is not something that *specifically* and *directly* contributes to the spiritual strengthening of the Body. The content of the tracts may be edifying, but the print shop is working with paper and ink, not producing the content of the tracts, and a secular printer could also fulfill this role.

Conclusion: Running a print shop that sometimes reproduces physical copies of biblical content should not necessarily be understood as ministry, even though it is wonderfully strategic for the edification of the Church.

Looking for Loopholes

The Christian life is full of gray areas, and God calls us to pursue wisdom and maturity so that we might navigate these areas in a way that honors him. There are a thousand decisions we must make that are not represented explicitly in Scripture. When we face gray areas around what does and doesn't constitute ministry, (and therefore what should not be sold but rather supported) the temptation arises to dismiss the dorean principle of freely giving in Matthew 10:8. Like some of the situations above, the decision can be complex and difficult, tempting us to resort to other pragmatic concerns in order to come to a conclusion. In other words, the attitude may be, "The definition of ministry is too hard to apply to my situation, so I give up. I'm just going to do what makes most sense culturally and practically, and sell what I'm doing. God will forgive me if I make the wrong decision."

While it's certainly true that God is merciful, compassionate, and gracious towards weak children like us, we are still called to strive for godliness and righteousness (1 Tim 6:11-12), follow Christ's example (John 13:5, 1 Pet 2:21), and apply biblical principles to our lives even when it's challenging (Rom 12:2, James 1:22-25).

Another common objection may be as follows: "I don't agree with your definition of ministry, so the dorean principle doesn't apply to me and I can monetize what I'm doing." After assiduously studying the scriptures and weighing our arguments with an open mind and humble spirit, you may find our definition too narrow or too broad. In this case, it's important to still *have* a biblically-grounded definition and apply it consistently. The challenge will be to explain persuasively from Scripture why some activities like administering the Lord's Supper and prayer might be considered ministry, while others, like preaching at a conference, might not be. Scripture provides clear examples of various forms of ministry (Eph 4:11-12), and your definition should be able to account for these diverse expressions of Spirit-empowered service. We do not claim that our definition of ministry is the last, infallible word on the subject, and we welcome critique. But we have strived to carefully delineate what Scripture delineates, and any alternative definition must do the same.

It may also be tempting to justify the sale of whatever you're doing by saying that you wouldn't consider it *ministry*, but rather something *spiritual* in nature. For that, we recommend reading the article on simony by Owens, which explains from Acts 8 that Scripture condemns the sale of spiritual things along with the sale of material things that are annexed to spiritual things.

Finally, someone may say, "I don't do my work by the power of the Spirit, so it's not ministry." Perhaps the author of an academic commentary or a mercy ministry missionary may assert something to that effect. This level of honesty and transparency is appreciated, but it does not negate the fact that there are certain things that God calls us to do by the strength he supplies and not by human strength (1 Cor 2:13, Acts 1:8, 1 Cor 12:3, 2 Thes 1:11).

Conclusion

In conclusion, defining Christian ministry is crucial for understanding what should and should not be sold. While all Christians are called to glorify God in all aspects of life, not all work can be classified as ministry. Through careful examination of Scripture, we believe that Christian ministry should be understood as Spirit-empowered service specifically and directly for the edification of the body of Christ. It is largely an effort to impart to fellow Christians the spiritual blessings we have received from God, which he has revealed through his Word and appointed leaders, and manifested through his Spirit, which may at times involve relieving the physical needs of destitute brothers and sisters. All Christians are called to minister to one another and to those outside the church by speaking the truth of the gospel. While gray areas will arise as we seek to discern and apply this definition, the vast majority of ministerial activities should be clear and obvious (e.g. evangelism, Bible translation, preaching, leading worship, prayer, etc.). Erring on the side of radical generosity always honors God. A firm commitment to searching the scriptures and calling out for wisdom and understanding can guide us in making decisions that uphold the integrity of ministry.

Affirmations and Denials

We affirm that Scripture regulates and sets boundaries for Spirit-empowered activities that edify the Church (ministry).

We deny that the biblical category of ministry and its activities should be defined by the caprice of human wisdom and pragmatism.

We affirm that all good things can be done for the glory of God.

We deny that all things done for the glory of God should be considered ministry.

We affirm that a Christian in a secular job can glorify God in his work just as it is possible for a Christian engaged in ministry to glorify God.

We deny that someone must label their work as "ministry" in order to find dignity and honor God in their labors.

We affirm that the example of Jesus should permeate and shape every facet of our lives.

We deny that everything done in the life of a Jesus-permeated individual should be considered ministry.

We affirm that the sacred/secular divide can be and has been misunderstood and misapplied.

We deny that Scripture makes no distinction between the sacred and secular.

We affirm that Christians should integrate their faith across all areas of life.

We deny that all areas of a Christian's life are sacred or should be categorized as ministry.

We affirm the priesthood of all believers.

We deny that the priesthood of all believers implies that everything a believer does is ministry.

We further deny that all vocations are categorically the same as priesthood.

We affirm that Jesus challenged and rejected some of the man-made traditions of his day.

We deny that Jesus dismantled the biblical distinctions between the sacred and common, or between ministry and non-ministry.

We affirm that some things are uniquely suited for the edification of the Church.

We deny that all work performed by Christians is particularly for the edification of the Church.

We affirm that there are varieties of service/ministry.

We deny that this variety implies that any God-honoring activity may be categorized as ministry.

We affirm that parachurch organizations can genuinely perform the work of biblical ministry.

We deny that parachurch organizations are exempt from biblical principles governing the sale and support of ministry.

We affirm that true biblical ministry should be supported by the free generosity of God's people.

We deny that ministry should be monetized or sold in any way.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/defining-ministry

THE BIBLICAL MODEL FOR FUNDING MINISTRY

Jon Here

When we give offerings at church, who are we giving them to? Practically speaking we are giving them to a legal entity (a local church) which then pools what is "offered" to pay for rent, wages, and other expenses. But the fact we use the term "offering" and not just "donation" should remind us that there is a spiritual dimension going on, even if the secular world cannot see it.

In my article *The Command to Freely Give*, it is established that:

1. Jesus commanded free giving in the context of ministry
2. Paul endorsed financial support for ministry, not commerce
3. Paul modeled free giving himself

We'll now consider how supporting ministry works at a spiritual level to better understand the importance of the free giving ethic.

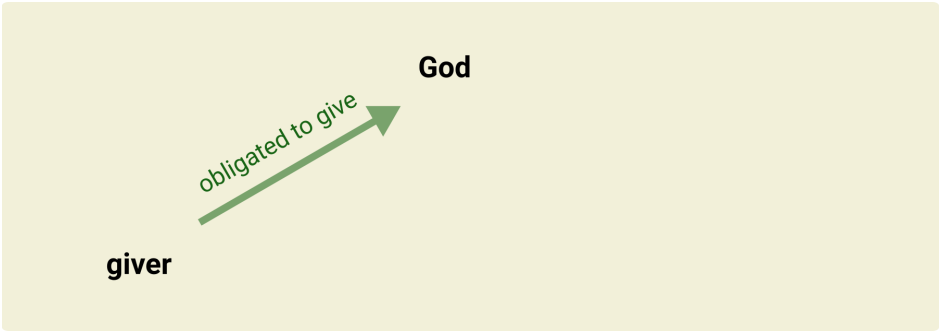
Offerings to God

The donating of money at church is rightly called an "offering" because it emphasises the person the money is being offered to, and it is not the pastor or the church. Let's see how Paul described money he received from the church in Philippi:

> I have all I need and more, now that I have received your gifts from Epaphroditus. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. (Phil 4:18)

Paul starts off describing how he himself has received support but then moves to describing it as *"a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God"*. While Paul received it in practical terms, it was actually God who received it spiritually speaking. Supporting Paul in his ministry was one of the ways the Philippian Christians lived out their obligation to worship God.

We'll represent this obligation via a diagram that will become more meaningful later:



Provision from God

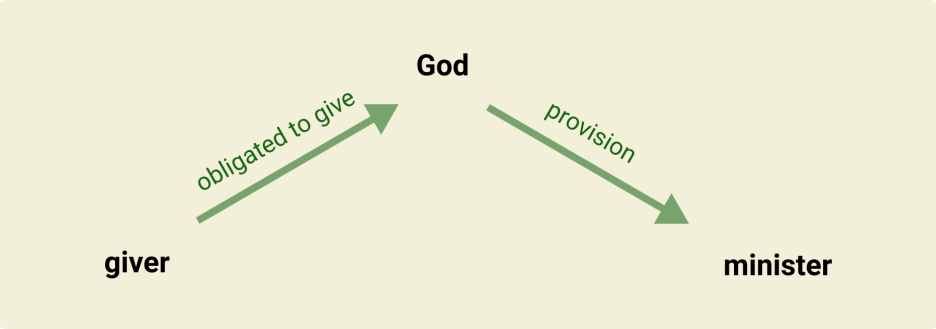
There is another spiritual dimension to financial support of ministry and that is God's provision. While Paul was provided for by other believers at a practical level, it wasn't them that did the providing spiritually. We have already looked at Jesus' command to "freely give" (Matt 10:8), but what we haven't looked at is his instruction on provision which immediately follows it:

> Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts. Take no bag for the road, or second tunic, or sandals, or staff; for the worker is worthy of his provisions. (Matt 10:9-10)

As we can see, freely giving and being financially supported goes hand-in-hand without conflict. But who is doing the providing here? And who is the employer of the worker? Do the towns people employ the worker? Obviously not. They will stay with them for some days and move on to the next town. The immediate context of the passage is key to understanding this:

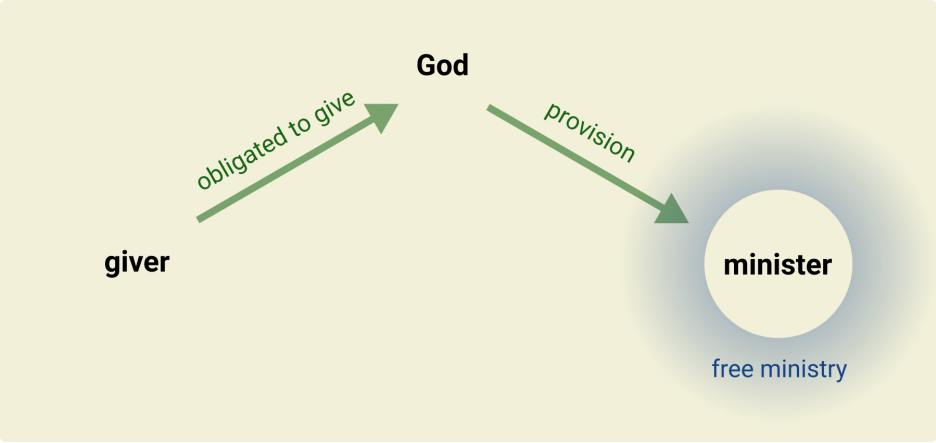
> Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest." (Matt 9:37-38)

God is the employer and it is he who provides for his workers, which he often does through other believers. Let's add this insight to our diagram:



Free ministry

In accordance with the free giving ethic, the minister will never charge for service and the offering is voluntary. Those who financially support the minister may be recipients of the service or may not be. For example, members of a congregation would be recipients of the ministry they fund, where as those supporting missionaries would not be.



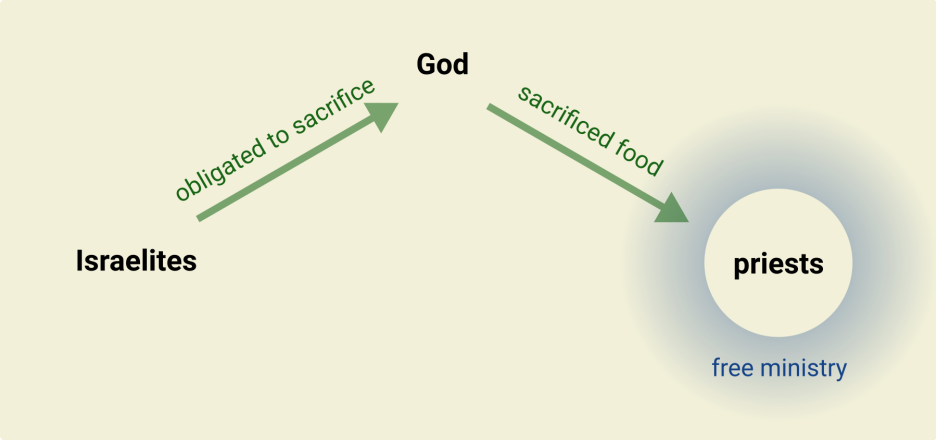
We have now completed the picture of the biblical model of financial support. While in human terms money may change hands between believers, at a spiritual level this exchange is mediated by God.

A consistent biblical model

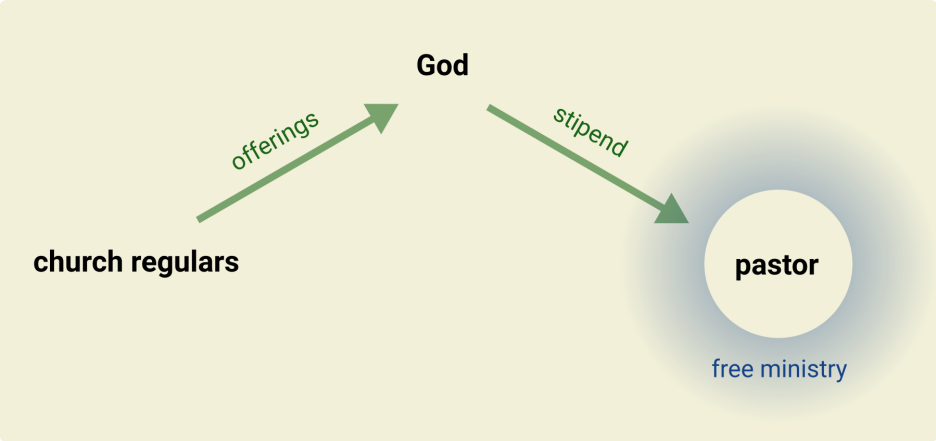
This biblical model of funding is not just theory. Aside from the New Testament evidence, it was also fairly clearly articulated in Levitical law (Num 18:8-20). As Paul says:

> Do you not know that those who work in the temple eat of its food, and those who serve at the altar partake of its offerings? In the same way, the Lord has prescribed that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. (1 Cor 9:13-14)

Let's apply the model to the example of the temple:



Paul isn't saying that we follow Levitical law today; just that the biblical model for funding ministry is consistent and hasn't changed. This is how churches have been funded for thousands of years and is still the case today:



Believers are not obligated to pay their pastor for their sermon but they are obligated to give offerings to God. And the minister is not to demand payment from those he serves but is to rely on God's provision, which will often come from the hands of other believers. Those who do the ministry and those who fund the ministry are then partners

in ministry (Phil 4:15), working together for the sake of the gospel. They give and serve out of obligation to God and not out of obligation to each other.

The same model can be used for missionaries, authors, musicians, and anyone else who ministers or creates ministry resources. As long as their ministry is freely given.

Commercial funding

We've established a biblical model for funding, but how does a commercial model compare?

Firstly, believers give primarily out of obligation to the minister rather than God. They owe the minister for their service or resource, and this debt will often be a legally enforceable one. Some people may see themselves as partnering with the provider of ministry or see their payment as a gift to God, but many exchanges will lack such nuance and be simply commercial in nature.

Secondly, the ministry is restricted to only paying customers. The person giving money and the person receiving ministry is often the same person, and the receiver of ministry cannot usually share it with others. Some ministry providers will give for free to those who can't afford to pay, but that is the exception rather than the norm.

The commercial model is also in the bible, but not in a positive way:

> Her leaders judge for a bribe,
> her priests teach for a price,
> and her prophets practice divination for money.
> Yet they lean upon the LORD, saying,
> "Is not the LORD among us?
> No disaster can come upon us." (Micah 3:11)

Selling ministry is a tell-tale sign of a false teacher. Please don't take this as an accusation that all who currently sell ministry resources are false teachers; that would be a wrong and absurd accusation. But by commercializing ministry we have blurred the lines and allowed false teachers to flourish since they can't be identified by trying to profit from ministry, as they use the same financial practices many respected Evangelicals do.

While many have good intentions and are just utilising commercial practices for practical reasons, nevertheless, the sincerity of ministry is still at stake. As who is to know where the minister's heart is at? What they do know is that they had to pay for the

ministry. Paul always ensured he preached for free so that his hearers would know of his sincerity:

> For we are not like so many others, who peddle the word of God. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as men sent from God. (2 Cor 2:17)

Decommercializing ministry

Ministry has become increasingly commercialized over many decades, and so decommercializing it will not be easy or pleasant. Providers of ministry are not alone to blame, as we have all been urging the sale of ministry on, churches and individuals alike.

Wisdom and grace is needed. However, things must not continue the way they are. As Jesus said, *"you cannot serve both God and money."*

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/biblical-funding

GIVING OUT OF OBLIGATION TO GOD, NOT MAN

Andrew Case

Imagine you finally get to meet your grandfather–your mother's father–for the first time. You're an adult now, and he has always lived in another country. And let's imagine that your mother died when you were young. So when you finally meet your grandfather, he showers you with gifts and love, even though he knows almost nothing about you. He tells you that, out of love for your mother, he feels like he owes it to her to show you extravagant generosity and kindness. He has a duty to you, but not because of anything you've done, but rather because of his relationship to your mother. This is an example of *mediated obligation*. When we talk about this idea in the context of funding Christian ministry, it means that we should be generous to fellow believers *out of love for God*. We should feel duty bound to God, and express that in generosity to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So where do we see this in Scripture? In 1 Corinthians 9:7-14 Paul talks about how to keep ministry going, and he uses several analogies to illustrate the notion of mediated obligation:

> Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

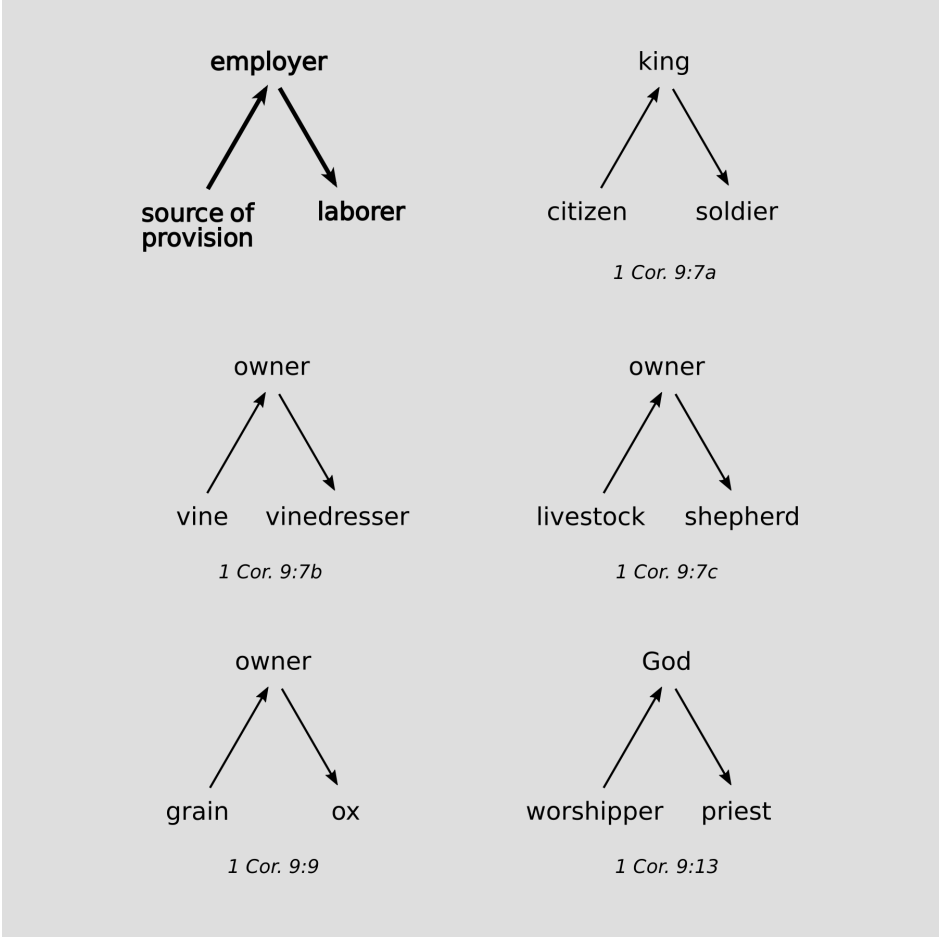
Let's take these one at a time and see where the obligation to give falls in each case. Keep in mind that these are all metaphors for those in service to God. First, who is obligated to give to the soldier? The king. In those days it was the *king* who ensured his soldiers were paid, but he himself received money through taxation. So when citizens give taxes, they do so out of obligation to the *king*, who then pays the soldiers their wages. They're not obligated to give to the soldier. If the soldier circumvents the king and demands payment from citizens directly for his work, it's wrong. That's called extortion. And this kind of extortion is exactly what many ministries actively practice when they condition ministry upon the payment of a fee, instead of relying on their King to provide for their livelihood.

Again, it is *the owner of the vineyard* who is obligated to provide for the vinedresser who plants the vineyard. The owner employs the vinedresser. The vine produces grapes for the owner, and the vinedresser gets to share in those grapes because the owner gives him permission. Likewise for the shepherd: the shepherd is in service to the owner of the flock, which he is employed to care for. The shepherd can't milk the flock for his own

benefit. All that milk belongs to the owner. But the owner allows the shepherd to share in the milk because the owner is responsible to provide for his employee.

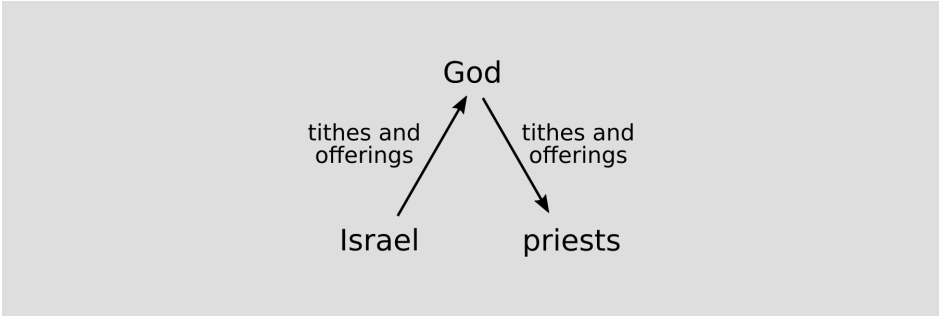
And the same with the ox. The ox doesn't own the grain that it's treading. Rather, the owner of the grain allows for the ox to share in the grain, because it's his responsibility to provide for his animal.

The following illustrations help show these relationships of mediated obligation more clearly:



If those previous examples weren't very clear, Paul's last example in verses 13 and 14 serve to make everything more clear. Here's what he says: "Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."

In other words, people gave offerings out of obligation to God, rather than obligation to the Levites.[1]

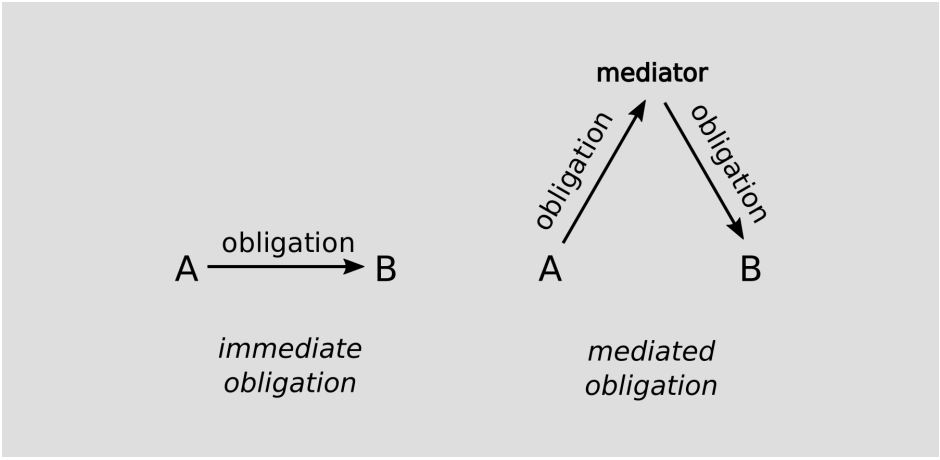


Consider the significance of the phrase "the Lord is their inheritance" (Num 18:20; cf. Deut 18:1–2). It shows the exclusivity of this mode of support. It's not merely that the Levites receive from the contributions, but they are to have no other inheritance. The law of Moses permits the priests to receive "colabor"—that which is offered to the Lord—but forbids reciprocity. Consequently, in Israel's times of faithlessness, the Levites languish (cf. Deut 14:27; Neh 13:10). When this model is violated and a priest accepts offerings directly, he essentially puts himself in the place of God. Such was the sin of Hophni and Phinehas, the corrupt sons of Eli who took raw meat before it had been offered to the Lord (1 Sam 2:12–17).

If you're unfamiliar with the issue of *reciprocity* vs. *colabor*, Conley Owens introduces the distinction in his book *The Dorean Principle*. *Ministerial reciprocity* involves giving to a minister out of a direct sense of obligation to that minister for their ministry. It's a kind of payment or exchange: "You did X ministry for me, so I feel compelled to give money back to you."

In contrast, *ministerial colabor* involves giving to a minister primarily out of an obligation *to God*, to honor and aid the work of Christian ministry. The giver sees himself to be a *colaborer* with the minister, working together in spiritual labors. In other words, they're both working for a common Master, giving and serving out of a sense of shared obligation to Christ.

1. To go deeper into this example, see the The Dorean Principle's section on the priesthood.



So, just as the Levites were supported by the Israelites, modern-day pastors are supported by their congregations. And the key is that the support is provided *voluntarily* and out of a desire to honor God and support the work of the ministry. Paul speaks to this very issue in 2 Corinthians 9:7, where he says, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or *under compulsion*, for God loves a cheerful giver." This verse emphasizes that giving to support the work of ministry should be done freely and willingly, without any sense of obligation or pressure. In other words, the person giving shouldn't be forced or manipulated to give, or put in a situation where he's exploited indirectly. While most churches do operate by colabor, many other ministries do not.

In Matthew 10:8-10, Jesus prohibited reciprocity but permitted colabor. He commanded his disciples to freely give, taking no payment in return. But they were also commanded to accept support from people of peace who would offer to supply what they needed.

Scripture makes clear that the work of ministry is meant to be freely given, supported by God's people, but never sold. As we saw in Paul's analogies, this support stems from a shared obligation to God, not direct indebtedness between giver and receiver.

Unfortunately, many modern practices impose reciprocity, and preclude colabor. This not only compromises the purity of motive but fails to trust God's prescribed means of sustainment. It resorts to exploitation rather than freely bearing one another's burdens.

As believers, we must recalibrate to God's model. Christians should fund ministries through voluntary, cheerful giving as an act of worship, so that those ministries can thrive and offer everything without any strings attached. When the work of God's Kingdom is fueled by the Spirit's leading rather than worldly salesmanship (venality),

both message and means stay aligned to biblical standards. May we have the courage to trust God to provide through his people, that the gospel may ring out purely and freely.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/colabor

Selling Ministry

TEN TIMES COMMERCIALIZING MINISTRY IS CONDEMNED

Jon Here

The Bible has a lot to say about greed and love of money. Almost all Christians know it should be avoided. But how about misuse of money in ministry? While a more specific subcategory, the Bible too has much to say on this topic. It isn't limited to those who sell ministry either, but also those who offer to buy it. Here are ten passages that condemn commercializing ministry.

Expecting payment

When Jesus said "freely you received, freely give" (Matt 10:8) when he sent out his disciples to proclaim the gospel, the obvious implication is that ministry should not be sold. But there are also specific examples of times it was sold, and condemned.

1. The Super Apostles

In 2 Corinthians Paul responds to the "super apostles" who were not just leading the church astray but were also peddling God's Word, exchanging their teaching for money. Unlike the super apostles, Paul never charged for ministry (2 Cor 11:7), he only accepted *voluntary* financial support (Phil 4:18).

> For we are not like so many others, who peddle the word of God. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as men sent from God. (2 Cor 2:17)

While many translations like to constrain Paul's condemnation by appending "for profit" (implying non-profit sale of teaching is ok), such additions are not from the original text.

2. Micah condemns the corrupt leaders

The leaders, priests, and prophets of Israel did many abhorrent things in the time of Micah the prophet. But included in that list is charging for ministry.

> Her leaders judge for a bribe,
> her priests teach for a price,
> and her prophets practice divination for money.
> Yet they lean upon the LORD, saying,
> "Is not the LORD among us?
> No disaster can come upon us." (Micah 3:11)

Most of their practices would be abhorred today, such as judges taking bribes. Yet most Bible translations read the action of the priests as simply charging for their teaching, which is common practice today outside of Sunday services.

3. Eli's sons want the best meat

Priests in the temple were supposed to be provided for by receiving some of the food offered at the temple after it had already been sacrificed to God (Num 18:8-20). Eli's sons, however, decided that they wanted to eat the meat before it had been sacrificed, effectively requiring payment from those who came to worship God.

> Even before the fat was burned, the servant of the priest would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest some meat to roast, because he will not accept boiled meat from you, but only raw." And if any man said to him, "The fat must be burned first; then you may take whatever you want," the servant would reply, "No, you must give it to me right now. If you refuse, I will take it by force! "Thus the sin of these young men was severe in the sight of the LORD, for they were treating the LORD's offering with contempt. (1 Sam 2:15-17)

Accepting payment

Some people explain that the reason why they sell ministry is because people would often offer to pay for it anyway, believing this would be appropriate since they also pay for everything else in their life, like shopping and servicing their car. However, this too is condemned.

4. Gehazi cursed with leprosy

There is a story in Kings about an army commander called Naaman who had leprosy, and Elisha the prophet instructed him on how to be miraculously healed. Naaman was very grateful and responded as follows:

> Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God, stood before him, and declared, "Now I know for sure that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant." But Elisha replied, "As surely as the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will not accept it." And although Naaman urged him to accept it, he refused. (2 Kings 5:15-16)

While Elisha refused payment for ministry, his servant Gehazi thought this was foolish. Why not accept compensation if it is offered? What's the harm in that? So he ran back to collect the payment and was cursed with leprosy as punishment (2 Kings 5:27).

Offering payment

While the Bible condemns charging for ministry it also condemns offering to buy it.

5. Simon wants to wield the Holy Spirit

Simon was amazed at the ministry of the apostles, and especially how God granted his Spirit to people they ministered to. Rather than become part of that ministry through sincere means, he thought he could obtain it with money.

> When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money. "Give me this power as well," he said, "so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter replied, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in our ministry, because your heart is not right before God. (Acts 8:18-21)

Note that Simon's sin wasn't paying for salvation for himself; he was seeking to dispense "God's gift" to others, most certainly for money. Simon's sin became known as "Simony", the sale of spiritual things.

Profiting from ministry

In addition to actual examples of people commercializing ministry, the Bible has several things to say about those who seek financial gain from ministry.

6. Paul's warning to Timothy

Paul warns Timothy about false teachers who seek to financially gain from their ministry beyond their actual needs. If ministers are not to profit from ministry, what is the alternative? Paul gives it. To be financially supported and content with that.

> ... men of depraved mind who are devoid of the truth. These men regard godliness as a means of gain. Of course, godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, so we cannot carry anything out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. (1 Tim 6:5-8)

7. Paul's warning to Titus

Paul also warns Titus about false teachers who will teach for dishonorable gain.

> For many are rebellious and full of empty talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced. For the sake of dishonorable gain, they undermine entire households and teach things they should not. (Titus 1:10-11)

8. Requirements for elders

Peter also talks about those who minister for "dishonorable gain". It is unlikely illegal activity is in view here as that would be too obvious a sin for elders to mistakenly fall into. Rather, ministry can never be entered into with mixed motives, you cannot serve God and seek to make a profit at the same time.

> I appeal to the elders among you: Be shepherds of God's flock that is among you, watching over them not out of compulsion, but because it is God's will; not for dishonorable gain, but out of eagerness; (1 Peter 5:1-2)

Mixing commerce with ministry

It is fine to engage in commerce in society at large, but Jesus himself warns us of the danger of mixing commerce and ministry together.

9. The inability to serve both God and money

Seeking to serve God and pursue money at the same time is not possible according to Jesus, as it will render one or the other insincere.

> No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Luke 16:13)

10. Jesus cleanses the temple

Last and most memorable is Jesus' anger at those who tried to profit from people who came to worship God in the temple, as recorded in all four Gospels:

> In the temple courts He found men selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers seated at their tables. So He made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle. He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those selling doves He said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn My Father's house into a marketplace!" (John 2:14-16)

Obviously Jesus was not opposed to the general sale of animals in a normal market. But people were seeking to do commerce in a place of ministry and worship, God's very own temple. While the holiness of the temple is important context, we should remember that God's Word is also holy, and all ministry deals with that which is holy.

While people in the temple were selling ordinary things in a place of worship, the commerce that happens today is not the sale of ordinary things but spiritual things! Actual teaching, bibles, and worship music.

We, too, have turned ministry into a marketplace, and the Lord is not likely to be pleased.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/commerce-condemned

SPEAKING IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

Why Moral Failing Invariably Accompanies the Sale of Biblical Instruction

Conley Owens

2 Corinthians is replete with remarks regarding sincerity. It would be rightly said that the theme of the whole book is *The Sincerity of the Kingdom of God*. This underlying concern flows from the first chapter where Paul responds to suspicions about his motives (2 Cor 1:17), to his appeal for the Corinthians' sincere love (2 Cor 6:11), to his denunciation of the integrity of the "super apostles" (2 Cor 11:13), all the way to his final claim that he cannot do anything against the truth (2 Cor 13:8).

One of the motifs that brings out that theme of sincerity is the reality of the "sight of God"—that is, being in his presence. All things are before God (Heb 4:13); he is the judge who will hold all accountable. However, *particularly as a minister of the gospel*, Paul speaks in the sight of God. That is, he operates only with concern for the Lord's judgment and without ulterior motive.

If we examine this theme carefully, we should see that the sale of biblical instruction is a warning sign of a ministry that will be accompanied by moral failing.

Sincerity and Its Antithesis

Let's begin by examining all seven passages in 2 Corinthians that speak of being in the presence or sight of God.

Sincerity is incompatible with lying

> I call *God as my witness* that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. (2 Cor 1:23)

To give some background for this verse, at the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote that he intended to come to the Corinthians for an extended stay (1 Cor 16:7). Because of sin in the church, he came early for a short and difficult visit (2 Cor 2:1), deciding not to return for the longer visit he had initially planned. Here at the beginning of 2 Corinthians, he addresses doubts regarding his intentions by swearing an oath: "I call God as my witness." This is the essence of an oath: calling God to observe as judge; in his presence there is no place for lying.

Sincerity is incompatible with vindictive grudges

> If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And if I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven it *in the presence of [lit.in the face of] Christ* for your sake. (2 Cor 2:10)

Paul's short visit had involved a case of discipline, traditionally thought to be the adulterous man of 1 Corinthians 5:1. This was a contentious matter, though affirmed by a majority (2 Cor 2:6). To "forgive" in this context refers to a restoration that is only possible under repentance. In other words, prior to this, the man was not forgiven and perhaps one could wonder whether Paul would continue holding this man's sin over his head in order to exert his authority and apply leverage. Because he is a minister of reconciliation (2 Cor 6:2) and stands before Christ, he has no option but to forgive.

Sincerity is incompatible with selling biblical instruction

> For we are not like so many others, who peddle the word of God. On the contrary, we speak *in the sight of God* with sincerity in Christ, as men sent from God. (2 Cor 2:17)

As a minister of the gospel, Paul desires to spread the fragrance of Christ everywhere (2 Cor 2:14). Because this is a profound task, he asks "Who is sufficient for these things" (2 Cor 2:16)? The answer, of course, is that no one is except the one who is truly commissioned by God, because God has made him sufficient for these things. Being commissioned by God, he is also *observed by God*, such that he cannot *sell the Word* he has been sent to give freely (Matt 10:8; Isa 55:1). Others who purport to be sent by God operate as though they are outside of his sight. Moreover, because they are not sent by him for this task, they necessarily have ulterior motives. Ulterior motives are always selfish motives, and because the quintessential form of selfishness is financial greed, the Bible speaks of this mark of false teachers as a *love of money* (Matt 6:24; 1 Tim 6:5).

Sincerity is incompatible with secrecy and underhanded manipulation

> But we have renounced secret and underhanded ways, not walking in craftiness, nor distorting the word of God, but by open proclamation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience *in the sight of God.* (2 Cor 4:2)

The glory of Paul's ministry is in question (2 Cor 3:7-18), particularly because he has undergone many physical difficulties (2 Cor 4:8-12). He argues that because he is a minister of the gospel, he and his associates have a great treasure in jars of clay (2 Cor 4:7). Of course, if Paul wanted to hide this, he could. He could hide his weaknesses or compromise the gospel with more impressive ideas. He could attack his opponents with slander or gossip. However, if Paul walks in the sight of God, there is no point in hiding any shame. Rather, those weaknesses which the world finds shameful he openly admits. He has no sin to hide, and engages in no underhanded dealings.

Sincerity is incompatible with malicious intent

> So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did wrong or the one who was harmed, but rather that your earnestness on our behalf would be made clear to you *in the sight of God.* (2 Cor 7:12)

In the case of discipline, Paul necessarily had to treat sin harshly. It would be easy to assume malicious intent. But once again, if Paul operates in the sight of God, he knows any such intent would be exposed before the Judge of the universe. While older translations speak of Paul's earnestness being demonstrated, newer ones tend to render it as the Corinthians' earnestness being demonstrated. Regardless, in either case, Paul explains his sincere motive, and the sight of God demands earnestness.

Sincerity is incompatible with embezzlement

> For we are taking great care to do what is right, not only *in the sight of the Lord*, but also in the sight of men. (2 Cor 8:21)

Paul collects money for the poor in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-29) from several churches including the Corinthian church (1 Cor 16:1). In 2 Corinthians 8, he anticipates the suspicion that he might be skimming off the top, but there is no place for this in the presence of the Lord. Moreover, he takes steps to approach the matter with a transparency that gives assurance.

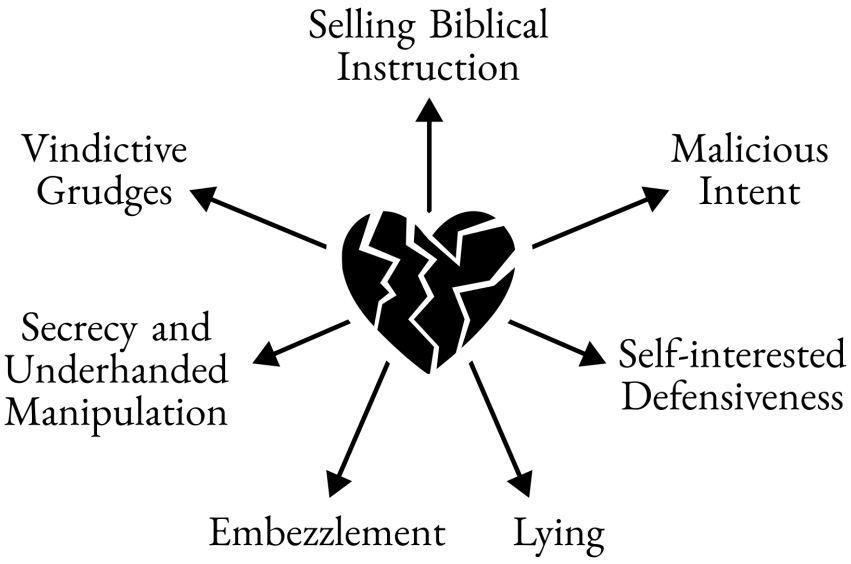
Sincerity is incompatible with self-interested defensiveness

> Have you been thinking all along that we were making a defense to you? We speak *in the sight of God* in Christ, and all of this, beloved, is to build you up. (2 Cor 12:19)

While Paul defends himself throughout, in the later portions, he particularly defends his character by making several boasts (2 Cor 11:16-12:10). One might think that he does this to defend his own name, and indeed he does, but not merely so. Because he stands before God, he is already sufficiently vindicated in the heavenly courts. His only reason for defending himself is for the benefit of the Corinthians as they face false apostles who compete with Paul for their attention (2 Cor 11:13).

Related Fruit of a Common Heart

If sincerity is incompatible with all these behaviors, then each comes from an insincere heart.



If imagining oneself outside of the presence of God leads to one infraction, it will lead to others. While an insincere heart will not manifest *every* insincere action, Paul does not speak of these individual manifestations as only existing in some, but as existing in "many" (2 Cor 2:17). Consider the following syllogism:

Premise 1	One with an insincere heart manifests various insincere actions
Premise 2	One who engages in insincere action has an insincere heart
Conclusion	One who engages in insincere action manifests various insincere actions

Because Paul speaks of peddling the Word as one of these insincere actions (2 Cor 2:17), we can substitute it for the generic insincere action we included before.

Premise 1	One with an insincere heart manifests various insincere actions
Premise 2	One who sells biblical instruction has an insincere heart
Conclusion	One who sells biblical instruction manifests various insincere actions

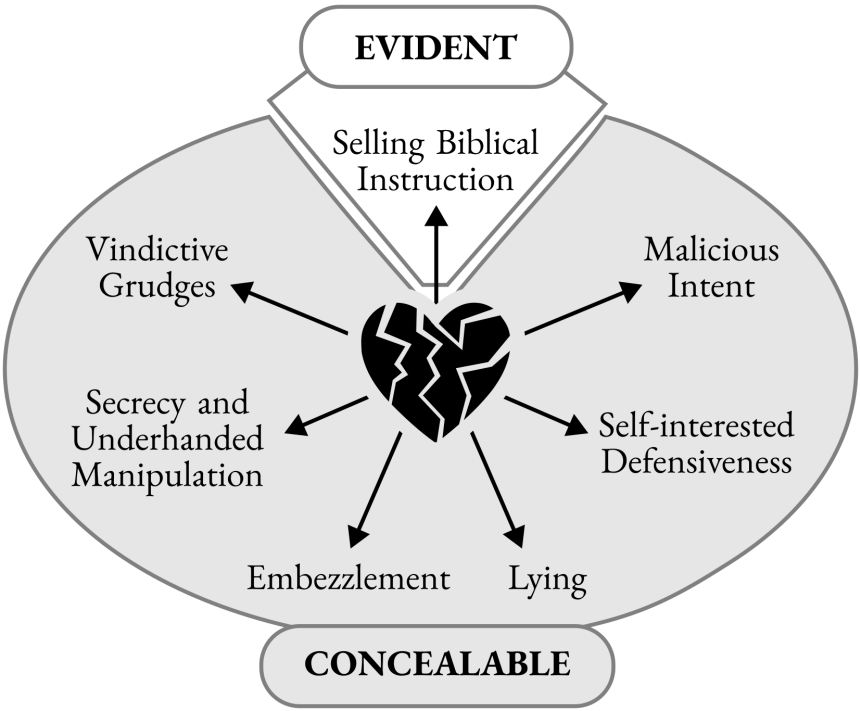
The commercialization of the Word is therefore the mark of a ministry that will lack integrity in other ways.

The Unique Sign of Peddling the Word

Each one of these seven verses speaks of a different insincere behavior. However, the sale of biblical instruction (2 Cor 2:17) stands out from all of them in that it is *objectively* discerned. Consider each of the others.

- Not all can discern when someone **lies**.
- Not all can discern when a decision to impose discipline is **vindictive grudge-holding**.
- Not all can discern when someone **hides what is shameful** or **employs underhanded cunning**.
- Not all can discern when one acts with **malicious intent**.
- Not all can discern when someone has secretly **embezzled**.
- Not all can discern when someone speaks out of a **self-interested defensiveness**.

Yet, **all can discern when the Word is being sold**. It is evident; nothing is hidden when someone gives biblical instruction in some direct reciprocal exchange.



This is why Paul chooses this to be the main sign by which he distinguishes himself from the super apostles.

> Was it a sin for me to humble myself in order to exalt you, because I preached the gospel of God to you *free of charge*? [...] But I will keep on doing what I am doing, in order to undercut those who want an opportunity to be regarded as our equals in the things of which they boast. (2 Cor 11:7,12)

In other areas, he can argue for his sincerity, but ultimately the Corinthians must decide whether to accept his arguments (2 Cor 6:11-13). When it comes to peddling the Word, they have no ground for such an accusation.

Conclusion

A number of ministries consider themselves in the clear because everything about their operation seems to be of high integrity. They think they can peddle the Word of God uprightly, without any consequences.

Yet the sale of biblical instruction necessarily entails an ulterior motive of gain. As such, it constitutes a compromise of sincerity that will invariably manifest in other ways, ultimately leading to divinely wrought consequences. It is not uncommon for ministries today to share the same blind spot as the priests described by Micah:

> Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets practice divination for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD, saying, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster can come upon us." (Micah 3:11)

We live in an era saturated with commercial practices around the Word of God. As such, from a human perspective, it's understandable that those attempting to faithfully serve the Lord would fall into such patterns. Yet they do not need to be continued. If you are involved in any ministry that sells biblical instruction, begin working toward reformation today.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/sincerity

THE SIN OF BUYING JESUS

Conley Owens

We frequently address the sin of selling Jesus. Plain passages of Scripture such as Matthew 10:8 and 2 Corinthians 2:17 all forbid selling ministry and spiritual benefits, most especially biblical teaching. This applies to seminary tuition, gospel conference tickets, Bible version licenses, worship music royalties, Christian e-book charges, and more.

However, a question arises at this point: If selling Jesus is a sin, is buying Jesus a sin? Often, people are convinced by the biblical arguments that Christian teaching should not be sold but then want to know whether Christian teaching may be bought. How does this apply to a Christian who wants to go to a seminary that charges tuition, read an e-book that costs money, etc.?

Purchasing Spiritual Things May Be A Sin

In general, buying Jesus—that is, exchanging money for spiritual things—is a sin. This has been universally recognized by the church in ages past. This sin of making the things of God a matter of commerce has most often been labeled *simony*, in reference to the magician who attempted to purchase the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit on others.

> When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money. "Give me this power as well," he said, "so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
>
> But Peter replied, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!" (Acts 8:18-20)

Typically, this label of "simony" is attached to the activity of those who would purchase ecclesiastical office, especially because such ordinations involve the laying on of hands, that ceremony sought by Simon. However, this term has been used historically to describe the buying and selling of all other sorts of spiritual things such as the Lord's supper, baptism, etc.

Purchasing Biblical Teaching May Be A Sin

We should recognize that commerce around Christian teaching fits within this category, and therefore may also be a sin. The one who attempts to purchase Christian teaching is not merely attempting to purchase raw knowledge, a set of propositions and dry information about the Christian faith; they seek to effect in themselves a work of the Spirit of God, who not only propositionally communicates to them the truth of God, but experientially communicates to them the goodness of God so that it would not be

rejected (1 Cor 2:14). This spiritual enlightenment happens through a human teacher as an instrument, but its agent is the Holy Spirit.

> We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. And this is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. (1 Cor 2:12-13)

Note that Paul speaks of such truth as being freely given. If such truth is freely given by God, then it must be freely given by man in order to obey the command of Christ: "freely you received, freely give" (Matt 10:8).

More to our point, if the one who purchases Christian teaching ultimately seeks to purchase an effect of the Spirit, he engages in the same sin as Simon.

Purchasing Spiritual Things Is Not Necessarily a Sin

However, notice Peter's identification of Simon's sin. His accusation is not that Simon has bought the Holy Spirit. In fact, Simon hasn't. His accusation is that Simon believes the Holy Spirit *can* be bought, warranting an exchange for money—"because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!" The root sin in "simony" is to regard the work of the Spirit as a matter of commerce.

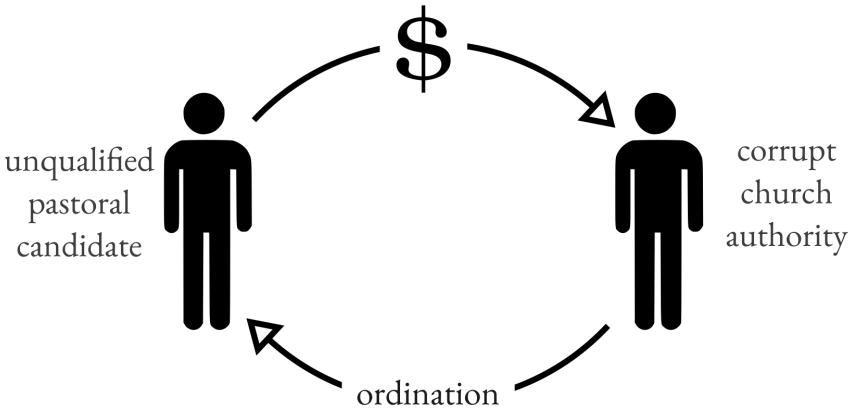
If something that should be given freely is withheld, those who use money in order to acquire it do not necessarily regard it as a matter of commerce, but simply operate within existing constraints. To purchase something *when no alternative means of access is available* is not to suggest that the object of purchase ought to be the subject of such an exchange.

Consider Thomas Aquinas's explanation of a circumstance where it would be right to purchase ordination to a church office.

> It would be simoniacal to buy off the opposition of one's rivals, before acquiring the right to a bishopric or any dignity or prebend, by election, appointment or presentation, since this would be to use money as a means of obtaining a spiritual thing. But it is lawful to use money as a means of removing unjust opposition, after one has already acquired that right.[1]

To paraphrase: "It is a sin to bribe someone to give you a pastoral position that would best be given to another. However, if such a position rightly belongs to you and a corrupt system stands in the way, it would not be a sin to use money in order to secure that position."

1. Aquinas, Thomas. Summa Theologiae, 2.2.100.2



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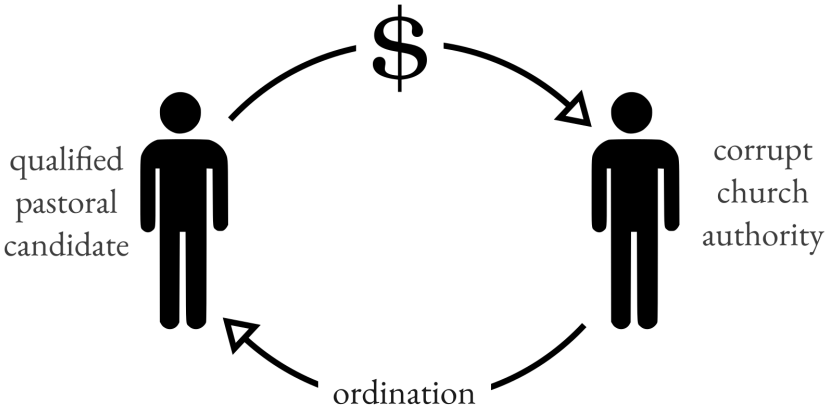

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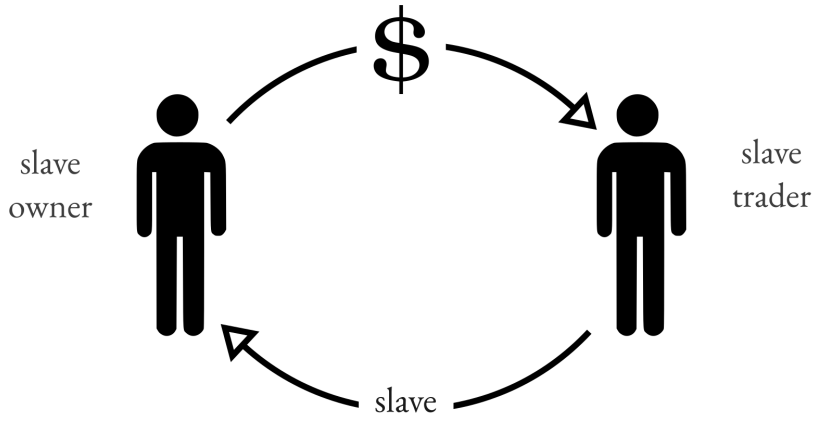
This might be odd to suggest that something akin to a bribe could be permissible, but an analogy helps here. Like simony, human trafficking is a sin. While kidnapped people should not be bought, none would fault someone for purchasing a slave or ransoming a hostage in order to free them.



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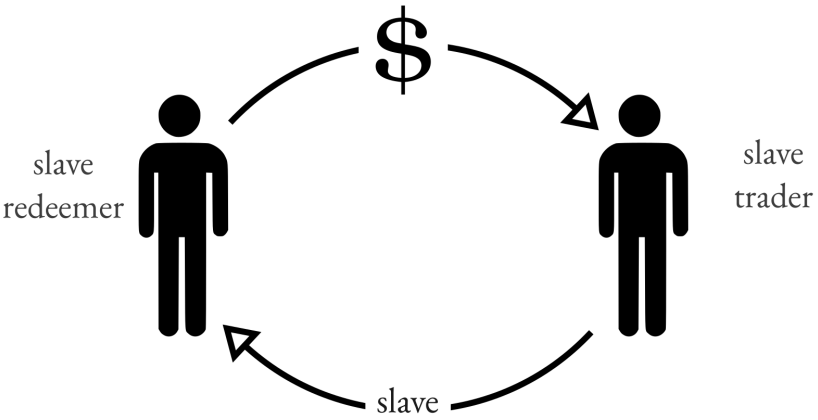

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We see a similar principle in the life of Jacob (Genesis 31:41). When Laban wrongly withheld Rachel from Jacob after he had done the work agreed upon, Jacob's decision to work seven more years was not a concession that Laban's trickery was right. Similarly, when he decided to continue working for Laban in order to get the financial wages wrongly withheld from him, he was not endorsing Laban's crooked dealings.

The problem with simony is not the actual exchange of material things for spiritual things, but regarding the imposition of that exchange as right.

Purchasing Biblical Teaching Is Not Necessarily a Sin

In this light, it may be obvious that purchasing Christian teaching is not necessarily a sin. Since we have framed the vindicating factor as a matter of "rights," we ought to ask whether Christians—and even non-Christians for that matter—have a right to biblical teaching. While no one is owed anything in particular, God has freely given his Word, and so it ought to be regarded as a "right."

> Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you without money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost! (Isa 55:1)

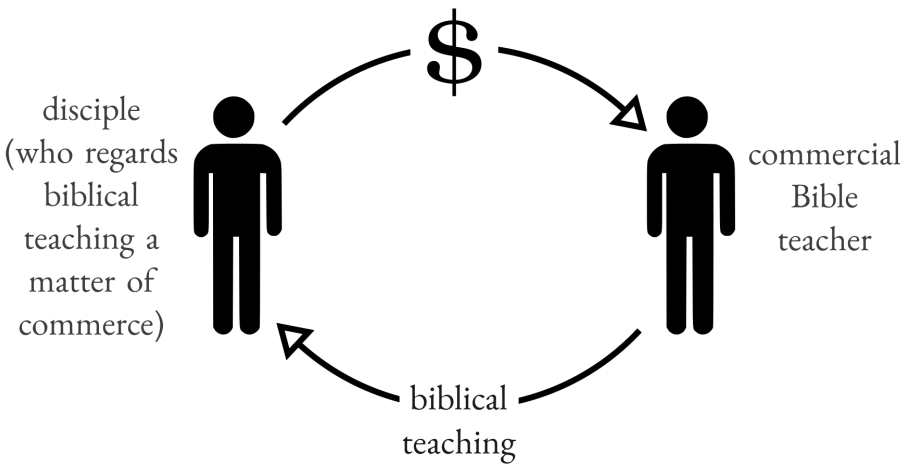
In other words, no one has the authority to restrict access to biblical teaching by means of a paywall.

> Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us." (Micah 3:11)
>
> For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (2 Cor 2:17)

If this is the case, then the one who purchases biblical teaching may be like the redeemer who frees the slave. He does not need to do so out of a heart that regards biblical teaching to be a matter of commerce, but as one who operates in a world where it is treated as a matter of commerce.

When Is Purchasing Biblical Teaching A Sin?

To summarize, purchasing biblical teaching may be a sin, but is not necessarily a sin. So when is it a sin and when isn't it a sin? The disciple who regards biblical teaching to be a matter of commerce sins, but the one who does not regard it to be a matter of commerce does not sin.



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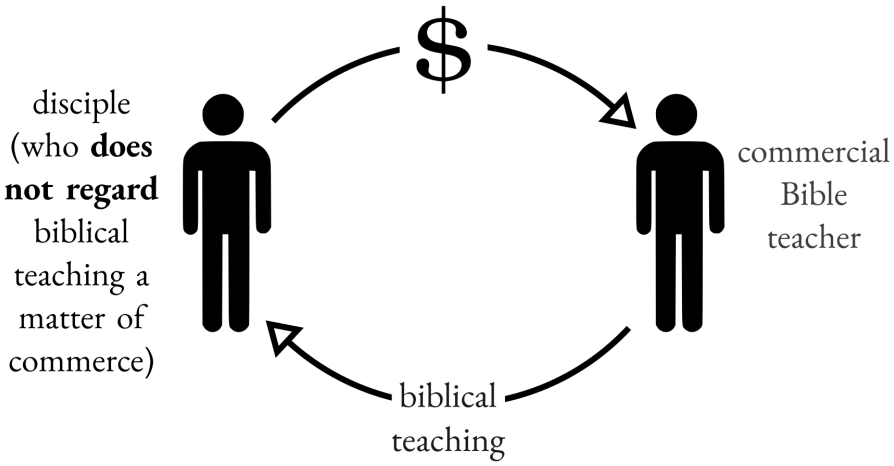

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Of course, now we have introduced an interesting qualification that requires us to distinguish between objective and subjective signals.

Objective signals: Former matters we've discussed have clear objective signals. Is the candidate minister purchasing the position unqualified to hold it? If so, he is a simoniac. Has the one who purchased the kidnapped individual refused to free them from bondage? If so, he is a human trafficker. But when it comes to the sale of Christian teaching, there are not frequently objective signals. We might ask, was it being offered for free before a price was offered? This is often the case in weddings, funerals, and counseling, where the service is offered for free but the party who requested the service chooses to make a payment regardless. However, in other sorts of Christian teaching, this isn't a common dynamic.

Subjective signals: The majority of the signals that one has to consider are largely subjective, internal. Rather than mourning the sale of Christian teaching, am I enjoying the experience of purchasing something as I might in other commercial interactions? Am I legitimizing this sale by regarding the price as "fair?" Am I thanking the seller in a way that suggests the exchange itself was a good thing? Am I refusing to speak out about the matter when my gifting and the occasion call for it? Some of these questions can be informed by outward observations, but ultimately need to be answered by the individual through an introspective examination of the heart.

The Aristotelian categories of *material causes* and *formal causes* provide useful vocabulary here.[2] For example, we may distinguish between *material obedience* and *formal obedience*. Material obedience is to a thing commanded, but formal obedience refers to the heart of submission behind it. Let's say that a local gang has decided to extort your business by requiring a monthly payment of $100.

- **Both material and formal obedience**: You believe that this demand is within the gang's lawful authority, and so you obey with a heart of submission regardless of the inconvenience.
- **Material but not formal obedience**: You reject the gang's supposed authority but pay the money anyway so that your storefront is not harmed.
- **Neither material nor formal obedience**: You keep your money and face the consequences.

While it is permissible to pay off the gang to protect yourself, it would be wrong to treat the racket as though it were an honorable system (Isa 5:20). Therefore, the first approach would be sinful, but either of the latter two options are permissible.

We can apply these categories to our question of simony. Let us distinguish between *material commodification* and *formal commodification*. Commodification refers to the process of making something a matter of commerce,[3] so material commodification would be making something a matter of commerce outwardly by selling or purchasing

2. Four causes - Wikipedia

3. This term typically applies to that which ought not be sold. For example, "human commodification" refers to legitimizing the sale of the human body through slavery, surrogacy, or prostitution.

it, and formal commodification would be doing so inwardly by regarding it as something to be bought and sold. Let's consider a situation where there is a commentary on the book of Acts in an e-book format available for $20.

- **Both material and formal commodification**: You believe that it is reasonable for the Christian teacher to sell this e-book; you purchase the book gladly.
- **Material but not formal commodification**: You grieve the sale of biblical teaching, but you desire to learn more about the book of Acts and do not want to be hindered from doing so, so you purchase the e-book.
- **Neither material nor formal commodification**: You don't purchase the e-book.

Material commodification of Christian ministry is not itself forbidden by the word of God, though *formal commodification* is. The first approach is forbidden since it involves formal commodification of ministry, but the latter two are acceptable since neither involve the formal commodification of ministry.

When Is Purchasing Biblical Teaching Unwise?

In the human trafficking analogy, there are times when it may be wise to pay a ransom and times where it would be unwise to pay a ransom. It's a common adage that one should not negotiate with terrorists; perhaps such a purchase would confirm the criminal in his behavior and lead him to kidnap again.

The same question arises for purchasing biblical teaching. While it may be permissible, one needs to question whether they are unnecessarily propping up the sinful commercialization of God's word.

Here are some questions you may ask yourself:

1. How helpful will this teaching be?
2. Are there teachers more faithful with their ministry fundraising that I could go to first?
3. How high is the cost? To what degree will my funds be useful to perpetuate the sale of Christian teaching?
4. How egregious are the licensing practices of the distributor? To what degree will my purchase be confirming their inhibition of translators and others in making use of their work?
5. Before making this purchase, should I write to the distributor of this teaching (author, publisher, conference-organizer, seminary) and explain my moral dilemma and the biblical case for ministry that freely gives?

There is no one-size-fits-all answer for these questions. Given your particular needs and abilities, you may respond differently than the next individual.

In that vein, a few personal examples may be helpful here:

- I have chosen to avoid using non-free Bible study software products such as Logos because they tend to be especially wayward in these considerations. Not only do such products tend to have a high cost and restrictive licensing, they also are pillars that enable the whole industry of the Jesus trade. Moreover, almost anything accessible via such platforms can be accessed elsewhere, often more cheaply. While I recognize that others may benefit from these platforms to a degree that warrants their purchase, I do not believe I would.
- I also chose to attend The Log College & Seminary. While other seminaries may have been more suitable in some ways—I am a Baptist, and LCS is a Presbyterian institution—I did not consider these factors to be as important as selecting a seminary committed to free training for prospective ministers.
- Each year, I usually attend a gospel conference that charges for tickets. (The specific conference is not necessarily the same each year.) While I do not believe it is right to charge for these sorts of gatherings, they are often run by local churches that are not attempting to build any sort of industry on the opportunity. In my estimation, the direct spiritual benefit of meeting with other brothers outweighs the indirect spiritual harm that may arise as an unintended consequence of my ticket purchase.
- When I preach through a new book of the Bible, I purchase a number of commentaries on that book that I would not be able to access otherwise. My primary concern is that my congregation be well-fed sheep, and this ultimately trumps my concern to go out of my way to actively resist the Jesus trade as I might in other areas.

Because these remarks involve concessions to differing circumstances, they may seem like a hodgepodge of unprincipled pragmatism. Hopefully, the previous distinctions between material and formal commoditization make it clear why they are not. Where actions are permissible, wisdom must be employed for biblical priorities to be kept in order.

Most people who have tried to live the Christian life faithfully recognize the need for such wisdom decisions. Many have zealously participated in boycotts against products that come from companies lacking Christian values only to later realize the number of similarly compromised corporations. The quantity is so great that they could not sustain their boycott at the scale needed to do so consistently. The Lord has not called us to avoid all interactions with evil things, but only to be wise about them (1 Cor 5:9-10). Some have attempted to do so via hermitage, but this is itself forbidden (Prov 18:1).

Conclusion

The buying and selling of spiritual things ought to be grieved, but buying Christian teaching is not always a sin. Recognizing the distinction between *material commodification* of Christian ministry and *formal commodification* of Christian ministry, we may cautiously engage in the former while rigorously avoiding the latter.

For those who have engaged in the sin of Simon, the formal commodification of Christian ministry, the Lord offers forgiveness.

> Repent, therefore, of your wickedness, and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for the intent of your heart." (Acts 8:22)

Let us repent of our ways and be forgiven rather than being poisoned by bitterness and held captive to iniquity!

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/buying

THE SIN OF JUDAS AND THE SALE OF CHRISTIAN TEACHING

Conley Owens

Judas betrayed Jesus for a mere 30 pieces of silver. This is widely regarded as one of the greatest sins ever committed. Is there an analogous sin that exists today?

Throughout church history, any who have been willing to trade the things of God for money have been labeled as "Judases," and not without cause. In fact, the common practice of selling Christian teaching today should be identified as the sin of Judas, regardless of how common or anodyne it may appear.

Let us consider several aspects of the sin of Judas and how they compare to the sale of Christian teaching.

A Greed for Earthly Gain

Greed may be defined as an inordinate desire for material gain. A particular type of greed is that which covets the possessions of others. We see that Judas operated with such sinful motivations.

> But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was going to betray Him, asked, "Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" Judas did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to take from what was put into it. (John 12:4-6)

This applies not only when one takes that which directly belongs to another, but also when one trades that which belongs to another for material possessions. For example, the thief who pawns catalytic converters for cash is functionally identical to a thief who steals money directly. Moreover, there is something especially heinous about such activity, because the cost of replacing what is lost is greater than the amount that is gained.

When Judas betrayed Jesus, he was not content with the situation in life that God had allotted to him, but sought to increase his own prosperity by taking that which was not his own—the precious life of Jesus—and selling it for some paltry amount.

> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life you inherited from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Similarly, the one who sells Christian teaching sells what is not his to sell. Inasmuch as it is of his own imagination—not in accord with the word of God—it ought not to be

taught as religious knowledge at all. Inasmuch as it is derived from divine revelation, it has been freely received and ought to be freely given.

> As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. (Matt 10:7-8)

Moreover, since good news of the gospel is Christ himself (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 1:23; Php 1:15), and the one who receives him possesses him as his own (1 John 5:12), the one who sells that message is not transacting in mere words, but in Christ himself, as did Judas.

A Disregard for Heavenly Gain

Values are comparative. Judas's sin was not merely in valuing earthly riches, but in valuing them beyond heavenly riches, such that he was willing to exchange the former for the latter. Paul describes the folly of this thinking when he remarks that the gospel is not his to sell, but even if it were, the material reward that could be gained by selling it would not match the heavenly reward that may be possessed by offering it freely.

> If my preaching is voluntary, I have a reward. But if it is not voluntary, I am still entrusted with a responsibility. What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not use up my rights in preaching it. (1 Cor 9:17-18)

The one who sells Christian teaching forfeits the heavenly reward available to those who offer the word of God freely. Jesus himself described how those who give or pray for recognition among men trade a heavenly reward for an earthly one (Matt 6:1-6). The same applies to the work of preaching and teaching. The one who exchanges the word for material honors does so at the expense of heavenly honors.

An Injury to the Kingdom

Moreover, Judas was willing to bring direct harm to the kingdom of God. Those who sell Christian teaching do harm to the kingdom on at least two counts. First, they withhold the teaching of Christ. Second, because the medium communicates the message, they fail to communicate the freeness of the grace of God, instead communicating an alternative message.

> Come, all you who are thirsty,
> come to the waters;
> and you without money,
> come, buy, and eat!
> Come, buy wine and milk
> without money and without cost! (Isa 55:1)

One may argue that this does not harm Jesus himself, but Jesus himself claimed that a neglect of his elect is a malicious neglect of him.

> And they too will reply, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then the King will answer, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.' (Matt 25:44-45; cf. Acts 9:4)

In fact, in considering the way it harms the kingdom, the sin of selling Christian teaching is even greater than the sin of Judas in several ways. Appealing to the Parisian Theologian William Perault, John Wycliffe observed that "simoniacs go beyond Iscariot, who secretly sold to the elders Truth existing in a mortal body, but simoniacs do the opposite entirely with regard to both the Son and the Holy Spirit."[1] A modern commentator explains Wycliffe's use of Perault: "The contrast here is that Judas sold God secretly as he exists in the human body of Christ, but simoniacs openly sell the divine Christ and the Holy Spirit." If we acknowledge that selling Christian teaching is simony, the reality of this assessment becomes apparent.

Judas operated in the shadows, but peddlers of the word of God operate openly. Judas did bodily harm to Christ, but the one who exchanges Christian teaching for money spiritually dishonors Christ who has been given to us freely. Additionally, since he presumably hopes to effect some work of the Spirit in the hearts of the hearers, he likewise dishonors the Holy Spirit who has been freely given as well.

> We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. And this is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. (1 Cor 2:12-13)

A Pretext of Friendship

Lastly, Judas turned Jesus over to the Roman authorities under the pretext of friendship.

> Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The One I kiss is the man; arrest Him." Going directly to Jesus, he said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. "Friend," Jesus replied, "do what you came for." (Matt 26:48-50)

All who sell Christian teaching do so with the stated intention of the good of Christ and his kingdom. In some cases, this is all for show, but in every other case, those good intentions are at best misguided.

These matters are often flipped on their head. For example, in Corinth, the "super apostles" who charged for their preaching were considered as bringing glory to the kingdom while Paul was only bringing shame. Of course, nothing could have been further from the truth.

1. Wycliffe, *On Simony*, trans. Terrence A. McVeigh, 39; cf. 46n33.

> Was it a sin for me to humble myself in order to exalt you, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? [...] Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! (2 Cor 11:7, 11)

Regardless of how well-intentioned anyone who sells Christian teaching may be, ultimately Scripture implicates them as insincere. They definitionally operate with an ulterior motive, giving teaching in exchange for some material gain.

> For we are not like so many others, who peddle the word of God. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as men sent from God. (2 Cor 2:17)

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

The prophet Zechariah encountered a situation that shares several details with the story of Judas.

> Then I told them, "If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." So they weighed out my wages, thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—this magnificent price at which they valued me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD. (Zec 11:12-13)

In summary,

1. he is paid thirty pieces of silver (Matt 27:3),
2. the silver is cast into the temple (Matt 27:5), and
3. the silver is given to a potter (Matt 27:7).

Matthew himself testifies that Zechariah's activity functions as a prophecy fulfilled by Judas (Matt 27:9-10).[2]

So what is the context of Zechariah? His people are as a flock with poor shepherds. These men are hirelings, eager to gain wealth from the sheep through selling them, saying "Blessed be the LORD, for I am rich!" (Zec 11:4-5). As a sign to Judah, Zechariah is commanded by God to take the role of a shepherd, only to abandon the flock.

> Then I said, "Let the dying die, and the perishing perish; and let those who remain devour one another's flesh." (Zec 11:9)

It is at this point that he breaks his staff and asks for payment, which he receives in thirty pieces of silver.

2. While it is evident that Matthew cites this passage, he attributes it to Jeremiah. He likely speaks of Jeremiah as the largest book of prophecy which stands in place of all the prophets. Note that the Bible often speaks of "the Psalms" to refer to all the second half of the Old Testament or of "Ephraim" to refer to all the northern tribes of Israel.

The picture of Judas is not primarily of one who harms the good shepherd, but one who has no care for the sheep and only wishes to profit from them. We should not narrowly interpret its significance or narrowly apply it.

Any sin which takes place in the narratives of Scripture is given as an example for us to avoid (cf. 1 Cor 10:6). Those who would reject the similarities between the activities of Judas and peddlers of the word risk making the sin of Judas one that cannot be imitated today, and therefore it would be of no real caution to the church.

Conclusion

It may seem absurd that selling Christian teaching could be identified as the sin of Judas, first because it is so common, and second because so many do it with good intentions. Yet as we have seen, it coincides with all the core aspects of that sin. Additionally, in appealing to Zechariah, Matthew himself confirms that Judas's behavior is identical to the behavior of one who seeks to secure wealth from the flock.

There is a great danger in mistaking the patience of God for his blessing. After Judas's sin, he was so afflicted that he willingly forfeited his silver and even took his own life; perhaps we would expect a similar divine affliction if our own generation's sin was as great as his. Yet Micah cautions us against this mistake.

> Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets practice divination for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD, saying, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster can come upon us." (Micah 3:11)

The sin of Judas is one that is alive and well. And as it did then, it exists today among Jesus's closest disciples. Yet he is a forgiving God! For all who have considered it right to exchange the things of God for money, may they heed Peter's words:

> Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. (Acts 8:22)

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/judas

THE WAGES OF A PROSTITUTE

Why Donating Ministry Income Doesn't Justify the Sale of Christian Teaching

Conley Owens

The Bible is replete with commands regarding the intersection of money and ministry: "Freely give" (Matt 10:8), don't be "peddlers of God's Word" (2 Cor 2:17), "you cannot serve God and money" (Matt 6:24), etc. Clearly, ministry is a task fraught with danger; it is no wonder James warns that not many should become teachers (James 3:1).

Given these concerns, how are those who advance the Word of God to Christians to honor the Lord financially? They must guard against greed in their own hearts, but they also must demonstrate their good intentions before man (2 Cor 8:21). The work of ministry requires resources, but to charge the hearers a fee may solicit accusations of using godliness as a means of gain (1 Tim 6:5).

One supposed remedy is to donate the profits. If someone receives none—or only a small amount—of the revenue, then they have at least demonstrated some level of generosity. In theory, this evidences a sincere heart that only desires to honor God.

There are a number of examples of this approach across the evangelical landscape. Just to take two, consider these well-known authors who receive royalties from their popular books:

- Rick Warren famously reverse tithes, giving 90% to various charities.
- John Piper forwards all his royalties to various ministries.[1]

Yet, does this actually accomplish the intended goal of aligning oneself with biblical principles?

The Problem with Donating Proceeds of Ministry Sales

The problem with this approach is quite simple: The Lord has forbidden all sale of Christian teaching. The command to "freely give" (Matt 10:8) and the denouncement of "peddlers of God's Word" (2 Cor 2:17) are not abstract warnings against greed; they are concrete prohibitions against the commercialization of biblical instruction. No subsequent activity justifies these transactions. Saul thought his plundering of the Amalekites was justified so long as he offered all of it to the Lord, but as the prophet Samuel explains, obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22).

Moreover, Scripture speaks of such gifts as being detestable. That is, he does not accept money wrongly acquired.

1. While Piper's newer works are available without charge in PDF format, his older works are not.

> You must not bring the wages of a prostitute, whether female or male, into the house of the LORD your God to fulfill any vow, because both are detestable to the LORD your God. (Deut 23:18)

In our own culture, a similar notion is communicated by the terms "blood money" or "dirty money." It is generally understood that one is complicit if he knowingly receives ill-gotten gain. Such money, as it stands, is only fit for destruction.

> All her carved images will be smashed to pieces;
> *all her wages will be burned in the fire*,
> and I will destroy all her idols.
> Since she collected the wages of a prostitute,
> they will be used again on a prostitute. (Mic 1:7)

The Lord's Warning against the Word-Peddler

If these gifts are illegitimate before God then those teachers who broadcast their donations are guilty of a false boast. Consider the following proverb:

> Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give. (Prov 25:14)

Notably, Jude picks up on the imagery of this proverb and incorporates it into his brief epistle:

> For certain people have crept in unnoticed [...] These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; **waterless clouds, swept along by winds**; (Jude 4,12; cf. 2 Peter 2:17)

Putting this together, we see a startling image. Those who publicly announce that they donate the proceeds from sales of ministry often do so as proof of their legitimacy. Yet if we acknowledge it as a false gift, Jude identifies this very behavior as marking *false* teachers.

I don't wish to overstate the case. It's worth observing that the church is currently inundated with commercial practices and those who forward their profits are often doing so out of an attempt to *fight against* an established commercial norm in the church rather than perpetuate it. As such, I commend the effort.

All the same, we should not fail to notice the biblical warnings and rightly assess what is taking place. Regardless of whether the proceeds of sales are donated, the teaching itself is not given generously. Rather, it is offered with partiality to those willing to pay (James 2:1). And once that payment is rendered, the teacher is obligated by the terms of sale—he therefore teaches under compulsion as Peter forbids (1 Pet 5:2).

Just as the prostitute's donation of her wages does not vindicate her actions or character, the same is true for the seller of biblical instruction and his donation. To reference a popular trope, the notion of a generous Word-peddler ultimately rings as artificial as the notion of a hooker with a heart of gold.

The Lord's Purpose for the Word-Peddler

While such activity is against the Lord's commands, we may rejoice with Paul when Christ is proclaimed, even by those who have an ulterior motive (Phil 1:17-18; cf. 2 Cor 2:17).

While the wages of a prostitute are not an acceptable sacrifice, that does not mean they will not be redeemed. Consider this stunning picture:

> And at the end of seventy years, the LORD will restore Tyre. Then she will return to hire as a prostitute and sell herself to all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. Yet her profits and wages will be set apart to the LORD; they will not be stored or saved, for her profit will go to those who live before the LORD, for abundant food and fine clothing. (Isa 23:17-18)

The surprising detail here is that the Lord will accept the prostitute's wages. While Isaiah speaks in metaphor regarding the nation of Tyre, he indicates that the Lord will ultimately use such ill-gotten funds. This is a theme repeated several times in Scripture (Prov 13:22; Ecc 2:26; cf. Rom 8:28). Those who grieve the sale of biblical teaching may rejoice in God's ultimate purposes for it.

The Lord's Forgiveness of the Word-Peddler

What ought one to do who has engaged in this sin of selling biblical instruction? Should such proceeds really be destroyed? Apart from repentance, yes. But he accepts that which is offered in true repentance. Consider the example of Zacchaeus. Given his status as tax-collector (Matt 18:17), we are to understand his wealth as ill-gotten.

> And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." (Luke 19:8)

Though he gives half his goods, there is no reason to think that only half were sinfully acquired. He acknowledges that he has defrauded others. Regardless, the Lord accepts his repentance, declaring him a saved man (Luke 19:9). This gives hope for those who would never be able to return what they have gained through wrongfully commercializing the Word.

One more narrative in the gospels is worth considering. Mary was identified as a notorious "sinner" (Luke 7:37), a word often interchanged with the explicit label of "prostitute" (Luke 15:1; Matt 21:31). Is it possible that her expensive offering to Jesus came from such sinful wages (John 12:3,5)? The Lord received this as well and declared her forgiven (Luke 7:47).

Conclusion

Scripture forbids the sale of biblical instruction and no amount of sacrifice can justify it. In fact, the artifice of such gifts only serve to mark oneself as a waterless cloud, a false teacher.

Please do not misunderstand; permit me to say it as charitably as I can: I believe there are many today with a true gospel and a true God who mistakenly peddle the Word. However, rather than marking themselves as true teachers by announcing the donation of the proceeds of their sales, they engage in a false generosity by which we are to identify false teachers.

This is a serious error, yet the Lord forgives all who turn to him. If you are involved in any ministry that sells biblical teaching, offer ill-gotten gain in repentance and begin working toward reformation today.

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Specific Passages

MICAH 3:11

Selling Truth

Andrew Case

"Everything's for sale in the 21st century," sang Derek Webb in his song *Ballad in Plain Red* (2003). Hyperbole? As I look around, I see Christian speakers charging fees for conferences, pastors requiring payment for digital sermon downloads, biblical commentaries and books about the gospel being sold, Christian bloggers monetizing their writing about Jesus through paid subscriptions and advertising, and worship artists selling the rights to sing their songs to God in church.

But this isn't new. Truth was already being sold way back in the 8th century BC in the time of the prophet Micah, and what he wrote has implications for today's monetizing of ministry. So, I invite you to join me in taking out the microscope and meditating on Micah 3:11. The prophet is speaking of the nation of Israel:

> Its leaders give judgment for a bribe;
> its priests teach for a price;
> its prophets practice pagan divination for money.
> Yet they lean on Yahweh and say,
> "Is not Yahweh in our midst?
> No disaster shall come upon us." (Micah 3:11)

We have three parallel lines in this part of the poem: 1) leaders taking bribes, 2) priests selling their teaching, 3) prophets selling divination. If we didn't have the first line, we might mistake the second two lines as things that are actually okay because of how normal they have become in our current commercialized Christian climate. But the first line is something we still universally recognize as wrong. Bribery within the justice system is obviously sinful to everyone.

"Its priests teach for a price"

Although not everyone is in agreement on how to translate the Hebrew root ירה (*yarah*) in line two of this verse, the consensus is that it has to do with *instruction* (NASB) or *teaching* (NIV). This is the same verb used to talk about the role of the priests in Deuteronomy 33:10: "They shall *teach* Jacob your rules and Israel your law" (see also 2 Chron 15:3, Deut 17:10-11, 24:8, Lev 10:11, 14:57, Ezek 44:23). So in the time of Micah, these spiritual leaders were teaching. About God and his word. And this teaching had a price tag.

In the phrase "priests teach for a price" the Hebrew word for "price" (מָחִיר, *mechir*) speaks of the simple idea of *requiring payment*. To be clear, these priests were not condemned by God for charging more than usual, nor for making more money than they needed to live on. It was simply for monetizing their role as servants of Yahweh. God

was already providing for their needs in other ways (Num 18:11), but they were using their position to invent ways of increasing their income. Christian history has used a strong, specific word for this sin: *venality*, defined as "the prostitution of talents, offices or services for reward."

Don't miss the fact that in this verse, selling godly instruction is likened to the sin of *taking a bribe as a judge*—unjustly favoring those who can pay in the court of law. Therefore, God condemns the sale of Christian instruction.

"Its prophets practice pagan divination for money"

The third parallel line of the verse speaks of prophets doing divination (Hebrew קסם, *qasam*) for money. In English the word "divination" can be ambiguous, referring to general prediction performed under divine inspiration. But in both the Hebrew original and the Septuagint translation, the words used are unambiguously negative. In Greek the word (μαντεύομαι, manteuomai) here refers to what we see in Acts 16:16 with the slave girl who was used to make money through fortune-telling. In Hebrew the verb (קסם, *qasam*) is exclusively used in negative contexts, such as those condemning false prophets (e.g. Ezek 21:29, Jer 27:9, Zech 10:2). It was forbidden in Deuteronomy 18:10: "There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination (קסם, *qasam*) or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer." We know from 2 Kings 17:17 that Israel was guilty of this sin.

Micah doesn't use the usual Hebrew verb for "prophesy" (from the root נבא, *nava'*) here, and to the original hearers it would have been especially shocking because of how unexpected it was after the first two parallel lines. In those lines he describes the leaders and priests doing *expected* things: judging (שׁפט, *shaphat*) and teaching (ירה, *yarah*), but then jars the listener with the action of these prophets. Unfortunately, the NLT fails to reflect both the negative connotation and surprise: "you prophets won't prophesy unless you are paid" (see also the GNT "give their revelations" and ISV "prophesy").

So there are actually two evils described in this third line of the verse: 1) doing pagan divination, and 2) the act of selling it. How do we know that selling the work of prophets was wrong? 2 Kings 5 gives us an example of how strict good prophets were about not even accepting offered remuneration for their righteous work, in the story of Elisha and Gehazi. When Gehazi did what he thought was reasonable in his own eyes, and accepted what Naaman offered as a payment of gratitude for his healing, the consequence was severe (5:26-27).

Once again, don't miss it: the evil of selling divination is something God likens to priests who sell teaching.

"Yet they lean on Yahweh"

The last half of Micah 3:11 shows that the corruption is all the worse because it's hidden behind a show of piety: "Yet they lean on Yahweh and say, 'Is not Yahweh in our midst? No disaster shall come upon us.'" Some may say this sincerely, and others insincerely. But either way, Micah is pointing out a dark irony—these spiritual leaders are claiming

to trust in Yahweh, and they believe that he is present among them as a sign of approval of what they're doing. They reassure themselves by the outward performance of religious rituals. But the end result will be destruction: "Therefore, because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins" (Micah 3:12).

Have we now moved past this temptation and practice? We still find non-profit organizations, authors, worship songwriters, biblical counselors, Bible publishers, and many others sincerely believing that it's ok for them to be selling access to the truth they offer through their ministry of the Word. We often misapply Scripture to justify this practice with phrases like: "A worker deserves his wages" or "How else would they make a living?" or "Paul said that charging money for ministry is one of my rights". But in spite of our reasoning, the sincerity of monetized ministry is compromised, and God likens it to 1) a judge taking a bribe and 2) a prophet using pagan forms of prediction and charging money for it.

Perhaps it's not an accident that in Judges 17 we meet a man also named *Micah*, who instead of condemning corruption, offers a Levite money to be his priest. Micah is a desperately confused man. He's convinced that God will bless him because 1) he has two expensive idols in his house (17:4) and 2) he paid a descendent of Levi to be his priest (17:10). The interesting thing about both Micah and the Levite is that they are well-meaning, and apparently oblivious to the evil of their actions. The Levite is never named by the author, probably to imply that the entire priesthood has become corrupt, and to highlight the degradation and lawlessness during this period where "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Responding well

All of this compels me to ask just a few questions: Could it be possible that the richest, most materialistic societies in all of human history (Western nations) might have a tendency to do what is right in their own eyes regarding money and ministry? Could it be that we are partaking in our culture's serious blind spots when it comes to the commercialization of Christianity? Might we be just as confused and well-meaning as Micah and the Levite, oblivious to the evil that God sees in us?

Over two thousand years later, are we—the church of the 21st century—guilty of the prophet Micah's indictment? In our cultural moment we have mostly accepted the peddling of God's word as normal: priests teach for a price all around us. Spiritual leaders are selling biblical teaching—in many forms and contexts. Digital books full of lifegiving, gospel truth have price tags, Bible study software is sold, videos to help people go deeper into the Bible are carefully guarded behind paywalls. But God's heart remains clear in Scripture: "let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev 22:17, cf. Isa 55:1).

Just like in Micah's time, most of us today assume we're doing nothing wrong when we turn the knowledge of God into a profitable product. After all, seemingly everyone around us and even those leaders we love and respect are doing the same. Surely so many people can't be wrong, we think. And yet every culture has its blind spots, as

Christian history has shown. How can we discover them except by returning over and over to Scripture to be informed and admonished as we discover what God desires and requires of us?

As with all prophetic critiques of well-established cultural practice, people almost never respond well. This is true of Micah's day and ours, especially when money is mentioned. Scripture has given an example of how it often goes when someone challenges our attachment to worldly wealth and ways of amassing it. After Jesus gave the rich young ruler a hard assignment, "he was deeply *dismayed* and he went away *grieving*; for he was one who owned much property" (Mark 10:22), or as Matthew 19 says: "he went away *sorrowful*, for he had great possessions."

So, I will not be surprised if many who monetize ministry simply dismiss this. I'll also not be surprised if some agree and say, "Yes, Scripture does condemn requiring payment for ministry. Instead, I should follow Jesus' instructions to give freely, and rely on my Master to provide for me," but then go away sorrowful, because change is too hard. They're too entrenched in the status quo. Or there's too much money at stake, and there are so many systems in place that have made themselves part of the very fabric of our organizations—systems which would need to be painfully uprooted. It'll probably be too uncomfortable. Tearing down idols is hard. Following Jesus is hard, and deeply uncomfortable, especially when you have a ship that you've built up over decades until it's too big to turn.

When Jesus entered the temple courts in Matthew 21:12, he didn't have a nice friendly conversation or soft-spoken debate with those who were buying and selling there. There was no feigning of neutrality. Instead, he drove them out and overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. Some may not have ears to hear a message like Micah's, and perhaps Jesus will respond with a violent wake-up call in their lives, painful and jarring. Yet my hope and prayer is that Western churches are not so full of money changers and sellers that the only way for change is for Jesus to resort to driving them out by force.

Let's pray for reform, so that some things *are* considered too sacred to be for sale in the 21st century. Instead of selling it, let's *freely speak* truth in love. And let's honor and imitate our perfect Judge, Priest, and Prophet who never sold his teaching—who gave his life for greedy people like you and me.

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2 CORINTHIANS 2:17

Commercializing the Word of God

Conley Owens & Andrew Case

In 2 Corinthians, Paul speaks of false apostles (the "super apostles") who, in comparison to Paul, charged for their preaching (2 Cor 11:7,12-13). The first indication in the epistle that the false apostles wrongly accepted money from the Corinthians is in 2:17, but bibles differ on how best to translate this verse. The ESV renders it as:

> For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (2 Cor 2:17, ESV)

In this article we will argue that the best way to translate καπηλεύοντες in the phrase "peddlers of God's Word" is with a word that carries the primary meaning of *commercial action and intent*, such as "retailers," or "merchants," or simply "sellers." Paul is contrasting his own free ministry with the commercialized ministry of false teachers, and using this distinction to show God's seal of authenticity on him as a true servant of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul defends the dignity of his ministry, which is fraught with things most would find shameful: beatings, shipwrecks, missed itineraries, etc. In constructing this defense, he must compare himself to the false teachers of Corinth. In this particular verse (2:17), the "many" (οἱ πολλοὶ) may refer to false teachers in general, but most especially refers to those of Corinth. However, the same entity reappears in the next verse as "some" (τινες), indicating that a particular group is in mind. This parallelism "suggests that 'the many' is rhetorical (and disparaging) rather than numerical."[1] With this remark, Paul intends to implicate his opponents, the false apostles.

That said, the primary source of interest in this verse is the word translated by the ESV as "peddlers" (καπηλεύοντες, from καπηλεύω). Commentators and translations divide over recognizing this word as indicating an adulteration or commercialization of the gospel. Furthermore, they differ on whether or not this word necessarily implies a motive of profit. Thus, as we will see below, some translations add "for profit" to the verse because they believe it to be implicit information from the context that needs to be made explicit to the reader, even though the words "for profit" are not found in the Greek.[2]

1. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 156n47.
2. Data collected from Bible Hub.

Version	Commerce	Corruption	God's Word	Profit
Historical				
Geneva	make merchandise of		the worde of God	
KJV		corrupt	the word of God	
ASV		corrupting	the word of God	
Modern literal				
ESV	peddlers of		God's word	
NASB	peddling		the word of God	
NKJV	peddling		the word of God	
ISV	commercializing		God's word	
Modern with explanatory gloss				
CSB	market		the word of God	for profit
NIV	peddle the word of God		the word of God	for profit
BSB	peddle		the word of God	for profit
NET	hucksters who peddle		the word of God	for profit
NLT	hucksters		who preach	for personal profit
CEV			from preaching God's message	try to get rich

Corruption or Commerce?

It should be recognized at the outset that the word in question, καπηλεύω, occurs only in 2 Corinthians 2:17 in all of the NT. The rarity of this word presents a challenge to interpreters because there are no other biblical contexts with which to compare its use, besides the Greek version of Isaiah 1:22 which uses a nominal form of the word (κάπηλοί).

In spite of this difficulty, there are good reasons to understand καπηλεύω as referring to *commerce* and not explicitly to corruption. These reasons include a careful lexical analysis of the extrabiblical and Septuagint's use of καπηλεύω and its related forms, the wider context of 2 Corinthians, a close look at what exactly Paul was being criticized for in terms of financial policy, a parallel passage in 1 Thessalonians 2:3–5, and the objective nature of Paul's criticism. Let's look at each of these in turn.

A Lexical Study of καπηλεύω

In spite of καπηλεύω being a *hapax legomenon* within the NT, there is ample evidence that it primarily means to *engage in market transactions*,[3] and for this reason BDAG gives the

fundamental meanings of "trade in, peddle, huckster." Although some older versions translate the word as "adulterate,"[4] there are compelling arguments not to go that direction. These arguments include a careful examination of two primary pieces of evidence: 1) the anti-Sophist polemic in the Greek classics and Hellenistic Judaism, 2) the use of the word "retailer" (κάπηλος) in the Greek LXX of Isaiah 1:22.[5]

Before discussing the evidence, it should be understood that the research of Hans Windisch from 1924 stands behind many of the mainstream arguments for understanding καπηλεύω as *to sell*.[6] Windisch did acknowledge the possible meaning of "adulterate," but only as a *secondary* meaning. Unfortunately, some who read his research misunderstood or misapplied it, and took the idea of adulteration as primary.[7] But Scott Hafemann, in his painstakingly thorough exegesis of 2 Corinthians 2:14-3:3 has shown that the idea of corruption is *not inherent in* the commercial sense of καπηλεύω, but rather added to it.[8]

The anti-Sophist polemic in the Greek classics boils down to the idea that Plato, who did not sell his teaching, criticized the Sophists for doing so. For example, "The Sophist is really a sort of merchant or dealer (κάπηλος) in provisions on which a soul is nourished." They are "hawking (καπηλεύοντες) [their doctrines] about any odd purchaser who desires them, commending everything that they sell."[9] Some interpreters have assumed that Plato looked down on them because they were selling corrupt teaching or watered-down philosophy, and so the meaning of καπηλεύω must include the idea of corruption or adulteration. But a deeper understanding of Plato from more context leads to the conclusion that Plato was not critiquing the Sophists for corrupting their message, but instead for claiming to sell what they did not have. "For Plato, Sophistry was a sham, and its teachers were entertainers (see *Soph.* 235A). What they sold was worthless."[10] Furthermore, a careful reading of Plato's treatment of this issue shows that "to sell one's instruction implied that what one had to teach was valuable enough to warrant its purchase. To sell one's teaching was, in effect, to make a *positive* claim concerning the worth of one's message."[11] Thus we cannot take Plato's use of καπηλεύω as support for the idea that it implied *corruption*. Rather, the context of Plato's writing strengthens the conclusion that the word refers to the simple act of *selling*, and possibly the connotation of pretending to sell something that one doesn't really have.

In Hellenistic Judaism (second-century B.C.) we find the word κάπηλος used by Jesus ben Sirach in Sirach 26:29: "A merchant will scarcely be delivered from

3. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.94, 2.141; *Sirach* 26:29.
4. For example, the Latin Vulgate renders it "adulterantes verbum Dei." Informed by the LXX translation of Isaiah 1:22, Gregory of Nanzianzus concluded that both ideas of peddling and adulterating were present. See Gregory of Nanzianzus, *Oration*, § 2.46.
5. Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering & Ministry in the Spirit: Paul's Defense of His Ministry in II Corinthians 2:14–3:3* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 106.
6. Ibid., 101–102.
7. See ibid., 103.
8. Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering & Ministry in the Spirit: Paul's Defense of His Ministry in II Corinthians 2:14–3:3*.
9. *Protagoras* 313CD.
10. Hafemann, *Suffering & Ministry in the Spirit,* 110.
11. Ibid., 112.

wrongdoing, and a retailer (κάπηλος) will not be innocent of sin." This teaching is undoubtedly related to what Sirach says later in the next chapter:

> Many have sinned on account of cash, and he who seeks to increase will avert an eye. Between joints of stones a peg will be driven, and between selling and buying sin will be wedged. If one does not hold fast in fear of the Lord, quickly, with speed, his house will be overthrown. (27:1-3)

Notice that in Sirach 26:29 "merchant" (ἔμπορος) is parallel to "retailer" (κάπηλος). BDAG defines ἔμπορος as "one who travels by ship for business reasons, *merchant.*" So, although Sirach rightly believes that the pursuit of money can cause one to sin, his use of the word κάπηλος gives no reason to conclude that it also carries the inherent meaning of adulteration of goods. The fact that merchants have historically fostered a bad reputation for themselves through dishonest dealings does not mean that the work of a merchant is primarily the work of corrupting things. And if we examine the works of both Lucian and Philostratus, we will arrive at the same conclusion.[12] To be inherently suspect of watering things down in a certain culture does not change the definition of words like *merchant, retailer,* or *wine-seller*.

Another important piece of historical evidence comes from the use of the related noun form (κάπηλος) in Isaiah 1:22: "Your silver has no value; your taverners (κάπηλοί) mix the wine with water." Before going further, it should be emphasized that the Greek version differs significantly from the Hebrew, which does not mention "taverners" or "drink-sellers."[13] That said, notice that these κάπηλοί are the people who *sell* wine, but we only find out what else they are doing to that wine later on in the Greek verse. In other words, the noun form κάπηλοί here only *identifies* the *merchants,* and then tells us that they are also watering down the wine. κάπηλοί does not refer to the act itself of adulterating wine. As Hafemann writes, "there is no evidence that this word-group ever directly signified the idea of 'watering down', 'adulterating', or 'falsifying' or that these ideas were ever present as part of the wider semantic field of the verb."[14] So while it may be understood why interpreters might be led to venture too far and impose the meaning of adulterate onto κάπηλοί because of the immediate context of Isaiah 1:22, that reading is tenuous at best. Although Paul was certainly concerned with the adulteration of God's Word (cf. 2 Cor 4:2), this verse does not address it.

The Wider Context of 2 Corinthians

The phrase "in the sight of God we speak in Christ" reappears (albeit in a different verbal form) later in the same letter in 2 Corinthians 12:19. What is the issue in the context of chapter 12? Paul continues to refuse to financially burden the Corinthians (2 Cor 12:13–18). Twice Paul has appealed to his speech being in the sight of God in Christ, emphasizing the sincerity of his message and lack of ulterior motives. If the *com-*

12. Ibid., 119-22.
13. The Hebrew says: "Your silver has become dross, your choice wine mixed with water."
14. Ibid., 123.

mercial interpretation of 2 Corinthians 2:17 is correct, both of these appeals have been in precisely the same financial context.

Criticism of Paul for His Financial Policy

Paul is not disparaged for the *content* of his gospel (corruption) but rather for the *free giving* of it (commerce), as seen in 2 Corinthians 11:7: "did I commit a sin… because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?". He says that, "in the sight of God" he speaks in Christ. In other words, he asserts his impunity before man as long as he has pleased God. He is not on trial before the Corinthians but rather stands before a heavenly court where his only aim is to please the Lord. This indicates that there is some offense he is responding to. If καπηλεύω refers to corruption, then the Corinthians have been offended by the content of his preaching because they find his truthful message displeasing and prefer an adulterated one. However, the contents of the letter do not sufficiently account for this interpretation. Even if the false apostles had been tampering with God's Word to offer something more attractive (cf. 2 Cor 4:2), at what point do we see evidence that the Corinthians despise Paul because of the contents of his gospel? If, on the other hand, καπηλεύω refers to *commercialization*, then the Corinthians have been offended because they find a free message displeasing and prefer the "dignity" of teachers who charge a fee. Indeed, reading the rest of 2 Corinthians, we see that this is precisely what has offended them (2 Cor 11:5–7). The commercial interpretation of 2 Corinthians 2:17 acknowledges Paul's need to respond to a past offense with a defense of his apostleship.

The Parallel Passage of 1 Thessalonians 2:3-5

Paul writes something remarkably similar in 1 Thessalonians 2:3–5. Although he doesn't present his concerns in the same sequence, this passage helps shed more light on 2 Corinthians 2:17, as the following comparison demonstrates:[15]

2 Corinthians 2:17	**1 Thessalonians 2:3–5**
For we are not, like so many, καπηλεύοντες of God's word,	[5a] For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed
but as men of sincerity,	[3] For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive,
as commissioned by God	[4a] but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel,
in the sight of God we speak in Christ.	[4b] so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. [5b] God is witness.

The key issue in 1 Thessalonians 2 is *greed* (1 Thess 2:5). If the similarity of these passages indicates a shared concern, it is natural to conclude that 2 Corinthians 2:17 is addressing

15. This chart is based on the similar chart provided in ibid., 176.

the commercialization of the gospel over the corruption of the gospel as the primary concern.

The Objective Nature of Paul's Criticism

Paul's directness in this verse demonstrates that his opponents accept payment for their preaching and teaching. We should ask, "How is Paul able confidently to attribute such negative motives to these men, while expecting his own claim 'of sincerity' to be accepted?"[16] If the false apostles are misusing Scripture in a particular way, then the matter is subjective, and Paul's accusation jumps too quickly to a verdict. But if the accusation has to do with selling God's Word, then the issue is already out in the open and objective: his opponents have accepted payment whereas Paul has refused.[17]

A Motive of Profit?

Beyond the concern between commercialization and corruption, many translations choose to elaborate on the motive behind the action (as seen above). Does καπηλεύω imply a *desire to profit*?

Of course, there is a normative sense in which anyone who sells—or even corrupts for that matter—has a desire to profit. Few would deny this. In fact, it is exactly for this reason that any word used for the commercialization of Scripture will naturally carry tacit suggestions of a profit motive. "Peddling," the common word among many translations, does this sufficiently. Why add additional words, transforming undertones to overtones?

Adding an explicit reference to profit restricts Paul's condemnation to the motive itself, failing to unambiguously condemn the specific action that is actually forbidden in the Greek text. For example, does Paul wish to distinguish himself from *all* who would sell God's Word, or only to distinguish himself from those who would sell God's Word *for profit*? Is it actually wrong to sell God's Word? Or is it only wrong when the one who is doing so doesn't have his heart in the right place?

Of course, Paul clearly answers these questions later in the same epistle. He wishes to distinguish himself from *all who would sell God's Word*. He preaches free of charge (2 Cor 11:7) and he will continue to do so to distinguish himself from those who don't (2 Cor 11:12). Would Paul have been satisfied with the commercial practices of his opponents if they had charged less? Of course not. Would he have been sufficiently distinguished from them if he simply charged less than they did? Of course not. Only a free proclamation of the gospel distinguishes itself from one that is offered at a price.

When modern translations add a "for profit" clause, are they providing themselves and others with a loophole to escape Paul's condemnation? Are they justifying themselves as "non-profit" organizations by adding "for profit" to Paul's words? Only God knows their hearts and intentions.

16. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 157.
17. See ibid.

Conclusion

There is something delightfully simple with the rendering of "καπηλεύω" provided by the ISV: "commercializing." There is no attempt to suggest any motive. There is no restriction of this verse to those with underhanded practices, as words like "peddlers" or "hucksters" might imply. There is only an acknowledgement of the meaning of the word and the actual nature of the sin: to engage in a reciprocal exchange that trades the Word of God for something in return. To quote a larger portion, "we are not commercializing God's Word like so many others."

Paul distinguished himself from the false apostles of Corinth, not merely by having a right heart as he sold the gospel, but by refusing to sell it at all. There are indeed "so many others" who sell the message of Christ. May the Church of God follow in the apostle's footsteps, offering that message at no charge at all. After all, when he did this, Paul was merely imitating his master, Christ (Matt 10:8; cf. 1 Cor 11:1).

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/commercializing-gods-word

1 CORINTHIANS 9

Affirming Payment or Condemning It?

Jon Here

1 Corinthians 9 is commonly upheld as proof that it's ok to sell ministry, since in it Paul vigorously argues for the right to material support in ministry. And it's true. Paul *does* thoroughly substantiate the right to material support with numerous examples, reference to the Law, and the conclusive statement that "those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel" (9:14).

However, there are two big mistakes that many interpreters of 1 Corinthians 9 make:

1. Assuming the right to material support justifies *selling* ministry
2. Assuming the right to material support is the point of the chapter

Many have been reading 1 Corinthians 9 upside down. Paul is not lifting up the right to material support to endorse its use, but for it to be all the more dramatic when he himself *relinquishes* it (*"But we did not exercise this right"*)! He even does it twice to drive the point home.

Context is crucial

1 Corinthians 9 is situated within Paul's admonishment to the Corinthians regarding food sacrificed to idols (chapters 8-10). Many either assume that Paul has gone off on a tangent or simply miss the fact that chapter 9 is integral to his overall argument regarding food sacrificed to idols.[1]

While Paul acknowledges that we have the "right" to eat whatever we like, he admonishes that such a right should not always be exercised (8:9). He then goes on in chapter 9 to give an example of how one of his own rights shouldn't be used to its fullest extent (the right to material support as a minister of the gospel).

The following terms are used in chapter 9 without much clarification from Paul as to what they are referring to, so it is important to read them in the overall context of the letter:

- **"free" /** ἐλεύθερος — This greek work for "free" refers to freedom, where as later in 9:18 ἀδάπανον is used for "free" in terms of payment. Paul uses ἐλεύθερος earlier in the letter to refer to slaves being free from their masters (7:21), and a woman being free to marry (7:39). Thus, when used in 9:1 and 9:19, Paul is not referring to his salvation but rather to his freedom from obligation to others, freedom to do as he pleases.[2]

1. See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, for a detailed explanation of this.
2. This is especially clear in 9:19, "Ελεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων" (Free, for I am, from all)

Paul will later make the point that while he may be free from others, he is not free from the Lord (9:17).

- **"right" /** ἐξουσία — This word is most often translated in the New Testament as "authority", something to be stewarded rather than some kind of moral entitlement. Critiquing the concept of "rights" is part of the purpose of Paul's letter. In earlier chapters he makes clear that exercising one's "right/authority" is not always justified and can be detrimental to the gospel, in regards to sexual immorality (6:12) and food sacrificed to idols (8:9).
- **"boast" /** καύχημα — Paul mentions "boasting" throughout both letters to the Corinthians. He is very critical of human boasting (1:29), redirects it to boasting about God instead (1:31), and also uses it sarcastically throughout 2 Corinthians (especially 2 Cor 11-12). In 1 Corinthians 9:15 he also uses it ironically.[3] While others really do boast, Paul instead humbles himself by not claiming his material rights.[4]
- **"reward" /** μισθός — Earlier in the letter Paul talks about God rewarding people for their service (3:8,14), and so too Paul himself seeks reward from God rather than payment from men. While others may get a material reward when preaching of their own initiative (9:17), Paul's "reward" (ironically) is to preach for free (9:18) and be rewarded by his master instead.

So when our modern translations render these terms in English, we must be careful not to import alternate meanings that are not implied in the original language or in the passage's context.

1 Corinthians 9 expanded

In light of this understanding, let's go through 1 Corinthians 9, with parenthetical expansions to help smooth out the flow of Paul's argument. These expansions work for any of the major translations, so feel free to apply them to your preferred translation.

The intention here is to help us recall what Paul means by these terms, applying what we know from the context. We'll start from the last verse of chapter 8 for context:

> 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again [despite having the right to], so that I will not cause him to stumble.
>
> 9:1 Am I not free [*to exercise my rights*]? Am I not an apostle [*with rights*]? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you yourselves not my workmanship in the Lord? 2 Even if I am not an apostle to others, surely I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord [*thus I have the rights of an apostle*].
>
> 3 This is my defense to those who scrutinize me [*when I tell you to give up your own rights*]: 4 Have we no right to food and to drink? 5 Have we no right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and

3. It's clear he is being ironic given he immediately follows "I would rather die than let anyone nullify my boast" with "I have no reason to boast" (9:15-16).

4. This is also how he refers to his giving up of material rights in 2 Corinthians 11:7 ("to humble myself").

Cephas? [6] Or do only Barnabas and I lack the right to not have to work?[5] [*Surely we have the right to support just as the other apostles do.*]

[7] Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Who tends a flock and does not drink of its milk? [*Nobody does.*]

[8] Do I say this from [*merely*] a human perspective? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? [9] 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? [10] Isn't He actually speaking on our behalf? Indeed, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they should also expect to share in the harvest.

[11] If we have sown spiritual seed [*of great value*] among you, is it too much for us to reap a material harvest [*of lesser value*] from you? [12] If others have this right to your support, shouldn't we have it all the more? [*Thus we deserve support from you more than anyone else does!*]

But we did not exercise this right. Instead, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ [*by expecting support from you*].

[13] Do you not know that those who work in the temple eat of its food, and those who serve at the altar partake of its offerings? [14] In the same way, the Lord has prescribed that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel [*through the support of others*].

[15] **But I have not used any of these rights.** And I am not writing this to suggest that something be done for me. Indeed, I would rather die than let anyone nullify my "boast", [*lest anyone think I'm doing this for material gain*].

[16] For when I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast, because I am obligated to preach [*as God's servant*]. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

[17] If my preaching is of my own will[6] [*like someone self-employed*], I have a reward [*receiving whatever I like*]. But if it is not of my own will [*which is the case*], I have been[7] entrusted with a responsibility [*as God's servant*]. [18] What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge [*seeking reward from God instead*], and so not take advantage of[8] my rights in preaching it.

[19] Though I am free of obligation to anyone, I make myself a slave to everyone [*giving up my rights*], to win as many as possible.

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5. This phrase is literally "right to not work". If someone has the right to not do something, they are not being forbidden from doing it, but are rather being freed from *having* to do it. A right to not clean the dishes is best expressed as a right to not *have to* clean the dishes. Which is why "have to" is supplied for clarity.

6. Some translations render ἑκὼν as "voluntary", however "voluntary" can be understood to mean someone has "volunteered" to serve under an authority, which would mean they are not really "free" (9:1). Rather, Paul is giving an example of someone who *is* free from any authority or obligation. Thus "of my own will" is a better rendering as it removes the potential for such a misunderstanding.

7. Some translations render the perfect tense of πεπίστευμαι as "I am still entrusted", however the use of "still" can mislead readers into thinking it is in contrast to "but if not of my own will". In which case Paul would be saying that he is still entrusted with a responsibility *despite* not preaching of his own will. When really Paul is entrusted with a responsibility *in accord with* not preaching of his own will. Thus "I have been entrusted" is more suitable.

8. "use" / καταχρήσασθαι — This verb is prepended by "κατα" which intensifies it (Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 2003, p427). Some translations read "not make full use of my rights" (NIV, ESV similar) which could mistakenly imply that Paul *did make some use* of his rights. Other translations read it in terms of excess "not abuse my authority" (NKJV). This is more likely given the context. Paul is heavily implying it would be *inappropriate* for him to "use" his rights, so "abuse" or "take advantage of" better capture the meaning.

[20-27] [*Paul continues the idea of giving up rights for the sake of others and being self-disciplined rather than living as we please.*]

1 Corinthians 9 paraphrased

It can be hard to follow the whole chapter given its size, so let's now reduce this to a paraphrased version:

> [1-12] I too could exercise my rights, such as my right to support. As you know, I'm an apostle. Apostles deserve to be compensated for their labor, just like anyone else does. So we could have accepted support from you if we wanted to.
>
> [12-15] But we didn't exercise this right! We'd prefer to go without support than let anything get in the way of the gospel. We certainly do have the right to support, as God has always supported ministers through people's offerings, in the temple and in the Church now as well. But I haven't used any of these rights!
>
> [15] (By the way, I'm not mentioning all of this to imply you should support me. I would rather die than have anyone think I'm doing this for material gain.)
>
> [16-19] I have to preach the gospel free of charge, as I'm not self-employed but rather a servant of God. My reward is getting to serve him and you. So while we might be free to do as we please, we should still give up our rights for the sake of the gospel.

The tension

This chapter is a challenging one to fully understand because Paul is holding two things in tension.

On the one hand, Paul indeed justifies the right to support. When he mentions that the other apostles received support (9:5-6), he is not criticizing them. It is all part of his argument that he too has the right to support just like they do. And Paul did accept support from other churches (Phil 4:18) and even requested it from the Corinthians at the end of the letter (1 Cor 16:6).

On the other hand, he will only preach "free of charge" (9:18) and will not let material things hinder his ministry in any way (9:12). This is not a matter of personal preference, but rather a practice he expects *everyone* to follow, lest they too "hinder the gospel of Christ." Just as he has given up his material rights, he expects the Corinthians to do the same in regard to food sacrificed to idols: "You are to imitate me, just as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

What we can conclude, then, is that the right to material support is legitimate, as long as it doesn't get in the way of the gospel. Which means there are times it is appropriate and times it is not, and forms of funding that are appropriate and forms that are not.

This nuance is easily observed when we consider the other topics Paul also addresses:

- The right to one's own body – which can be sexually exercised appropriately (in marriage) or inappropriately (with a prostitute, 6:15).

- The right to eat – which can be exercised appropriately (eating an ordinary meal) or inappropriately (eating at "the table of demons", 10:21).

And so, too:

- The right to material support

It is necessary to consult the rest of Scripture to further flesh out what appropriate and inappropriate support looks like, but we can already see the pattern emerging from this passage. According to Paul's example, which he expects his readers to follow, ministry must be free and it must not be hindered by any demand for material support.

Paul did not think it appropriate to receive support from the Corinthians prior to the letter, most likely due to their lack of maturity (3:1-2). Unlike the Philippians who would have understood supporting free ministry as an act of worship (Phil 4:18), Paul had to ensure that the Corinthians understood that sincere ministry is not *conditioned* on any potential support (1 Cor 9:18, 2 Cor 2:17, 2 Cor 11:7).

Alternate interpretations

Let's consider some of the most common alternate interpretations for this passage:

- **Responding to criticism:** Verses 1-6 sound very defensive and appear to be a response to criticism of Paul's apostleship and/or his financial practices. If so, what prompted this sudden outburst in the middle of a discussion about food? Paul was actually having a problem with people revering him excessively (1:12) and the flow of Paul's argument implies that he expects his readers to answer all his questions positively, including whether he is an apostle. These introductory verses are rhetoric Paul uses to establish his "rights", making it all the more surprising that he doesn't make use of them.[9]
- **Supererogation:** Some read Paul's giving up of material support as a noble act that he does not necessarily expect of others. They believe he is going beyond what is required of believers (supererogation). But that would undermine the point he is making regarding food sacrificed to idols. Although believers may theoretically eat anything, that does not mean that right should always be exercised. Eating sacrificed food is not a matter of good vs. better, but of sin vs. holiness (1 Cor 8:12, 10:20, 10:28). Paul sets an example for others in this matter (8:13) and it is an example he expects them to follow: "You are to imitate me, just as I imitate Christ" (11:1). Likewise, the means of funding ministry is not a matter of good vs. better but of hindering or not hindering the gospel of Christ (9:12).[10]

9. Authors who agree that Paul is not defending his apostleship: Garland, *1 Corinthians*; Witherington, *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*; Verbrugge and Harris, *1 & 2 Corinthians*.

10. Authors who agree Paul is not going 'above and beyond' but expects all to give up their own rights regarding material support and food sacrificed to idols: Garland, *1 Corinthians*; Witherington, *A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*.

- **Patronage:** Some argue that Paul wanted to avoid being controlled by the Corinthians, were they to become his financial backers (hence Paul's emphasis on being free of obligation to others [9:1, 9:19]). However, this doesn't fit with the context of food rights (chapters 8-10) as it implies Paul is simply off on a tangent that is only vaguely related. It doesn't make sense of the Corinthians' desire to be *under* Paul as followers (1:12), since patronage assumes they wanted to be *over* him. And it also doesn't explain why Paul would be happy to be financially connected to the church in Philippi (Phil 4:18) but not the church in Corinth. There is no indication of any issue of patronage in the actual text so this view is merely speculative.[11]

Therefore, all of these other interpretations prove inadequate and do not sufficiently explain all aspects of the passage.

A right to sell ministry?

There is a form of material support that is conspicuously absent in this chapter. Paul covers a range of occupations: apostles, soldiers, vinedressers, shepherds, oxen, plowmen, threshers, sowers, and priests. Yet the common occupation of a merchant in a marketplace is missing, and for good reason.

All the examples Paul gives are of those who receive *indirect* support, through hospitality, wages from a master, or sharing in what is produced. This is in contrast to a merchant who directly exchanges something for money. Go back through the whole chapter and you'll notice that Paul never even uses the words "money" or "payment"!

Directly exchanging spiritual things for money is exactly the type of funding that "hinders the gospel of Christ." To sell ministry is to deny people access to it unless they pay. It is also the type of finance explicitly condemned by Micah (Mic 3:11) and Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 2:17).

In conclusion, 1 Corinthians 9 does not support selling ministry. It condemns it. Paul navigates a complex space where the right to support exists, but must be exercised cautiously to avoid compromising the gospel and one's own integrity. This nuanced approach, reflected in other areas of his teachings, suggests that context and intention play a crucial role in determining the appropriateness of receiving or offering support. This passage cannot and should not be used to justify the commercialization of spiritual things so prevalent today. In the end, 1 Corinthians 9 must be read in light of Jesus' command to freely give what has been freely received (Matt 10:8).

11. Witherington in *"A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians"* espouses this view but he is hesitant to be conclusive, often favoring wording like: "Apparently Paul did not want", "Paul may have", "It may well be", "a preacher receiving patronage would probably be". This is a good reminder that this view is based on guesswork and not anything clear in the text.

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1 CORINTHIANS 9

The Meaning of "Right" / "Authority"

Conley Owens

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul repeatedly uses the Greek word "exousia" (ἐξουσία) to speak of his "authority" or "right" to material support as a minister of the gospel. He speaks of his "exousia" in several ways:

Instances of "exousia" in 1 Cor 9 (BLB)	**Explanation**
v4 Have we no authority to eat and to drink?	To eat and drink in this context is to receive material support; Paul alludes to the discussion about eating in the previous chapter.
v5 Have we no authority to take about a believer as a wife, as also the other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?	Supporting a family while planting churches requires material support
v6 Or only I and Barnabas, have we no authority not to work?	Ceasing from secular labors requires material support
v12 If others partake of the authority over you, should we not more? But we did not use this right. Instead, we bear all things, so that we should not place any hindrance to the gospel of Christ.	Material support would come from those Christians who benefit from Paul's ministry
v18 What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel, I should offer the gospel free of charge, so as not to use up my right in the gospel.	In preaching the gospel freely, Paul does not receive material things in exchange

Of all the passages in Scripture dedicated to the intersection between money and ministry, 1 Corinthians 9 is by far the lengthiest. Naturally, any interpretive conclusions lead to substantial implications. To what degree do recipients of ministry owe repayment? May a minister always receive material support in the context of ministry?

I would posit that there are three primary ways of interpreting Paul's right. In the context of ministry and giving, it is either:

A. a claim to material support,

B. a plenary authority to receive material support, or

C. a limited authority to receive material support.

The point of this article is to advocate for **C** as the correct understanding. I will present arguments for this in a moment, but first, a few words of clarification.

A: When Paul speaks of his right, he does not primarily have in mind his claim to material support or the duty or payment that is owed to him. Certainly, the fact that something is owed to him is repeatedly asserted in this passage (e.g., 1 Cor 9:11). Additionally, it is clearly stated elsewhere in Scripture (1 Tim 5:18; Gal 6:6). However, my contention is that this is not his emphasis in using the word "right," as one might speak of "a right to a fair trial."

B: When Paul speaks of his right, he also does not indicate a plenary authority to receive all that is offered to him. That is, it is not the kind of authority where his actions may stand without being subject to review. My point is not merely that Paul will have to give an account for his actions on the day of judgment (2 Cor 5:10), but that here in this life there are clear boundaries to his proper use of authority.

C: When Paul speaks of his right, he indicates a limited authority to receive what is offered. We may here consider the difference between a "right of autonomy" and a "right of attorney." One who is autonomous has plenary authority over his own self, but one who is an attorney has a limited authority over the life of another. As a steward with a delegated authority, he has a fiduciary duty to honor his client's mandates and directives. Right use of Paul's authority is not merely constrained by his private sense of wisdom, but by the public charter of gospel ministry.

What then is the limit on Paul's authority? As a representative of Christ, the apostle may only receive material support that is legitimately offered to Christ. Receiving anything beyond this would be an abuse of his authority. Specifically, in preaching free of charge (1 Cor 9:18; 2 Cor 11:7), Paul rejects all reciprocity that would suggest he is to be honored as the source of the gospel. While he happily accepts what is offered to the Lord in thankfulness, he rejects any exchange for his message.[1]

"Exousia" Indicates Authority

"Exousia" indicates an authority or power to control. Bauer's Lexicon (BDAG) gives a semantic range of seven possible meanings, all being variations on notions of authority or power, none referring to the state of something being owed as we often think of the word "right." This is not to say that "right" is a poor translation; often the word "right" indicates power or authority such as "a right to bear arms." However, it is to say that "right" has the potential to imply a meaning not indicated by the word "exousia": something that is owed by another as in the phrase "a right to a fair trial." Note that rights come in two varieties: negative rights are things that should not be taken away (e.g., property rights) and positive rights are things that should be given (e.g., health care rights).[2]

While English Bible versions often translate "exousia" (ἐξουσία) as "right" in 1 Corinthians 9, the vast majority of times it is simply translated "authority." For example, though the word appears 102 times in Scripture, outside of 1 Corinthians 9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:9 (which addresses the same topic of Paul's fundraising), the Berean Literal Bible (BLB) translates it as "right" only once and the New American Standard Bible (NASB) only translates it as "right" three times. In each of these instances, the

1. Consider Acts 16:15. Paul resists the hospitality of Lydia since she is a new convert to the Christian faith, one who would likely want to repay him for the gospel . Yet he accepts when she offers it on the basis of her service to the Lord.

2. This is not to comment on the reality of health care rights or to deny that a right to a fair trial can be reframed as a negative right—one who is not given a fair trial typically has their property rights violated. My point is just to demonstrate the semantic range of the English word "right" extends beyond the Greek word "exousia."

word "right" could be replaced with "power," "authority," or "access," and often is in other versions.

BLB	
1 Corinthians 8:9	But be careful, lest somehow this **right** of yours becomes an occasion of stumbling to those being weak
NASB	
John 1:12	to them He gave the **right** to become children of God
Hebrews 13:10	We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no **right** to eat.
Revelation 22:14	they will have the **right** to the tree of life

These examples speak of a freedom of access rather than something that is owed by someone else.

Paul's Analogies Indicate a Limited Authority

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul employs a bevy of analogies to describe his right to material support. Elsewhere, we have analyzed the nature of these analogies, but it is worth pointing out that these all indicate a limited authority.

The several agricultural analogies are the least direct, but neither the ox (1 Cor 9:9), the vinedresser (1 Cor 9:7b), nor the shepherd (1 Cor 9:7c) have a direct authority to take from the produce. In each of these situations they receive under the owner's direction.

The analogy of the soldier is more direct.

> Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? (1 Cor 9:7a)

Consider the contexts in which the soldier is permitted to take money from citizens. He should collect from taxes given to the king; the citizens are obligated to the king, and as the soldier collects, he has authority from the king to receive this money even for his own support. However, there are circumstances where it would be wrong for him to receive money. If he compels a citizen to give directly to him rather than to the king, it is extortion. If the citizen offers money beyond his duty to the king, for the sake of the soldier, it is bribery. The soldier's right to receive on behalf of the king is limited rather than plenary.

The same is true for the most direct analogy: that of the priesthood.

> Do you not know that those working in the temple eat the things of the temple; those attending at the altar partake in the altar? (1 Cor 9:13)

The Levites received of the tithes and offerings given by the people in Israel. As frequently indicated throughout Numbers 18, "the Lord is their inheritance" (Deu 18:2). That is, they had authority to receive contributions and sacrifices that were made to God. However, this was not a plenary authority to receive anything offered to them in the context of ministry. If one offered sacrifice directly to them rather than to the Lord, it

would be idolatrous. The sons of Eli committed a great sin in receiving meat that was not offered to the Lord (1 Sam 2:12-17). If we would not regard the priests as having a plenary authority to any kind of support, we should not regard Paul as having this sort of authority either.

Paul's Primary Point is His Limited Use of Authority

Paul begins 1 Corinthians 9 by establishing his "right" or authority. However, he starts from this foundation in order to highlight the contrast between his authority and its proper use.

> If others partake of the authority over you, *should* we not more? But we did not use this right. Instead, we bear all things, so that we should not place any hindrance to the gospel of Christ. (1 Cor 9:12)

> But I have not used *any* of these. And neither have I written these things that it should be thus with me; for *it would be* better to me to die, rather than that anyone will make void my boasting. (1 Cor 9:15)

> What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel, I should offer the gospel free of charge, so as not to use up my right in the gospel. (1 Cor 9:18)

Of course, when people refer to this chapter, they frequently identify the premise as the main conclusion. In hearing the standard appeal to this passage, one might imagine that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 9 in order to argue for his right to receive material support. The 19th century Scottish minister James Begg the Younger observed this difficulty as he addressed the problem of churches raising money through charging rent for pews. In his time, many would appeal to this chapter in order to argue that ministers should receive material support from those blessed by their ministry. While this is an ideal that is implied by the passage, Paul's main point is rather to explain why that ideal should often remain unrealized.

> The Apostle did not enjoin Christian ministers to live on the contributions of their hearers. Those who quote [1 Corinthians 9] for the purpose of proving the opposite doctrine always halt in the middle of the apostle's statement with an evident design.[3]

How does this observation relate to the question of whether Paul's right is a plenary authority? If his main point is that his use of his authority should be limited, it certainly adds weight to the idea that the authority itself is limited.

Even the length of the chapter adds weight to the judgment that Paul's authority is limited. That is, a well-developed understanding of Scripture should recognize that a substantially long discourse on ethics would tend toward that which has direct application. Because Scripture is designed for edification (2 Tim 3:16), personal or hy-

3. James Begg, *Seat Rents*, 20.

per-contextual considerations are typically relegated to shorter pericopes. Yet those who would see Paul's right as a plenary authority regard the limitation of its use to be the result of such considerations.

Paul's Stewardship Indicates a Limited Authority

Paul's reason for rejecting material support is centered in the notion of stewardship.

> For if I preach the gospel, there is no boasting to me, for necessity is laid upon me. But woe be to me if I should not preach the gospel. For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if unwillingly, I am entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel, I should offer the gospel free of charge, so as not to use up my right[4] in the gospel. (1 Cor 9:16-18)

Paul rejects the idea that he operates with autonomy when he says he does not proclaim the gospel of his own will. That is, he is not a free agent who gives the gospel to whom he wills for the price that he sets. Instead, he is a steward who does not use his particular authority to charge for the gospel.

Because Paul says that he has a right or authority to receive material support, many imagine that it would not have been inherently wrong for him to have received that which was offered in Corinth. It would only be unsuitable to his particular context or strategy. We will see in a moment why Paul speaks in terms of possessing a broader right to material support rather than explicitly disavowing it in the context of reciprocity,[5] but consider the implications that the apostle himself has stated here: It is not merely that he would be making a strategic blunder or unwise move; to use his authority beyond particular boundaries would be to no longer operate as a steward. He can either forfeit the notion of a plenary authority or he can forfeit his status as a servant of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 4:1). Given his options, he embraces a limited authority to receive support.

This stewardship connects to Paul's boasting and reward. If he were to act with a plenary authority and not as a steward, he would sacrifice his grounds for boasting. That is, to step outside of his limited authority would be to abdicate any claim to God's operation in his ministry. "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31; cf. 15:31; 2 Cor 10:17-18). Moreover, it would sacrifice his reward in exchange for a less valuable one (cf. Mat 6:1-6). Over material things received in exchange for preaching, he would prefer the high status of being a steward of God (1 Cor 9:17). Sincere stewardship stands at odds with any peddling of the word (2 Cor 2:17). These boasts and rewards Paul chooses from are mutually exclusive because they come from mutually exclusive modes of proclamation: autonomy and stewardship, plenary authority and limited authority.

4. "Use" is "καταχρήσασθαι", intensified with the prefix "κατα". The idea is not that Paul made some use of his rights, but that he did not abuse his authority (cf. New King James Version). See also Garland, 1 Corinthians, 2003, 427.

5. It plays off of the Corinthians' incomplete notion of Christian liberty, that "all things are lawful."

	plenary authority	limited authority
reciprocity	accepted	rejected
mode	willing	unwilling
boast	in self	in the Lord
reward	reciprocity	stewardship

1 Corinthians 8 and 10 Express a Limited Authority

Perhaps the strongest argument to be made comes from the larger context of the epistle. Much insight can be drawn from the surrounding chapters, which address the matter of meat sacrificed to idols. In fact, chapter 9 serves as an illustration for the consideration of these surrounding chapters. There, he speaks of the Corinthians' "right" to eat.

> But be careful, lest somehow this **right** of yours becomes an occasion of stumbling to those being weak (1 Cor 8:9)

Paul's comments regarding the conscience in 1 Corinthians 8:7–12 have given rise to an interpretation that regards the issue in Corinth to center on a conflict between those of a strong conscience and those of a weak conscience. In this view, those with strong consciences know they are permitted to eat all things, but those with weak consciences do not feel comfortable availing themselves of this freedom. Paul's solution is for the strong to be considerate of others by foregoing their right to eat food sacrificed to idols so as not to offend the muddy consciences of the weak. By this reading, the strong are not at risk of any religious danger, only of offending weaker brothers. This appears to be corroborated by the companion text in Romans 14:1.

However, this Corinthian contention between the weak and the strong is assumed rather than proven.[6] There is no suggestion that those with weak consciences may be offended or that they would somehow benefit from understanding that it is permissible to eat food sacrificed to idols. Instead, Paul's concern is the opposite: he worries that they will be drawn into eating (1 Cor 8:10). Their weak consciences, which do not know the difference between right and wrong, may be deceived by the foolish bravado of other Christians into thinking that one may eat food sacrificed to idols. In 1 Corinthians 10, he directly tells them to flee idolatry by ceasing to eat food sacrificed to idols.

> Therefore my beloved, flee from idolatry. […] Then what do I mean? That what is sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? Rather, that what the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. And I do not want you to be fellow partakers with demons. (1 Cor 10:14,19-20)

Moreover, the connection to Romans 14 is not as direct as it appears on an initial inspection. While Romans 14 speaks of a weak brother, 1 Corinthians 8 speaks of a weak

6. David E. Garland offers a thorough critique of this interpretation in his commentary. Garland, 1 Corinthians, 350–362.

conscience. The weak conscience of 1 Corinthians 8 is a conscience that remains unconvicted regarding a sinful action unlike the weak brother of Romans 14 that is wrongly convicted by a neutral action.

If the Corinthians' right in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 is neither a claim to ownership of food nor a plenary authority to eat, then Paul's right in 1 Corinthians 9—which serves as an illustration for the surrounding chapters—must have a similar shape. In arguing that a right to eat does not entail a permissive license to eat in all circumstances (cf. 1 Cor 6:13), he points to his own ministry. His right to receive material support does not entail a permissive license to receive in all circumstances.

The Associated Notion of Lawfulness Expresses a Limited Authority

Exploring the larger context of 1 Corinthians, we must take note of the Greek word "exestin" (ἔξεστιν), typically translated as "lawful." In English, "right" and "lawful" look and sound very different, but "exousia" and "exestin" are closely related etymologically.

root	οὐσία	ἐστιν
parsing	feminine present participle of the verb eimi (εἰμί)	present indicative third person singular of the verb eimi (εἰμί)
meaning	being	is
prefixed	ἐξουσία	ἔξεστιν
meaning	right	lawful

In other words, when Paul uses the terms "right" and "lawful," he is speaking in terms of two aspects of the same concept. When a person has a "right" to an activity, that activity for them is "lawful." Recognizing this connection is possibly the most important key to realizing Paul speaks of a limited right, because he explicitly speaks of "lawfulness" as a limited authority rather than plenary authority.

Paul originally addresses the notion of lawfulness in 1 Corinthians 6:12. Likely appealing to the grace of God (cf. Rom 6:1), the Corinthians have written to him about all actions being lawful. Rather than rejecting their claim outright, Paul concedes there is a sense in which all things are lawful, but he cleverly responds by distinguishing "lawful" from "profitable."

> "All things are lawful to me," but not all things do profit. "All things are lawful to me," but I will not be mastered by anything. (1 Cor 6:12)

What kinds of activities are lawful but not profitable? He speaks of both food and sex (1 Cor 6:13-14). He then addresses each over the next several chapters, beginning with sex.

Paul argues that sex is lawful, but that doesn't mean one has a permissive license to sleep with a prostitute. Next, he argues that eating is lawful, but that does mean one should eat food sacrificed to idols. If the matter weren't clear enough already, he even

demonstrates his unity of thought by closing off his argument with a repetition of the aphorism: "'All things are lawful,' but not all things are profitable" (1 Cor 10:23).

In context, the point of Paul's illustration in 1 Corinthians 9 becomes obvious.

lawful	**not profitable**	**passage**
sex	sexual immorality	1 Corinthians 6:15-7:40
eating	eating food sacrificed to idols	1 Corinthians 8; 10
receiving material things	charging for preaching	1 Corinthians 9

Returning from the notion of lawfulness to rights, if the Christian's right to sexual activity is not a plenary authority to enjoy sex as he pleases, only guided by some personal or hyper-contextual wisdom considerations, why would we regard Paul's right this way? Paul does not speak of a plenary authority to receive material support, but a limited authority with clear boundaries.

Conclusion

While we've only scratched the surface of 1 Corinthians 9, it should be evident that when Paul uses the word "right," he does not indicate a claim to material support or even a plenary authority to receive it. Even as an apostle, he does not have a permissive license or legal carte blanche that would justify any and all courses of action. Rather, he denotes a limited authority of stewardship that permits him to receive that which is truly offered to the Lord. Paul would never charge for his preaching, accepting honor for himself that belongs to the Lord. However, as his representative and steward, the apostle gladly receives what is offered to the Lord.

> But I have all things, and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things from you, an odor of a sweet smell, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. (Phil 4:18)

A minister of the gospel does not have a plenary authority to receive every gift that is offered to him. He has something much greater! He has a boast in the Lord and a reward of stewardship itself, and within that stewardship from God he may receive all that is offered in sacrifice to the Lord.

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JOHN 2 / MARK 11

Cleansing the Temple of Commerce

Jon Here

In the temple cleansing accounts, we see Jesus act very un-Jesus like (according to modern stereotypes). He turned over tables, poured coins all over the ground, and drove out animals and traders with a whip.[1] Were someone to do that in church today it might be described as "extreme" or even "violent."

Some would have you believe that Jesus' cleansing of the temple has little relevance for us today, since the temple no longer exists. Let's evaluate that by carefully considering what made Jesus so upset.

Comparing the accounts

As a testimony to its significance, this is one of the few scenes in Jesus' earthly ministry that is recorded in all four Gospels. All four have Jesus (1) entering the temple, (2) driving out those selling things, and (3) rebuking them for turning God's house into something it is not supposed to be.

This is John's account (2:14-16):

> In the temple he found those selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting there. So he made a whip out of cords and drove them all from the temple, with the sheep and cattle. He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those selling doves he said, "Get these out of here! Do not turn my father's house into a house of trade!"

The Synoptics tell of a separate event, later in his ministry. According to Mark (11:15-17):

> When they arrived in Jerusalem, he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and buying in the temple. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves. And he would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. Then Jesus began to teach them, and he declared, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

The accounts recorded in Matthew 21:12-13 and Luke 19:45-46 match closely with Mark's longer version. There are no significant details in Matthew and Luke that are not also recorded in Mark; they only differ in minor linguistic matters.[2]

There is good reason to believe John's account is a distinct event to that of the Synoptics.[3] But whether distinct or not, we should study them both together to determine

Jesus' motivations. The events have more in common than not, and it is unlikely that Jesus would drive out similar commerce in similar ways for different reasons. It is, therefore, appropriate to consult his actions and speech from both events to determine what his motivations were and what implications they have for today.

Was Jesus fulfilling prophecy?

If you consult commentaries on the temple cleansing passages you will find that many scholars interpret them messianically. That is, Jesus made a big scene to show that the temple was soon to be done away with and would be "rebuilt" in him. These interpretations have merit and are supported by the context of the accounts. Mark surrounds the temple cleansing with the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-21), and John follows his account with Jesus' statement that the rebuilding of the temple would be fulfilled in his resurrection (John 2:21).[4]

Yet many neglect to properly consider the *literal* significance of Jesus' rebuke. He did not prearrange for there to be trade in the temple so that he could symbolically drive it out, like he prearranged to enter triumphantly on a donkey (Matt 21:2). While Jesus cursed the fig tree to symbolically confront human sin, the temple cleansings involve him *literally* confronting human sin.

So yes, these passages do point to Jesus being the Messiah, but his outrage at the traders was not just for show. In all four accounts Jesus rebukes people for turning the temple into something it is not supposed to be. We must determine *what* he was rebuking if we are to properly understand the passage.

Was Jesus offended by greed?

The main targets of Jesus' rebuke were those who were selling things. This has led a number of commentators to speculate that they must have been engaged in some unsavory business practices. Jesus' reference to a "den of robbers" might suggest this, but there is otherwise no reference to greed in any of the texts. We must also ask: If everyone in the temple were completely honest and fair in their business practices, would Jesus have still been upset?

We can conclude with certainty: yes. Jesus did not drive out only those overcharging for their wares, he drove out every seller. Not only did he drive out every seller, **he drove out every buyer** (Matt 21:12, Mark 11:15). If the sellers were extorting people then the

2. All three share a similar context, all recording the temple cleansing as taking place soon after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. So we can safely conclude that they are all recording the exact same event. Mark tells of Jesus first looking around in the temple, but then staying the night in Bethany because it was late, before returning to cleanse the temple the next day. Since Mark includes more details of the event in general, it is reasonable to assume that Jesus did do this reconnaissance even if Matthew and Luke do not mention it.

1. While it is tempting to guess that Jesus just drove the animals out with the whip and did not direct it at people, it is more likely from the actual text that he directed it primarily at the merchants (see Klink, *John*; Mounce, *John*). This does not necessarily mean the whip made contact with anyone but it was certainly forceful psychologically at the very least.

4. There is also the possibility of Jesus fulfilling Zech 14:21 depending on if כְּנַעֲנִי is translated literally as "canaanite" or figuratively as "merchant".

buyers would be the victims. Instead, they are driven out along with the rest of the commerce.

Was Jesus offended by distractions?

The location of the temple cleansing was the court of the Gentiles,[5] the most outer court which was as far as non-Jews could go.[6] The trade of animals would no doubt have been noisy which has led some commentators to guess that Jesus was offended by all the distraction it would have caused from worship in the temple.

But animals had to make their way through the temple complex to be sacrificed one way or another, so removing trade from the temple would have reduced but not eliminated such noise. The temple courts were also a common place for teaching (Luke 2:46),[7] so it was not expected to be a quiet space.

More importantly, identifying distraction as the main concern stands at odds with Jesus' words of rebuke. If he objected to turning the temple into a "house of trade", distractions could only be at best a secondary matter. Further, are "dens of robbers" known for being noisy and distracting? The noise of trade could certainly be an annoyance, but it does not address the heart of the matter.

Jesus was offended by the commerce

It is most reasonable to simply conclude that Jesus was offended by exactly that which he drove out: the commerce.

All the elements of the accounts relate to trade:

- What did Jesus see? Money and property being exchanged.
- What did he spill on the floor? Money.
- What did he drive out? Animals and the people trading them.
- Who was rebuked? Both buyers and sellers.
- What had the temple turned into? A "house of trade" and "den of robbers".[8]

Jews who lived far from the temple were permitted to bring money instead of produce, and exchange it for the items needed for sacrifice when they reached the temple (Deut 14:24-26). There was nothing wrong with selling animals for sacrifice, and Jesus

5. There is scholarly consensus on this. All accounts describe Jesus entering the ἱερὸν which most likely refers to the temple grounds as opposed to the temple sanctuary (ναός, John 2:19). Herod's temple had separate courts for gentiles and women, the court of the gentiles being the outermost court. It is most likely that commerce was taking place in the court of the gentiles. There is historical evidence for this, but also Jesus' rebuke that the temple was to be "a house of prayer for all the nations" (Mark 11:17).

6. Foreigners were allowed to offer sacrifices (Lev 17:8), though some were reserved for only those who had been circumcised (Exod 12:48). So it would appear that the rules of entry imposed in Herod's time were unbiblical.

7. See also Matt 21:23, Mark 12:35, Luke 19:47, John 7:14.

8. Some commentators believe 'den of robbers' refers to insurrectionists and Garland even goes so far as to say "The reference to the 'den of robbers' has nothing to do with the trade in the temple. Instead, it denounces the false security that the sacrificial cult breeds." (Garland, *Mark*, NIVAC). This betrays the immediate context of Jesus' words in favor of an importation of the context of Jeremiah 7:11. Greed is part of the condemnation in Jeremiah 7 which is likely what Jesus is referencing. To completely reinterpret Jesus' actions based on a single obscure reference while ignoring the immediate context of commerce is simply bad exegesis.

would not have reacted as he did had it taken place in a regular market outside the temple.[9]

We must conclude, then, that it was the circumstance of the commerce that offended Jesus. But what was it about the nature of the circumstance that precluded commerce? We might assume it was because the temple complex was holy ground. However, the original temple initiated by God through Solomon consisted only of the sanctuary and the priestly courtyard (1 Kings 6:36, 2 Chron 4:9).[10] The additional courtyards were added by Herod and have no basis in Scripture. Anyone was allowed in the outer courtyard (the only exception being menstruating women) with no purification practices required.[11] This shows that it was not considered a significantly holy space at the time, whereas the actual sanctuary was (cf. Acts 21:28).

Yet Jesus, speaking from the outer courtyard, referred to the location as "my father's house" (John 2:16). While the outer courtyard was not sacred ground in the same sense the sanctuary was, it did have a sacred purpose. This is brought forth in Jesus' rebukes. He does not rebuke anyone for violating the sanctity of the place, but for violating its *purpose*. In both his rebukes, Jesus compares the original purpose of the temple with what it had become. The temple was being used for a purpose it was not intended for. It was meant to be God's house where he is worshiped and had become something else.

Implications for today

Bock, in his commentary on Luke, is one of the few authors to actually consider the theological implications for today:

> This cleansing of the temple took place at an institution of God that no longer exists. But a principle about worship surfaces in Jesus' remarks that is still valid, even if the temple is no longer with us. Worship is a sacred trust, where commerce and hypocrisy have no place.[12]

Yet the temple does still exist in a new form. Believers are now referred to as the temple, both individually (1 Cor 6:19) and corporately (Eph 2:21). The temple was holy because it was the dwelling place of God (Matt 23:21), and now God dwells within us, making us the new temple. This makes it all the more important to live holy lives (1 Cor 6:20). Like-

9. Some scholars believe the money changers were present in the temple to assist those paying the temple tax (Exod 30:13), but they may also have been there to simply serve those trying to purchase animals for sacrifice. Like the merchants, they were a necessary service for temple worship.

10. There was a courtyard that surrounded the temple and palace in Solomon's day (1 Kings 7:12) but it was not part of the actual temple. The temple was modeled on the tabernacle, which also only had one courtyard for the priests (Exo 27:9, Num 3:10).

11. The outer courtyard had a degree of sanctity as women were not allowed in during their menstrual period (Josephus, *Against Apion*, translated by Whiston, book 2 section 8). Since Josephus mentions only the exclusion of menstruating women, it can be assumed that other people during their periods of defilement (Leviticus 15) were permitted. So tabernacle/temple rules were not being applied to the court of the gentiles.

12. Bock, *Luke*, NIVAC. Bock should be commended on making this accurate observation, yet he does not follow it to its logical conclusion. That commerce has been given a place in worship today, such as in regard to royalties paid for song use in churches. He waters down his own conclusion with statements such as "the temple has become an excessively commercial enterprise." Yet there is no evidence in the passage that Jesus was offended by an excess. He did not drive out those charging too much. Rather, he drove out everyone charging anything at all.

wise, when we gather together corporately as God's "temple" we must ensure the *purpose* of our gatherings is not violated (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34).

The temple cleansing accounts clearly tell us that *commerce has no place in the things of God*. We can flesh this out with the following practical applications for the church today:

1. Corporate worship should be free of commerce

God has not designated any new places on earth for worship because *wherever* we gather we function as his temple, whether in a church building or a school hall. As revealed from the temple cleansing passages, it is not the property that is important but the *purpose*. When the purpose of a gathering is for worship, there must not be any commerce.

An egregious historical example would be the renting of pews (reserved seating in church), which was common only a century ago. Modern day examples include royalties for worship songs, church bookstores, and church cafes. Churches that wish to provide their members with access to helpful books and food should go the full step of providing *free* access.

However, we should be wary of applying this principle legalistically. For example, we should not forbid renting the church hall on weekdays when it is not being used for worship. Nor should we condemn informal trading between individuals after a church service (provided it is part of socializing and not conducting business). It *should* apply if any trade is directed towards the congregation as a whole.

2. Ministry itself should always be free

Jesus was offended by commerce happening in a place of worship, and yet everything that was sold in the temple was ordinary: sheep, doves, and different currencies. Just imagine what he would think if it were not just ordinary animals being sold but ministry itself! What happens today is not just the sale of ordinary things but spiritual things: teaching, worship songs, sermons, biblical counseling, etc.

We know what Jesus would think because he clearly forbids selling ministry in Matthew 10:8 ("Freely you received, freely give"), and we have the testimony of other passages as well. The temple cleansing reveals how seriously Jesus takes this issue.

3. We should avoid participating in the commercialization of Christianity

An often overlooked facet of the temple cleansings is that the *buyers* were driven out along with the sellers. We too should avoid participating in commerce when it takes place in the context of worship and ministry. One important consideration, however, is that there is often no alternative available to us. Jews could have purchased animals outside the temple and brought them in, but were too tempted by the convenience the temple sellers offered. The same can't be said for many forms of ministry today.

If your church charges for lunch, it is probably permissible to participate for the sake of fellowship. Though, the issue of payment should be raised with your church leadership.

When it comes to buying Christian books, you may need to buy a copy if you can't access it via other means (such as a physical or online library).

There are, however, things we can easily avoid. We should not participate in paid worship events when so many other options for free corporate worship are available to us. We should not direct people we are discipling to purchase resources, but rather pay for them ourselves (if needed). We should not promote commercial ministry online or at church if it's unnecessary, or would potentially endorse the commerce.

These matters require wisdom, but in general, we should endeavor to support those providing free ministry rather than propping up existing commercial systems.

4. Rebuke is appropriate

I do not propose we emulate the Lord Jesus' means of rebuking commerce in the temple. As a sinless man and as God's son he could righteously overturn tables without a hint of hypocrisy, just as he could rebuke his disciples for lacking faith (Mark 4:40). As fellow sinners who struggle with our own forms of greed, we should always correct and rebuke with a degree of humility. That said, Jesus' rebuke for commercializing the temple is one of the harshest rebukes ever recorded from him. While some may criticize us for confronting the commercialization of ministry, we can hardly be said to be excessive until tables have been flipped.

Would Jesus turn over tables today? Would he enter the church bookstore and send all the products crashing to the ground, bending their pages and scratching their glossy covers? Would he yank the payment terminal from the wall and knock customers' smartphones out of their hands?

In an age where it is not merely animals being sold but the truth of the gospel itself, let's hope that's all he would do.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/temple-cleansing

History

THE SALE OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION CONSIDERED SIMONY

Conley Owens

In the past, the church was often plagued with crooked deals for power and prestige. For a price, one could purchase ecclesiastical office, whether it be an episcopal see or some title of lesser rank. These were positions that came not only with power but with prebend, a regular stipend that was substantial and secure. For the shrewd and unscrupulous, the upfront investment was small compared to the payoff.

Reformers in the church fought against this practice and labeled it "simony" after Simon the magician.

> When Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money. "Give me this power as well," he said, "so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:18-19)

This practice largely thrived during the post-Nicene era and throughout the Middle Ages. However, it exists today in a new form. Rather than restraining itself to backroom dealings, it happens in the open marketplace. Rather than being a matter of church office, it is a matter of the gospel itself.

Authors sell books on biblical topics at double digit markups. Gospel conferences charge in the hundreds to hear solid preaching. Seminaries raise tuition to tens of thousands, and aspiring ministers pay in the hopes of becoming refined by the Spirit for the work of ministry. Each of these activities may have some supposed justification: "People don't value what doesn't cost them anything!" "The worker is worthy of his wages!" "We have to cover costs!" (More on that last one in a moment.) But the fact remains that this is a matter of modern day simony, treating the things of God as commodities to be commercialized rather than as heavenly blessings to be offered graciously.

Of course, this label on the sale of religious instruction may not be readily accepted by many. Let's consider several objections.

Objection 1: Simony Refers to Buying, not Selling

In Acts 8, Simon is guilty of attempting to purchase the gift of the Spirit. One might object that it is odd for the activity of selling to bear his name when he only attempted to buy.

But what was Simon's root sin? Was it merely attempting to purchase the gift of the Spirit, or was it rather his judgment that the gift of God was purchasable? Peter makes it clear that it is the latter, a matter of the heart.

> But Peter replied, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in our ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of your wickedness, and pray to the Lord. Perhaps He will forgive you for the intent of your heart. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and captive to iniquity." (Acts 8:20-23)

Those who attempt to sell the gift of God are guilty of the very same sin. They openly regard spiritual things as items that may be exchanged for money.

Moreover, the historical definition of simony extended to both buying and selling. Consider this definition from Peter Lombard, the prominent medieval theologian.

> Properly speaking, simoniacs are those who, like Simon Magus, wish to put a price on a priceless grace; and those who, in the manner of Giezi receive money for some sacred ministry, ought to be called Giezites. And yet all, whether givers or receivers, are called simoniacs, and both are struck down by the same sentence.[1]

That is, theologians have historically grouped both the sin of Simon and the sin of Gehazi (Giezi) under the banner of "simony." Gehazi was the servant of Elijah who accepted payment from Naaman for his miraculous healing (2 Kings 5:15-27).

Objection 2: Simony Refers to Ordinations, Not Other Religious Things

Ordination to church office involves the laying on of hands (1 Tim 5:22). In biblical examples, we also see this associated with an impartation of the Spirit (Acts 8:18; 2 Tim 1:6). While Protestants would generally (and correctly) regard this feature of laying on hands as reserved to the apostles, the assumption such a gift continues to be communicated by the laying on of hands led the purchase of ordinations in particular to be regarded as simony. Just as Simon tried to buy the gift of the Spirit through the laying on of hands, crooked men who had obtained their office illicitly were guilty of attempting the same.

However, it should be clear that the heart of Simon's sin extends to more than just matters that involve the laying on of hands. Rather, the purchase or sale of any spiritual thing freely given by God constitutes a sin of like character. Indeed, throughout history, theologians who addressed simony agreed on this, regularly defining it as a desire to exchange spiritual things for material things. For example, John Hus defined Simony as "an evil consent to exchange of spiritual goods for nonspiritual."[2] Expositing Gregory the Great, one of the first to campaign heavily against simony in the church, he summarizes,

> ... whenever anyone confers a spiritual gift improperly either himself or through another, either openly or covertly either in consideration of service, of material

1. Lombard, Peter. Sentences, 4.25.2
2. Hus, John. On Simony, 2.

> gift, or human favor, he thereby commits simony, contrary to the Scriptures and Christ's command, "Freely have ye received, freely give."[3]

Objection 3: Simony Refers to Spiritual Things, not Teaching

If simony is a desire to exchange spiritual things for material things, one might readily object that teaching hardly fits into the category of "spiritual things." Just as one may learn about science or literature, become an expert, and then charge students to receive instruction, one could do the same with the Bible.

However, this view misses what the Bible says about the nature of teaching within the church. It is not a natural matter but a spiritual one.

> We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. And this is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. (1 Cor 2:12-13)

Any minister who seeks to instruct others about the things of God should not be seeking to impart human wisdom, but words taught by the Spirit. That is, successful Christian teaching involves a work of the Spirit who is freely given. To charge for this would be discordant with the gracious gift of God (Matt 10:8).

At this point, one may object on historical grounds, observing that past theologians did not regard the sale of religious instruction as simony. While it was not common for works on simony to even address the matter of teaching, we do have at least one example of a theologian who was hesitant to label the sale of religious instruction as simony. Wycliffe writes,

> In the same manner as a teacher should exchange knowledge eagerly with his pupils, so a preacher or minister of the sacraments should eagerly exchange a spiritual service or benefit for a small temporal stipend. Therefore, there is no sin intrinsically in such an exchange,...[4]

A few aspects of Wycliffe's argument should be considered before accepting it. First, in context, he uses Isaiah 55:1 as evidence that teaching could be bought because it encourages people to "come and buy without money." Yet the call to buy *without money* indicates that the grace of God should not be purchased at all, not that it should be purchased for a modest fee. Second, Wycliffe implies that even baptism or communion (the sacraments themselves) could be bought and sold. Third, Wycliffe is operating without working distinctions that would account for the call to supply ministers without a reciprocal exchange.

This last point is crucial. Scripture makes the distinction between reciprocity and colabor. While Jesus says that ministers should freely give (Matt 10:8), he commands

3. Ibid.
4. Wycliffe, John. On Simony, 2.

that they be supported by kingdom citizens (Matt 10:9-10). While John says that missionaries should not charge those to whom they are sent (3 John 7), he also says that they should be supported by fellow workers (3 John 8). Armed with this simple distinction, we are free to say that ministers should never charge for the work of ministry, though they should certainly expect God's people to support the work, and even condition their continued labors on that continued support.

What we see in Wycliffe is not a denial of this assessment but his attempt to wrestle with the matter of ministry fundraising apart from this reciprocity/colabor distinction. This is by and large a product of his situation in the era in which he lived. As the sale of ordinations ran rampant, he offers deep thoughts and distinctions on the matter. As the commercial sale of teaching was not a similarly common issue, he settles for a minimal accounting on the matter. We live in an era where the commercial sale of teaching is far more common; therefore, we are called to a greater clarity.

However, others working with similar definitions as Wycliffe came to the conclusion that the sale of teaching is indeed simony. The famous Counter-Reformation theologian Leonardo Lessius attempted to follow medieval definitions of simony to their logical conclusions. Albert Barnes—the famous Presbyterian Bible commentator—quotes him approvingly with the following translation:

> It is Simony to teach and preach the doctrine of Christ and His Gospel, or to give answers to quiet the conscience, for money. For the immediate object of these two acts, is the calling forth of faith, hope, charity, penitence, and other supernatural acts, and the reception of the consolation of the Holy Spirit; and this is, among Christians, their only value. Whence they are accounted things sacred and supernatural; for their immediate end is to things supernatural; and they are done by man, as he is an instrument of the Holy Spirit.[5]

Objection 4: Simony Refers to Immaterial Things, Not Material Things

In the introduction to this article, I gave the examples of book prices, conference tickets, and seminary tuition. Each one of these has a material aspect: books are printed with paper and ink, and conferences along with brick-and-mortar seminaries require facilities. Should not ministers be able to charge for these things?

First, it should be evident that ministries engaged in this practice rarely limit their fees to material things. Digital editions of books are typically offered at prices which do not reflect the ease of distribution. Conferences and seminaries typically charge in order to pay the ministers involved, not merely cover facility fees.

While it may be appropriate to charge for food at a conference or housing at a seminary, often charging for such material things is a proxy for charging for spiritual things. Aquinas is representative of medieval theologians when he asserts that Scripture forbids not only the sale of spiritual things but also the sale of material things that are *annexed* to spiritual things.

5. Barnes, Albert. Micah 3:11, translating Lessius, Leonardus. De Justitius et Jure, 2.35.13.

> A thing may be annexed to spiritual things [...] as being dependent on spiritual things. [...] such things can by no means exist apart from spiritual things. Consequently it is altogether unlawful to sell such things, because the sale thereof implies the sale of things spiritual.[6]

To "annex" one thing to another is to attach it in such a way that the other cannot be independently obtained. For example, if you require someone purchase a physical certificate in order to be baptized, you have annexed that certificate to baptism.

The Gratian Decretals, canon law which extensively addressed this sin of simony, similarly record the following:

> Not only those who receive spiritual things, but also those who receive temporal things attached to them at a price, are judged to be simoniacs. Hence Malachi, speaking in the person of the Lord: "Who is there among you," he said, "who will shut the doors and burn my altar for nothing? I have no will among you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept a gift from your hand." To shut the doors is not a sacred office of the officiating, but only an accessory to it.[7]

When one refuses to share his teaching unless someone purchases a physical book, he has annexed a spiritual thing to a material thing. The same applies to facility fees. Pew rents were quite common in western churches for nearly two hundred years. One could argue that they were not selling anything spiritual, only space on a bench. Yet today, we would look back and recognize this clearly as annexing a material thing to a spiritual thing and wrongly charging for the word of God.

Objection 5: Simony Implicates the Buyer

It may seem that this argument proves too much. If one has committed simony by accepting payment for religious instruction, then one also necessarily commits simony by purchasing it. Do we really want to argue that it is wrong for Christians to buy theology books, attend gospel conferences, pay seminary tuition, etc.?

Actually, this is not the logical conclusion of what has been argued here at all; it is a non-sequitur. While it is simony to consider spiritual things to be matters of commerce, those who engage in that commerce for lack of an alternative do not necessarily condone or espouse this line of thought. If something that should be given freely is withheld, those who use money in order to acquire it are clear from guilt. Consider Aquinas's explanation of a circumstance where it would be *right* to purchase ordination to office.

> It would be simoniacal to buy off the opposition of one's rivals, before acquiring the right to a bishopric or any dignity or prebend, by election, appointment or presentation, since this would be to use money as a means of obtaining a

6. Aquinas, Thomas. Summa Theologiae, 2.2.100.4.
7. Decretum Gratiani, Causa 1, Question 3.

> spiritual thing. But it is lawful to use money as a means of removing unjust opposition, after one has already acquired that right.[8]

As an example, people should not be bought and sold; to engage in the purchase or sale of humans is immoral. Yet, if someone were kidnapped and held hostage, none would hold guilty a family member who pays the ransom. Now, depending on the circumstances, we might determine it *unwise* to pay the ransom. Perhaps it would confirm the criminal in his behavior and lead him to kidnap again. Regardless, the one who chooses to pay remains innocent of the charge of human trafficking.

The same may be said for those who buy religious instruction. There are times when it is wise to avoid such purchases in order to discourage this industry that commercializes God's word. However, the one who buys teaching wrongly withheld from him is innocent of simony.

Conclusion

Though primarily a modern problem that takes a different shape than the sale of ordinations, the sale of religious instruction is rightly labeled simony. As such, it should be readily condemned. The contemporary church is saturated with this particular sin, but God is merciful to all who repent.

> Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me, so that nothing you have said may happen to me." (Acts 8:24)

The gospel has been given freely and should therefore be freely given. The same is true for all revelation that has been handed down from on high. To give such things freely is not a burden, but a wonderful privilege!

> What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not use up my rights in preaching it. (1 Cor 9:18)

8. Aquinas, Thomas. Summa Theologiae, 2.2.100.2.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/simony

FROM BENEVOLENCE TO BUSINESS

The Commercialization of Bible Societies and the Rise of Copyright

Andrew Case

Early Charitable Bible Work in America

The Bible society movement in America began with a burst of evangelical zeal in the early 19th century, deeply rooted in the spirit of charity. The initial aim was straightforward: provide every person with access to the Scriptures as a part of ushering in the millennial reign of Christ. Inspired by the British and Foreign Bible Society (founded in 1804), the earliest American Bible societies viewed the free circulation of the Word of God as a sacred duty and a vital component of the Christian mission.[1] Their goal, in their own words, was "the distribution of [the Bible] among persons who are unable or not disposed to purchase it."[2]

In their foundational documents and public addresses, these societies emphasized that bibles should be distributed "without money and without price" (Isa 55:1).[3] The Connecticut Bible Society, for example, declared in 1808 that the Christian world had "never had opportunities of distributing the Bible equally favorable to those which present themselves to the present generation."[4] The Bible Society of Philadelphia (1809) confidently predicted that "before the present generation shall have passed away, the holy Scriptures will be read by all the principal nations under heaven."[5]

This spirit of free dissemination reflected their understanding of key biblical principles, especially Christ's command to "freely give" (Matt 10:8). For early Bible societies, charity was not merely an activity, it was their very *identity*. As David Paul Nord summarizes it, "Their business was benevolence, not bookselling."[6]

By 1816, over 130 Bible societies had been established in various states and territories. Recognizing the need for a unified national effort, prominent figures like Elias Boudinot, a former President of the Continental Congress, and John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, advocated for the creation of a central

1. David Paul Nord, "Benevolent Capital: Financing Evangelical Book Publishing in Early Nineteenth-Century America," in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790–1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 147.

2. The opening sentence of the first Bible society in America, founded in Philadelphia in 1808. *An Address of the Bible Society Established at Philadelphia to the Public: To Which is Subjoined the Constitution of Said Society and the Names of the Managers* (Philadelphia: Fry and Kammerer, 1809), 10, 22.

3. *An Exposé of the Rise and Proceedings of the American Bible Society, During the Thirteen Years of Its Existence, by a Member* (New York: n.p., 1830), 3.

4. Connecticut Bible Society, *First Annual Report of the Connecticut Bible Society* (New Haven: Connecticut Bible Society, 1808), 10.

5. Bible Society of Philadelphia, *First Annual Report of the Bible Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Bible Society of Philadelphia, 1809), 6.

6. David Paul Nord, "Free Grace: The Religious Roots of the American Printing Revolution," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 106 (1996): 270–72.

organization to coordinate these endeavors. Their vision culminated on May 11, 1816, when delegates from 28 local Bible societies convened in New York City to establish the American Bible Society (ABS).[7] From the beginning, the ABS was committed to sharing Scripture "without note or comment," believing in its inherent power to transform lives.

The Technological Shift: Stereotype Printing

Bibles were expensive to print with moving type. This led societies to embrace the latest emerging technology of their time: stereotype printing. This allowed for durable metal plates to be reused for mass production without re-typesetting. This innovation dramatically reduced the cost per Bible over time and improved the print quality.[8]

The Bible Society of Philadelphia became a pioneer in this field. In 1812, they imported stereotype plates from England and launched a mass-printing operation. Within a few years, they had produced over 55,000 bibles and New Testaments, becoming a national supplier to smaller societies. The stereotype process became a hallmark of American Bible society publishing after 1816.

More Money, More Ministry

Before Bible societies decided to become publishers, their operations had been simple. They purchased bibles from commercial publishers, and coordinated with "auxiliaries" to distribute them to the destitute. These auxiliaries were local congregations all over the U.S. that functioned as volunteer extensions of the Bible societies' charitable mission. This system, however, was too slow for the Bible societies. The Philadelphia Society wrote:

> The number of families and individuals, who are destitute of a copy of the Scriptures is so great, that the whole of the funds in the possession of the Society, could be profitably expended in supplying the wants of this city alone; and the opportunities of distributing them in other places are so numerous, that if their funds were tenfold as great as they are, they would still be inadequate to satisfy the demand.[9]

"With this grim scene looming before them, the managers of the Philadelphia Bible Society made a fateful decision. They would become publishers as well as distributors of the Bible."[10] In their estimation, more money equaled more ministry. Therefore, money had to be obtained—whether that be through commercial enterprise or donations. Impatience and ambition drove them to drastically increase their scale of operations through sales out of expedience rather than principle. This was accomplished through the sales of bibles.

They explained their reasoning as follows:

7. "American Bible Society," *Wikipedia*, accessed May 22, 2025.
8. Nord, "Benevolent Capital," 153-154.
9. Bible Society of Philadelphia, *First Annual Report* (1809), 4, 8-9.
10. Nord, "Free Grace," 249.

> The copies of the sacred scriptures, from your press, it is expected, from the excellence and beauty of the type, will be much superior to those which are generally in our market; and the managers have, at several meetings, deliberated on the question, Whether it be their duty to use the means which Providence has put in their hands for increasing your funds (all of which must be expended in gratuitous distribution of the sacred volume) by selling, at a moderate gain, to other persons, as well as to Bible societies, who may prefer their copies, and send orders. After mature consideration of this question, they have resolved, that…it is both their duty and their interest, to supply any orders that may be sent to them for Bibles.[11]

Economic logic had prevailed over other scruples. With the shift to Bible-society-as-publisher came a new model: fund free distribution to the poor by selling to those who could pay.[12]

Pragmatism eventually led to partiality and compromise. The leadership of the ABS wrote, "The Managers deem it expedient to renew their recommendation to the Auxiliaries to sell the Scriptures at cost or at reduced prices, in preference to distributing them gratuitously."[13]

The societies developed a form of differential pricing. There were premium editions for the trade, cost-covering prices for general buyers, subsidized rates for auxiliaries, and free copies for the indigent.[14] This pricing model blurred the line between charity and commerce and eventually undermined the idea that Bible societies were strictly non-profit ministries.[15]

By the end of the 1820s, the ABS had become one of the largest publishing houses in the country, nearly holding a monopoly over the production of inexpensive bibles in the U.S.[16] Their stated goal remained evangelistic, but their methods mirrored those of commercial publishers. Bibles were now holy commodities. The American Bible Society, the American Tract Society, and the American Sunday School Union had become national publishing corporations, indistinguishable in business methods from secular enterprises.[17]

Criticism and Controversy

The shift from pure charity to market-driven strategies did not go unnoticed or unchallenged. Critics began to accuse the societies of hypocrisy. The 1830s saw a wave

11. Bible Society of Philadelphia, *Fifth Annual Report* (1813), 11-12.
12. Bible Society of Philadelphia, *Fourth Annual Report of the Bible Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Bible Society of Philadelphia, 1812), 4–5.
13. American Bible Society, *Seventh Annual Report* (1823), 24.
14. "Essentially, they had four prices: 1) a premium price for trade Bibles on fine paper; 2) a price modestly above cost for regular Bibles sold to outsiders; 3) a 'first cost' price for Bibles sold to other societies and auxiliaries; and 4) a zero price for Bibles given to destitute persons, through the Philadelphia headquarters directly or through the little societies." Ibid., 254.
15. Leslie Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth-Century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 77–79.
16. Nord, "Free Grace," 256.
17. Nord, "Benevolent Capital," 157-160.

of opposition from those who believed retail sales betrayed the founding ideals of Bible work. One insider wrote *An Exposé of the Rise and Proceedings of the American Bible Society*, arguing that selling Scripture "mocked the claim of publishers to furnish Scripture 'without money and without price'"[18] (Isa 55:1). He pointed out that the societies had accumulated vast wealth in stereotype plates, real estate, and buildings, enriching themselves while claiming to serve the poor. The author wrote:

> The community had zealously assisted their spiritual teachers in the formation of this Society, on the supposition that it would dispense their charities collectively, to those who needed them, to much better advantage than they themselves could do individually. But in this the public were to be deceived. The benefit of the suffering community–suffering for the want of spiritual food, was of very minor consideration when compared with "the best interests of this Society." Contributions and donations were pouring in from every section of this vast republic, for the purpose of *gratuitously* furnishing the destitute with that which the benevolent said they most needed, viz. the Bible, when the Managers very gravely passed the following "Resolution," which they unblushingly promulgated.
>
> "*Resolved, That in ordinary cases occurring within the United States, it is inconsistent with the best interests of this Society to distribute the Bible gratuitously, except through the medium of Auxiliary Societies.*"[19]

He then explains: "At a cursory view of this 'Resolution,' it may appear to some that this institution still furnishes the Scriptures gratuitously, though it may be through the medium of Auxiliary Societies. But such is not the fact."[20] Furthermore, he predicted that this new commercial approach "would render nugatory all competition."

Other critics shared this concern about the impact on commercial publishers. By using charitable donations to subsidize low-cost Bibles, the societies were distorting the market and crowding out honest competition. As one polemicist asked, "What business have Christians to give their charity to do that which business enterprise and capital would do, if let alone, quite as well and cheaply?" His conclusion: "None at all."[21]

Even within the societies, some leaders came to recognize the problem. They admitted that under the sales model, *Scripture flowed primarily to those with money* and undermined the charitable nature of their mission. Wealthier auxiliaries generated more sales and returned more revenue to the national office, while poorer regions remained underserved. "Ironically, the turn to retail sales, which was designed to produce universal circulation, not profit, had entrapped the societies in market forces they had been founded to resist."[22]

18. *Exposé*, 13–14.
19. Ibid., 8-9.
20. Ibid., 10.
21. Herman Hooker, *An Appeal to the Christian Public, on the Evil and Impolicy of the Church Engaging in Merchandise* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1849), 5–6.
22. Nord, "Benevolent Capital," 160.

Copyright and Proprietary Control

Amid this growing entanglement with market mechanisms, the question of intellectual property arose. Early Bible societies operated in a legal gray zone. The text of the King James Bible, their main version, was not protected by American copyright law, even though it remained under the perpetual copyright of the Crown in the United Kingdom. This empowered Americans to print the text of Scripture royalty-free and give it away without restrictions. But the publishing of copyright-free bibles would soon go the way of all flesh.

The book *Faith in Reading*[23] shows the growing use of proprietary control mechanisms used by the ABS in the 19th century, such as the stereotype plates themselves. These costly plates effectively locked other societies into dependency relationships, because only those with access could print standardized editions. The plates functioned as a kind of analog copyright.[24]

The Revised Version (RV or ERV, 1885) led to the advent of the first copyrighted Bible in the U.S. Published initially by the British, the RV was the first major revision since the 1769 Blayney revision of the 1611 King James. It became a transatlantic sensation. In May 1881, American newspapers rushed to meet public curiosity: the *Chicago Tribune* printed the entire RV New Testament in a single Sunday edition, selling 107,000 copies of that issue.[25] The Tribune freely used the biblical text from the British publishers, since no U.S. copyright prevented it. Rival papers did likewise.

Meanwhile, legitimate book publishers also raced to sell bound copies; over a million copies of the RV sold within months. This frenzy highlighted the possible profits that might be gained by copyrighting the text to ensure a monopoly on sales. It also revealed potential risks of having no copyright: anyone could reproduce or alter the text, which might result in errors or "tampered" editions. The stage was set for a shift in the stance of Bible publishers towards copyright.

Although American churches had enjoyed the British revision, they still wanted their own edition incorporating American-preferred renderings in the body of the text. However, an agreement had been made that the Americans would have to wait fourteen years before publishing such an edition. When the waiting period expired, the American Standard Version (ASV) was published in 1901 as the *"Standard American Edition of the Revised Version."* The preface states:

> It was agreed that, respecting all points of ultimate difference, the English Companies, who had the initiative in the work of revision, should have the decisive vote. But as an offset to this, it was proposed on the British side that the American preferences should be published as an Appendix in every copy of the Revised Bible during a term of fourteen years. The American Committee on their part pledged themselves to give, for the same limited period, no sanction to the

23. David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
24. Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, 77–79.
25. Ibid., 78.

> publication of any other editions of the Revised Version than those issued by the University Presses of England... It now [1901] seems to be expedient to issue an edition of the Revised Version with those preferences embodied in the text.[26]

This version was different in a critical way. It included a copyright notice with a nebulous reason: "to insure purity of text." Later, the RSV preface explained:

> Because of unhappy experience with unauthorized publications in the two decades between 1881 and 1901, which tampered with the text of the English Revised Version in the supposed interest of the American public [by placing the American preferences into the main text rather than in the Appendix], the American Standard Version was copyrighted, to protect the text from unauthorized changes.[27]

The first move to copyright the Bible really had nothing to do with true textual purity. The "unhappy experience" that motivated this change was simply the faithful adaptation of the text to American English. This change was "unauthorized," but it did not introduce errors or heretical readings into the text. Thus, it can be concluded that the clause "Copyright, 1901 ... TO INSURE PURITY OF TEXT" in the front matter of the ASV, was disingenuous. There were no reports of someone trying to commandeer the text for malicious purposes, or hostile parties corrupting the text in order to deceive readers, or cult leaders appropriating it for their own heretical ends. Instead, a petty squabble laid the foundation for a new tradition of binding the Word of God with the traditions of men. Ironically, after publishing unauthorized Americanized editions, Americans did the same again, but this time *officially*—and with a copyright restriction to prevent anyone else from doing to them what they did to the RV.

The copyright provided an economic reward for the publisher who underwrote the translation effort. Thomas Nelson's financial support (≈$25,000) to the American revision committee was essentially repaid by granting Nelson exclusive publishing rights. The pious rationale of safeguarding "purity of text" conveniently aligned with securing a printing monopoly for recouping investment. But once the investment was repaid through sales, was the copyright lifted to drive prices lower and bless more people with the translation? No.

Dr. Maurice Robinson in his article *The Bondage of the Word* writes:

> There was also a notice that Thomas Nelson & Sons was specifically "certified" to be the publisher of "the only editions authorized by the American Committee of Revision." That copyright was renewed in 1929, but transferred to the International Council of Christian Education (the forerunner of the National Council of Churches) with both statements still attached. In fact, the original 1946 edition of

26. *The Holy Bible. Newly edited by the American Revision Committee, A. D. 1901* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1901), "Preface," iii.

27. *The New Covenant, Commonly called the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Revised Standard Version* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946), "Preface," iii-iv.

> the Revised Standard Version was also similarly copyrighted "to insure purity of text." …
>
> Once the ASV 1901 had been successfully copyrighted in this country with no apparent legal challenge, the gate was opened, and nearly all subsequent Bible texts and translations followed suit. Permissions and royalty fees became the norm, since these were regularly required of all secular writings. But somewhere a great evil is involved whenever the people of God permit commercial publishers to hold hostage their sacred texts by copyright and licensing restrictions; for far too long the Christian community has been distracted from seeing the full implications of this matter, and the time is rapidly approaching when it may be too late to take reconstructive action.[28]

By the late 20th century it was not uncommon to hear critics claiming that new Bible versions were merely "made for money," often praising the KJV as superior because it could be freely reproduced. The view that modern translations are driven by greed is still alive and well.[29] These accusations of profit motive and restrictive access have plagued new Bible releases from the NIV to the NKJV.

Defenders of the practice have countered that translation projects cost millions, and without copyright, few publishers could afford such work. And the proliferation of versions, each with its own copyright, has reinforced the notion that intellectual property is and should be a normal part of Bible publishing.

When the ministry of producing Bible translations became funded through sales, rather than the free generosity of God's people, it sabotaged the sincerity of all institutions involved. Furthermore, they committed two sins: the sin of partiality (James 2:1-7) and the sin of simony (Acts 8:18-19). What began as a mission to give the Bible away had evolved into a business model that required restricting others from freely doing so.

The Legacy of Commercialization

By the end of the 19th century, the economic survival of Bible societies depended on sales, infrastructure investment, and, increasingly, copyright enforcement. The shift toward commerce had compromised the very principle that animated the Bible society movement: the idea that the Word of God must run freely, unhindered by human systems of control. The societies had embraced the market, not for profit, but for the sake of efficiency. Yet in doing so, they had also adopted the logic of exclusion and intellectual property.

Critics were not wrong to worry. "Scholars seem generally agreed that American religion plunged into the market world of the early nineteenth century."[30] As Bible publishers became awash in a sea of commercialism, the question of *"What will sell?"* eclipsed all other priorities.

28. Maurice A. Robinson, *The Bondage of the Word: Copyright and the Bible* (1996), accessed May 20, 2025.
29. Doug Kutilek, *The KJV Is a Copyrighted Translation,* accessed May 20, 2025.
30. Nord, "Benevolent Capital," 163.

Conclusion: Charity Entrapped

The transformation of Bible societies from charitable missions to commercial enterprises was not a single decision, but a gradual evolution driven by technological innovation, financial necessity, and the rationale of the market. The adoption of stereotype printing enabled mass production but required capital. That capital was raised through Bible sales. Differential pricing enabled both charity and commerce, but invited criticism and ended in dependency on market demand. Eventually, copyright and proprietary control followed.

What began as a pure mission to give away God's Word became a hybrid operation —part charity, part business. The founding ideal, rooted in the freely given grace of God, still lingered in the rhetoric, but the economic structures told another story. The Bible societies had not become for-profit corporations in name, but they had become commercial enterprises in practice. And the Bible, once held to be a gift without price, now had a price tag attached—even if only to fund its own distribution. The ends had justified the means.

The legacy of that transformation continues today. Modern Bible societies rely on copyright to fund their operations and control their texts, often preventing others from freely copying and sharing the Scriptures. The challenge for the 21st-century church is to recover the original vision: that the Word of God may "run freely and be glorified" (2 Thess 3:1)—not just spiritually, but legally and economically as well.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/bible-societies

Application

SHOULD PREACHERS BE PAID?

Conley Owens

Jesus was clear that the preached word should be freely given (Matt 10:8) and Paul spoke against being a peddler of the Word (2 Cor 2:17). Given these embargos on commercial exchanges in ministry, one who desires to follow a biblical ethic may wonder whether a minister—in particular, a preacher—may even be paid at all. Out of such concern, some have forgone a reliable income in the work of the gospel to live as tent-makers,[1] and others have gone as far as abandoning ministry altogether, unable to navigate the difficulty.

However, the Bible is clear that ministers should be financially supported. In the same context that Jesus commanded the disciples to "freely give" their message, he acknowledged that the worker is "worthy of his food" (Matt 10:10). Paul also argued for the right of a minister to earn a living as he does ministry (1 Cor 9:1-14).

Ministry should be supported, but it shouldn't be sold. So long as the gospel worker makes no exchange for his message, he is free to receive support. Let's consider several implications of this distinction.

Vocational Ministry

First, the Bible not only allows—but even commends—vocational ministry. While the Lord often calls people to a bivocational course in life, many have pursued such a course without warrant, needlessly stretching themselves thin. Consider the fact that Paul himself took a break from making tents when he had the opportunity. In Acts 18:1-4, Luke explains Paul's tent-making labors, but in the next verse we read,

> When Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself *fully* to the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 18:5)

Evidently, Silas and Timothy brought Paul financial support so that he might labor fulltime in the proclamation of the gospel. The churches of Macedonia were Paul's primary external source of funding (Phil 4:15), and elsewhere he confirms that they supplied his work in Corinth (2 Cor 11:9).

Paul evidently preferred a focused ministry, and in his second letter to Timothy, he explains why this is ideal:

> A soldier refrains from entangling himself in civilian affairs in order to please the one who enlisted him. (2 Tim 2:4)

1. The term "tent-maker" comes from Paul's work in a trade in order to fund his church-planting efforts (Acts 18:1-4).

The Lord supplies his laborers with what they need, and for many he provides enough for full-time work. To forbid vocational ministry is to forbid what God has ordained (1 Cor 9:14).

Salaries

Second, while it never makes explicit mention of the concept, the Bible certainly permits salaried support. Since the time of the Reformation, many have acknowledged the legitimacy of material support for ministers but criticized any regularity in this support. That is, so long as financial maintenance is not *salaried*, it may be acceptable. This position was adopted by Menno Simons,[2] further popularized by George Müller,[3] and is held by many evangelicals today.

This approach has a number of pragmatic justifications:

- the ability of a congregation to give may only last for a season,
- a minister may be tempted to appease regular donors in his preaching,
- a minister may cease to trust God for his supply, etc.

Of course, every single one of these issues exists with irregular support, and some perhaps even in greater measure. However, the real issue is with biblical foundations. As pious as a rejection of salaries may sound, it lacks any such grounding, and so it should not bind the conscience. Never does the Bible actually forbid salaried ministry.

The conclusion that ministers should not be salaried likely represents a well-meant attempt to grapple with the Bible's strong prohibitions against the sale of ministry. However, the Bible nowhere distinguishes between regular and irregular funding; instead it distinguishes between reciprocity and colabor; sale and support.

Should a minister's regular paycheck then be counted as reciprocity or colabor? Certainly, a man could go about his duties with a mercenary mindset, and the people could give with the same heart. These would all run afoul of the biblical ethic. Yet if the people of God promote the proclamation of the gospel—a few giving their time and skill in teaching, the rest giving their funds—this is clearly a joint venture. That is why John calls those who give to missionaries "fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 7-8).

Honorariums

Third, ministers may receive honorariums. Our concern for the support of preachers and other ministers does not end with those firmly installed in a congregation, but extends even to those who may work temporarily with various congregations.

So what is an honorarium? In the New Testament, the term "honor" frequently denotes "price" or "value" (cf. Matt 27:6–9; Acts 4:34; 5:2–3; 1 Tim 5:17). Similarly, we use the word "honorarium" to speak of a sum given to a speaker. These may have the

2. Menno Simons, The Complete Work of Menno Simon (John F. Funk / Brother, 1871), 2.340–350.
3. George Müller, A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller (James Nisbet & Co., 1881), 68–69.

shape of commercial transactions—one providing the other with a service in exchange for a fee—but such a shape is not necessary.

Used rightly, honorariums may be regarded as a fruitful means of supporting interim preachers and teachers. If the purpose of a church is to gather for the collective worship of God in the preaching and hearing of the Word, the congregation and preacher work toward the same end. Anchored by a mutual desire to properly honor God, a church provides an honorarium as an act of colabor. If a regular preacher receives from his church in coordination with his labors among them, then a visiting preacher may do the same. This is why Paul could acknowledge that Peter was able to arrive at Corinth and receive financial support for his work there (cf. 1 Cor 9:5).

Conclusion

Ministers should take special precautions not to transgress the Bible's ethic of ministry fundraising. However, if we forbid what the Bible permits and even commends, we wander into the realm of legalism, harming ourselves and others. Let us not sell ministry, but let us encourage its support to the fullest!

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/should-preachers-be-paid

OBJECTIONS TO PAYING PASTORS

Jon Here

Some people have been so put off by the commercialization of ministry that it has led them to question whether pastors should be paid at all. We've already argued that pastors should be paid. In this article, I'd like to specifically address objections raised regarding financially supporting pastors. I'll be doing so in light of *the dorean principle*, that ministry should be supported but not sold.

Objection 1 – Pastors Are After Your Money

Pastors encourage their congregations to give to church, and some see this as manipulative and greedy because pastors themselves benefit from such giving.

While pastors are not the only beneficiaries of church donations, there is a close connection between church funding and their compensation. Pastors, therefore, should be careful how they communicate financial matters to those under their care. They would not want to manipulate their congregations by guilting them into giving or claiming that God will prosper them financially if they do. Such coercion is a form of spiritual abuse.

However, pastors are tasked with preaching the whole Word of God (Acts 20:26-27). This includes teaching on supporting those in ministry, even themselves. Such teaching can be communicated in a way that is not coercive. Pastors should not be heavy-handed in teaching on giving, but they should not neglect its teaching either. We have a responsibility to support the ministry at our churches (1 Tim 5:17-18), yet it should be done joyfully and not reluctantly or under compulsion (2 Cor 9:7).[1] It is a difficult balance for pastors to communicate, and attendees should assume good will unless there is a clear reason not to.

Objection 2 – Pastors Who Receive Pay Are Insincere "Hired Hands"

Since many pastors are "hired" by churches, some accuse them of being like the "hired hand" of which Jesus spoke:

> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd, and the sheep are not his own. When he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf pounces on them and scatters the flock. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (John 10:11-13)

Are pastors who receive pay like the hired hand in this passage? Jesus criticizes those who are in it solely for the money and "care nothing for the sheep." However, receiving

1. I am aware that 2 Cor 9 refers to supporting poor Christians in Jerusalem and not pastors (1 Cor 16:3, Romans 15:26). The principles behind the giving are still relevant to all forms of giving.

financial compensation does not immediately imply insincere motives, just as being financially dependent in a marriage does not imply insincere love. The point of Jesus' illustration is not to only trust human shepherds who work for free, but to trust in *the good shepherd*. While no pastor can match the sacrificial nature of the chief shepherd himself (1 Peter 5:4), any good pastor will tell you that you should ultimately follow Jesus, not them.

Finally, it should be remembered that this is an illustration of Jesus' trustworthiness and sacrifice, not an instruction on how to run a church. Notably, the sheep do not give any money to the hired hands (to state the obvious) in this illustration. Jesus gives other illustrations where servants receive compensation in a positive light (Matt 20:1–16, Luke 12:42-44). Pastors should not be greedy while shepherding God's flock (1 Peter 5:2) yet they are entitled to support from the flock (1 Cor 9:7).

Objection 3 – Paying Pastors Perpetuates Old Testament Tithing

It is unfortunately true that there is confusion around tithing, and some pastors use "tithing" to refer to any kind of church giving. The word literally refers to giving a *tenth* of something. Most who do refer to church giving as tithing do not claim that we are to obey Old Testament tithing law but merely that it is a good practice that is still relevant to today. Those who use this language often see 10% as an appropriate amount within people's means rather than a requirement.

Israelite farmers were commanded to give a tenth of their produce *annually* as a sacrifice to God and provision for those who did not have their own land to grow produce. The Levites relied on this system since they were not allocated any land like the rest of the tribes (Num 18:24), but tithing was also intended to aid foreigners, orphans, and widows who may not have had land to farm (Deut 14:29).[2] There was no mention of tithing monetary income because it was a system focused on the distribution of food. From this brief survey, we can see that it would be inappropriate to apply the tithing system to today and it is quite different to what some pastors refer to as "tithing."

Old Testament laws are not binding on Christians, though the principles behind them can still be relevant. The sacrificial system (including tithing) involved supporting those who dedicated their lives to ministry. Israelites were to sacrifice to God, and God allocated portions of this to provide for his ministerial servants, the Levites.

We do not argue that pastors should be supported because of the temple system. We merely argue that the way God provides for those in ministry is consistent throughout the Bible. They are provided for through the offerings believers give in worship of God, whether someone chooses to give a certain percentage or not. The consistency adds weight to our view, not proof.

2. There seems to be 2-3 different tithes in Old Testament law (Lev 27:30-33, Num 18:20-29, Deut 14:22-29), at least one annually and one every third year.

Objection 4 – Pastors Should Receive Only Basic Necessities

Some argue that pastors only have the right to basic necessities such as food and clothing, not a regular income.

They argue that Jesus' statement that "the worker is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:7) is in the context of "eating and drinking whatever you are offered" from those who welcome you into their home. They bolster this argument with a similar passage in Matthew where Jesus is quoted as just saying "the worker is worthy of his *food*" (Matt 10:10). They also point out that there is no explicit reference to financial gain in 1 Corinthians 9 and most of the illustrations refer to receiving food. And in contrast to treating "godliness as a means of gain," Paul says we are to be content with "food and clothing" (1 Tim 6:5-8).

Firstly, there is no instruction to give pastors *only* food and clothing. All references to food and/or clothing are minimum standards, things ministers are expected to receive at the very least. Jesus' statement that "the worker is worthy of his food" does not mean the worker is unworthy of other necessities such as clothing, shelter, or medicine. It is not only ministers who are to be content with "food and clothing" but all believers, when faced with temptation (1 Tim 6:6-10).

While the instruction that a worker is worthy of their wages is often applied in Scripture through the giving of food and shelter, that does not take away from the fact that they are referred to as "wages." Providing for a minister financially would not be going beyond "wages" but rather staying inline with it. In fact, there are references to *financially* supporting those in ministry. Paul received financial support from the Philippians (Phil 4:18) and instructed believers to financially support elders/pastors (1 Tim 5:17-18).[3]

One of the ways that believers are to participate in the work of God is through financial giving. In regard to those who minister in God's name, John said "we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 1:8). This is why *the dorean principle* refers to supporting ministry as "colabor," because by giving financially to ministry we become colaborers in it. Paul likewise mentions how the Philippians "partnered with me in the matter of giving and receiving" (Phil 4:15). Their gifts were not given out of obligation to Paul but were "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing *to God*" (Phil 4:18). Giving to ministry is an act of worship and claiming that such an act is inappropriate is an offense to our God, who is the one such gifts are offered to.

Finally, in 1 Timothy 5:17, Paul says, "elders who lead effectively are worthy of double honor." There is strong evidence that "honor" (τιμῆς) has financial implications in this verse (see next section). But what is indisputable is that elders/pastors[4] are to be treated with literal *honor*.[5] Paul's use of "double" (διπλῆς) at minimum implies "more

3. There are three words used for senior leaders in Scripture and they are interchangeable: elder, pastor, overseer.

4. See previous footnote.

5. "At a minimum the word includes the idea of respect" (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary).

than" others receive.[6] If pastors are only to receive basic necessities such as food and clothing then are they really being doubly honored when compared to anyone who is in need (cf. 5:3-16)? Believers are not to merely give food but are to give generously and sacrificially, just as Paul commended the Philippians for "sharing in his affliction" (Phil 4:14). If the worker deserves their wages, then are pastors honored with giving that is below what society considers to be a living wage? We can hardly be considered as "honoring" our pastors if such were the case.

Objection 5 – Paying One's Own Pastor Is Self-Serving

Some believe that we should not give to those who serve us, because otherwise our giving would be self-serving. For example, if you give to your pastor, then you benefit from your own giving by receiving his teaching and guidance. Whereas giving to a missionary (or other external ministry) brings no direct benefit for yourself.

While we do reject reciprocity in ministry, and affirm that there should be no obligation to support or pay someone in order to receive ministry, that is not what goes on in biblical churches. Churches are open to the public and anyone may come in and receive ministry free of charge. While regular attendees will benefit from the church's ministry, it is not kept to themselves but open to all.

The New Testament was written in a time when there were relatively few churches, so most accounts we have of funding ministry are in the context of mission and evangelism. But there is no instruction in Scripture to only give to ministries which don't benefit you. Rather, Paul explicitly tells us that it *is* appropriate to support those who serve at one's own church:

> Elders who lead effectively are worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and, "The worker is worthy of his wages." (1 Tim 5:17-18)

The context of this passage is clearly the local church, with elders who serve the congregation. *Honor* is clearly financial in application, given the context of *financially* honoring widows prior to it, and the subsequent quotes (ox, wages).[7]

When you receive spiritual things through a minister of the gospel, it is all the more appropriate to ensure such ministry is supported as a way of responding to God's

6. There is debate around whether elders are to (1) receive exactly double the finance others might receive, (2) receive significantly more than others receive, (3) are doubly worthy of receiving finance, or (4) are to receive double honor in the sense of "both literal honor and finance". Given the vagueness of Paul's language, using "honor" to refer to finance, it is safer to assume he is not being precise in his reference to an amount, so option #1 should be dismissed. Paul is referring to both literal honor and finance, but if he meant option #4 then he could also have said widows are worthy of "double honor" (5:3). Options #2 and #3 seem most likely. Elders should be well provided for, not just to help them have basic necessities (cf. widows) but to free them from the need to work so they can dedicate themselves to ministry (Acts 18:1-5).

7. This is not to say that the term "honor" (τιμῆς) always implies a financial application. For example, Paul also says slaves are to "honor" their masters (6:1) by respecting and obeying them. Whereas, honoring one's parents would often involve financially supporting them (Matt 15:3-6). It is the context that matters, and the context is clear when it comes to honoring elders.

provision to you through it. Part of Paul's argument for the right to support in 1 Corinthians 9 is based on the appropriateness of supporting those you have yourself benefited from spiritually: "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much for us to reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right to your support, shouldn't we have it all the more?" (1 Cor 9:11-12).[8] Paul goes on to explain why he did not exercise such a right when with the Corinthians, but his reasoning is sound. Receiving ministry from someone does not make it *less* appropriate to support them, it makes it *more* appropriate.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that there is abuse of finance in ministry today, with many charging for their teaching or coercing their flock to give. But we should not let such negative experiences cloud our judgment. In biblical churches, pastors provide free ministry to everyone who wishes to receive it, without conditioning such service on payment. Churches support their pastors financially to be able to do this, with regular attendees giving generously to benefit the church as a whole. This model is an excellent example of *the dorean principle* in action, and has been sustaining ministry for generations. We should, therefore, generously support those laboring for the Lord with joy, "so that we may be fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 1:8).

8. See also Galatians 6:6.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/paying-pastors

COVERING COSTS

Can You Charge for Printed Books?

Jon Here

Some Christian resources are expensive to produce and distribute, and this can make it challenging to give them for free if there is limited funding available. The most common example of this is the printing and shipping of books. This raises the question: Is it permissible to charge for the costs of producing and distributing individual copies, without trying to make a profit from them?

When thinking about Christian resources as property, there is *physical* property (such as a book) and there is what the world calls *intellectual* property (the actual content). Let's first make it crystal clear that, under no circumstances whatsoever, can the ministry content be sold. It does not matter how much time and money was put into creating it. *If you have any doubts about that, please first read our articles on freely giving.*

Such ministry content (or "intellectual property") must be given away free of charge and without conditions on its use. This is best done by dedicating it to the public domain. When a Christian resource has been dedicated to the public domain, it is free for anyone to copy and pass on to someone else. The ministry itself has been given for free.

But how do we transmit content to others in the first place? How do we get it into their hands? We are incredibly blessed in modern society to be able to do this electronically, and often at no cost. So, many Christian resources can simply be distributed online for free.

But what about when a physical copy *is* desirable? That is the situation we'll now explore.

A matter of wisdom and generosity

It is good to first acknowledge that this is a matter of wisdom, not absolutes. If a Christian resource has been freed from copyright and made available in some form for free, then we are not so much talking about the sale of ministry but more *the sale of paper and ink*. Rather than a matter of simony, it is a matter of *generosity*, which should not be legislated (2 Cor 9:7).

So, with the common example of a self-published book: If it is easily accessible in digital form and public domain, then well-intentioned authors should not feel guilty if they sell printed copies. When using a print-on-demand service, this allows them to focus on their ministry and not have to store inventory, fund large orders, or deal with unreasonable requests. If anyone truly wants to benefit from the resource, the quickest means of access will be the free digital copy.

That being said, giving all forms of a resource for free is commendable, and may even be warranted in certain situations, such as when a digital copy is insufficient. Let's first think through what free giving would have looked like before the digital age.

Before the digital age...

If biblical principles are timeless, then they would have guided the early church in distributing Christian resources long before free digital distribution was possible.

How *would* Christian resources have been distributed back then?[1]

1. The author may have made several copies
2. The recipients may have made copies and given them to others
3. Literate believers may have copied the text onto their own papyri
4. Less literate believers may have hired a scribe to make copies for them
5. Believers may have shared a single copy

None of these means of distribution involve charging someone for *access* to ministry content. All content was "public domain", with no legal restrictions on copying. It would, therefore, have been a matter of simony only if *access* to the text were conditioned on payment. Given Scripture's general condemnation of commercializing ministry, we can be confident this would not have been permitted.

If someone allowed the reading of manuscripts and charged for copies, it would be a situation similar to the one we are now discussing. The recipient of ministry is being charged, but only for papyri and ink, not for access to the content. So, giving freely was possible for centuries before the advent of digital distribution. In other words, it's possible to freely give without modern technology; the internet age has merely made it more convenient.

Reasons to offer resources at no cost

There are several good reasons why you may decide to cover all costs of the products you make available, even if charging for the copy material would not violate the dorean principle.

1. The digital version is not easily accessible

If your resource is designed to be printed and doesn't read well in a digital format, then accessing it on a device would not be practical for your audience. This could be the case, for example, with certain children's books. If most of your audience is going to want a printed version, and it is not easy to print at home, then it could be best to offer printed copies free of charge.

1. For more information on the nature of manuscript copying in the early church, see *Copying Early Christian Texts* by Alan Mugridge (Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

2. Charging for a product is not the only way to fund it

Many assume that if you can't charge for something, then there's simply no way to pay for its production costs. But there is always the possibility of simply asking for donations. Raising donations is often easier than selling products, which involves handling refunds and other logistics. Planning ahead and organizing fundraising can cover even the large sums required for an expensive print run.

3. Limited ministry is better than commercial ministry

Let's imagine the following scenario: Joe goes evangelizing on the weekend. His evangelism bears much fruit and he wants to do it even more often, but he needs his full-time job to get by. He decides to start charging people to hear the gospel so that he can make his ministry sustainable and evangelize more often. He is now reaching even more people, but he has compromised the sincerity of his message and put it behind a paywall. This situation is unlikely, but the point is clear. The ends don't justify the means in this case. It would be wrong for Joe to charge for his ministry even if it would lead to greater impact.[2]

Even if we are not charging for the gospel, but merely copies of free ministry content, we should still be careful not to deceive ourselves into believing commerce is always justified, or that God needs us to reach those he wants to reach. It could be that a more limited ministry is more pleasing to God than one that resorts to unhelpful commercial practices.

4. Don't throw your pearls to pigs

When giving resources that are expensive to produce, there can be a fear that your generosity may be taken advantage of, such as by someone ordering excessive quantities, or selling for profit what you've given for free. While we shouldn't live in fear of such situations, it is good to be wise in our giving. Even when giving money to the poor, sometimes it can do more harm than good.

Scripture is clear that we should withhold blessings such as fellowship (and ministry included) from those who are unrepentant (Matt 18:17, 1 Cor 5:11, 2 Thes 3:6, 2 Thes 3:14-15, Titus 3:10). And we should not give food to those who are lazy, rather than in real need (2 Thess 3:10). Likewise, it may be appropriate to withhold resources from those who will waste them. This could mean, for example, limiting book orders to a single copy. Anyone truly requiring more could contact you directly and explain their situation. Remember that if your book is free digitally, they have the option of printing multiple copies themselves.

5. Be willing to make a sacrifice

Some people talk about "covering costs" because they want their generous giving to be sustainable. It is good to seek wisdom in such matters. But there are others who talk

about "covering costs", and really mean "how can I serve God without it costing me anything?" Such people have an ungodly aversion to any kind of sacrifice.

This is not to guilt anyone into overburdening themselves, but rather a reminder to examine our own hearts and motives. We should avoid the frame of mind that we need to be supplied with as much funding as secular resource creators would receive. Rather, we should take joy in the opportunity to offer not only our time to God, but our money as well.

Reasons to charge for some resources

While generosity is a guiding principle, we need not fear overburdening ourselves or giving beyond our means. Charging for copies of resources can be a reasonable way to fund their production, provided the ministry content within the product is free and easily accessible in some form. When that is the case, selling copies is not a violation of the dorean principle. But it may be inappropriate for other reasons. We must still be on guard against other sins, such as: greed, insincerity, and opportunism.

Let's consider a few situations where charging for a resource may be permissible, and identify any issues we should be cautious of.

1. Charging for physical editions

If your ministry resource is readily accessible online, then a physical copy can be considered a "premium edition". We should make it easy for people to access our resources, but if desiring a physical copy is simply a matter of preference, then we are not bound to provide for people in such cases. It is ok to charge for them.

However, several matters should be carefully thought through:

1. It should be obvious where the free edition can be obtained. For example, there could be a "free download" button in online stores for every printed book, and physical stores could place a QR code below each book for sale.
2. If someone has a disability or something else that makes it difficult for them to access online resources, then it would be appropriate to provide free physical copies for them.
3. The free version should have the same content as paid editions, there shouldn't be any exclusive content.
4. Authors should consider whether the sale of products would cast doubt on the sincerity of their ministry. For this reason, it is preferable if a third-party manages the production and distribution of resources.

2. King Saul also failed to understand that the ends do not justify the means of disobedience to God (1 Sam 13:8-14). While we can still rejoice that Christ is preached, whether by false motives or true (Phil 1:18), that does not excuse the one who is acting inappropriately from correcting their behavior.

Ideally, someone else would take full responsibility for publishing and sales. However, using a print-on-demand service is a good alternative, as it delegates the transactional logistics to the platform and reduces the author's direct involvement.

When the author is involved with product sales, it would be wise to not try to generate profit from them (whether for ministry purposes or not). As doing so invites doubt as to whether the aim is to support the dissemination of the content, or to exploit it for financial gain. Selling products at cost—covering only the unavoidable expenses of printing and delivery—is a common way to guard against this. However, there may be circumstances where charging a higher amount is appropriate—for example, to offset additional related expenses.

As a general principle, distancing yourself from commercial activity as much as possible will help to avoid muddying the waters. This takes wisdom, and the right approach may differ from one ministry to another.

2. More expensive options

There's nothing inherently wrong with charging for higher-quality editions of content that is otherwise free. As explained already, if the content is available online for free, then the cost of a softcover book, for example, simply covers the cost of the materials. Likewise, if you charge extra for a hardcover edition, then you are charging literally for the harder cover.

Some publishers may wish to produce high-end formats, such as premium leather-bound editions. While these can serve a valuable purpose, it is important to remain mindful that such products will not be financially accessible to everyone. Care should be taken in how they are described and offered, so as not to give the impression that ministry is only available to those who can afford it.

3. Requiring support

There may arise a situation in which someone wants to order products in bulk, but you simply don't have the funds to produce them. In such a case you could inform them that it won't be possible without funding, and ask whether they could provide it. To avoid turning it into a commercial transaction for ministry, you would need to ensure that:

1. The ministry content itself is freely available. You could provide them with a digital copy and instructions on how to print it via another printing service if they so desired.
2. You're not compromising the sincerity of your ministry. You should be open and honest about the costs and ensure the arrangement is being understood as colabor–a ministry partnership–rather than a sale. A mutual desire to see ministry flourish, without trying to get any financial advantage over one another.

Case studies

To provide further guidance, here are some examples of how different authors have chosen to navigate this issue. In all of the following cases, ministry content is not being sold.

- **Completely free:** Conley Owens gives away printed copies of *The Dorean Principle* for free. This ensures there is no confusion about the sincerity of his message, which directly addresses the sale of ministry. It also helps to spread the teaching at a time when the church is desperately in need of reform and decommercialization.
- **Printed books at cost:** Andrew Case and Sawyer Moranville make their books freely available online and use Amazon's print-on-demand service to offer printed copies. While the books are sold under their own Amazon accounts, they make it clear that they are sold at cost and do not generate a profit. They are made available for the convenience of readers who prefer printed editions, and not for the benefit of the authors.
- **Involving third-parties:** The Berean Standard Bible (BSB) was initially sold by its sponsor, BibleHub. This allowed them to make printed copies available as soon as possible. They sell hardcover bibles as well as premium leather options. They have since invited third-party publishers to sell copies independently of them, and have made all source files available for any additional publishers to contribute to the translation's dissemination.

Conclusion

If anyone wants to invest in a ministry product you have created, it should first and foremost be you! So, you may decide–with joy–to distribute physical copies free of charge. But aside from offering the ministry content for free, Scripture does not require us to give physical products that contain it.

If you do charge for resources, it's important to ensure that:

1. The ministry *content* is free of cost and copyright.
2. The format you offer for free is easily accessible for most people.
3. The sale of any products that contain the content is not conducted in a way that casts doubt on the sincerity of your ministry.

Exactly how free content is distributed will vary from ministry to ministry. This is not a burden, but a blessing—an open invitation to give as generously as the Spirit leads. So let us pray, seek wisdom, and act with sincere hearts that aim to please the Lord in all things.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/covering-costs

BIBLICAL COUNSELING SHOULD BE FREE

Andrew Case

The biblical counseling movement was founded on the conviction that the Bible is sufficient for solving all non-medical problems that humans face. The central figure behind this return to Scripture was Jay Adams, who shocked the world with a bold and controversial claim "that the task of counseling was a theological enterprise that should be primarily informed by a commitment to God's Word."[1] While this claim draws fire from both inside and outside the Church, its truth has been proven by both Scripture and experience. Biblical counseling continues to bring hope, peace, freedom, healing, and joy to thousands of suffering people through the power of Christ and his Word–people with conditions like anorexia, bipolar disorder, postpartum depression, and dissociative identity disorder. People who struggle with homosexuality, anxiety, rage, and much more.[2] Commenting on 2 Peter 1:3-5, Ed Bulkley writes:

> A necessary presupposition of biblical counseling is that God has indeed provided every essential truth the believer needs for a happy, fulfilling life in Christ Jesus. It is the belief that God has not left us lacking in any sense. The apostle Peter states it emphatically. . . . ["His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness…"] Note the word everything. God has provided absolutely *everything* man needs for physical and spiritual life. This is a primary consideration. If Peter is correct, then God has given us all the information we need to function successfully in this life. *Every* essential truth, *every* essential principle, *every* essential technique for solving human problems has been delivered in God's Word.[3]

In light of such an inviolable allegiance to the Bible, biblical counseling practice should be expected to operate according to biblical principles. And this means that it would be appropriate to look to Scripture to answer a simple, practical concern: Should biblical counseling be offered for a fee?

Before answering this question, we must consider whether it is a question Scripture addresses or wants us to address. There are many things Scripture does not speak to, such as how neurons work, or the biological processes involved in human emotion, etc. This is an important clarification that biblical counselors have been making for a long time:

> The Bible certainly does not tell us everything we come to know or might want to know…. The carefully developed view of the biblical counseling movement is not that the Scriptures provide Christians with all of the information we *desire* but rather with the understanding we *need* to do *counseling ministry*…. Biblical coun-

1. Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott, *Counseling the Hard Cases* (B&H, 2015), 19.
2. Ibid., 16.
3. Ed Bulkley, *Why Christians Can't Trust Psychology* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 268.

> selors have not argued that the Bible is adequate as a scientific text. They have argued that the Bible is adequate *as it is*.[4]

When we examine God's Word we find two things:

1. God is deeply concerned with our relationship to money (e.g. Matt 6:24, 19:23-24).
2. God has a lot to say about how Christian ministry should and should not be funded (e.g. 2 Kings 5:20-27, Micah 3:11, Matt 10:8, Acts 8:9-24, 1 Cor 9:18, 2 Cor 2:17, 2 Cor 9).

With remarkable clarity of both example and explicit command, Scripture condemns the sale of ministry while commending its support. The Lord of the Harvest promises to faithfully provide for those who labor in the ministry of edifying the Body as conduits of spiritual blessing (Luke 10:1-9, Matt 10:1-12). And he provides for them through the free generosity of his people, not through the sale of the spiritual gifts he has freely bestowed. The command of Christ to never condition ministry upon a fee (Matt 10:8) is not only binding today, but is also relevant to all those who speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).

So, if biblical counseling is Christian ministry, then Scripture decidedly *does* address the question as to whether biblical counselors should charge for their service to God. But *should* biblical counseling be defined as ministry? The answer is an unequivocal yes. Dr. Heath Lambert writes:

> The fact is that counseling is ministry, and ministry is counseling. The two are equivalent terms. *Counseling* is the word our culture uses to describe what happens when people with questions, problems, and trouble have a conversation with someone they think has answers, solutions, and help.[5]

David Powlison drives this point home even further when he writes, "The activities we call 'preaching and teaching' and those we call 'counseling and daily conversation' are two facets of a single activity: the ministry of the Word."[6] So just as most believers rightly cringe at the thought of a preacher charging an entry fee to hear his preaching from the word of God, we should recoil at the thought of a biblical counselor putting a price tag on his counseling from the Word of God. The Old Testament prophets would have decried this practice as presumptuous (Micah 3:11). The New Testament apostles, recognizing that such a ministry is a gracious work of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:12-13), would have condemned the money exchanged along with the one who proposed the exchange in the first place (Acts 8:32).

Given the frequency with which it addresses the topic, to deny that the Bible gives a clear answer to the question of whether we may charge a fee for counseling is to deny the sufficiency of Scripture. And such a denial undermines one of the central pillars of

4. Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott, *Counseling the Hard Cases,* 29-30.
5. Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 25.
6. David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love* (Punch Press, 2005), 73.

the biblical counseling movement. Charging fees for biblical counseling is a plain violation of Scripture's teaching and Christ's instructions for ministers of the gospel, and turns counselors into "peddlers of God's Word" instead of people "of sincerity" (2 Cor 2:17). Deborah Dewart has provided much scriptural support to this position in her excellent article on counseling fees. She also writes:

> It is worthwhile to consider an analogy between fee-based counseling and prostitution. God ordained the institution of marriage, wherein husband and wife become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:23) and are told to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28, 9:7). A husband provides financial support for his wife and family (1 Timothy 5:8). Both prostitution and marriage involve sexual intercourse, and both involve money, but the contrast could not be more striking. Prostitution is a gross perversion of God's plan for the union of male and female. What exactly is the difference?
>
> *Relationship* is a key factor, particularly the conditions for initiating and continuing it. Marriage is a lifetime covenantal commitment of love and faithfulness. Prostitution is a temporary arrangement between people who may never see one another again. The prostitute requires money as a condition to sex. Husband and wife come together sexually in the context of a God-ordained *relationship* accompanied by mutual *responsibility* (Ephesians 5:22-33; Hebrews 13:4). "Professional" counseling, like prostitution, requires money as a condition to providing counsel. While the relationship may have more substance than a prostitute and "client," it is often artificial and highly restricted. Biblical counseling may depart from this model as two people in a church form a counseling relationship quite unlike its professional counterpart. But what happens if a required payment is introduced as a pre-condition to ministry? Counselor and counselee are brothers/sisters in Christ. What if the counselee is no longer able or willing to pay a set fee for the ministry of God's Word? What happens to the *relationship*? No ministry relationship in the body of Christ should ever be conditioned on the payment of money by the one receiving ministry. Although full-time ordained leaders are entitled to compensation so they can support themselves and feed their families, such compensation is paid to them by the church and does not involve charging a set hourly fee to individuals who receive ministry, either publicly or privately. Believers have obligations to support their churches financially, according to their means (Malachi 3:8-10; 2 Corinthians 9:7), and church leaders have spiritual obligations to care for God's flock (Peter 5:1-5). Both are based on voluntary, joyful service performed out of gratitude to God for His blessings.[7]

Biblical counseling is a beautiful and important ministry that should flourish within the Church through generous funding. Many counselors have already proven that the biblical model is possible; they are supported well by the offerings of their local church or other believers. Selling truth, wisdom, and friendship is not necessary to make the ministry of counseling sustainable. God will provide through the ways he has

7. Deborah Dewart, "Charging Fees for Biblical Counseling?"

sanctioned in his Word. His resources are unlimited. He is a compassionate and generous father. Just as the first disciples trusted him to give them the food they needed in order to do ministry, biblical counselors are called to do the same as they rest in God's love and faithfulness.

The temptation to charge for ministry in our cultural moment is strong. The prevailing voices would have us believe that God cannot be trusted to clothe and feed us as he does the lilies and sparrows, and so we must resort to the wisdom of the world to fund ministry. The spirit of the age screams, "Monetize everything!" More often than not we lull each other into complacency and secular ways of financing the work of God. Yet Scripture tells us to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb 10:24). Whether you are a counselor or counselee, think deeply about these things, scour Scripture to weigh the claims of this article, and cast off the works of darkness. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold (Rom 12:2). And even if you end up unconvinced by the formidable weight and clarity of God's Word regarding money and ministry, consider erring on the side of your Father's radical generosity, who *gave* his Son's life for sinners.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/biblical-counseling

SHOULD CHRISTIAN MINISTRY BE SUPPORTED BY ADS?

Andrew Case

The 1998 movie *The Truman Show* is a film about a man named Truman Burbank who—unaware—lived his entire life inside a simulated reality TV show. In order to pay for the show, the producers filled Truman's world with cleverly placed ads of all kinds, even within conversations that Truman had with his wife (who was really a paid actress). At one point Truman and his wife are in the middle of an intense conversation, and she suddenly holds up a product and says with fake chipperness: "Why don't you let me fix you some of this new Mococoa drink. All natural cocoa beans from the upper slopes of Mount Nicaragua, no artificial sweeteners!" This would be unsettling to most of us, especially in the context of something sacred like a marriage relationship. We instinctively feel that there are certain things too holy to pollute with ads of any kind. Some things in life require honor and respect, but when those things are turned into advertising opportunities, honor and respect are stripped away.

Before going further, we should define what advertisements are. At their core, advertisements are unsolicited intrusions into our experience of the world that seek to persuade us to buy a product, service, or idea. Essentially, the goal of any ad is to influence perception and behavior in favor of the advertiser's merchandise. Even if the ad is for a Christian resource, it still gets in the way of the content the viewer is actually seeking. No matter what kind of ad it is, the objectives remain the same: capture attention, influence attitudes, and drive profitable action for the advertiser.

Christian ministries face enormous pressure to monetize their content through advertisements. YouTubers in particular often face the question of whether they should monetize their channel or not. The logic often goes like this: "Ad revenue will help provide regular income to grow the ministry, so we don't have to rely just on donations from supporters." I want to make the case from biblical principles that running ads on ministry content is wrong. Truth, holy things, the work of the Spirit of God, and all kinds of Christian edification are like marriage or friendship–too sacred to exploit with advertising.

Forcing vs Freedom

In our article *Giving out of Obligation to God*, we explain the important biblical difference between giving as payment and giving as support/colabor, which is a key issue when it comes to running ads on ministry content. It's important to remember that Scripture teaches that the support for spiritual work must be provided *voluntarily* and out of a desire to honor God and support the work of the ministry. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul says, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or *under compulsion*, for God loves a cheerful giver." This verse emphasizes that giving to support the work of

ministry should be done freely and willingly, without any sense of obligation or pressure. In other words, the person giving shouldn't be forced or manipulated to give, or put in a situation where he's exploited indirectly. But that's exactly what ads do.

When we apply this principle, we see that forcing people to see or listen to ads puts the receiver of ministry in obligation to the minister rather than to God. The person targeted by the ad doesn't have the choice to joyfully and freely give out of a sense of gratitude to God and thereby partner with the one doing ministry. Ads create relationships of obligation at odds with Paul's instructions.

In 1 Corinthians 9:7 Paul asks, "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?" In those days it was the *king* who ensured his soldiers were paid, but he himself received money through taxation. So when citizens give taxes, they do so out of obligation to the *king*, who then pays the soldiers their wages. They're not obligated to the soldier. If the soldier circumvents the king and demands payment from citizens directly for his work, it's wrong. That's called extortion. And this kind of extortion is exactly what ads are. If I am the one receiving ministry, I get access only in exchange for payment. But in this case the payment is indirect. I end up paying with my attention, my time, or simply by enduring the annoyance of the ad. This imposes a sense of reciprocity and indebtedness that should not exist between minister and recipient. And it goes contrary to the concept of bearing one another's burdens. The minister instead forces me to bear the burden of paying for what *God* is responsible to provide for; and the minister does so by pushing a manipulative, distracting thing into my life. This fails to reflect the law of Christ (Gal 6:2), circumvents the ways God has chosen to support ministry, and betrays a lack of trust in God to provide in the ways he has already promised to provide (through the free generosity of his people).

Mixing Financial Incentives with the Sacred

Again, it's important to emphasize that mixing financial incentives with spiritual and sacred things compromises the purity of motive and mission. And when ad revenue drives content, the focus can subtly shift from *serving*, to maximizing clicks.

Again, as we've said multiple times, Christian workers deserve wages (Luke 10:7), and ministries require financial resources. But biblical support stems from collaborative generosity, not commercial exchange. Those who receive blessings should give voluntarily to spread blessings to others. Any contribution must flow from the Spirit's leading, not worldly coercion.

Paul echoed this principle by refusing to peddle the word of God (2 Cor 2:17). True ministers trust God to provide through His people. They don't resort to treating others as impersonal revenue streams.

Objections

These objections will focus on YouTubers, but the implications can be applied more broadly.

I feel guilty for living off of the sacrificial giving of others.

Many think that dependence on the Body of Christ for ministry support is not the ideal. They feel guilty asking for or receiving donations from other believers. In addition, there may be donors or other voices in their lives who actively encourage them to become "financially independent" of donations as soon as an opportunity arises, such as monetizing a YouTube channel with many subscribers. Donors can be just as confused as those doing ministry, and exert pressure on ministries to find a way to minimize or eliminate their reliance on donations.

But God has called the Body to work *together* to advance the kingdom rather than rely on secular revenue models (1 Cor 12). The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you because YouTube's partnership program now sustains me through ads" (1 Cor 12:21). When a ministry uses advertising, it immediately discourages people from colaboring or partnering with that ministry in gospel work through donations. They often assume that all the needs of the ministry are being covered by secular revenue models, and so it's not necessary to give and bear the burden of support with them. This is a loss for everyone, since the potential giver loses the joy of giving, and a potentially edifying relationship between the two brothers or sisters in Christ is forfeited (Phil 4:17). In addition, the minister wastes time setting up or negotiating the ad, and the receiver suffers the irritation of the ad. A brother punishes another brother for the sake of worldly means of gain and for lack of faith.

YouTube is running ads on my videos whether I monetize them or not, so I might as well get something out of it.

This is a common argument with several problems. First, this objection assumes that pragmatism is more important than principle, which should never be the case, as we have already argued. Biblical principle should guide our actions supremely over practical concerns.

Second, the objection assumes wrongly that it's impossible for ministers to communicate clearly with those to whom they minister. Those creating ministry videos can easily and transparently communicate that they do not run ads on their content. This can be done on their website, in the description of each video, in the video itself, etc. There are plenty of ways to let people know that any ads they see are put there against the creator's will by YouTube.

Third, these ads that YouTube forces onto non-monetized videos are usually far less frequent and intrusive (and this frequency can depend on the country). Many times viewers will be able to watch non-monetized videos without any ad interruptions. However, when a creator has intentionally placed an ad in a video, the ad will run much more frequently (unless an ad blocker is used). And if the creator decides to make the ad non-skippable, it will always be non-skippable.

Fourth, very rarely does ad revenue from YouTube amount to much. Most ministry channels don't tend to have millions of views per month, and rarely reach even tens of thousands of subscribers. It would be sad to go against a biblical principle just for the

sake of a few extra dollars (Prov 28:21). One should consider the question: "Will it be worth it to risk sinning against God for a tiny amount of money?" Scripture gives us examples like Judas and Esau for a reason. And ministries will never know how many potential donors they drove away by annoying them with ads or by causing them to assume that the ministry was covering all their expenses with ad revenue. Is it worth driving away a donor who would have given $2,000 for the sake of an ad program that pays you $20/month?

People can just use ad-blockers if they don't want to see my ads.

This used to be true for computer browsers, but since 2023 YouTube has been at war with ad-blockers and limiting their effectiveness through different tactics. And ad-blockers have never been available for the YouTube mobile app, which many people use. Again, even if ad-blockers win the war against YouTube's aggression, this attitude places the burden of ad-avoidance on the receiver of ministry and follows the voice of pragmatism rather than principle. Although YouTube is one of the most strategic places to host ministry content, it's helpful to serve others by providing an ad-free environment to enjoy the videos you create. Having an Odysee.com or Lets.Church clone of your channel makes your videos freely available without ads, and it's a good idea to make them downloadable via torrent (as I have done for *Aleph with Beth*). Providing these options, along with clear public communication about your commitment to never monetize your channel, shows the heart of a true minister of Christ who seeks to *serve* others rather than force them to watch ads in exchange for paltry worldly wages.

In conclusion, God can and does sustain and expand ministries through prayer and Spirit-led giving alone, and he has clearly given us biblical principles for ministry support in his Word. Let us trust him and not lean on our own understanding.

Practical Application for YouTube

There are several ways you can beat YouTube at their own game and rid your channel of ads.

1. Enroll in the YouTube Partnership Program, which is normally intended to enable you to monetize your videos. In order to do this you'll have to reach some milestones to qualify. Once you're in, simply *don't* turn on any ad monetization on your videos, and this will increase the likelihood of no ads being shown.
2. Avoid having YouTube flag anything in your video with a copyright claim. If you have a copyright claim on a video, it will trigger an ad nearly every time.
3. Post your videos on Lets.Church and Odysee.com so that people have an alternative to view and download them ad-free.

Conclusion

The short answer to this article's title is: no, ministry should not be supported by ads. Instead, it should be supported by the free generosity of God's people. When we are

pointing people to Jesus, it is counterintuitive to point them to ads. Our Father is a faithful provider, and he can advance his Kingdom through us without resorting to secular revenue models. Let's stop pushing manipulative, distracting things into other people's lives in the name of Christ, and instead reflect his servant heart, bearing one another's burdens (Gal 6:2).

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/ads

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCES SHOULD BE FREE

Conley Owens

Christian conferences often sell tickets at substantial prices; these days often in excess of $300. On one hand, these events are expensive to host, but given that the gospel itself is free (Isa 55:1), ought they charge anything at all?

TGC25's registration page

To get right to the point: I believe that Christian conferences should be free. Conversely, to sell tickets for such things is against the commands of Scripture. I'll lay out the claim more precisely, then make my argument.

Definitions

It's important we define both "Christian conferences" as well as "free."

"Christian Conferences"

By "Christian conferences," I mean *gatherings where the primary featured activity is the proclamation of the Word of God*. I do not intend conferences on non-religious matters (business, homeschooling, etc.) that are particularly for Christians. I'm addressing a category of events that might often be labeled "gospel conferences."

"Free"

By "free" I mean that *access to the conference should be offered apart from finance-based partiality*. Not only should the teaching itself not be sold, but the conference host should

not restrict attendance based on the purchase of any other thing—e.g., requiring the purchase of a meal pass to attend.

There are several things that one might imagine me saying that I don't intend. **I'm not claiming that hosts must**:

1. actively ensure access for attendees—e.g., provide plane tickets.
2. avoid charging for other things in a way that does not restrict attendance—e.g., selling food.
3. avoid acting as a proxy to any costs that may be incurred by the attendee—e.g., collecting money from attendees to make hotel reservations on their behalf.
4. avoid all venues that would impose their own finance-based partiality on attendance—e.g., hosting at a private camp that imposes its own entrance fee.
5. avoid restricting attendance on all other bases of partiality—e.g., forbidding individuals who constitute a threat to safety or enforcing an RSVP deadline.
6. refuse conference speakers an honorarium—in many cases, they should give one.

That is not to say that these activities would be negligible or neutral. In typical situations, a number of the above would be profoundly *unwise*. Scripture forbids the sale of Christian teaching in part because it compromises the sincerity of the message (2 Cor 2:17). Those who simultaneously take the positions of minister and secular vendor—for example, teaching for free but selling food—risk suggesting ulterior motives for their ministry. Those who are thoughtless about the financial difficulties imposed by the venue—for example, hosting it on a cruise—risk suggesting that the gospel is not freely offered to all. However, these activities constitute gray areas because they do not *necessarily* undermine the sincerity of the message; none of these activities are technically selling access to teaching.

Argument: Partiality in Christian Teaching is Forbidden

A number of arguments could be advanced here,[1] but to choose one and put it forward simply: the Bible forbids partiality in Christian teaching. Consider both 2 Corinthians 2:17 and James 2:1.

2 Corinthians 2:17

Paul forbids peddling the word of God because it demonstrates an ulterior motive; i.e., a lack of sincerity.

> For we are not like so many others, who peddle the word of God. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as men sent from God. (2 Cor 2:17)

1. Most of our articles are relevant to this question. For a sampling of passages, consider Matthew 10:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 1 Corinthians 9; 2 Corinthians 11; 3 John 7-8.

The one who charges for teaching (peddles the word) is one who does not teach *purely* out of a desire for others to know the message. The reason he chooses to teach one person and not another is because of the benefit he receives by doing so.

James 2:1

James explicitly forbids partiality in the context of Christian teaching. Even to give someone better access on the basis of finance is contrary to a biblical ethic of Christian ministry.

> My brothers, as you hold out your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, do not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you lavish attention on the man in fine clothes and say, "Here is a seat of honor," but say to the poor man, "You must stand" or "Sit at my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:1-4)

Does not James' prohibition on partiality clearly forbid the sale of conference tickets? Since God has chosen the poor of this world (James 2:5), ought we not reflect that in how we would promote Christian teaching? To sell conference tickets is to favor those who are willing and able to give us some benefit in our teaching. James clarifies for us that the concern over finance-based partiality is not just in the binary question of access, but even in *the degree* of access (e.g., online vs. in-person).

Objections

There are a number of objections one might raise. Some objections respond to the use of the above passages; others come from a pragmatic perspective.

"Christian Conferences Are Not Religious Worship"

James 2 is addressing church services, not conferences. It would be sinful to charge for access to a church service, but conferences are not church services.

James 2:2-4 gives the example of church services as *one application* of James 2:1 ("do not show favoritism"). James 2:1 forbids partiality in Christian teaching altogether and naturally has broader applications than church services, as indicated by the rest of the passage. To narrow the scope of James' warning is to miss his point, which is to broaden our consideration of the love of neighbor (James 2:8-11).

It is right to make distinctions between religious worship and other venues of Christian teaching, but that distinction has no bearing on the sin of charging for access. Paul did not say that it is acceptable to peddle the word so long as it is outside of a church service.

"Christian Conferences Are Not Obligatory"

No one is forcing you to go to a conference. It's not like a church service where God requires us to attend.

The fact that conferences are voluntarily attended is irrelevant as to whether it is acceptable to charge attendees of conferences. Once again, Paul did not say, it is acceptable to peddle the word when others are voluntary participants in the transaction. He refused to peddle the word in any circumstance.

Moreover, Christians are obligated to seek the truth even outside of church services. Not every Christian is required to go to every conference, but some might find themselves obligated to go under the broader commands of Scripture. Proverbs 23:23 commands the Christian to "invest in truth." Some will rightly feel an obligation to purchase access, even when it is wrongly sold.

Additionally, one could make the same argument to justify charging for church services, saying, "no one is forcing you to come to my church; you can go to another church instead." There may be freedom of choice for those who would be taught, but that does not imply a license for teachers to charge.

"Christian Conferences Often Make the Messages Available Online"

Many conferences stream online or make the material available after the fact for free. They aren't charging for the message.

James 2 forbids finance-based partiality *even in seating*. To say to the one who is willing to pay, "you sit here" and to say to the one who is not willing to pay, "you sit at home," have you not become judges with evil intentions?

"Christian Conferences Engage in No More Partiality Than Other Teaching Mediums"

Consider a book. One might offer the content for free but charge for paper and ink. How is this any different from charging for seating while streaming online for free? The one who pays gets a premium experience.

This may appear like a weighty objection, but its power rests on the mental difficulty of maintaining the qualifications given in the position statement. If we can recount some of these, it should be evident that charging for a physical book is different from charging for a conference ticket. Let's begin with three similarities between conferences and printed books that Scripture does not condemn.

First, we already acknowledged that conference hosts do not necessarily sin by choosing a venue where a third party charges for access. In fact, given that most countries have visa fees, every in-person conference implies some kind of cost to a theoretical foreign attendee. Similarly, if a third party publisher sells a physical book, this does not necessarily reflect poorly on the author.

Second, we acknowledged that conference hosts do not necessarily sin by serving as a proxy for a third party who would charge for conference-related conveniences. This would be analogous to the Christian author who runs a storefront for his own books, but behind the scenes uses some print-on-demand service.

Third, we acknowledged that conference hosts do not necessarily sin by selling things that do not restrict attendance. The one who sells a paper and ink book, even at a

profit, essentially does the same, provided they do not restrict access to the content of their teaching (e.g., prohibiting distribution via copyright, etc.).

So what makes charging for a ticket *unlike* charging for a physical book? The answer is that in the case of books, the secular service being charged for may be divorced from the spiritual service offered freely. In the case of conferences, it cannot. The activities of authoring and publishing are consecutive and separable; one can write content without the involvement of physical books. However, the activity of live teaching is *inseparably annexed* to the physical space in which it is given. That physical space is a limited resource inherent in the act of teaching itself. As such, to the degree that it is controlled by the minister/conference host, it should be offered apart from finance-based partiality.

Of course, one might only make a conference available online—at that point they have circumvented the concern over partiality. Additionally third-party venue administrators may charge attendees for access to this space, but it would be *their* finance-based partiality rather than the host's.

"Christian Conferences Don't Offer A False Gospel"

2 Corinthians 2:17 is about *corrupting* the message, not selling the message.

There are some translations of 2 Corinthians 2:17 that refer to "corrupting" the word rather than "peddling" it. I would contend that this is an erroneous translation. Regardless, even if 2 Corinthians 2:17 is about corrupting the message, it still demands sincerity—a lack of ulterior motive. But to sell the word is to expose an ulterior motive of benefit, regardless of whether one teaches falsely.

Additionally, one who sells the word implicitly corrupts the message because a corrupt *medium* (which is not free) carries the message (which is a free offer).

"Christian Conferences Don't Just Teach the Gospel"

Maybe it's wrong to charge for the gospel, but Christian conferences often teach on other topics. It should be fine to charge for those.

Paul forbids selling the word. James speaks of holding on to the faith. Neither of these verses are particular to the gospel itself.

At the same time, all scriptural teaching, rightly understood, relates to the gospel (Luke 24:44-45; 1 Cor 2:2). Thus, no Christian teaching should be so absent of the gospel that it can be called *gospel-less*. If your teaching is devoid of the gospel, go ahead and charge, but don't call it Christian teaching.

"Christian Conferences Are for Christians"

It might be a problem to charge unbelievers to hear Christian teaching, but if one already has the gospel, then you are not charging for the gospel, but for additional truths.

The Christian is likewise in need of the gospel (Rom 1:15). Consider that many of those to whom Jesus sent out the twelve disciples were already regenerate, yet they still needed to hear the message of the kingdom, and he still commanded "freely give" (Matt 10:8).

"Christian Conferences Offer Something Valuable"

If it is true teaching, it has value, and it is reasonable to charge for it.

Christian teaching is not just valuable, it's *priceless*. Furthermore, it belongs to God. He gets to set its price, and he has made it available at no cost (Isa 55:1)!

"Christian Conferences Often Have Scholarship Programs"

If you are truly needy, conferences will often give you a free ticket.

This is still a finance-based partiality. When the scholarship is needs-based, those who are well-to-do can still only attend if they are willing to give the host some financial benefit. And those who have less are required to jump through special hoops and reveal their financial situation.

"Christian Conferences Often Only Charge to Cover Costs"

It would be a problem if Christian conferences were selling tickets to make a profit, but if they sell tickets to cover costs, that's fine.

While some translations of 2 Corinthians 2:17 say "peddle…for profit," the Greek word "καπηλεύω" refers to selling in general, not just the kind of selling that makes a profit. Moreover, this does nothing to settle the problem of ulterior motives. To give one person teaching and not another, based on benefit received, is to act partially toward them.

"Christian Conferences Can Charge without Greedy Motives"

You say that conference organizers who charge have an ulterior financial motive, but isn't that claiming you can see their heart? Many just want the gospel to go forward as much as possible, and they have deemed charging for tickets as being the best way to accomplish that because it will ensure their work is sufficiently funded.

Even though I use the word "ulterior," my claim isn't so much one about the heart as it is about the *stated* motives. If person A and person B both desire to attend the conference, and the conference organizer admits one but not the other, there must be some reason for that. If the stated reason is that one was willing to pay for a ticket and the other was not, we can safely assess that it is an additional motive beyond the desire for others to hear the teaching. One could argue that *more* people will hear the teaching this way, assuming the finances serve to enable more ministry. But the concern in James is *which* people will hear it.

"Christian Conferences Must Fund the Laborers"

The laborer is worthy of his wages. This includes both the conference organizers and speakers. You have to charge in order for them to be paid.

I agree that speakers and conference organizers should be funded in the work that they are doing. This can happen in many ways that aren't ticket sales. That is, there are many ways for God's people to exercise generosity and pool their financial resources.

The simplest of these would be the mechanism that already exists in the weekly giving of the church. Many churches have ample space in their budget to put on free conferences without even seeking outside help.

"Christian Conferences Wouldn't Happen if They Didn't Charge"

These conferences are a substantial undertaking and it would be impossible to fund them if they didn't charge. How do you expect these conferences to happen otherwise?

First, it's not a given to me that every conference should happen. Given the dangers of celebrity culture in conferences, maybe it'd even be good if some ceased to exist.

Second, if there is already enough demand that people are willing to pay, why would we assume there wouldn't be enough demand for people to voluntarily donate in order for a conference to happen? Churches and individuals can financially partner to bring about a conference and offer it for free to all attendees.

Alternatives

We've already pointed out some alternatives to charging for conferences, but just to consolidate, here are a few ideas.

Reducing costs:

- Use church facilities.
- Do not provide food; let guests order or go out for lunch.
- Choose speakers who do not demand large honorariums.

Funding:

- Churches can fund a conference out of their own budget.
- Churches can work together to fund a conference out of their combined resources.
- Churches and individuals can fund a conference together, even using crowdfunding tools if needed (e.g., GoFundMe).

Conclusion

While there are a number of gray areas, the main point is clear: God has forbidden finance-based partiality in giving access to biblical teaching. This is precisely what is done when tickets to Christian conferences are sold.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/conferences

THE FOLLY OF PRAGMATISM IN MINISTRY FUNDRAISING

Conley Owens

Here at *Selling Jesus*, we advocate that ministries be funded by fellow workers for the truth rather than by sales (3 John 7-8). This has applications for seminary tuition, conference tickets, and other paywalls on biblical teaching. We often point to verses such as Matthew 10:8 ("freely give"), 2 Corinthians 2:17 ("we are not peddlers of God's word"), and many others.

While some are willing to interact with these passages, surprisingly, a majority of the pushback we receive does not address the biblical texts at all. Instead, it typically moves immediately into the realm of practical concerns. While such matters are certainly relevant considerations, they cannot be determinative when in conflict with a biblical principle.

While numerous passages could be cited in support of the priority of principle over pragmatism,[1] the point is so straightforward that an extensive discussion may blunt its edge. As such, I'd like to offer a brief exposition of Proverbs 11:24 as applied to the topic of ministry fundraising.

> One gives freely, yet gains even more;
> another withholds what is right, only to become poor. (Prov 11:24)

This may be divided under the complementary heads of duty and blessing.

Duty

Proverbs 11:24 contrasts giving freely and withholding what is right. Literally it commends "scattering" (פָּזַר), an idiomatic term that contextually refers to generosity (cf. Psa 112:9). Additionally, it condemns withholding "what is right" (BSB, CSB, LSB)—as in some translations, what is "justly due" (NASB). The question that must be answered here is "What is right?" or "What is justly due?"

Matthew 10:8 gives us a direct application when Jesus commands the disciples to "freely give" what has been "freely received." *What exactly has been freely received?* The proclamation of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 10:7), the teaching of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:12). It would not be right to withhold these unless a fee is paid. This is not merely a command for the first disciples, but a principle that applies to us today.

If we have a duty (i.e., something is justly due), the oughtness of a matter is settled. The rightness of the matter cannot be overturned by another consideration such as "whether it seems practical."

1. Just as one example, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 12:14)

Blessing

But the main point of this passage is not merely that a consideration of duty must come before practical concerns: It's that when duty is involved, a pragmatic consideration of the result is inherently misguided. One would expect the one who gives freely to lose. One would expect the one who withholds to gain. Yet this passage says that the inverse takes place. The one who gives freely grows rich and the one who withholds grows poor.

The next two verses in Proverbs spell out this contrast further.

> A generous soul will prosper,
> and he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.
> The people will curse the hoarder of grain,
> but blessing will crown the one who sells it. (Prov 11:25-26)

This counterintuitive truth is echoed throughout Scripture (Prov 19:17; Prov 22:9; Prov 28:27; Ecc 11:1; 2 Cor 9:6). How can it be true? Because the *results* do not ultimately come from some marketplace of goods; they come from God who "will not forget your work and the love you have shown for His name" (Heb 6:10).

Additionally, if Solomon says this matter applies to hoarding grain, how much more does it apply to hoarding the bread of life? Grain should be sometimes sold (Gen 47:14) and sometimes given freely (Gen 42:25), but manna from heaven should be given freely to all (2 Cor 2:17).

Principle trumps pragmatism. Why? Because the Lord is good.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/pragmatism

CHRISTIANS WHO SELL JESUS

Andrew Case

Joe the Author

Joe is a gifted author who writes books to help churches be healthier. He has valuable biblical teaching to share, and he genuinely wants to serve the Body of Christ. Since he has friends in high places, he's been able to get his books published by a large and influential Christian publishing house. He's happy that the publisher only charges $14.99 for each of his paperbacks, and $9.99 for the e-book versions. They pay him a dollar royalty for each sale. When people ask him about how much he makes from his books, he's always quick to say that he's not in it for the money, and the small kickback he gets doesn't even cover the amount of time each book takes him to write. The fact that he's losing money (in the sense that his profits don't equal the value of his time) makes him feel good that he's making a sacrifice for the Kingdom of God.

Although Joe is well-meaning and sincere, and willing to sacrifice time and money to build up God's Church, he has been deceived in several ways. First, he wrongly assumes that Scripture allows the sale of ministry. What he's doing is clearly Christian ministry, and both Jesus and Paul make it crystal clear through their lived example and teaching that ministry should never be sold, but it should definitely be supported by the free generosity of God's people.

Second, Joe wrongly believes that the only way Christian writers can care for their families and keep from poverty is by putting price tags on their books. The Bible and Church history are full of examples of servants of God who were provided for through the free giving of his people to do ministry, or who worked a secular job (like making tents) in order to pay the bills.

Third, Joe has been deceived by promises of renown and acclaim if he publishes with a big-name publisher. Although he knows that he could distribute his book for free online digitally, and self-publish a paper version without receiving any profit, the lure of being perceived as a "legitimate" or "real" author because of the imprint of a well-known publisher prevailed. However, he covers up this desire for prestige by telling himself that a big publisher will reach more people. This may or may not be so, since he has never tried the alternative, but it doesn't matter. God does not measure success in numbers of copies distributed, but rather in obedience. And obedience would mean giving his writing away, and supporting his ability to write by some other means than selling it. Joe is unintentionally living the lie that reaching more people with his writing is more important than obeying God. For him, the ends justify the means.

Jane the Free Thinker

Jane believes that there are no guiding principles in Scripture regarding money and ministry because "everything is ministry, if it's done as unto the Lord, right? As long as we're loving God and our neighbor and seeking to make disciples, all of life is ministry! A

janitor can work for the glory of God, and when he does, that's a ministry just as important as preaching. A Christian flipping burgers can be a ministry just as much as praying for someone's healing!" So Jane has concluded that, just as a janitor can demand payment for the work he is doing, a preacher can demand payment for each sermon he preaches.

It's true that all of life should be lived to the glory of God, and that all believers are priests and should actively participate in building up the Body of Christ. But Jane has believed the lie that Scripture does not distinguish spiritual things from earthly things. Although she is well-meaning, and wants to glorify God, she has mistakenly oversimplified what it means to do Christian ministry. She also has wrongly conflated the truth that we should do everything as unto the Lord with the truth that some things are uniquely suited for the edification of the Church. The sincerity of encouragement and love are utterly compromised when done in exchange for money. Even unbelievers understand that some things like friendship and marriage should not be sold, and if they are sold, they are no longer real. Jane means well, but has been led astray by her culture's obsession with money and materialism, along with the desire to force Scripture to support the status quo.

Steve the Biblical Counselor

Steve is a biblical counselor. He believes that God has called him to minister to the broken in spirit, and he sincerely wants to help people be healed and whole, walking in victory over sin through the power of the gospel. But he's concerned that if he charges the same rates for counseling sessions as other prominent biblical counselors in his area, he'll end up alienating the poor. During times of prayer he believes that God has placed a desire within him to simply give counsel for free, but older, more experienced counselors have talked him out of it. "God gave you common sense, and you need to be responsible and provide for your family," they say. "Besides, if people don't pay you for your counsel, they won't value it." So Steve has reluctantly decided to charge half of what most people usually charge.

Although Steve believes that the Bible is sufficient for godly wisdom, he has failed to turn to it for answers to the simple question as to whether he should require payment for "speaking truth in love" to broken people. He has failed to heed Jesus' command to give freely (Matt 10:8), and allowed the conventional, worldly wisdom of his superiors to eclipse the sincere desire God has placed on his heart. He has also believed the lie that biblical counselors are somehow "above" raising support (as most missionaries do) to be able to minister freely and without compromising their sincerity. Steve is a tragic example of someone with an honest desire to honor God, but who was derailed by the blindness, complacency, and carnal pragmatism around him. He's trapped in a fog of confusion. In the end, biblical counselors are offering to lead people to Jesus through the Scriptures, with wisdom, truth, and sincere friendship–things that cannot and should never be sold. But Steve is unable to see this fact.

James the Worship Composer

James is a worship leader. When he was single he wrote some of his best worship songs in the evenings while working at a bookstore to make ends meet. His heart's passion is to serve the Church with Bible-saturated, God-centered, beautiful music that will point people to Christ. In the days of MySpace he was happy to post his songs for free for people to stream, and some of them started going viral. Eventually a Christian record label approached him and laid out a plan to turn his passion into a "career." James trusted them because they seemed like sincere believers and were obviously "professionals" who had been in the worship business for decades. They convinced him that the best way to bless the most Christians with his music would be to join them and use his gifts to generate a full-time income.

Now James leads worship events for large conferences and usually charges an upfront fee of tens of thousands of dollars for each event. His songs are now sung in churches around the world and bring in a steady stream of income through royalties and CCLI. He's happy that more people than he ever imagined are being touched by his music and encounter the presence of God. His recordings are no longer free to listen to, but every now and then he'll release one at no cost to download, which makes him feel good that he has done his part to be generous.

James has been deceived by the "professionals" into believing that the worship of God can be sold as a commodity. He also has bought into the lie that reaching large numbers of people means that God must automatically approve of the way one is doing ministry. God must be happy and honored with the means, if the outcome is large. Unfortunately he has failed to take seriously the account of Jesus cleansing the temple because the place of worship and prayer had been turned into a marketplace. If James is honest with himself, he remembers being happier before he turned his passion into a full time career that denies people access to his music unless they pay. Although his former way of life proved that he could write amazing songs for the Church without treating it as a full time business, he now tries to convince himself that it's the only way for him to make it "sustainable." He has already signed contracts and feels trapped in a corporate landscape that feels nothing like a real ministry. But everyone he respects is doing the same thing, and older, wiser Christians assure him that he's doing what's sensible, and that God is using him powerfully. And so, in his heart, the lie that the Jesus trade is respectable and inevitable has prevailed.

Luke the Sought-After Preacher

Luke is a gifted preacher and speaker. Some of the biggest summer camps book him years in advance, and large churches love to invite him to present at conferences.

In the early years of his preaching ministry he would only receive honorariums as a free gift that churches might give him to help cover expenses. But now he receives more requests than he can commit to. At one point an old pastor told him that he needed to think about charging upfront for speaking engagements. This would help limit the amount of requests and enable him to start a college fund for his kids. His family agreed

that this was a wise idea, and after considering it prayerfully, Luke began making it clear that he would require X amount in payment in addition to all of his travel expenses before agreeing to speak at an event. At first he didn't like how this exchange felt, especially when smaller, likable churches couldn't afford what he asked. But as the money started to flow, after a while he got used to it.

Once in a while when Luke has quieted his heart and is out on an evening walk with God, conflicted sentiments crowd his thoughts, and his conscience wonders whether he's doing the right thing by putting a price tag on sharing what God has freely given him. But he's quick to tell himself, "At least you don't charge as much as your friend David does. He charges twice as much and doesn't even have the greatest things to say. Most respected Christian celebrities charge for speaking. Besides, how else could you help your kids with their college expenses? God wants you to care for your family."

Luke is a classic example of a man who bases his pursuit of holiness on people around him instead of on the standard of God's Word. As long as he's a little better than "that other guy," he feels justified. He has believed a few lies: 1) putting his kids through college is more important than obeying God, 2) God is incapable of providing for his children through any other means than the ill-gotten gain of peddling God's Word, 3) as long as his sin is not as extreme as those around him, God is pleased and honored, 4) widely-respected, famous evangelicals are a better standard to live by than Scripture. While Luke is not actively trying to do evil, he has become complacent with the default state of affairs around him and is content to go with the flow. He's comfortable with worldly ways of thinking about money and ministry, so why rock the boat?

Mandy the Biblical Scholar

Mandy is an Old Testament scholar and the author of some of the best commentaries on Job and Amos. Both are published by Zondervan and don't cost more than other commentaries. She's also employed by a legacy Bible institute and teaches several courses, including biblical Hebrew. She regularly tells her friends that she has a dream job and couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to do what she loves. People respect her and look up to her as a nearly perfect model of someone who has given her life to God's service, blessing readers and students year after year.

Unfortunately and unwittingly, Mandy is selling Jesus. The problem for her, like many others, is the fact that she has simply never thought about copyright or the status quo of selling Christian teaching. Even though she is a deep, critical thinker and has a PhD, she hasn't taken the time to think biblically about whether it's right to sell her commentaries on God's Word or require students to pay tuition before being able to learn about the Bible from her. She has accepted an old, widespread system without a second thought, assuming that the system is biblical because so many other people have bought into it. If you were to challenge her to think differently and reconsider how biblical the system is, she would dismiss any contrary ideas as "fringe" and not worthy of her time. Like Luke (above), she's comfortable with the way things are. In this way she resembles antebellum Christians who were extremely comfortable with the slave

trade, and many historic Roman Catholic priests who were comfortable selling baptism. Besides, she might lose her dream job if she started to take what Scripture says about money and ministry seriously. Better to leave well enough alone, and if anyone brings it up, simply silence them by forcing certain parts of Scripture to support the status quo of commercializing Christianity. Ignorance is bliss.

Julia the YouTuber/Blogger

Julia is a well-known Christian YouTuber and blogger. Her mission is to leverage the reach of the internet to edify believers with God-centered, Christ-exalting content. She's particularly called to minister to women who have been victims of abuse, helping them seek healing in Christ. When her subscriber count hit 100,000 she was advised by her cousin to monetize the channel and start earning ad revenue and seek out sponsors. When she asked her followers about this idea, most people said, "Of course! We would gladly sit through ads to support the great things you share! God has obviously blessed you! A worker is worthy of her wages! You go girl!"

Now Julia has nearly half a million followers and several revenue streams besides ads and sponsors. First, she has a special subscription option that enables people to access some of her content early, as well as suggest ideas for future videos and blogs. People who pay for an even more premium subscription also get some kind of free merch once a year, along with an opportunity to ask her questions in a livestream she does every couple months.

When her sister admonished her to think more carefully about whether it's biblical to force people to watch ads before receiving spiritual guidance from her, she got offended. "It's not like I'm driving a Tesla and live in Beverly Hills! I always tithe, and I support six different charities. These income streams allow me to give more than I ever have in my life! How dare you judge me, when the Bible clearly says that you shouldn't muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain! Besides, people don't have to sign up for the premium stuff, and they can get an ad blocker if they don't wanna watch the ads. Or if they don't like it, they can go listen to someone else! It's a free country."

Julia has bought into the lie that, as long as you don't maintain an extravagant lifestyle, you're incapable of mismanaging the relationship between money and ministry. Whether or not people "like" how she is monetizing her service to God is irrelevant to God. Jesus wants his servants to give what they have been given without cost in order to reflect 1) the radical generosity of his own heart, 2) the sincerity of Julia's own ministry, and 3) the truth that spiritual things are not commodities to be bought and sold like everything else in the world's marketplace. As it stands, the sincerity of Julia's ministry is seriously compromised, since there is nothing to keep someone from thinking that she has ulterior financial motives for the truth she imparts. She is unable to be above the reproach of using Jesus as a platform for making money. God is more interested in her obedience than whether she gives her ill-gotten gain to charities or churches. Finally, Julia has failed to truly love those who listen to her, for true Christian

love never has strings attached. Love lays down profit and pleasure, and endures pain for the sake of others.

Tom the Seminary President

Tom follows in the footsteps of many seminary leaders who have gone before him since the seminary was founded in 1892. He has inherited a system and structure that is typical of nearly all seminaries around the world: students must pay tuition if they want to receive spiritual guidance and biblical teaching. Thankfully, the seminary has some endowments that allow it to keep its course prices down, but Tom is well aware that there are many people who never attend his seminary because of the cost. Although there are scholarships available, they are limited and usually reserved for international students. Sometimes at night he thinks about how nice it would be if professors could simply be like missionaries and raise support, freeing themselves to teach without charging students money. Or why couldn't there be more bivocational professors who support themselves with another job like Paul did and offer their services to the seminary for free? But then he shakes his head and laughs at how impossible his idealistic musings are. The seminary has been operating the same way for too long. Tradition can't be broken. There are too many people who would hate his ideas and keep them from even being tried. Why bother with a pipe dream?

Tom, like most, is well-meaning and wants to do the right thing. But he's also still largely ignorant of the biblical teaching on money and ministry. He has believed the lie that obeying God is an ideal fantasy, especially when it involves breaking with tradition. While Tom is impressed by the size, age, and influence of his seminary, God is not impressed. Nor is God impressed by its lack of fundamental obedience to the command to freely give what they have freely received. Tom is also a coward, fearing man more than his Creator. And if he's willing to admit it, he doesn't have faith that God would provide enough support for the seminary professors. He doesn't even believe that the professors themselves would have enough faith to even attempt to raise support. And very few of them have any other skill that might enable them to be bivocational like Paul. In the end, Tom's God is too small to overcome these obstacles to true obedience. The wisdom of a capitalistic economy is better than God's wisdom for "building up the Body of Christ through sound biblical teaching" (the seminary's slogan). The scale at which Tom's seminary does ministry requires more money than God could supply through the generous colabor of his people, so Jesus must be sold in order to cover the costs. Once again, the ends justify the means, sincerity is compromised, God is defamed and belittled as a commodity.

Jada the Publishing CEO

Jada runs a nonprofit Christian publishing house. One of the best and brightest authors she publishes came to her one day and proposed two new ideas. He wanted to publish his next book on a God-centered view of marriage as public domain (or Creative Commons Zero), and he wanted to make the book available in several digital formats for

free on his personal website. Jada listened patiently to his petition and then explained, "I admire your generosity, but we live in a fallen world where there is a real possibility that someone might exploit your book if it's made available so openly. Someone might make a derivative work and then lock it up in a restrictive copyright. Anyone could freely alter your writing according to their own opinions and then set up a printing press to produce copies. Besides, we need to make money off of your book to cover the costs of typesetting, cover design, marketing, etc. And if you make it freely available to download, that'll eat into our profits. Obviously we're not in this for the money, but we've got bills to pay and we want to be good stewards of our resources." The author eventually understood and went away disappointed.

Jada is deceived in several ways. First, she thinks that the best solution to living in a fallen world is to respond in fear, limit the spread of Christian teaching, and use man-made copyright laws that were created solely for monetary gain. Her fear mongering contradicts both the clear teaching of Scripture regarding the sovereignty of God and the testimony of history (she cannot name a single historical example of her fear being realized). What's more, she's failed to understand that Scripture itself survived uncorrupted for thousands of years without the protection of copyright law, and there are Bible versions in the public domain that have never been manipulated harmfully.

Second, Jada has been deceived into thinking that copyright law actually keeps bad people from doing bad things to good content. The reality is that it only gives her the right to sue them if she ever finds out about it, and she probably won't. In the end, copyright law really only prevents law-abiding Christians from sharing good content out of joy with their neighbor–it hinders them from loving their neighbor in that way. And it does nothing to hinder law-breakers from doing anything they like with it, since the mere words "All rights reserved" cannot physically stop anyone from doing what they see fit.

Finally, Jada has believed the lie that God cannot provide for the publication costs, and thus the only way to cover those costs is by denying people access to the author's teaching unless they pay. In other words, she naively thinks that her non-profit publishing house is incapable of running like any other non-profit–by the free donations of God's people. Even though the biblical model of how a local church pays the bills (through free tithes and offerings) is staring her right in the face week after week, she is blind to this solution. Obedience to God in this area is a low priority for Jada, since "the way things have always been done" keeps her in the stranglehold of expediency. Christ is not honored by ministries that operate out of baseless fear and blindness at the expense of reflecting the extravagant generosity in the heart of our Father.

Jordan the Famous Pastor

Jordan pastors Beverly Hills Baptist Church, one of the largest and most influential churches in California. His sermons are renowned for their combination of clarity, passion, intellectual rigor, and gospel-centered eloquence. Although his church and nonprofit organization take in millions of dollars/year in donations, most of his sermons

are not free to download online. Instead, each of his sermons is listed on the church webstore for 99 cents. When people ask him why he doesn't make his sermons available for free, he typically answers with several reasons.

"First, you've gotta understand that in the old days when I started preaching, there was no Internet. You had to order a cassette tape recording of a sermon if you wanted it. And those cassettes weren't free, because the physical tape had a cost, and no one complained about that. So we're just continuing that tradition, and covering the costs of the servers and people who maintain the website.

"Second, don't forget that the sermons I preach are considered 'works for hire,' so they legally belong to my church, which is my employer. I don't own them; the church owns them. So when you pay for them, the money doesn't go into my pocket; it goes into the church's ministry account. And I'm not receiving any commission for the sermon sales. My church is just doing what any honest business would do to pay the bills and make the sermon distribution system sustainable.

"Third, I want to talk about the preaching of the Word as a means of grace. Most people don't understand that it's only a means of grace *when administered in the context of the corporate worship of the people of God*. In that case it would be wrong to charge money for it, such as an admission fee. But digital recordings of sermons are not delivered in the context of corporate worship, so they're in a completely separate category, and the Bible leaves it to us to treat these special circumstances with wisdom, since they aren't addressed in Scripture. A biblical doctrine of preaching would tend to put recorded sermons in the same category as Christian books. Both are definitely useful, but not an essential part of the Christian life, so we're free to sell them.

"Finally, to be honest, why *wouldn't* my church want to charge for access to my sermons? We don't think it strange that pastors charge for the books they write. And just like books, these sermons are expensive to produce. This is Beverly Hills we're talking about. While most churches may get things done through volunteer work, we're in a city that demands a higher standard, so we hire professionals and use premium services. And that's not cheap. So the money our church makes off the sermons barely covers the cost of production."

Jordan means well, and genuinely thinks he's doing what's right in the sight of God, but the culture around him has squeezed him into its mold. He has believed the lie that it is impossible to cover the cost of a website by donations. And he fails to realize that the sincerity of his preaching is compromised by selling it, no matter what the price may be. His God is not big enough to provide money to pay the bills.

Jordan has also been fooled by the idea that Christians in rich areas must match their milieu with lavish spending and offer "premium" ministry. If God chooses not to provide the money for plush frills for a church through the free generosity of his people, then he probably doesn't want them to have those frills.

Next, by saying that his recorded sermons are not technically a means of grace, he assumes that the Holy Spirit is limited by technology. While this argument may sound sophisticated to some on the surface, it's a classic example of how clever men can be when they want to find a technical loophole to justify themselves. When he compares

recorded sermons to books in order to prove the legitimacy of what his church is doing, he commits the error of using one widespread wrong to make another wrong feel ok. In other words, he claims that one culturally respectable sin makes another similar sin respectable. But this is not how the Bible or the Christian life work. God condemns the selling of godly instruction (Micah 3:11), and does not limit it to corporate worship. Jesus commands the free giving of ministry (Matt 10:8) and doesn't confine that free giving to a specific context. Sadly and ironically, the pastor who thousands look to for Scriptural guidance has not shown sufficient care in looking to Scripture for guidance on whether he should sell his own teaching. In this area he has been conformed to the pattern of this world.

Rob the Strategic Vision Officer

Rob Hood is the strategic vision officer of a prominent organization that publishes academic biblical literature. After many trips overseas and conversations with leaders from the global south, he was struck with the scarcity of serious biblical study resources in the developing world. He recognized that voices from around the globe are underrepresented in the West, and that many people struggle to gain access to the literature they need to do biblical research. As a response, he and his colleagues developed policies that would make it easier for poorer countries to have free access to the academic resources his organization publishes. In short, these policies describe strategies for robbing the rich to feed the poor:

Strategy 1: "Charge premium prices in rich countries like the US for the biblical content we publish, and use that money to donate free copies to seminary libraries and Christian leaders in poor countries."

Strategy 2: "Charge for or give away digital resources based on IP address. If someone accesses our website from an IP address of a country with a GDP per capita that is substantially lower than the average GDP per capita of the United States and the European Union, a page with free PDFs will be available. If someone visits our website from an IP address in a country of high GDP, they will only be able to access those same resources through a paywall."

While Rob should be commended for his passion to serve the under-resourced and learn from the marginalized cultures of the world, his strategy falls short of what God has made clear in Scripture. First, in Matthew 10:8 Jesus commanded his disciples to give freely to everyone, not just the poor. Likewise, in Micah 3:11 God condemns priests for teaching for money *in general*, not just for charging the poor. Simply put, the Bible never gives a green light to sell holy things to *anyone*–rich or poor. Unfortunately, Rob has fallen into the same error that so many around him have championed: the belief that the ends justify the means, and that God doesn't care about the means as long as the end result is good. The biblical model for doing what Rob wants to do would be to give everything they publish to poor and rich alike, and rely on God and his people to supply their operations costs through the free generosity of believers.

On a practical note, Rob has grossly misunderstood the reality of higher income countries. Simply because someone lives in a rich country does *not* mean they are rich or able to afford a $40 commentary on a book of the Bible, etc. The idea that in these countries there are no poor people who have a strong desire to learn and go deeper into Scripture, grow in their faith, and avail themselves of serious biblical tools and resources is both naive and false. But Rob's strategies would block them from the good teaching his organization publishes. It is clear in Scripture that Jesus was not only concerned with the poor in other countries; he had a deep compassion for the poor of his *own* country. While Rob feels really good about his ideas, and others herald him as heroic for such forward-thinking generosity, his organization's actions sadly fall short of the glory of God.

Susan the Bible Study Author

Susan writes Bible studies for women and does speaking tours around the USA. She is the founder of Living Water Ministries, and reaches millions of women with her events and books. Her passion is to equip and empower women with a solid knowledge of the scriptures and challenge them to study the Bible deeply and seriously. On her ministry's website their stated mission is "to encourage all to know and love Jesus Christ through the study of Scripture." Her latest Bible study of Philippians is called *The Surpassing Worth of Knowing Jesus*, and you can buy the digital workbook for $20. Conference tickets to her Philippians study tour are $85 for adults. Live streaming tickets are also available, but if you live within a 150 mile radius of where the conference will be held, you are not allowed to stream the event. The streaming cost for a small group of up to twelve people is $125. If you have more than twelve, you must pay $20/additional attendee. Once you purchase the streaming access, the video recordings will be available to you for only 30 days after the event. You can own the digital download of the entire five-session study of Philippians for $50. The ministry website also has the option to give a donation.

Susan has never thought about an alternative way to do what she does. She grew up around the selling of ministry, and in her circles no one has ever questioned it. On the contrary, everyone she has come into contact with has celebrated the Jesus-trade in nearly all its forms. Susan is proud of her ability to support her household with her gift of teaching. She's also happy to be an example to her millions of followers of a woman who values her gifts enough to charge a fair price for them. What's more, the numbers of women impacted by her ministry speak for themselves. No one would ever question that God is 100% pleased with the way she's doing ministry, since so many books have been purchased, so many venues sold out, and lives changed. If she were to explain to someone the biblical foundation for selling her ministry, she would probably quote 1 Corinthians 9:14: "Those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." She considers herself simply to be obedient to that verse by getting her living by the sale of gospel ministry.

Susan has been deceived by her Christian cultural milieu into thinking that it's ok to deny people access to the knowledge of Christ unless they pay for it (although neither

she nor her friends would describe it that way). She has turned encouragement "to know and love Jesus Christ through the study of Scripture" into merchandise. Although it would be easy for a person of her celebrity to fund her ministry through the donations of thousands of devoted women who have been blessed by her teaching, she chooses to trust in worldly ways of funding to lead people to Jesus. She doesn't realize that what she is doing makes no sense at the most fundamental levels of logic. If she really wants to encourage as many people as possible to know and love Jesus Christ, why would she block access to her teaching with a paywall? Limiting access to ministry that leads to a deeper knowledge of Jesus and the Bible is the opposite of her mission statement, which gives the impression that money is really her main concern, and helping people know and love Jesus is second.

Susan does not realize that the sincerity of her ministry is compromised by every resource she sells, since it sends a clear message to the whole world: "I can't trust Christ my Master to provide for me through the free generosity of his people, nor am I willing to give sacrificially for the sake of God's Kingdom. I would rather keep millions of people from being blessed by the teaching that God has freely given me than lose the ability to monetize it in ways that Scripture condemns." Ironically, the woman who seeks to spread a passion for the Bible has ignored or misconstrued the Bible's teaching on money and ministry. The woman who wants people to know Jesus has turned Jesus into a product to be bought and sold.

Sadly, Susan cannot be excused on the basis of being young and naive. She is actually 60 years old and has been serving the Lord in ministry for 30 of those years and studying the Bible assiduously. Like many others, she has completely misinterpreted 1 Corinthians 9:14 to mean that she has permission to sell the gospel as a commodity in order to "get her living by the gospel." But it doesn't say that at all. It simply says that she should be able to get her living by the gospel, which requires her to go back to Matthew 10:8 and listen to Jesus in order to understand how she should be compensated for her work of gospel proclamation. There she'll find it clear that Jesus forbids selling her teaching, and instructs her to receive support from God's people.

Eric the Excuse Expert

Eric is the leader of a prominent publisher of valuable resources in the field of biblical studies. He loves God with all his heart, and wants to see the Church edified and grow in the knowledge of Christ through the amazing things he publishes. In spite of knowing the Bible better than just about anyone, he still has not considered whether commercializing the truth of Scripture is something God condones or condemns. If he were to be honest, the question has never crossed his mind.

One day a prominent Bible translation ministry called Lingua Divina Translators came to him with a proposition. They encouraged him to consider how much more impact his resources could have if he were to free them up under open licenses, especially so that the Bible translation movement could use them without any legal or financial hindrance. At first Eric thought they were absolutely crazy, and dismissed the

idea. Then he read something they sent him that explained the philosophy more thoroughly, and it slowly began to dawn on him that perhaps they were right. Maybe it *would* be more strategic for the Kingdom if he released his catalog under open licenses.

In subsequent days Eric explored the internet for more information about open licenses and giving ministry freely. Eventually he ran across a Christian website he hadn't seen before that was dedicated to the free and open movement. Scrolling through the content, he got the sense that these people were too radical for his taste. To him they came across as arrogant because they invoked so much Scripture and seemed so sure of their position. Without taking the time to truly read and understand their arguments, he closed his browser in a state of irritation and annoyance. These people were probably angry extremists, ready to attack anyone who disagreed with them! Even worse, they seemed to hail from a theological tradition that was antithetical to his own!

He picked up his phone and dialed Lingua Divina. He told them that, while he had nearly been ready to follow through with their proposal, he didn't want to be associated with the other questionable people out there preaching the same ideas. He was offended that there were other people advocating for a free and open Christian world in a way that was unappealing to him, and that these were dangerous extremists who had no tact in how they argued against monetizing ministry. "I regret to inform you that I will *not* be willing to release my catalog, and that's my final answer," he said, and hung up.

Eric has jumped to a conclusion (derived from baseless assumptions) that supports his emotional proclivity towards anything that might cast a shadow of doubt on his actions. He is also under the deception that he can dismiss truth based on whoever might happen to be associated with it. Instead of owning the ideas of the free and open movement for himself and coming to his own conclusions, he is looking for an excuse to avoid obedience to Scripture. Just as atheists blame "bad" Christians they've encountered for their unbelief, Eric blames other Christians for his unwillingness to follow Christ's command to freely give (Matt 10:8)—Christians whom he has not even taken the time to truly listen to. What he does not want to admit to himself is that Lingua Divina caused him to face a suppressed element of greed in his heart, and he didn't like it. He welcomes any excuse to go back to enjoying the status quo that the world affirms. Instead of wanting to do the right thing because it's *right*, Eric only wants to do the right thing if the "right" people are doing it.

Bob the Economist

Bob loves economics. He believes that God has given capitalism to the world as a gift that we should steward wisely. But because Jesus and Paul did not know anything about modern economies of scale, he feels led to help people make better decisions about how to manage ministry in our forward-thinking culture. He has encouraged his pastors to begin charging money to pray for people. Their time is a scarce resource, and economics is all about getting scarce resources to the right people. There are too many people for the pastors to pray for, so they can use economics to help narrow down the people who are more serious about needing prayer. In other words, those who are willing to pay. He

also has encouraged them to associate a standard fee for baptisms, since there are real costs to filling the baptistry and the time required to council and teach those who are seeking baptism (not to mention the time it takes to plan and execute the baptisms themselves). Bob tells the pastors that this is the most sustainable way to operate, and that they're only covering costs, not selling the ministry itself.

Although he has good intentions, Bob has been deceived by the notion that expediency is more important than what Scripture teaches. He's more excited about economics than about studying, understanding, and obeying God's word. He would rather force Scripture to support his pet ideas than allow Scripture to condemn them. Swayed by the pride that economic expertise and power bring, he is acting as though his ways are better than God's. He hasn't even seriously given thought to passages like the account of Jesus cleansing the temple, Matthew 10:8, or Micah 3:11. In his heart of hearts he's convinced that it's far more important for the Church to be up-to-date, relevant, and economically savvy. Bob has also been encouraged his church leaders to commit the sin of partiality (James 2). He believes that by charging money for prayer, the right people will be prayed for, and the wrong people will leave the pastors alone. But in the end this will always privilege the rich and discriminate against the poor–something the heart of Yahweh abhors.

Chris the Prophetic Voice

Chris has a timely message and warning for the Church. He's filled with a passionate and prophetic urgency to admonish evangelicals about the dangers he sees looming ahead if they do not repent and reform in seven key areas. So he has written a book in the form of a letter called *Dear Church: Seven Lies Seducing Evangelicals*. In the book he talks about how these lies are slowly infiltrating Christendom, and he desperately wants people to be aware of the dire consequences. Speaking from decades of pastoral experience, he believes that God has commanded him to sound a wake-up call to his people, and that he would have blood on his hands if he failed to raise these concerns. Chris has shared in multiple interviews that he had no intentions to write another book in his life, but God made it clear to him that he needed to help deliver people from the deadly deceptions of our anti-Christian culture.

Since Chris is already a well-established author, he published his "letter" with a legacy publishing house. There are two options to choose from: a Kindle version for $14.99, and a hardback for $21.99. It is not freely available in any format, and copying it or sharing it is strictly forbidden in the "All Rights Reserved" notice at the beginning of the book.

As we've already seen from other profiles like that of "Joe the Author," what Chris has done is a clear violation of Christ's command (Matt 10:8) and the wider teaching of Scripture (e.g. 2 Cor 2:17, Micah 3:11, 2 Cor 9). But from a purely pragmatic perspective,

Chris's choice for spreading his timely message is completely insane and hypocritical. It is evil, cruel, and illogical. Why?

1. When you write a letter to someone, it's an insult to require money from that person before allowing them to read it. It goes against the very definition of a letter to charge the recipient for it.
2. It is both illogical and evil to put a paywall between people and urgent warnings. It's illogical because, if you truly want to save people from imminent harm, you want them to get access to your warning as quickly, effortlessly, and freely as possible. For example, if you charge a fee before people can hear a hurricane or fire warning, it reveals that you don't truly want to save lives, nor do you have any real "urgency" in your heart. This paywall is also evil and cruel because it *ensures* that many people will suffer harm or death because they didn't hear the warning, especially the poor. Chris, by putting his book behind a paywall, has sealed painful consequences for many people, for which he will be held accountable at the judgment (by his own assessment and admission).
3. People who are the most vulnerable to these lies of our anti-Christian culture are often the least likely to pay for a book in order to find out how they've been seduced. Many people who are deceived believe with all their hearts that they're walking in the truth. They scoff at the idea of going out of their way to pay someone to tell them what lies they've fallen for.

Ironically, Chris has contributed to the lies that harm evangelicals by believing and promoting a lie himself: the lie that Christian exhortation and messages inspired by the Spirit of God (speaking truth) can be turned into merchandise. He is not only aggravating the current crisis by keeping his important letter behind a paywall, but also helping to spread the deception that the only way to warn people is by *selling* that warning.

What's even more tragic is that Chris genuinely has radically important things to say. When Christians read his book they wish they could share it with hundreds of their friends who are flirting with the perils he describes. But they can neither convince their friends to buy it, nor afford to buy a copy for everyone in their life who needs to hear his Bible-saturated admonitions. In spite of this frustration, most believers slavishly accept this cruel evil as normal, and even defend it as the way things should be. And so, many people remain deceived and unwarned, while Chris and his publisher grow richer.

Copyright & Licensing

COPYRIGHT & JESUS' COMMAND TO FREELY GIVE

Conley Owens

This article has been adapted from the chapter on copyright in The Dorean Principle.

In the mid-sixth century, an Irish monk named Finnian traveled home from Rome. Excitement gripped him, for he had come in possession of a great treasure: a Bible. While he certainly had access to some Scripture in his hometown, this Bible represented a purer and more complete copy than anything he owned, and all in a single volume. Nearby monks heard of Finnian's new prize, and many came from significant distances to see it. It more than pleased Finnian to show it off, yet all the same, he was rather possessive of his book.

Among those who visited was a monk named Colmcille, a charismatic, young redhead. He was equally excited by the Bible, so much, in fact, that he sneaked into the church where it was kept in order to spend the night copying it. He administered a scriptorium nearby and anticipated the opportunity to reproduce and disseminate the Scriptures on a grander scale. When Finnian discovered the act taking place, he became furious. Soon afterward, he pursued litigation.

Both men requested an audience before the High King Diarmaid for arbitration, each one confident that justice would rule in his favor. Finnian argued that because the book was his, the copy was his as well. Colmcille responded, offering his defense.

> My friend's claim seeks to apply a worn out law to a new reality. Books are different to other chattels (possessions) and the law should recognize this. Learned men like us, who have received a new heritage of knowledge through books, have an obligation to spread that knowledge, by copying and distributing those books far and wide. I haven't used up Finnian's book by copying it. He still has the original and that original is none the worse for my having copied it. Nor has it decreased in value because I made a transcript of it. The knowledge in books should be available to anybody who wants to read them and has the skills or is worthy to do so; and it is wrong to hide such knowledge away or to attempt to extinguish the divine things that books contain.[1]

To Colmcille's shock, the king ruled in Finnian's favor. Many speculations surround this event. Perhaps it represented an unbiased attempt at justice, or perhaps the court counselor, a druid, sought to hinder the advancement of Christianity. Regardless, the details of the story certainly make for interesting considerations.[2]

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1. Corrigan, R. (2007). Colmcille and the Battle of the Book: Technology, Law and Access to Knowledge in 6th Century Ireland. *GikII 2 Workshop on the Intersections between Law, Technology and Popular Culture at University College London* p. 6.

In our day, access to efficient copying is vastly more widespread than it was in Colmcille's. Through the digitization of information, even a child can reproduce a book in near-infinitesimal time at near-infinite quantities. Through the internet, that same work may be disseminated to nearly every person on the planet. If the fiery monk worried that outdated laws would hinder the advancement of the gospel in a new era, how much more should we revisit those same concerns?

Copyright and Obligation

Defined broadly, copyright is any legal mechanism that regulates the reproduction and use of creative works.[3] While copyright offers legal protections to authors, it simultaneously restricts the freedoms of those who consume creative works.

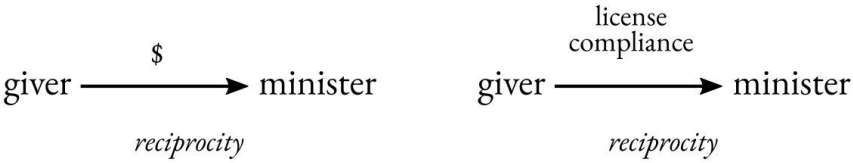
Scripture's teaching on freely giving ministry should lead us to question the church's use of copyright protection mechanisms in the context of gospel ministry.[4] If a minister is to give freely, has he really done so if he retains exclusive rights to the content of his proclamation? In my estimation, the answer is a resounding *no*.

Even though maintaining full copyright protection does not necessitate an exchange of money, it does impose a burden on the recipient of ministry. Apart from express permission, he may not copy, modify, or redistribute that work, the information he has received. Note that this imposes a *requirement*, requirement being the innermost circle of the forms of acceptance that violate the dorean principle. As such, it is the most serious form of violation. Moreover, typically, money is involved in the exchange. Ministers refuse ministry—in the form of books, recorded lectures, etc.—apart from a payment collected from the recipient.

2. See Corrigan, R. (2007). Colmcille and the Battle of the Book: Technology, Law and Access to Knowledge in 6th Century Ireland. *GikII 2 Workshop on the Intersections between Law, Technology and Popular Culture at University College London*.

3. Misinformation often clouds popular understanding of copyright. For further clarification, I have written a brief overview of copyright law in the United States.

4. While the dorean principle leads me to certain conclusions, some theologians have advanced a broader case for the abolition of copyright by appealing to a Christian notion of natural law.



Additionally, the involuntary nature of copyright precludes colabor (the voluntary support of ministry in obligation to God). One who complies with legal restrictions does not offer a freewill sacrifice to the Lord but only a concession to the one protected by the law. One who gives money to receive access to gospel-related material does so only as an exchange, compensating another to settle a debt owed to him.

Copyright and Sincerity

Stepping back and examining things through the lens of sincerity, we must question the earnestness of one who asserts all copyrights over the content of their ministry. If they impose restrictions or require payment, can they truly say that they operate as a servant of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 9:16)? If they impose restrictions or require payment, can they truly say that they are a servant to all so that more might be won (cf. 1 Cor 9:19)?

To be clear, I think highly of fellow pastors who have writing ministries, many of whom engage in the kind of exchanges forbidden by the dorean principle. Most have never directly faced this issue and therefore have made their decisions in ignorance. In a sense, I hold nothing against them because I likely would have taken the same steps had I never been led to especially ruminate on the passages we've examined. However, all this being said, I cannot ignore the logical conclusion of what the Bible says about sincere ministry. From a human perspective, the error is understandable. From a divine perspective, these models of ministry culpably transgress Christ's plan for the advancement of the gospel.

While the day-to-day activities of the local church largely remain within the boundaries set by the dorean principle, the advent of the Christian publishing industry has introduced breaches of sweeping proportions. Believers who want to deepen their knowledge of the faith frequently find themselves required to give to an author or publisher (i.e., the copyright holder) before receiving the benefit of some ministry. The issue goes much further than books, encompassing Bible study software, performance rights for worship songs, etc.

Of course, it has not always been this way. While the dorean principle has always been in danger of being violated, for the majority of the life of the church, there were relatively few opportunities for temptation or confusion to arise. However, the advancement of publication technology, especially as it has culminated in digital media, has presented the church with a test of faithfulness. Unprepared for the challenge set before her, the church has blindly followed the model of the world in its publication practices, distributing materials for a fee. Additionally, as the cost of reproduction and distribution wanes, being virtually negligible for digital content in the present era, the severity of transgression waxes stronger. Prior to the twentieth century, to purchase a book was to purchase a bound edition of printed pages. One was not paying for the content so much as they were paying for the tangible product as a whole, a matter of limited ethical concern. Today, a physical book and its content are more easily distinguished as paper and data. While people still purchase paper books, the sale of e-books indicates that publishers intend to charge not only for the physical good but also for the content. A completed work may be disseminated online to millions at no cost to the producer, yet ministering entities often default to charging for this service.

Not only does the use of copyright protection have potential to violate the dorean principle, but in most instances, it constitutes the most direct violation conceivable. Regardless of the intent of those behind such ministries, to require payment in exchange for religious education is to engage in the practices condemned by both Scripture and the early church.

Alternative Licensing

Simply stated, the antithesis of using the power of governing authorities to enforce copyright is *not* using the power of governing authorities to enforce copyright. However, under United States law, a creative work is protected by copyright as soon as it is fixed in a tangible medium. A minister who has no intention of taking advantage of these protections must go out of his way to explicitly waive his rights if he wishes to assure others they are free to use the creative products of his ministry however they wish.

To that end, institutions have fashioned a variety of licenses. The earliest of these licenses were largely designed to accommodate collaborative software projects,[5] but more recently, initiatives have addressed the needs of non-software (i.e., non-functional) projects. The most popular of these, Creative Commons, is not a single license but a suite of licenses designed to give copyright holders the ability to mix and match specific rights they would like to reserve or waive. Each Creative Commons license ensures that a work may be distributed in its original form, but additional restrictions may apply. As an exercise, I'd like us to take a look at these restrictions and evaluate their implications for dorean ministry.

Adaptation: The first option available for a Creative Commons license is the *No Derivatives* feature. One who applies this to their creative work restricts others from

5. For fuller arguments from similar perspectives, see Kinsella, N. S. (2008). *Against Intellectual Property*. Ludwig von Mises Institute; Poythress, V. *Copyright and Copying: Why The Laws Should Be Changed*. Retrieved May 23, 2020.

making adaptations of that work. For a book, this would prohibit translations and audio adaptations. For a song, this would prohibit musical rearrangements and public performances. Anyone wishing to make such adaptations would be required to obtain express permission from the copyright holder.

Such restrictions do not accord with the dorean principle. The recipient of ministry should not be bound to comply with the wishes of the minister. It is not sufficient to talk merely in terms of financial burden; all forms of burden (i.e., direct, horizontal obligation to the minister) fall in the same category. These stipulations do far more to hinder the gospel than advance it.

One may object that allowing adaptations opens a work to distortion and perversion. True; but at a fundamental level, *all* good things may be corrupted. Further, the history of Christian resources testifies that works available for adaptation encourage more good than they do harm. For example, Joseph Smith (the founder of Mormonism) produced a modified version of the King James Bible in order to promote his aberrant beliefs, yet few would argue that the harm caused by this document outweighs the proliferation of the Bible in audiobooks, tracts, study Bibles, and dramatic readings, all made possible through the availability of the King James Version. Most importantly, such pragmatic objections cannot dominate the principled concern of dorean ministry.

Commercial use: Creative Commons additionally provides a *Noncommercial* feature, which prohibits use of the creative work for commercial purposes. For example, this would keep one from directly selling the licensed material, or incorporating it into a derivative work that is then sold.

From a secular perspective, this feature has received substantial pushback due to the inherent ambiguity in the concept of "commercial purposes."[6] The text of the licenses using this feature speaks specifically of uses that are "primarily intended for or directed toward commercial advantage or private monetary compensation."[7] Even if it is not sold in a traditional fashion, an entity that uses a work licensed for noncommercial use in a way that supports a commercial endeavor potentially violates the terms of the license.

Regardless, the guidelines we have already set give us a clear path forward. Restricting uses of a product of ministry, even commercial uses, does not accord with the dorean principle.

Attribution: The most commonly used option of a Creative Commons license is the *Attribution* feature. This requires that anyone distributing the original licensed work or a derivative credit the copyright holder. For example, a Bible translation licensed with this feature would require that any tract quoting it credit the copyright holder of the translation.

In several ways, this seems more reasonable than the previous restrictions we have covered. Unlike those, the requirement of attribution does not imply friction between

6. This pushback led Creative Commons to publish a study of the public's understanding of "noncommercial use." See Creative Commons. (2009). *Defining "Noncommercial": A Study of How the Online Population Understands "Noncommercial Use."* Creative Commons Corporation.

7. Creative Commons. *Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0*. Retrieved February 4, 2019.

the consumer and the copyright holder for typical adaptive uses. For the other restrictions, typical uses require explicit authorization from the copyright holder in order to proceed. Attribution, on the other hand, may be provided by anyone downstream apart from any interaction with the copyright holder.

However, from the perspective of dorean ministry, there is no reason to classify this condition as fundamentally different. Even if no money changes hands, it imposes a direct obligation on the recipient of ministry to the minister. It should therefore be rejected in the context of gospel ministry.

Naturally, the primary concerns over waiving the right to attribution center around plagiarism and misattribution. Unfortunately, the complexity of the current situation makes it difficult to provide a simple response. Copyright law is designed to address matters related to the eighth commandment (thou shalt not steal), yet it has been co-opted to address matters related to the ninth commandment (thou shalt not bear false witness). Measures to inhibit plagiarism should certainly be welcome, but it is not clear that copyright enforcement was ever the right solution. Defamation laws may offer some alternative protection and perhaps the technology of the future will provide more immediate detection of such misappropriation. Regardless, in the course of ministry, a Christian's first priority should be the honor of Christ rather than security of credit.

License propagation: A frequent feature of alternative licenses requires all derivative works, provided they are disseminated, to be made available under the terms of the same license. This is known as *copyleft*[8] and guarantees that a creative work is not used and repackaged under more restrictive terms. To this end, Creative Commons provides a *Share Alike* feature.

This particular feature does not require explicit permission from the copyright holder for typical adaptive use. Furthermore, it seems to have the added benefit of encouraging others who might use ministry materials in a similar context to embrace the same licensing scheme.

Yet once again, we must acknowledge that the *Share Alike* feature is a restriction that goes beyond what is permitted by the dorean principle. First, it implicitly requires the *Attribution* restriction since a license has limited significance apart from an express mention of the one issuing it. Second, it requires compliance from any producer of an adaptation.

The Public Domain

Beyond various licenses, another option exists. A *public domain* work is a work that is not subject to copyright protection. Placing a work in the public domain is not always straightforward, especially in jurisdictions that acknowledge and do not allow for the waiver of "moral rights," which include, among other things, the right to attribution. In order to provide a simple approach to this, Creative Commons offers the Creative Commons Zero Public Domain Dedication. Rather than a license, it is a waiver of rights

8. For the origin of this pun on "copyright," see Stallman, R. M. (1995). The GNU Manifesto. *Dr. Dobb's Journal of Software Tools*, 10(3), 30–35.

that provides a license fallback in the event the waiver is deemed insufficient. This dedication states the intent of the author to provide maximal freedom to any consumer of the work.

In my estimation, a public domain dedication such as Creative Commons Zero offers the most consistent approach for dorean ministry. While the dorean principle does not mandate that a minister explicitly apply such a dedication to his work, it does require the spirit of such a dedication be present in all acts of gospel ministry.

Conclusion

To restrict others in their use of any product of gospel ministry is to require direct repayment—i.e., reciprocity—and violate the dorean principle. In not so many words, it says, "If I provide this ministry to you, you must do something for me." Furthermore, employing the power of governing authorities to coerce others to comply with such restrictions adds an objectionable level of hostility to the transgression.

In response, ministers and ministries should consider waiving any government-established copyright protections. For most creative works and in most jurisdictions, this may be done effectively through the use of Creative Commons Zero.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/copyright-jesus-command-to-freely-give

THE BONDAGE OF THE WORD: COPYRIGHT AND THE BIBLE

Maurice A. Robinson, Ph.D.

This was originally published by Maurice A. Robinson in 1996,[1] *and is public domain. Dr. Robinson served for many years as senior professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. His views are his own.*

Copyright as a means of special protection for the written product of an author has a long history, dating back to the guilds of antiquity. Our own laws regarding copyright stem from British jurisprudence, which in 1710 granted to authors the first meaningful protection of their own works.

In America, the framers of the Constitution declared that "The Congress shall have power to… promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries."[2] Note what has come about as a legal result of this provision:

1. Copyright is *not* an inherent right of an author, editor, composer, printer or publisher; it is a *privilege* specifically granted to certain works by an act of Congress for a limited time.
2. Certain items such as government documents, book or song titles, or tabulated lists specifically have been legislatively excluded from copyright protection by Congress.
3. Once the limited term of a copyright has expired, a work will enter the public domain and become free for use by all. Anything no longer protected by statute is deemed to be in the "public domain," as well as any works which are specifically donated to the public domain.

The law secures the exclusive right to control one's own creative contribution only "for limited times." Material protectable by copyright includes original works of authorship, translations of a work from one language to another, and "derivative" works taken or compiled from existing sources. Add to this the entire realm of musical composition and artistic endeavor, and one can see the scope of what is copyrightable.

The duration of copyright protection has varied over the years. The first copyright legislation enacted in this country granted a 14-year term, renewable for an identical period. In 1909 a new copyright law fixed the initial period at 28 years, with an equal renewal period. The copyright law of 1978 as amended has increased the maximum from

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1. Originally delivered in a slightly different format as the Fall Faculty Lecture, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina, 24 October 1995. Some revisions and errors of fact also were corrected following the ETS meeting at which this present paper was presented.
2. US Constitution, Art. 1, Sec. 8.

56 years to the life of the author plus 50 years (with certain mandated exceptions). Congress is currently considering legislation to extend the term of copyright by an additional 20 years, even though further extension will likely benefit only the copyright-holding publishers rather than the original authors or their immediate heirs.

Under the 1909 law, any work published before 1940 would now be in the public domain. However, under the current law, works published between 1922 and 1940 will not enter the public domain until the period 1997-2015. Only works published and copyrighted before 1922 are currently in the public domain. The change in the 1978 law has led to many abuses and much windfall profiteering which does not benefit in any way the original authors or their heirs.

For example, the *Manual Grammar of the Greek NT* by Dana and Mantey was completed in 1935, and under the 1909 law would have become part of the public domain as of 1991. From that point, low-cost reprint houses such as CBD/Hendrickson then could have produced royalty-free copies selling for approximately $15. However, under the 1978 law, Macmillan publishers retain the copyright to Dana and Mantey until the year 2010, thus reaping windfall profits beyond what they had ever anticipated due to the unexpected extension of copyright. In the meantime Macmillan has increased the price of that small volume from what was already an expensive $39 in 1992 to an outrageous $57 today.

The current copyright law adversely impacts the common good by extending a reasonable 56-year period of protection solely to enhance the profitability of a few older books which continue to sell. The greater benefit of public access to quality material of the past has been stifled by publishers' lobbyists who have transformed the copyright law into a profiteering tool which frustrates the public good.

Yet in terms of the present paper, it is not the *term length* of copyright protection which is the matter of primary concern. My interest is in the matter of copyright in regard to ancient religious texts which *de facto* should be in the public domain, especially in regard to any religious work which its advocates claim to have been derived from direct revelation and inspiration such as the Bible. In this paper, my concern clearly transcends the *legal* aspects of copyright law and contemplates the *moral* implication of copyright as applied to such texts. There are two issues at stake: the original language texts of Scripture, and the translations of what is deemed to be Holy Scripture into modern languages. Although the same concerns could apply to the sacred texts of any religion, I intend to speak from within an evangelical Christian context respecting those matters which directly concern our community of faith, and which reflect the believers' devotion to those sacred texts.

(1) Ancient Biblical Texts

The OT in Hebrew/Aramaic and the NT in Greek have always been received by the Christian community as the revealed and inspired word of God. The revelation of these texts occurred centuries ago, and they have been vouchsafed to us in thousands of original-language manuscripts, ancient language translations, and patristic quotations.

The science of textual criticism has labored long and hard to ensure that the printed editions of the Greek and Hebrew texts we currently enjoy are substantially identical to the text originally revealed by God and inscribed by the human authors. So much labor and effort has been devoted to the restoration of the sacred autograph that in most cases we are 100% certain as to the original reading of the text, and even where differences of reading occur we are quite certain that the true reading *is* preserved among the MSS we currently possess.

It might seem inconceivable that any modern printed edition of these ancient sacred scriptures would ever impose a claim to copyright since the public domain nature of these ancient texts should be plain by virtue of age. Yet the Bible Societies and other publishers since the end of the last century have presumed to copyright every "critically-edited" original language text that they have published, and even take the position that the text as edited even though claimed to be the closest possible reproduction of the autographs originally given by inspiration of God is the specific "intellectual property" of the Bible Societies themselves."[3]

Note that this writer does *not* object to the copyright of introductions, appendices, the forms of an apparatus, or other explanatory details, but the biblical text itself should be a different matter. Certainly the vast labor of learned editors in collating MSS, comparing and evaluating the variations, and publishing the text determined by such scholarly effort *is* valuable for the Christian community as a whole, but the question is whether such labor should be restricted by copyright from its free and open use by God's people. Should a book devoted to textual restoration be published, such a work clearly would be copyrightable. For example, Bruce Metzger has written a volume explaining the reasons for the decisions of the UBS committee in over 1400 places of textual variance.[4] That volume clearly reflects original creative work and is deservedly protectable by copyright.

The biblical text itself is a different matter, however. The facts are plain: over 90% of the biblical text is common in *all* editions, regardless of text type, whether printed in the present century or in the 1500s. Further, almost every variant reading cited in modern critical editions was known and published over a century ago, and scholars have been free to select from among a mass of variants since the time of Mill in 1707. All these variant readings are as much a part of the public domain as the Greek text itself, regardless of their individual selection or rejection by modern critical editors.

The present writer compared the entire Greek text of the 1994 Nestle 27th edition against the (now) public domain 1881 Westcott-Hort Greek text. Out of approximately 138,000 words, there were only about 1600 variational differences between both

3. Expressed in a public posting addressed to the present writer by Harold P. Scanlin of the American Bible Society which appeared on the internet TC-List (text-critical listserver), 15 April 1996. Scanlin specifically stated, "It is not my intention to enter into a legal debate, but I just want to state that it is the position of the Bible Societies that an eclectic text and the accompanying critical apparatus is 'intellectual property' and subject to copyright protection. I look forward to any forum such as the upcoming ETS meeting where this issue can be discussed." This writer would note that the point under discussion is only the biblical text itself (eclectic or otherwise), and *not* the accompanying apparatus, introductions, or appended matter.

4. Bruce M. Metzger, A *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, GBS, 1994). The first edition was published by the United Bible Societies, London, 1975.

editions, and half of these were merely the presence or absence of brackets surrounding identical text. Most of the remaining 800 differences were already clearly known from previously published editions, critical apparati or collations of the past century, which shows clearly that in textual matters, as elsewhere, "there is nothing new under the sun."

It is interesting to note that the editors of the UBS/Nestle 27 text made at least one alteration from the text of Westcott and Hort in every book of the NT, seemingly thus to ensure that their edition would *not* be identical with the public domain Westcott-Hort text in any given NT book. By rearranging variant readings, they produced a text differing only sporadically from that of Westcott and Hort. That resultant text — which remains 99.9% identical to its public domain predecessor — is then somehow claimed to be unique, the result of contemporary scholarly labor, and thus copyrightable.

A similar procedure is followed in regard to the Bible Societies' Stuttgart edition of the Hebrew/Aramaic Old Testament, which merely reproduces the exact text of the ancient manuscript St. Petersburg (Leningrad) B19A, whose text remains virtually identical to almost all other MSS and previous printed editions of the Hebrew Bible. Even where slight differences occur in MS B19A which reflect scribal peculiarities or differences between recensions, virtually all of the basic variations had long ago been noted in the collation data of Kennicott and Rossi from the 1700s. Again, there is "nothing new under the sun" — and that which is not new should not be copyrightable.

Some might ask, however, is not the deep and diligent labor of the critic sufficient in itself to merit copyright protection? The answer is "no"; Supreme Court decisions such as Rural Telephone Feist[5] have declared that what is termed "sweat of the brow" labor, based upon intellectual decisions regarding pre-existing factual data is specifically excluded from copyright protection.[6] Editorial selection from pre-existing public domain readings does not in itself create a protectable entity.[7]

The present writer has prepared a volume, *The Greek New Testament according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform*.[8] Every reading in that edition, though carefully selected by myself and my co-editor from among numerous variants, was derived from pre-existing

5. US Supreme Court, 1282, 1287-88 (1991). Decision on appeal from Rural Telephone Service Co. v. Feist Publications, Inc., 737 F. Supp. 610, 622 (Kan. 1990).

6. In the Feist decision, Sandra Day O'Connor, writing for the majority, noted that in what was "known alternatively as 'sweat of the brow' or 'industrious collection, the underlying notion was that copyright was a reward for the hard work that went into compiling facts... [But] the 'sweat of the brow' doctrine had numerous flaws... A subsequent compiler was 'not entitled to take one word of information previously published,' but rather had to 'independently work out the matter for himself, so as to arrive at the same result from the same common sources of information. Id., at 88-89 (internal quotations omitted). 'Sweat of the brow' courts thereby eschewed the most fundamental axiom of copyright law that no one may copyright facts or ideas... Decisions of this Court applying the 1909 Act make clear that the statute did not permit the 'sweat of the brow' approach... [In the case of] International News Service v. Associated Press, 248 U.S. 215 (1918)... the Court stated unambiguously that the 1909 Act conferred copyright protection only on those elements of a work that were original to the author... In enacting the Copyright Act of 1976, Congress dropped the reference to "all the writings of an author" and replaced it with the phrase "original works of authorship." 17 U.S.C. Sec. 102(a). In making explicit the originality requirement, Congress announced that it was merely clarifying existing law: The 1976 Act [added] Sec. 102(b), [which]... identifies specifically those elements of a work for which copyright is not available: 'In no case does copyright protection for an original work of authorship extend to any idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery, regardless of the form in which it is described, explained, illustrated, or embodied in such work.'"

public domain sources, and copyright is thus only claimed for the introduction and appendices to that volume. (the Greek text itself was released as public-domain freeware in the *Online Bible* computer program some four years earlier, and could not be *ex post facto* copyrighted in any case). Yet how by any criterion a text constructed out of pre-existing ancient manuscript data should be copyrightable seems beyond comprehension, even if that text reflected the result of fifteen years of joint editorial research and evaluation of individual variant readings. But the truth is plain: our labor created nothing new, but merely utilized freely available material from the past in light of a specific text-critical methodology in order to construct a close approximation to the autograph text. "Sweat of the brow" labor of this nature is *not* copyrightable, regardless of its merit.[9] My co-editor and myself freely offered the electronic form of our text to the public and the publisher with no thought of remuneration or personal gain, specifically because it was the biblical text which was at issue. There is no good reason why the Bible Societies or other publishers should not apply the same policy to the original-language source texts of the Old or New Testaments.

If a work is merely a reflection of a public-domain text or a reproduction of public domain variations from manuscripts which make up that text, copyright should not be claimed. There is *no* original work being performed, and the creative selection which produces the final product is strictly labor-based.

Scholarly labor in such a situation (which *is* commendable) merely selects a pattern of readings out of pre-existing data and publishes that pattern as an edition of the Greek or Hebrew Bible.[10] Much labor *is* involved, and certainly "the laborer is worthy of his hire." The authors or publishers of such editions will generate the deserved profit from the initial publication of such works. However, the text as an entity should *not* be copyrightable (though introductions, prolegomena, and the specific format of a critical appa-

7. Justice O'Connor in the Feist decision further notes that "originality is a constitutional requirement," and "there can be no valid copyright in facts." She continues, "The mere fact that a work is copyrighted does not mean that every element of the work may be protected. Originality remains the *sine qua non* of copyright; accordingly, copyright protection may extend only to those components of a work that are original to the author [even though] . . . . it may seem unfair that much of the fruit of the compiler's labor may be used by others without compensation."

8. Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, eds. *The Greek New Testament according to the Byzantine/ Majority Textform* (Atlanta: Original Word, 1991). The Greek text of that edition was initially released into the public domain in 1987 as electronic freeware by means of the *Online Bible* computer program (West Montrose, Ontario: Timnathserah, 1987).

9. To quote Justice O'Connor in Feist once more: "The most important point here is one that is commonly misunderstood today: copyright... has no effect one way or the other on the copyright or public domain status of the preexisting material.' H. R. Rep., at 57; S. Rep., at 55.... Even those scholars who believe that "industrious collection" should be rewarded seem to recognize that this is beyond the scope of existing copyright law... Brief for Respondent 17. Section 103(b) states explicitly [p*362] that the copyright in a compilation does not extend to 'the preexisting material employed in the work.'... This is 'selection' of a sort, but it lacks the modicum of creativity necessary to transform mere selection into copyrightable expression."

10. Citing the Feist decision: "Rural expended sufficient effort [p*363] to make the white pages directory useful, but insufficient creativity to make it original... there is nothing remotely creative about arranging names alphabetically in a white pages directory... As a constitutional matter, copyright protects only those constituent elements of a work that possess more than a *de minimis* quantum of creativity." The same principle would appear to apply in a situation where a selection of readings taken from a given fixed list is made, since the final resultant pattern of the entire text still remains essentially the same as previous editions now in the public domain (e.g. Westcott and Hort as compared to Nestle-Aland27).

ratus *are* protected). Once the publication of an edited biblical text has occurred, *anyone* should be able to utilize that edition freely as public domain material, since those texts themselves claim to be nothing more than an almost exact equivalent of the inspired autograph. God Himself was the initial publisher long ago; does He not hold the ultimate copyright to His own divinely-revealed words? Is God's intent to benefit His people by the free and unhindered dissemination of that word, or not?

The time is long overdue for the Bible Societies to renounce copyright on the original language texts of the Bibles that they prepare and distribute.[11] This especially includes the elimination of the incongruous policy of charging a license fee or royalty payment in order to utilize what they claim are the original texts of the word of God in either printed or electronic form. The Bible Societies were constituted to *serve* the churches and to be supported by freewill gifts from God's people. Their charter declares their mission to be a united endeavor based upon cooperation from Christians and churches of various denominations to promote the dissemination of copies and portions of Scripture at the lowest possible cost with the goal of *enhancing* and not of *restricting* the distribution of the biblical texts and translations.[12] With the advent of electronic publishing, the lowest possible cost is now often free, except for the intrusion of license or royalty fees. To charge such fees — whether to a consumer, book publisher or software programmer — merely so they might utilize a translation or critically-restored version of the word of God is not only unbiblical ("Freely have you received, freely give"), but borders on the unethical and unconscionable. Yet such fees along with other restrictions continue to be imposed whenever publishers or individuals might desire to use such edited texts to promote the reading, study, and use of the word of God. Copyright claims and licensing fees imposed upon God's people merely so that they can *use* God's Word is an immoral action into which the Bible Societies themselves should be ashamed ever to have entered.

Such a policy does *not* serve God's people in the most honorable or efficient manner, and anyone should be ashamed to charge a fee for "permission" to publish God's holy

11. According to Henry Otis Dwight, *The Centennial History of the American* Bible Society. 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1916), the Bible Societies since their beginning have erroneously and arrogantly considered that they alone, and not God's people within Christ's Church are the custodians and guardians of Holy Writ: "In all questions of the accuracy and propriety of versions the Bible Society must satisfy itself, for it will be held responsible for whatever goes forth published in its name. . . . The responsibility of the Bible Society for the English version is everywhere understood. As President J. Cotton Smith remarked in his address at the Annual Meeting of the Society in 1836: 'The Society is charged with the preservation, not only of the truths of the English Bible but of its precise language.' An interdenominational Society only can properly secure the text against alteration; it being a body trusted by all denominations, it watches over the inviolability of the text. A copy bearing the imprint of such a Society is of guaranteed authenticity." (vol. i., p. 132). Dwight further states on the same page, "Only after Bible Societies became established could one feel that an authoritative control guaranteed the new editions as they came from the press." One need only note that today most publishers are not exactly seeking the approval of the Bible Societies before publishing their proprietary translations. Only those translations specifically commissioned and copyrighted by the Bible Societies (e.g. TEV, CEV) are "protected" by licensing restrictions and royalty requirements to those publishers who contract for their use.

12. Since the widest possible low-cost distribution of scripture texts and translations is indeed the purpose of the Bible Societies, and since the advent of electronic media has reduced the cost of certain forms of "publication" to almost zero, one should rightly wonder *why* the Bible Societies would *ever* seek to restrict the wider dissemination of biblical texts and translations by charging license and royalty fees and claiming "intellectual property" rights over *any* form of God's word, to which they themselves should be subject, and not *vice versa*.

word. I would exhort the Bible Societies to eliminate *all* royalty or license fee restrictions and to permit the *free* dissemination of the biblical texts in the original languages and ancient versions. While it is obviously permissible for a publisher to recoup costs of production and advertising in their own printed volumes, it is quite another matter to claim that the very text of the word of God is some sort of "proprietary matter" or "intellectual property" which can be bartered and sold by those who maintain the exclusive copyright to such. There is a guilt which remains upon certain heads in this regard, and the Bible Societies in particular need once more to recognize their original mission and purpose and begin to *support* those purposes with integrity and responsibility and *not* with bullying legal claims or talk of "intellectual property" which supposedly subsists in man's rendition of God's holy word.

(2) Modernized Bible Versions

Another area in which the laws of copyright have been invoked to the disadvantage of God's people involves modernized English renditions of previous English translations. Certainly, translation from one language into another is protected by copyright law. This includes modern translations of *any* ancient text even though the original language forms of such texts may be in the public domain. Homer's *Odyssey* translated into English is clearly protected by copyright; but it is questionable whether putting the works of Shakespeare into contemporary English rather than its seventeenth-century form is really "translation." A questionable and "thin" use of the translation provision of the copyright law has been manipulated by certain publishers to create an illusion of "translation" when little or no real translation has occurred.

Translation reflects the original creative work of those who render a text from one language to another. The simple modernization of older English words or expressions to those in current use is *not* translation, nor is the restructuring of antiquated English syntax into that commonly received. Merely because a rendition ultimately derives from a non-English original is *not* sufficient ground for presupposing that the modernization of the archaic English text is a *primary* act of "translation," regardless of whether the original-language texts are consulted and "diligently compared" during the modernization process. For example, no one would claim that the KJV is a "translation" of the Bishop's Bible, even though a similar process occurred in that revision paralleling what one sees in the NKJV or NASV. There is *no* "original creation" involved in such a process, and the result should *not* have been copyrighted, let alone have become proprietary to any individual publisher. Infringement cannot and should not occur when significant creativity has not been involved in the production of a work. This of course does not preclude a publisher from claiming and even filing for copyright protection. The US Copyright Office will supply notice of copyright to almost any work submitted with the proper forms and fees. The Copyright Office does *not* have the time or manpower to determine the validity of that copyright, but notes that any infringement of copyright *must* be pursued in a court of law, and only the court can determine whether a claimed

copyright is valid. The fact that a work is issued a certificate by the Copyright Office does not a valid copyright make.

Consider a parallel example: were I to prepare and attempt to copyright a novel derived from John Grisham's *The Firm,* with 95% of my text still in agreement with Grisham's original wording (only the names of the characters might be changed), I certainly would *not* possess a valid copyright, regardless of the action of the US Copyright Office concerning my application for such. In fact, I certainly would be liable for damages due to plagiarizing infringement.

To consider even the previous example of a work which is clearly in the public domain: were I to modernize the 5% Elizabethan English of Shakespeare and leave 95% of the text as he originally wrote it, my copyright on the final product would and should be called into question as a "non- original" work, which basically (though legally) plagiarized the Bard's original text. Certainly, I could *not* be sued for appropriating public domain material; but anyone else could modernize Shakespeare in an identical or near-identical fashion so as to produce a text like my own, and I would have no legal recourse, since by definition infringement could *not* occur.

The slight modification of an original source does *not* represent a creative production which should be protectable by copyright. It would smack of blatant plagiarism for me to claim "authorship" and copyright and royalty protection for my Shakespearean text where 95% of it remains identical to the original.

The case is no different in regard to so-called English Bible "translations" which are primarily mere modernizations of older public domain versions. The bulk of the text of such modernizing versions is identical to that found in their public domain predecessors, and almost anyone familiar with contemporary English would be able to perform the same task, even without a knowledge of the original languages. Despite claims to that effect, the modernization of archaic language and restructuring its form of expression, even in light of the original underlying texts, is not and should not be considered "translation," nor should be protected by copyright.

Two major translations currently marketed are modernizations of older translations which long ago became part of the public domain in this country. Regardless of the scholarship involved in its production, the New King James Version is little more than the modernization and restructuring of the 1759 Blayney revision of the 1611 KJV. Words and phraseology were updated, but significant "real" translation rarely occurred. The facts are simple: the average person who can handle Elizabethan English not being familiar with the NKJV and not consulting such in the process could randomly select almost any chapter of the original King James and modernize it so successfully that he or she will find that the resultant text will be approximately 95% identical to the NKJV.

Such a revision process primarily concerns simple matters such as the alteration of "thee" or "thou" into "you" or the altering of "God forbid" into "May it not be" or "Certainly not." Whether one proclaims "Thus saith the LORD" or "Thus says the LORD" the public domain nature of the text remains evident. Even the removal of archaisms (such as replacing "neesing" with "sneezing" or "letteth" with "restrains") is *not* "translation," but simple non-copyrightable modernization.

Such a modernization process also includes basic syntactical restructuring: "Know ye not?" becomes "Know you not?" and must be restructured into "Do you not know?" Again, no real "translation" occurs with such a process, but merely the modernization of older forms of expression within the same language base. Most anyone familiar with older and current English should be able to produce a nearly identical product, even without consulting and comparing against the original Greek and Hebrew/Aramaic underlying texts.[13]

The case is simple: no one should presume to claim copyright protection for simple English modernization, whether the text be that of Shakespeare or the word of God itself. Yet every modernized revision of the KJV claims copyright protection — not only the NKJV, but also minor editions such as Jay Green's "Modern KJV," and the recently-advertised "21st Century KJV." None of these editions reflects a true work of translation, since little or no real "translation" has actually occurred to produce the final product.

The Lockman Foundation similarly claims copyright for their "translation" of the New American Standard Version when it also is little more than a modernization of the public domain American Standard Version of 1901. As an experiment, the present writer modernized a sample chapter of the NT (Matthew 4) from the ASV 1901 without consulting either the NASV or the Greek text. Without even trying, my modern English result was 96% identical with the wording of the NASV. In the 4% where differences of rendering occurred, either my own or the NASV rendering could have been acceptable (I of course was prejudiced in favor of my own rendition). Lest anyone presume that such occurred because I was already familiar with either the NASV or the ASV, this was not the case, since I have not used the NASV during the past ten years, and rarely use the ASV. I also did not consult the underlying Greek text during the modernization process.

The claim is regularly made in promoting both the NKJV and NASV regarding the diligent and strenuous labor of numerous editors and translators of both translations over a period of many years, at great expense, and how stylists went over every line of the product to bring it to perfection. While this is true, and a noble undertaking in all respects, the fact remains that, despite all the hoopla, the end result in either version is a product which in general the average English-speaking person with simple common sense could create on the fly as he or she read from the original KJV or ASV, modernizing the English as need required.

Certainly, those who know the biblical languages *can* improve the final product at certain points, but for the average person the end result remains similar to what anyone without the benefit of scholarship or ancient language skills could accomplish. The current text of both editions remains primarily a mere "modernization" of pre-existing public domain translations.

By pressing a claim of copyright, both the Lockman Foundation and Thomas Nelson Publishers. suggest that there is something "original," "creative" and "unique" in their

modernized. "translations." But remember Grisham and Shakespeare: had the identical process been used to make a "modernization" of a currently copyrighted volume, and the respective final texts ever been subjected to an open demonstration of how easily anyone could produce virtually the same product by altering the original English-language sources, I doubt that any judge or jury would hold the text to be copyrightable, let alone proprietary, but that such publishers would be found liable for plagiarism of the copyrighted text. The advantage which the KJV and NASV publishers possess is that, just as with Shakespeare, no one can or will bring charges from the original KJV or ASV in regard to infringement; it seems ludicrous that they should then claim a particular proprietary right in the modernized product merely because no claim of infringement is possible.

Do not misunderstand my point: the problem is *not* with these publishers and their modern renditions of public domain translations, nor even with their making a reasonable profit from publishing such versions in a variety of forms. The problem is with the specific claim that such texts *must* become exclusive and proprietary to them, protected by copyright, and requiring a license or royalty fee from anyone who might otherwise desire to publish and distribute such texts.

One publisher who licenses the NASV from the Lockman Foundation told me that they must pay a royalty exceeding 10% to the Lockman Foundation for each copy of the NASV that they sell. This should not be the case, considering that virtually anyone could produce a near-identical product with no expenditure of effort beyond mere English modernization of the 1901 ASV.

Allow me to propose a money-saving alternative for *all* publishers: assemble a team of scholars, who will work voluntarily for the glory of God alone, who will then use computer technology for search-and-replace, and finally completely modernize the 1901 ASV from scratch, so as to produce *totally* public domain modern version of the ASV. The result will be a royalty-free *Modern American Standard Version* (MASV) version which will be 95% or more identical in wording to the NASV, but which will require *no* licensing or royalty fees for anyone to use. Such a text would clearly be available freely to all, and anyone would be free to publish that *Modern ASV* with no copyright problems, let alone license or royalty fees. The same can just as easily be done with the KJV so as to produce a free public domain equivalent to the NKJV which would be nearly identical to it. The rationale for such a proposal is clear: the word of God in *any* form should be free for all to use with *no* restrictions or hindrances to hobble the free dissemination of God's holy word to a dying world. License and royalty fees have become attached to the text of the word of God primarily because publishers are more interested in the almighty dollar than they are in a commitment to serving God and ministering to His people.

Note that I am *not* arguing that publishers should not print and distribute numerous Bible editions; nor that they cannot make some profit on each copy sold. I am

rather railing against proprietary restrictions which *hinder* the free and open dissemination of God's word — regardless of translation — whether such restrictions are designed to enrich the publishers or not. The KJV itself appears in hundreds of editions from numerous publishers in every type of format, varying in price and quality. The 1901 ASV has also been reprinted by various publishers since it entered the public domain in 1957. The publishers of the KJV or the 1901 ASV make whatever profit they can in a free market economy and serve the people of God in the process. No proprietary claim can be involved with the dissemination of those versions, since they are already a part of the public domain.

It should be recognized that neither the quality of the KJV or ASV nor the profits for their publishers are harmed by the free and open availability of those versions from multiple sources, and God's people derive great spiritual benefit thereby. Licensing and royalty restrictions imposed upon the modernizations of those versions reflect a bold attempt to seize the rights to God's word from His people and financially to restrict the free distribution of that word until the proper fee be paid. Publishers should freely release such modernized versions into the public domain so that *all* the people of God may be unrestricted in their use of such, with no financial or legal hindrances attached.

Every publisher can earn a just profit by marketing the biblical text in a multitude of specialty editions, whether as study Bibles (e.g., African Heritage, Women, Men, Charismatics, Baptists, Wesleyans, the Orthodox or the Reformed). There is no question that introductions, study notes and supplementary materials which appear in such editions will remain proprietary and protected by copyright. The only issue is that the *text* of Scripture itself should be freely distributable, regardless of translation. Modernized versions of public domain translations should *not* become the peculiar property of any publisher, regardless of sponsorship, how many revisers participated, or at what cost — the ultimate product of "sweat of the brow" labor should *not* be copyrightable. *Real* translation — a re-casting of the biblical text into a wholly unique form of expression directly from the original languages — has not occurred in such cases, only the modernization of an existing freely available text.

(3) Other Modern Translations

But what about translations which are not mere modernizations? According to law, these indeed *can* be copyrighted and thus licensed to various publishers and distributors for a fee. Most modern dynamic equivalency translations fall under this category, whether the New International Version, the Jerusalem Bible, the Contemporary English Version, or the many others currently in print. One can wonder, however, whether the motivating factor in the multiplication and publication of such translations is the glory

13. Note that this is not intended in any way to deprecate the scholarship or industry of those who have labored and used their knowledge of the original languages to produce such modernized renditions. It is true, however, that even without the application of such scholarly acumen a text which is 95% identical to the NKJV *could* be produced by simple modernization. The primary possibility for observable "new" scholarship in the resultant text in such situations remains minimal, and is not often observable even within the 5% of the text which might differ from the original translation.

of God or the enlargement of publisher's bankrolls. The awful truth is that Bible publishing is a huge profit-making enterprise, and most publishers seek to enlarge their profits by every means available, without regard for concepts such as sharing and ministry as a primary factor.

As an example, the New International Version was produced under the auspices of the International Bible Society, and was funded by the freewill gifts of God's people and churches. That translation should have become freely available to God's people with no restriction or royalty fees attached. Yet the exclusive rights to the NIV were transferred to the profit-oriented Zondervan corporation, which (due to the great popularity of the NIV) has imposed on other publishers some of the most outrageous license and royalty restrictions that have ever been attached to a translation.[14] Numerous Bible study tools marketed by Zondervan now bear the *trademarked* term "NIV" in the title, even if that translation is *not* the primary focus of such books the profit motive in this regard is obvious. Speaking as a Southern Baptist, even Broadman/Holman publishers have joined the vicious cycle by licensing the NIV as the base text of its New American Commentary series, with certain restrictions accompanying such a license which should not be tolerated in a commentary series.[15]

When Bible publishers start demanding $10,000 royalty fees, as well as a required sales quota merely to obtain a license to utilize a contemporary translation, something is clearly amiss. The people of God should *never* have been willing to barter away their rights to His precious word. When exactly did God's people determine to surrender their rights to God's word and to allow the publishing community to dictate its use to the

14. One software publisher (here "Mr. J", though I know his real name) told me via the internet that his request for a license to use the NIV in his proposed product was denied due to his inability to guarantee a minimum sales quota of $10,000 worth of copies per year, even though he would have been able to pay the required $10,000 up-front licensing fee as well as the subsequent percentage royalty fee for sales. The absurdity of this licensing arrangement is further compounded by the fact that, in the time since the Zondervan corporation originally obtained the rights to the NIV, that corporation has been sold and is now a subsidiary of the secular Harper/Collins publishing chain, which is a part of the same conglomerate owned by Rupert Murdoch, which includes Fox Broadcasting. Mr. J also sought a similar permission from the American Bible Society "to publish the TEV, CEV, and Versión Popular, in electronic form, either for free or for any royalty fee (reasonable or unreasonable)." His report is disheartening: "Feel free to relate the ABS *absolute denial* of my request (on behalf of Rainbow Missions, Inc.). . . . They had decided *not* to grant my request, based on the lack of security of my Internet distribution method. (Horrors! Someone might read the Gospel without paying for it!)." Even after communicating assurances of security due to encryption technology, Mr. J was again refused permission, with a message from the Bible Society to the effect "that they had decided not to let *anyone* have electronic rights to publish their Bible texts (including, I presume, the foreign language texts that they act as copyright representatives for in the USA), but that if they were published at all, that they would do it themselves." Mr. J's comments to me declare a well-founded exasperation: "Frankly, I feel like I've been ripped off, having contributed to the ABS based on their stated purpose of 'providing the Holy Scriptures to every man, woman, and child in a language and form each can readily understand, and at a price each can easily afford.' I fail to comprehend how these go together. This action does not match their mission statement very well."

15. Although the royalty fee for use of the NIV in a commentary is relatively low (a few hundred dollars one-time payment per volume in the commentary series which is not dependent upon the number of copies sold), there still are certain guidelines with which commentary authors have to concur before writing their comments. Included among these is a requirement that direct criticism of the NIV rendering is *not* permitted within the commentary text, and also that Zondervan reserves the right to review all comments to make certain that this guideline is followed strictly. Such an imposition on the academic freedom of a commentator in effect makes that commentator a marketing shill for Zondervan and not a true commentator such has historically existed who *always* should remain free to criticize or suggest improvements to the text of *any* translation whenever such might be justified. This Zondervan licensing requirement is most definitely an unacceptable burden imposed upon any commentator worthy of the name.

churches? It is the *publishers* who should be paying the churches royalties for making profit from that word, rather than the reverse. If silver and gold interferes with the unrestricted use and dissemination of God's word as the sacred scripture for the Christian community, it will be the copyright-holding publishers who will have to answer for their motives at the judgment.

The initial release of the English Revised Version of 1881-1885 was free of copyright in the United States and was intended for mass distribution. It was the first major revision since the 1769 Blayney revision of the King James in 1611. The day it was released, two major daily newspapers in Chicago printed the complete ERV New Testament text.[16] This was followed by a number of US publishers releasing editions of the ERV, with no restrictions attached.

When the American edition of the ERV was published 16 years later as the American Standard Version of 1901, matters somehow had changed. The American Revision (identical to the ERV except for the incorporation of various changes recommended by the American Committee) was copyrighted by Thomas Nelson & Sons Publishers with the enigmatic statement "To insure purity of text." There was also a notice that Thomas Nelson & Sons was specifically "certified" to be the publisher of "the only editions authorized by the American Committee of Revision." That copyright was renewed in 1929, but transferred to the International Council of Christian Education (the forerunner of the National Council of Churches) with both statements still attached. In fact, the original 1946 edition of the Revised Standard Version was also similarly copyrighted "to insure purity of text."

Although it may be questioned what "purity of text" needed to be specifically "insured," and it does not specify who the anticipated or real corrupters might have been, the answer is not long in coming. The prefaces to both the 1901 ASV and the 1946 RSV New Testament make the situation quite clear:

> It was agreed that, respecting all points of ultimate difference, the English Companies, who had the initiative in the work of revision, should have the decisive vote. But as an offset to this, it was proposed on the British side that the American preferences should be published as an Appendix in every copy of the Revised Bible during a term of fourteen years. The American Committee on their part pledged themselves to give, for the same limited period, no sanction to the publication of any other editions of the Revised Version than those issued by the University Presses of England… It now [1901] seems to be expedient to issue an edition of the Revised Version with those preferences embodied in the text.[17]
>
> Because of unhappy experience with unauthorized publications in the two decades between 1881 and 1901, which tampered with the text of the English Revised Version in the supposed interest of the American public [by placing the American preferences into the main text rather than in the Appendix], the

16. Klaus Penzel, ed., Philip *Schaff. Historian and Ambassador of the Universal Church: Selected Writings* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1991), chapter **7**, "The Revision of the English Bible," p. 267.

17. *The Holy Bible*. Newly edited by the American Revision Committee, A. D. 1901 (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1901), "Preface," p. iii.

> American Standard Version was copyrighted, to protect the text from unauthorized changes.[18]

So the answer is plain: despite the American Committee's agreement not to "give sanction" to any "unauthorized" editions of the ERV published in the United States, such publications *did* legally and freely occur, and in fact may have outsold the British printings of the ERV in this country. Rather than giving glory to God for the further dissemination of His word, the concern seems to have been with the apparent violation of the initial agreement more than anything else. Thus, beginning with the 1901 ASV, the copyrighting of biblical translations in the US became a matter of policy, even if by subterfuge. Although the copyright to the ASV 1901 was transferred in 1928 to the International Council for Religious Education, as noted, the original agreement allowed Thomas Nelson & Sons publishers to hold the initial copyright. Despite the protestations to the contrary, this was *not* due to any significant desire "to insure purity of text," but was in fact a return for the Nelson company's financial bailout of ASV Committee expenses to the then-hefty tune of approximately $25,000. The bailout was needed to cover the costs of preparing the American revision, since the American Committee significantly expanded upon the original changes enumerated in the 1881-1885 ERV appendix.[19] Thus, a modern policy of restricted access to the word of God was imposed, merely in order that the less-than-altruistic American publisher might financially benefit from an exclusive copyright. After 1901, the possibility of further danger to the "purity of the text" was probably insignificant, but the "protection" of that purity involved a granting of exclusive rights to a publisher by a translation committee which probably was *not* authorized to make such deals to the detriment of the people of God, but which in the absence of an external controlling body chose to seek its own best course.

Once the ASV 1901 had been successfully copyrighted in this country with no apparent legal challenge, the gate was opened, and nearly all subsequent Bible texts and translations followed suit. Permissions and royalty fees became the norm, since these were regularly required of all secular writings. But somewhere a great evil is involved whenever the people of God permit commercial publishers to hold hostage their sacred texts by copyright and licensing restrictions; for far too long the Christian community

18. *The New Covenant, Commonly called the New Testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946), "Preface," pp. iii-iv. Penzel, *Philip Schaff,* p. 261, n.29, points out that the fault did not lie solely with various American publishers tampering with the non-copyrighted biblical text of the ERV, but that "Unauthorized Bible Versions incorporating the American Appendix [into the main text] had already been published… without prior consultation with the American revisers, by the English University Presses in 1898"!

19. ASV "Preface," p. iv: "In now issuing an American edition, the American Revisers, being entirely untrammelled by any connection with the British Revisers and Presses, have felt themselves to be free to go beyond the task of incorporating the Appendix in the text, and are no longer restrained from introducing into the text a large number of . . . suppressed emendations." Regarding the Nelson buyout of the ASV copyright, see Penzel, *Philip Schaff,* pp. 251-271. (Philip Schaff was President of the American Revision Committee). The financial matters regarding the American Committee which led up to the Nelson buyout are partially detailed on pp. 256-257 and p. 261, n. 29. Significantly, the American Committee initially considered the copyright issue "an unwarranted intrusion of a legal question (copyright) into a moral question (joint responsibility)" (p. 257).

has been distracted from seeing the full implications of this matter, and the time is rapidly approaching when it may be too late to take reconstructive action.[20]

The word of God is itself the peculiar possession of the people of God.[21] It should *never* become the exclusive property of various publishers and license providers who offer to dole out divine revelation for a fee. The primary incentive for publishing the word of God should *not* be the engendering of profit for the hireling publisher, but that the people of God might use His word for both their own edification and the evangelization and discipling of the nations.

It is high time that the Christian community awaken itself to the situation and dispatch a loud and strong cry in order to reclaim the biblical text from those who have made it into proprietary merchandise. It is not the "purity of the text" which has to be protected, but the *liberation* of that text from those non-church entities who desire to profit unjustly from marketing God's word back to God's people, who should own and control the dissemination of that word in the first place. Our ministry to a dying world requires sanctuary from the profit motive in regard to our sacred texts.

The commercial copyright "owners" of biblical texts should at once freely and clearly release those texts back to God's people for their unrestricted and unhindered use. There is more than one parallel case: whether the subject is musical composition,[22] or the editing, recording,[23] or live public performance[24] of biblical translations or origi-

20. Current proposed alterations to the copyright law may soon increase the restrictions currently in place by extending copyright for an additional twenty years, as well as increasing the likelihood of infringement claims, even on works which are public domain, once such works are placed in an electronic database. One proposed item now under consideration would even make *facts* such as ball game scores proprietary, and unable to be reported by news media without a payment to, e.g., the NFL or Major League Baseball. What the end result of "intellectual property" legislation and litigation will be in the next century is unknown, but the prospects appear dangerously dim, and we all stand to lose something very valuable in regard to information technology due to legislative maneuverings in the interest of unjust profit alone.

21. The Westminster Confession of Faith offers a typical comment to this effect: "It pleased the Lord, at sundry times and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will *unto his church;* and afterward, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort *of the church* against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing, which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary" (Article 1, "Of the Holy Scripture"). Emphasis added.

22. As a sometime Christian composer, I would editorially suggest the same for those who ostensibly write music "for the glory of God" but who then demand copyright-based ransom fees from our churches (whether by CCLI or other licensing arrangements) merely in order that God's people can praise Him in public worship by displaying the lyrics to simple choruses (many of which are mostly bible text!) on an overhead projector during worship. While "the laborer is worthy of his hire," and deserves just compensation for the initial sale and recording of music for commercial purposes, it remains *absurd* for such a composer to claim that "God gave me this song" and then demand compensation for what is specifically claimed to be God's revelation. But in public worship, the people of God should *freely* praise Him with *any* psalms, hymns or spiritual songs with *no* license or copyright restrictions to hinder such worship. Christian songwriters and musicians had better sort out their priorities and decide whether for public worship (at the very least) their music is *freely* dedicated to God's people for the glory of God and God alone or whether the ultimate object is personal financial profit. Our Lord made no idle comment when he declared "Do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise!" Had the proper spirit been in place from the beginning, there would have *never* been a need for the Christian Musical Thought Police to monitor copyright claims by CCLI or similar unbiblical licensing arrangements.

23. Since the present writer intends to maintain his own policy, he includes the public domain release of his own edited version of the Byzantine Greek Textform in electronic or other media, including a complete Digital Audio Tape recording of that same text, made in a professional studio environment (Greg House Studios, Wichita, Kansas) during the past two years, in which studio time, engineering, master tapes and personal reading were fully donated by *all* parties in order that God's people might freely benefit from non-copyrighted and royalty-free biblical texts in multiple media.

nal language texts, one either performs his or her labor *first* for the glory of God or for financial enrichment and personal glory. Publishers and copyright holders of material intended for Christian worship, evangelization, and ministry should desire (and request) little more than the basic cost of production and materials. To do otherwise is to forget the genuine concept of ministry, and to ignore the biblical admonition "Freely you have received — freely give" (Mt. 10:8)

(4) Unreasonable Limitations upon Fair Use

As if it were not sufficient for copyright holders to license the use of the biblical text for profit, many translational copyright holders have decided to further restrict the "fair use" of the biblical text itself by the people of God by adding limitations upon how much biblical text can be used at any given time. Some editions of the Bible are *totally* restricted just as any secular work by statements similar to the following:

> All rights in this book are reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the Publisher, except brief quotations and in connection with a review or comment in a magazine or newspaper.

Or again,

> No reproduction of the material in this Bible may be made by photocopy, mechanical means, or in any other form without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Additional restrictions attempt to dictate precisely how much of the Bible one can freely quote at any given time. The typical restriction notice will give permission to quote up to 200 (or 250, 500, or 1000) verses of the text of a given translation without seeking written permission from the publisher.[25] The accessory restrictions usually further state that, in quoting such verses, one is *prohibited* from quoting the complete text of any biblical book, and the portion quoted cannot exceed a certain percentage (usually 50%) of the text of the document containing such quotes. In other words, one can reproduce and quote the entire NIV/NASV/NKJV or other text from 1 John 1:2 through 2 John 12 without infringing, but woe to the person who might dare to cite 2 John 1- 13 on the back of a church flyer! Neither should anyone use any copyrighted translation in a gospel tract without obtaining formal permission from the copyright holder, lest he or she be sued for infringement for merely attempting to present the gospel as Christ commanded

24. I allude to a situation in which a Christian radio disk jockey intended to stage a media event wherein 300 people would read different portions of the Bible simultaneously in a public setting for 15 minutes, thus completing the reading of the entire word of God in that short time. The DJ desired to use the Contemporary English Version published by the American Bible Society and sought their permission to do so, expecting that they would be excited about any such project which would give media attention to the word of God. On the contrary, the Bible Society *refused* his request, and he opted to use the public-domain KJV instead (reported to this writer via internet e-mail by the DJ in question).

25. See Exhibit A appended to this paper for a complete sample restriction notice, taken from the inside title page of the NRSV.

and quoting scripture more than 50% of the time. The obedient disciple of Jesus Christ should *never* have to seek permission to quote or reproduce *any* portion of Holy Scripture! The present writer *renounces* such restrictions, and cheerfully reproduces the *entire* "prohibited" text of 2 John from the NRSV at the end of this paper to illustrate the point.

The truth is, regardless of such authoritative-sounding statements, there are *no* precise restrictions or limits specified under present copyright law concerning what is normally termed "fair use." There *are* tests which may be applied in court to determine whether a given quotation might overstep the boundaries of "fair use," but this would force a Christian to risk infringement merely to freely utilize the word of God in the manner which seems most appropriate. Secular courts should never have to rule in regard to "fair use" of biblical texts. The publishers should immediately drop all appended restrictions regarding the use of their translations which they have chosen to add to their copyright notices. By lording their exclusive copyright over all else, contemporary publishers now presume to dictate to their readers the precise limits under which their edition of the word of God may be utilized. The situation has degenerated to such a degree that one can even find *false* claims of copyright being issued, for no other reason except an attempt to obtain control and/or remuneration for what does not legitimately belong to the publisher.[26] This writer personally finds such restrictions abhorrent, and an attempt to further stifle the true "fair use" of God's holy word.

(5) Conclusion

In summary, for nearly a century, copyright legislation has been subtly but effectively applied, misused and abused in regard to the word of God in order to chain the Bible to a new pulpit, differing in kind but not in essence from the restrictive practice so loudly decried in the Middle Ages. While the contemporary difference can be described in terms of dollars and cents, the net effect is identical: the free and unhindered access by God's people to the revealed truth of His word is restricted once more, this time not by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but by the chains of copyright and financial ransom as demanded by the proprietary publishers. Has God's word all of a sudden ceased to be

26. One of the most blatant claims of false copyright can be seen in *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), which states on the inside title page "Copyright © 1995 by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530 USA. Printed in the United States of America. All rights reserved" even though the entire book contains *only* the title page, table of contents listing the biblical books in alphabetical order, and the entire public domain KJV text unaltered, without note or comment. There is *nothing* copyrightable in the entire product! Attorney/Professor Paul J. Heald speaks directly to this point in Paul J. Heald, "Payment Demands for Spurious Copyrights: Four Causes of Action," *Journal of Intellectual Property Law* 1 (Spring 1994) 2:259-292. Heald concludes, "Unless publishers are made to bear the cost of their misrepresentations, they will have no incentive to remove false copyright notices from the works they sell. Nor will they have any incentive to cease the sort of intimidation consumers confront whenever they seek to photocopy a text. Successful actions brought on the grounds... [of] breach of warranty, unjust enrichment, fraud, and false advertising . . . might help stem the tide of misrepresentation and confusion. This is especially true if courts... exercise their prerogative to award punitive or other augmented damages and attorneys' fees. Until the publishing industry is jolted into compliance with sound public policy, consumers will continue to be induced to part with their money by spurious claims of copyright" (pp. 281-282).

the "intellectual property" of God's people? Must it now remain under the peculiar control of executives, scholars and lawyers?

In contrast, I find it commendable that Richard Francis Weymouth, when creating his own original translation entitled *The New Testament in Modern Speech* (5th ed., 1929, various publishers), permitted that work to be published with *no* notice or claim of copyright, even though it would have been legally possible for him so to have done. In comparison with all other modern versions, Weymouth's magnanimous gesture passes almost unnoticed. Yet a great spiritual benefit is derived from quietly performing one's work and releasing it solely to the glory of God with no anticipation of personal profit or remuneration. Such a quality is sadly lacking among the contemporary commercial publishers and even within the Bible Societies themselves, who are constituted expressly for the wide and economical distribution of the word of God. The abuses noted have a common link, and that is the desire to create profitable merchandise out of the word of God; such is nothing less than a deceitful handling of that very word which condemns such a practice. The judgment of God in regard to the profiteers is no different than that which Jesus and Paul declared so long ago:

> "Take these things from here: do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise" (John 2:16);
>
> "We are not as the many, making merchandise of the word of God" (2 Cor 2:17);
>
> "[We] have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor 4:2).

There is no need for negotiation concerning the contemporary "Bondage of the Word"; it already exists and there seems to be no sign that such abuse will diminish. Legislation and royalty fees to the contrary, and notwithstanding the legal chains and bonds which modern editors and publishers have attempted to impose, our Almighty God once and for all has declared that "the word of God is *not* bound" (2 Tim 2.9), and only from this perspective can anything truly be accomplished solely for the glory of God. Amen.[27]

Exhibit A: A Display of "Prohibited" Scripture

To exemplify the abuses imposed by copyright and subsequent restrictions, this page reproduces *without* seeking permission either orally or in writing the *entire* text of the book

27. It is noteworthy that the Muslims tend to consider the text of the Qur'an as public domain, and this even in translation. Whereas some commercial translations of the Qur'an *are* copyrighted and restricted by publishers in much the same manner as English Bible translations, other translations such as that by M. H. Shakir *(The Qur'an,* [Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an Inc., 1995]) claim *no* copyright on the translation, and specifically state that their publishing house is "a nonprofit religious organization... devoted to the dissemination of authentic knowledge concerning Islam through the sale and free distribution of copies of holy Qur'an and its translation." This parallels that which the Bible Societies are supposedly thought to emulate, but with significant differences of opinion regarding the text considered to be sacred. Similarly, the translation based upon (but not identical to) that of J. M. Rodwell from the 19th century *(The Koran* [New York: Ivy Books, 1993]) also claims no copyright, despite a modernization of language and syntax in a manner paralleling that of the NKJV and NASV.

of 2 John — a *direct* violation of the restriction regarding the quotation of the copyrighted biblical text of the NRSV. The restriction is violated because an entire book of the Bible is quoted, in utter disregard of the specific NRSV restriction statement on the inside title page, which expressly states (emphasis added):

> The NRSV text may be quoted and or reprinted up to and inclusive of five hundred (500) verses without express written permission of the publisher, *provided the verses quoted do not amount to a complete book of the Bible* nor account for 50% of the written text of the total work in which they are quoted.
>
> Notice of copyright must appear on the title or copyright page of the work as follows:
>
> "The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright, 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. Used by permission. All rights reserved."
>
> When quotations from the NRSV text are used in non-saleable media, such as church bulletins, orders of service, posters, transparencies, or similar media, the initials (NRSV) may be used at the end of each quotation.
>
> Quotations or reprints in excess of five hundred (500) verses (as well as other permission requests) *must* be approved *in writing* by the NRSV Permissions Office, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

The real absurdity to this entire excursus is that *no* permission would have been required to quote the far more extensive passage from 1 Jn 1:2 all the way through 2 Jn 12. However, the mere reproduction of the thirteen verses which appear below is prohibited. Regardless of restrictions, however, here now is the *entire* text of 2 John from the NRSV — used *without* seeking any permission whatsoever:

The Second Letter of John

> [1] The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth, and not only I but also all who know the truth, [2] because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever.
>
> [3] Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, in truth and love.
>
> [4] I was overjoyed to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we have been commanded by the Father. [5] But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another. [6] And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments: this is the commandment just as you have heard it from the beginning you must walk in it.
>
> [7] Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh: any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist! [8] Be on your guard, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but may receive a full reward. [9] Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God: whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. [10] Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone

who comes to you and does not bring this teaching: [11] for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.

[12] Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink: instead I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.

[13] The children of your elect sister send you their greetings.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/copyright-and-the-bible

A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO ABUSE OF RESOURCES

Jon Here

A common argument given for keeping ministry resources under restrictive copyright is to supposedly protect them from abuse. The fear goes that someone may try to profit off of your hard work or claim it is their own, or a sect might make a derivative that includes their own heresy, or someone might even make a mockery of it. All of these things would be legal if a resource were to be dedicated to the public domain. So, is this a good reason to retain copyright on Christian resources?

Copyright *primarily* prevents well–intentioned use of resources

When fears are listed off regarding misuses of resources, what is often not acknowledged are all the *good* uses that will also be prevented by copyright. Think of all the possible positive uses of a resource, and you can guarantee that all but the most trivial would be forbidden. Such as translating a resource for an unreached people group, including it in Bible study software, adapting it for a younger audience, bundling it together with other useful resources, etc.

As an analogy, what would it look like if we were to take a similar approach to church services? It would mean forbidding anyone from entering church unless they applied for permission, to guard against the rare possibility that someone might come in and do something bad. It would be an extreme overreaction to a merely hypothetical threat.

It is also rarely acknowledged that Christian works can already be misused under existing fair use laws. Parodies of works are legal, meaning any Christian resource can be turned into a satanic mockery, regardless of copyright. Even then, we are assuming that all copiers of the resource are law-abiding. Those with evil intentions will be predisposed to simply ignoring copyright law altogether, especially those living in countries that rarely enforce it.

The open source software movement has already demonstrated that fears of abuse are irrational,[1] as the benefits of freely sharing resources far outweigh any risks involved in the relinquishing of copyright restrictions. This has also been clearly demonstrated by the free publication of the public domain KJV Bible translation in most countries, which has not resulted in any widespread corruption of the text.

But abuses do occasionally happen, so how should we respond if they do?

1. The open source movement has been so successful that even big companies like Microsoft, Apple, and Google, are significant contributors to open source software. Microsoft was especially critical of open source philosophy in its early days, and yet now it is the owner of the largest platform for open source code in the world (GitHub).

Rather be wronged

Thankfully, we have some very clear instruction from Paul in this regard:

> If any of you has a grievance against another, how dare he go to law before the unrighteous instead of before the saints! Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!
>
> So if you need to settle everyday matters, do you appoint as judges those of no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Is there really no one among you wise enough to arbitrate between his brothers? Instead, one brother goes to law against another, and this in front of unbelievers!
>
> The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you are thoroughly defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, even against your own brothers! (1 Cor 6:1–8 BSB)

Copyright is secular law that has little support from Scripture,[2] and it can only be enforced by secular authorities. Paul does not explicitly state what the believers in Corinth were suing each other over, but perceived abuse of mere *copies* of resources would surely fit well into the category of issues Paul is addressing.

Pay careful attention to Paul's advice, for when such matters cannot be resolved: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" Paul says it is better for the gospel when we *don't* bring such matters before secular authorities. In fact, to do so would be to "cheat and do wrong." Threatening another believer with a lawsuit may be even worse than whatever wrong you are accusing them of. While this passage specifically addresses grievances between believers, Jesus' own teaching on how to respond to minor forms of injustice should also be kept in mind (Matt 5:38-41, Luke 6:29-30).

This isn't to say that abuse of resources shouldn't be confronted, though.

Rebuke is appropriate

While it is better to be wronged than air grievances before secular authorities, Paul does not say such grievances don't matter at all. He refers to such grievances as "trivial" (ἐλαχίστων) when compared to "judging the world" and angels. But his concern is not that these grievances are merely being aired, but that they are being aired *before unbelievers*. And he implies that it *is* appropriate to address them before fellow believers (1 Cor 6:5).

Just because a resource has been freely given, that doesn't mean the author cannot condemn abuses of it. Some argue that condemning an abuse of a resource would mean

2. Violation of copyright is often referred to as theft, but it lacks the core component that makes theft *theft*: the owner is not deprived of the resource. For example, if someone steals a bike then the owner of the bike no longer has a bike. But if someone copies a book, the owner of the book still has their own book. They have not been deprived of anything. See also "Appendix C. Copyright and Natural Law" in *The Dorean Principle*.

it hasn't really been "freely given" because there is a condition that it cannot be misused. However, that would be to confuse the reason for the condemnation. We should not condemn misuse because we have some kind of ownership of a resource, but simply because *misuse is wrong*.

If you gave someone a phone for free, but they used it to make scam calls, you would rightly condemn them. But this should not necessarily be understood as a condition on the giving. If instead it was your friend who gave them a free phone, you would still rightly condemn them for making scam calls. The primary issue is their *misbehavior*.

Jesus himself said "freely give" (Matt 10:8) and freely gave his own teaching (and life!), yet we know for certain that he is quick to rebuke and condemn those who misuse his words or exploit them for their own gain (e.g. Matt 23:13–15, 21:12–13, 7:21–23, John 2:13–17, Mark 7:6–9, Luke 20:45–47).

If you are the creator of a resource that is misused, you will naturally be more invested in correcting such behavior. While this might stem from perceived ownership of the resource, it need not be. It can simply be because you are more informed than anyone else as to why the resource is being misused. For example, if someone were to copy one of the apps I develop and paywall it without changing it, I'd probably rebuke them. This is because they would not be adding any value, and users might not realize the original version is free. If they refused to remove the paywall, and I knew what church they attended, I might even reach out to their pastor about it. But I'd have no desire–or ability–to threaten them with a secular lawsuit. If they don't listen to correction from others, then God will be their judge (Matt 18:17).

Conclusion

While it is understandable to have concerns about the potential misuse of Christian resources, the biblical approach calls us to prioritize the free and generous sharing of these resources over any legal protections copyright might afford. It is easy to claim that one is protecting the message of the gospel by maintaining exclusive control over Christian resources, but this can just as easily be born out of our own pride and concern for our own reputation. The example set by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6 reminds us that, in such cases, it is better to endure wrong than to threaten legal recourse. We can instead protect the truth by continuing to proclaim it, correcting those who manipulate it, just as the apostles (Gal 1:9, 2 Peter 3:16, 3 John 1:9-10) and countless other believers have done for thousands of years before the advent of copyright.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/abuse

ON THE SPECTER OF COPYRIGHT HIJACKING

Conley Owens

Here at *Selling Jesus*, we advocate that ministries release their content into the public domain.[1] Among other reasons, we believe this to be the most consistent approach to Jesus's command to "freely give" in Matthew 10:8.

However, a question occasionally arises at this point: **Couldn't another party republish that content and claim it as their own?** Further, couldn't they then take legal action against the original creator who hadn't claimed copyright?

For lack of a more official term, I'll refer to this as "copyright hijacking."

1. The Public Domain Is Not New Ground

Often, people have this concern because they believe the public domain is untrodden territory, and they would be taking a relatively new risk that others have not. This simply isn't the case.

Innumerable older works are already in the public domain and have been for a long time. While someone could claim authorship of older works and then use this to litigate others who might republish, we're not aware of any cases where this has happened.[2]

Works by the US Government are in the public domain. This would include the speeches of government agencies as well as any information produced directly by them and not some third party contractor. These comprise millions of documents and recordings. Once again, we're not aware of any case where someone has claimed ownership of one of these works and then used that claim to litigate others.

Other public domain dedications have been around for some time. The most popular of these, Creative Commons Zero, has been in frequent use since 2009.[3] If copyright hijacking is such a serious threat for works dedicated to the public domain, where are the manifold examples of a Creative Commons Zero work being hijacked in this way?

2. Copyright Hijacking Is Not Legal

Perhaps the main reason folks worry about copyright hijacking is because they imagine it is legal. However, it is not. If one waives their rights to a work, there is no legal ground for another party to come along and claim those rights exclusively.

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1. For those familiar with other forms of free licensing, see our article *On the Specter of Copyright Hijacking* on why Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike is not enough.

2. With the potential exception of critical texts. In this case, some have claimed copyright around their recension of older texts, due to ambiguities in the actual content of autographs (the manuscripts penned by original authors).

3. For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art made over 492,000 images of public-domain artworks available under CC0.

The Berne Convention (an international copyright treaty) addresses these matters with common sense. Rights are granted specifically to authors, not publishers or other distributors.[4] Someone may falsely claim to hold the rights to a work "in the absence of proof to the contrary", but this "shall cease to apply when the author reveals his identity and establishes his claim to authorship of the work."[5] Likewise, in the United States, one has to be the author of a creative work or receive a license from that author in order to claim exclusive rights.[6] Apart from such licensing, no prosecution would have legal standing. Any evidence of prior authorship would immediately render the claim invalid.

In fact, a claim to ownership over a work authored by another and dedicated to the public domain would not only be invalid but potentially would even be subject to litigation. One photographer who had dedicated her images to the public domain brought a lawsuit against Getty Images for claiming ownership of her photos. The court agreed with Getty that the public domain photos could be commercialized but it also upheld the photographer's claim[7] that Getty was acting deceptively by claiming ownership of them. While the parties involved ended up settling outside of court, it is evident from this case that you cannot claim exclusive rights to a public domain work, and even large corporations can't get away with falsely claiming ownership.

These are basics when it comes to copyright.[8] Simply put: when one waives exclusive rights, that exclusivity does not become "up for grabs."

3. Asserting "All Rights Reserved" Does Little to Prevent Copyright Hijacking

Even if one does claim "all rights reserved" on a creative work, it does little to prevent copyright hijacking.

Regarding unintentional actors, there are some instances where a public domain work, because it is freely available, may be added to a system designed to detect unauthorized copies. By all appearances, this is what happened in the Getty Images case.[9] However, other well-known phenomena like the frequency of false YouTube copyright strikes on original content make it evident that platforms will often claim third party ownership even of fully copyrighted works. In either case, legal recourse is available.

Regarding malicious actors, there is no difference. One could just as easily claim authorship/exclusive rights to work that is dedicated to the public domain as they could

4. Authors may grant a license or transfer rights to a publisher or other entity, but that is only if the author consents to such things.

5. Article 15 of The Berne Convention.

6. Once a work is in the public domain it is no longer subject to copyright law and cannot regain copyright protection by another party. As stated in Title 17, Appendix Q, Section 12: "Title 17 [...] does not provide copyright protection for any work that is in the public domain in the United States."

7. The court dismissed matters related to copyright (since the photos were public domain) but allowed claims of violation of New York General Business Law § 349 regarding deceptive business practices.

8. I am not a lawyer.

9. See the previously mentioned article.

to a work that is not. Criminals don't stop simply because you put a sign up that says, "You're not allowed."

4. Copyright Registration and Public Domain Dedications Are Not Mutually Exclusive

If even works with "all rights reserved" are subject to copyright hijacking, what is the remedy? The generally recommended solution is copyright registration. By registering with the copyright office, you make some public record that could assist you in the event of litigation and would even be necessary if you were the party filing legal action.

In fact, this is exactly the same approach one can take with a work dedicated to the public domain. Dedication to the public domain does not change whether a work can be registered. Stated differently, what you intend to do with the work and how you intend to license the work does not affect the authorship of the work.

Of course this registration process takes several months[10] and costs $65.[11] Depending on the quantity of creative works your ministry produces, registering each could become onerous. Furthermore, legal protection still exists even without this registration, which is why few choose to pursue this route with most forms of creative works. Practically, uploading your work on a third party website like archive.org under your own account would provide equivalent evidence of authorship while being both quick and free.

5. Principle Trumps Pragmatism

Finally, it's important to ask such hypothetical questions about copyright with the right mindset. There are commendable ways of approaching this concern:

- How do I dedicate my work in the public domain responsibly so that I don't open myself or others up to unnecessary harm?
- Are there any implications to the public domain that would prove inconsistent with other moral imperatives in Scripture?

There are also less honorable approaches. For example:

- Regardless of what Jesus commands, what approach seems like it will ensure my ministry has the most success?
- What justifications can I find for withholding generosity in ministry?

While we should walk by faith and not by sight in every area of life, this is especially true in the work of ministry. In fact, the Bible specifically tells us that pragmatic (results-oriented) approaches to generosity typically don't play out as one would expect.

10. See US Copyright Office's processing times.
11. See US Copyright Office's fees.

> *One gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds what is right, only to become poor.* (Prov 11:24)

Let me encourage you to take a step back and examine your heart around whatever concern you may have regarding copyright hijacking.

Conclusion

While copyright hijacking is a real thing, it is a rare threat and should not be a major concern for ministries. Moreover, the difference between asserting "all rights reserved" and making a public domain dedication has little impact on whether a work would be subject to copyright hijacking.

As such, a ministry's decision to dedicate their works to the public domain should not be influenced by such pragmatic concerns. Instead, it should be based on their desire to generously follow the command and example of Christ.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/copyright-hijacking

THE PROBLEM WITH CREATIVE COMMONS SHAREALIKE

Conley Owens

For those interested in disseminating ministry materials at no cost, Creative Commons licenses have provided a standard alternative to full copyright. Any license in this suite of licenses ensures that material may be distributed to anyone without royalties. In particular, the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License (CC BY-SA) has been a favorite among many. Unlike many other Creative Commons licenses, which require explicit permission from the copyright holder to make derivatives or use them in potentially commercial settings, works under CC BY-SA may be used without friction between the copyright holder and the user of the copyrighted work.

The two features of CC BY-SA are the Attribution feature and the ShareAlike feature. The Attribution feature requires that any redistribution of the work or any derivative must include credit to the copyright holder. The ShareAlike feature requires that any derivative work must be licensed under the same license. This license propagation is often known as "copyleft" and prevents a creative work from being repackaged or distributed under more restrictive terms.

In the context of ministry, the ShareAlike feature has a natural appeal. For one who cares about the no-cost distribution of ministry materials, CC BY-SA ensures that derivative ministry materials are also distributed at no cost. One who writes a book and offers it gratis would certainly be disappointed to see another translate the book only to sell it.

Yet, there are several reasons why applying this feature is problematic.

5 Reasons Share-Alike is Problematic

1. Limited License Interoperability: Copyleft licenses only make sense in a world where alternative licenses are limited and enjoy non-competing market share.[1] For example, one who wants to combine several Bible references, available under CC BY-SA as well as the GNU Free Documentation License will find the problem intractable.[2]

In recent years, there has been cooperation from the makers of copyleft licenses to add interoperability between their licenses, but this is simply not the case across the board. Moreover, there is no guarantee that it will continue to be the case as new licenses are introduced into the ecosystem.

A key takeaway is that content creators cannot anticipate how their works may be used by others, and copyleft licensing restrictions often prevent legitimate use cases.

2. Burdensome Impositions: While we might describe something given at no financial cost as "free," if it is given apart from the liberty to use that thing to the fullest

1. While somewhat dated, this article by David Wiley captures some of the concerns well.

potential, is it truly free? To offer material with strings attached is a limited generosity that does not match the biblical ethic.

The biblical ethic teaches that we should offer gospel ministry without imposing any sort of burden.

> And when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden on any man, for the brothers, when they came from Macedonia, supplied my need. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will remain. (2 Cor 11:9)

Many are quick to read this passage as Paul simply claiming that he did not take money from the Corinthians. It is true that he took money from the Macedonians and not the Corinthians. However, if we interpret "burden" as referring simply to money, that would suggest that Paul *did* burden the Macedonians, something he asserts he would never do to any of his churches (2 Cor 12:14).[3] Furthermore, one might interpret "burden" as referring to financial hardship, but the Corinthians were well-off compared to the Macedonians.[4]

Rather, burden should be recognized as the imposition of obligation. One who offers the gospel freely and receives support in his mission imposes no burden, but one who offers the gospel with strings attached imposes a burden even if he receives no financial compensation.

3. Illegitimate Claims of Ownership: While a contentious topic, do ministries even have the right to claim such restrictions on derivative works? Certainly, they do by the copyright laws of most modern jurisdictions, but this has not always been the case. Copyright law and the notion of intellectual property is a relatively recent invention,[5] and the legitimacy of such restrictions are more assumptions than they are proven fact. They stand on pragmatism rather than principle. Justice and property should be biblically defined, yet most approach this question on the basis of pragmatic concerns.

Property is a real thing; thus, God gave man dominion over the creatures (Gen 1:26) and instituted the eighth commandment (Exo 20:15). But nowhere are ideas called property. Nowhere is anything which cannot be lost called property. Indeed, ideas cannot be lost and are not in any biblical sense property. If this assessment is correct, then no one has the right to assert that a derivative work must conform to any copyleft licensing restrictions.

4. Enforcement Difficulties: It's also worth noting that many barriers stand in the way of enforcing ShareAlike restrictions. Typically, individuals and organizations simply

2. Apart from having the political sway to get license authors to declare compatibility, as was the case with the Wikimedia Foundation in 2009.

3. On its face, 2 Corinthians 12:13 may suggest otherwise ("For what is there in which you were made inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself was not a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong."). But the irony present in the verse more likely only indicates that his non-burdensome actions toward other churches would count as burdens if applied to the Corinthians. Besides, it would be difficult to justify the apostle's behavior if he actually did treat his congregations with partiality (cf. James 2:1).

4. Some in Corinth were presumably of noble birth (1 Cor 1:26) and well off (1 Cor 11:21). On the other hand, the Macedonians gave "beyond their means" (2 Cor 8:4) and Paul goes as far as to describe it as "robbery" to take money from them (2 Cor 11:8).

rely on copyright producing a chilling factor on the creation of derivative works. They possess neither the financial means nor willpower to actually enforce such restrictions in most circumstances.

Moreover, the Bible would forbid such enforcement in the context of ministry use. As Paul forbade weaponizing the legal system against other Christians (1 Cor 6:1-8), so we should resolve such disputes within the church and rather be defrauded when we cannot. If we cannot agree that it is right for things like translated works to be distributed more freely than the original author intended, should the copyright holder really pursue their brother in court? Even in ecclesiastical courts, such blatant restrictions on gospel ministry work against the concerns of 1 Corinthians 6, to demonstrate the unity of the body of Christ.

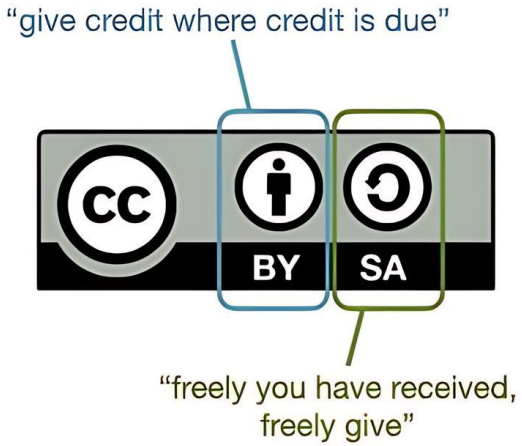
5. Confusing Terms: Unfortunately, copyright is an area fraught with complications. As such, a mechanism like copyleft can often add to the confusion. For example, most people feel free to quote or incorporate other fully copyrighted works into their own, either with an implicit or explicit understanding of fair use doctrine. However, CC BY-SA often leads people to believe that they cannot make use of such works in this way. By making explicit statements that a derivative work must be licensed under the same terms, many believe that such a use of a quotation would require a relicensing of the containing work.

One may object that this is a broken understanding of how the license works, but it makes no difference how illegitimate these concerns may be. Such confusion around the ShareAlike mechanism often exists and produces an unintended chilling effect.

An objection considered

Some have asserted that Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike actually advances biblical concerns. Consider the following image from Unfolding Word:[6]

5. The first copyright law was introduced in 1710.
6. Oakes, Perry. Equipping the Global Church to Translate the Bible into Its Own Language



An attempt at a biblical justification for CC BY-SA

Presumably, "give credit where credit is due" is a citation of Romans 13:7. While we could take issue with both the selective translation and application of this text, our present concern is Share-Alike rather than Attribution. Here, the graphic implies that the Share-Alike feature promotes the kind of freely giving Jesus commanded in Matthew 10:8.

First, we should consider who primarily has the obligation of freely giving. It is the minister who is charged with giving freely, not the recipient of ministry. This choice of license restricts the recipient of ministry, not the minister. Moreover, because it restricts the recipient of ministry, it actually entails a lack of free giving on the part of the minister. He has saddled the recipient with obligations for how they may use what they have received. (See reason #2 above.)

Second, If imposing these restrictions is not freely giving, then any recipient of such ministry may not freely give it either, since they are required to maintain the same license on any derivative work. Perhaps one would argue that this is begging the question, since I'm assuming that these licensing restrictions truly are burdens at odds with freely giving. Granting that for a moment, consider the very real scenario where one who shares the convictions of this article receives a CC BY-SA work from some ministry. If he wishes to build on top of it, making a derivative work to bless others, his hands are tied. He is unable to dedicate it in the public domain as he considers right. In this case, an attempt at generosity has hampered further generosity.

Third, the command to freely give is as much a command to internal attitude as it is outward actions. Offering the word of God freely is to go hand in hand with gospel sincerity (1 Corinthians 2:17). Yet, the threat of litigation does nothing to promote such generosity. In fact, if the recipient freely offers what he has received, it is only because he

has no other way to redistribute this resource. Forced charity is no virtue at all (2 Cor 9:7). In fact, at this point, the ministry who originally chose a Share-Alike license is guilty of violating the pattern set by Paul in 2 Corinthians 9: to encourage giving without it being a matter of compulsion. This is not to say the one who redistributes a CC BY-SA work is required to do so, but if they do, they are required to do so without charging under threat of penalty.

Fourth, we should consider that it was possible to freely give long before copyright ever existed. To consider this licensing scheme as essential to the end of promoting the command of Christ is simply anachronistic. Perhaps one may not go as far as to consider it "essential," yet this approach still represents a radical departure from that which Jesus actually advocated. His kingdom is not one of this world, and he did not advance it with the sword. By employing the threat of penalty through law and the power of government force, we are not simply using a modern mechanism to reach the same end but adopting a different strategy altogether.

While the ShareAlike feature of Creative Commons licenses seems to promote free access and sharing of ministry materials, it prohibits truly free access. Ministries should abandon this feature of the Creative Commons license as well as any other restriction. Instead, they should use alternatives like Creative Commons Zero, which dedicates the work into the public domain. It is only through waiving every claim to works of ministry that the gospel may be freely given as it was freely received.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/sharealike

Contemporary Commerce

BIBLE PUBLISHERS

Stewards or Gatekeepers?

Jon Here

Let's imagine that your pastor gets up one Sunday morning and announces: "If anyone wants to share passages from the Bible they need to ask me for permission first. I have to do this in order to carefully steward God's Word, because people might abuse it. That said, I'll be very generous in giving permission. I'll even let you share it for free if you're only using small portions. But if you use large portions, I'll expect some payment to cover the costs of carefully stewarding God's Word." How would you feel?

While that might be unthinkable for a pastor to do, it is exactly what most Bible publishers have been doing for decades. There are some exceptions,[1] but for the purpose of this article we'll be focusing on the most popular modern English translations that most Christians use today.

Bible publishers will, of course, argue that they are carefully stewarding God's Word. Let's evaluate that by asking several questions:

Is it legal to copy and share Scripture?

No, not in any reasonable sense when compared to any other commercial product. Almost all of the most popular English translations are copyrighted and, therefore, illegal to freely share. For example, would it be reasonable to say *Harry Potter* is legal to share because you can quote parts of it? Of course not.

Some argue that Bible publishers are "generous" in allowing quotations of Scripture up to certain limits, but any commercial work can be quoted in similar ways. Most countries have "fair use"[2] or "fair dealing"[3] exemptions that allow use of a work as long as it is "fair", taking into consideration several factors, including how substantial the use is. So most people will be able to quote a significant number of verses from bibles whether they are granted permission to or not, especially those under a "fair use" system.

1. There are a few modern openly licensed or public domain English translations. You can learn about their licenses at *copy.church*.

2. Along with other factors, fair use takes into account "the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole" (Title 17, section 107). There are no set amounts, and quality is taken into account as well as quantity. A small quotation of high value could be considered unfair, where as a very large quotation of less value could be considered "fair use".

3. Australia gives copyright owners the exclusive right to "reproduce the work in a material form" (Copyright Act section 31), with "material form" being defined as "a substantial part of the work" (Copyright Act section 10). The Australian Copyright Council advises that "a part may be considered substantial if it is an important, essential or distinctive part" (Quotes and Extracts fact sheet). Australia has "fair dealing" exemptions that allow for more substantial use as long as it is for the purpose of research or study, criticism or review, parody or satire, or reporting news (Copyright Act sections 40-42). This is in contrast to "fair use" exemptions which are general rather than limited to specific uses. However, the definition of "substantial" means Australia does somewhat have a "fair use" allowance, but it allows for much less than countries with a proper fair use exemption.

So while publishers do allow their Bible translations to be quoted up to certain limits, these terms do not go very far beyond what is already permissible under "fair use" laws, and in many cases are even more restrictive. The limits are as follows:

Translation	Verse limit	Scripture can be	Share whole book
NIV, ESV, NLT, NKJV, NRSV	500 verses	25% of work	No
CSB, NASB, LSB	1000 verses	50% of work	No

These limits are more permissive than fair use law in the sense that you are guaranteed to be able to use a certain number of verses, regardless of other factors. However, not by much. You still can't share a substantial part such as an entire book, even if it is only 13 verses like 2 John. More significantly, you can't share plain Scripture. Since Scripture can only comprise 25-50% of a work you have created, you must always accompany it with other commentary.

Some translations even try to unlawfully deny fair use rights, such as the ESV:

> The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language.

You can legally ignore this claim as long as your use still falls under fair use/dealing exemptions.

So no, Scripture is not legal to copy and share in any reasonable sense. Not because of an oppressive government, but because of Christian publishers.

Are publishers generous with permission?

No. While they are not all the same, they all make it difficult to get permission, whether it is due to complicated application processes, slow responses, burdensome conditions, charging fees, or simply not granting permission.[4]

- The non-commercial permission form for the NIV has ***49 fields*** to fill out, including one for your "distribution and marketing strategy".
- Crossway allowed the ESV to be used by open source Bible apps for some years, and then suddenly decided to stop and recoup licensing fees. Several open source Bible apps were then forced to remove it, resulting in these apps receiving very negative reviews from oblivious users ("Poor review due to the fact that ESV version is no longer available").
- When I myself contacted Bible publishers for permission for a free app, one took ***eight months*** to respond, another took ***one and a half years!***, and one didn't respond at all.
- Some publishers will not grant permission to apps unless they are "truly unique and innovative". Since users will generally shun apps unless they have their favorite

4. Additional examples of restrictive licensing practices have been added since first publication (26 Feb 2025).

translation, it is very difficult for any new apps to emerge, since it is the publishers who decide if something is "truly innovative" rather than actual users.

- Permission is so hard to get that some ministries boast when they have been granted it: *"We have hard-to-get traction with Bible publishers, including a licensing commitment from Biblica"*.[5]
- When licensing the NIV for use in Bible commentaries, the publisher forbids any direct criticism of its rendering, which restricts the pursuit of the intended meaning of Scripture.[6]
- Reading the entire Bible aloud in a public setting was forbidden by the American Bible Society for their Contemporary English Version.[7]
- Even just reading portions of the LSB out loud and publishing as podcast episodes resulted in Pastor Gabriel Hughes being cautioned about copyright. He took down all previous episodes from his *Hear the Word of the Lord* podcast and had to "go through the right channels" before he could resume reading Scripture to people publicly.[8]

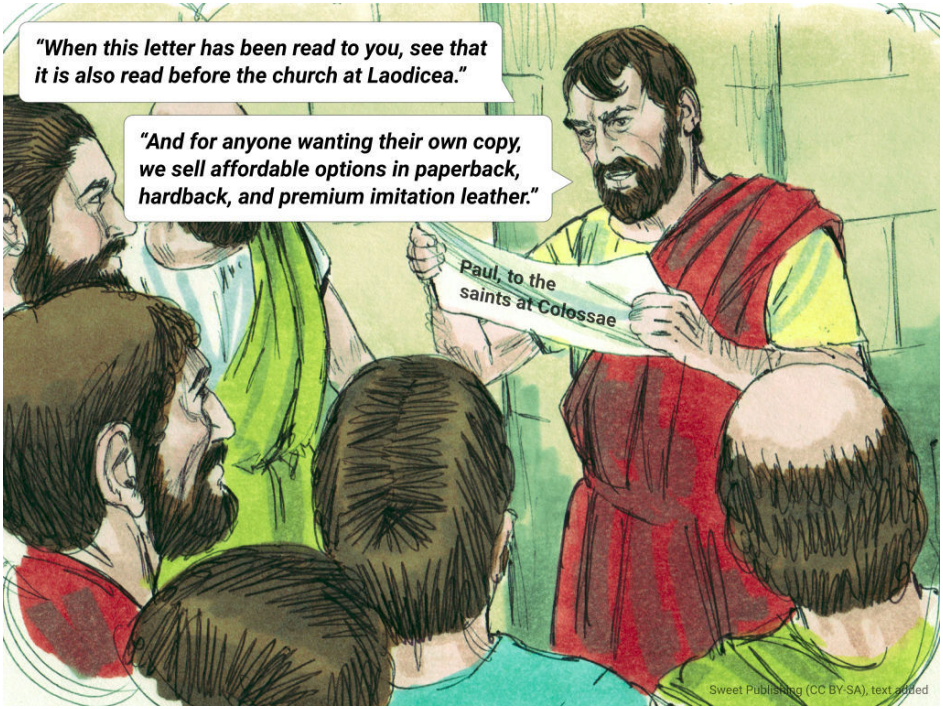
While publishers might *seem* to be generous by making their translations freely available on certain websites like Bible Gateway, that is actually in part a strategy to increase print sales. The more popular your translation is online, the more print sales you'll likely make. I've heard this confessed first-hand from those in the industry.

I recently made an app that allows anyone to print individual books of the Bible at home for free. It was denied permission by all the publishers I asked, except one who demanded money. The technology is open source, so they could use it themselves if they wanted to, adding whatever quality assurance they would like. Instead, it is clear that publishers do not want ordinary Christians to be able to print Scripture themselves. They said so explicitly:

> We do not however grant licenses for end-users to print their own editions, regardless of the amount of text they're printing.

While sites like Bible Gateway allow you to print portions of a book, it maxes out at 10 chapters. There is also no special license granted for printing, so sharing a printout with anyone else is in many cases illegal, even though Christians often do it.

5. Quoted from the FAQ "How will you raise the money?" for The Video Bible
6. See footnote 15 in *The Bondage of the Word: Copyright and the Bible.*
7. See footnote 24 in *The Bondage of the Word: Copyright and the Bible.*
8. See WWUTT Podcast episode 2295 from time 13:24 onwards.



Do they commercialize Scripture?

Yes. To start with the clearest offender, the NKJV is a 100% for-profit translation owned by unbelievers. Job applications for Thomas Nelson simply redirect to its parent company (HarperCollins) which is a secular company,[9] and is itself owned by News Corp.

While all the other organizations are non-profit, some of them have given exclusive publishing rights to for-profit companies.[10] Biblica has given Zondervan exclusive rights in the US to print the NIV commercially, meaning a significant portion of the profits go to Zondervan's owner (also News Corp), and no other Christian publishers can print the NIV.

9. The "careers" link on Thomas Nelson's website redirects straight to the careers website for HarperCollins.

10. It can be appropriate to make use of for-profit publication and printing services, whether Christian or secular. But when publishers are given *exclusive* rights, they are no longer just a service provider but become a partner in the profits of a work, preventing anyone else from offering an alternate service.

Just like secular companies, Christian publishers have been printing special gimmicks to generate profit and are even willing to exploit Christian vices to do so. Some idolize American identity, like the NASB Founders' [of America] Bible and the NKJV American Patriot's Bible, while others appeal to believers' materialistic tendencies. While high quality products have their uses, the exclusive publishing and $400 USD [correction, $399.99] price tag make the ESV Pulpit Bible truly stand out.

Almost all Bible publishers distribute their translations via The Digital Bible Library, which is quite literally designed to restrict access to God's Word.[11] It's an initiative by the largest Bible organizations, which requires all its members to "acknowledge the following":

> organizations employ various business models, including donation-based models, sales-based models, service-delivery models, among others. All of these

11. The Digital Bible Library (DBL) is a licensing platform that prevents anyone from accessing a Bible translation unless they have explicit permission from the owner to do so. The actual resources it contains are simply files that could easily be hosted on any ordinary server accessible to the public. The only thing that makes the DBL stand out is the system it uses to facilitate the forming of contracts between rights holders and distributors of Scripture, ensuring Scripture stays restricted to only authorized parties.

> models and hybrid models among them are considered reasonable and appropriate[12]

In other words, to be a member of the Digital Bible Library community you must agree that it is ok to commercialize Scripture as much as any other member may like. There is not even a requirement to be a non-profit organization.

Even then, the non-profit legal category itself only prevents owners from arbitrarily receiving money from their organization, but it doesn't take into account personal profiting through high salaries and other compensation. The CEO for Crossway (owner of the ESV) in 2020 received a total of $423,927 USD in annual compensation for only 31 hours/week of work.[13] While it is normal to pay CEOs large salaries to attract talent, that should not be necessary to motivate Christian CEOs.

Whether an organization is non-profit or not, to sell God's Word with exclusive publishing arrangements is to commercialize Scripture. God's Word has been made a commodity, providing well-paid job security to those who "steward" it. Those who labor in producing and updating translations should be financially supported, but many other organizations have managed to achieve that without restricting their translations.[14]

Do they ever give for free?

Sometimes. As already mentioned, you can find all these translations online for free in certain apps/websites. However, they usually expect some kind of commercial compensation from the website owner, such as royalty payments or displaying ads for their products. These agreements are all private, but my organization was offered use of a text (for free distribution) for $1,000 USD/year. I declined. This appears to be a common demand from most major translations. Ironically, if you want to share God's Word for free, you often have to pay to do so.

Even when publishers do give for free, it is not always really for "free". Every single one of the above mentioned translations collects your personal information when choosing to download their translation for offline use in YouVersion (the most popular Bible app). Notably, they also collect your name and country, which is not ideal for persecuted Christians were that data to ever get leaked.

Publishers have in fact been reluctant to make their translations free online,[15] and have been very slow to do so, fearing a drop in print sales. Not too long ago, many of these translations charged a fee to download them in apps like YouVersion. During that time, in 2011, Biblica/Zondervan made the NIV free to download for a limited time, explicitly as a marketing strategy to generate more print and digital sales:

12. From the "DBL Community and Partnership Values" section of The Digital Bible Library.
13. This information comes from the latest available publicly-accessible tax return (at the time of publication) for "Good News Publishers" which trades as "Crossway".
14. Such as unfoldingWord, Bible Hub, and numerous Bible translators for other languages.
15. See footnote 14 in *The Bondage of the Word: Copyright and the Bible.*

> This limited offer ends next Tuesday … That's when you'll also be able to pick up the NIV in print at retailers everywhere. We'd like to thank Biblica and Zondervan once again for making the NIV available offline.

Charging fees for offline use in the 2010s was a blatant money-making strategy. In terms of technology, it would cost ***less*** to let people read offline than to have them keep downloading the text from servers. Publishers forced users to pay for something that would actually *decrease* distribution expenses. This was especially greedy in that time given bandwidth was more limited and mobile payment plans more expensive.

Some publishers like Biblica and Tyndale have encouragingly been more open with some of their resources, which is a step in the right direction. However, their most popular Bible translations remain restricted.

Do they actually protect Scripture?

No. While publishers try to protect Scripture through copyright, this is ineffective and does more harm than good:[16]

- Copyright more commonly prevents those with good intentions from using Scripture, as those with bad intentions may well ignore the copyright anyway
- Christians generally trust *sources* of content rather than the *copyright-status* of content. The KJV is public domain in most countries and yet malicious modifications have not been a wide problem as there are numerous trustworthy *sources* of the text.
- Even with the current licensing conditions of modern translations, someone could publish blasphemous material as long as Scripture only took up a quarter of the total content.

What publishers *do prevent* is the sharing of pure Scripture. None of their public licenses allow copying and sharing plain Scripture. You are always forced to add your own commentary to it. You can't even share a parable of Jesus by itself, as many oblivious Christians have done without permission over the years.

Fears of bad things happening if people have free access to Scripture is not without historical precedent, as Catholic clergy had the same fears when ordinary believers started to access Scripture through translations into the vernacular. Henry Knighton (a Catholic historian) criticized John Wycliffe's translation into English on the grounds that ordinary believers could not be trusted to safeguard Scripture as clergy could:

> The Gospel, which **Christ gave to the clergy** … that they might **administer it to the laity** … that Master John Wyclif translated from Latin … so that he made that **common and open to the laity** … and spread the Evangelists' pearls to be **trampled by swine**. [emphasis added][17]

16. See *Letting Go* by Tim Jore for more reasoning on why copyright does more harm than good. Jore argues that a ShareAlike license is a better option, however, the motivation for such a license has the same flaw that the "all rights reserved" approach has. Namely, "the fear of bad things happening to good content". Dedicating to the public domain is the logical conclusion to resisting such an irrational fear.

Pope Pius IV in 1584 reluctantly allowed translations in the vernacular, but only if one had written permission from a bishop:

> if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, be indiscriminately allowed to every one, the rashness of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it, it is, on this point, referred to the judgment of the bishops or inquisitors, who may, … permit the reading of the Bible translated into the vulgar tongue … and this permission must be had in writing.[18]

Publishers today likewise believe they have been entrusted by God with the task of stewarding his Word and that they cannot trust ordinary believers to print or publish it themselves. Instead, anyone wanting to do so must receive permission from them.

To be truly free, all Bible translations should be public domain, relying on the church to uphold good teaching rather than secular law courts.[19] However, for the sake of argument, if these organizations really wanted to ensure 'purity of text' they could make use of the popular Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives license.[20] This license would mean anyone can freely share Scripture as long as they don't modify or commercialize it. None of these Bible publishers have chosen to make use of it.[21] It is entirely fair to conclude then that they are not just concerned about purity of text, but rather the *control* of the text. As Dr. Maurice Robinson puts it in his 1996 paper *The Bondage of the Word: Copyright and the Bible*:

> It is not the "purity of the text" which has to be protected, but the *liberation* of that text from those non-church entities who desire to profit unjustly from marketing God's word back to God's people

17. Larger quotation: "The Gospel, which Christ gave to the clergy and the doctors of the church, that they might administer it to the laity and to weaker brethren, according to the demands of the time and the needs of the individual, as a sweet food for the mind, that Master John Wyclif translated from Latin into the language not of angels but of Englishmen, so that he made that common and open to the laity, and to women who were able to read, which used to be for literate and perceptive clerks, and spread the Evangelists' pearls to be trampled by swine. And thus that which was dear to the clergy and laity alike became as it were a jest common to both, and the clerks' jewels became the playthings of laymen, that the laity might enjoy now forever what had once been the clergy's talent from on high."
G. H. Martin, trans., *Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p243-245

18. Larger quotation: "if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, be indiscriminately allowed to every one, the rashness of men will cause more evil than good to arise from it, it is, on this point, referred to the judgment of the bishops or inquisitors, who may, by the advice of the priest or confessor, permit the reading of the Bible translated into the vulgar tongue by Catholic authors, to those persons whose faith and piety they apprehend will be augmented and not injured by it; and this permission must be had in writing."
Philip Schaff, "Bible Reading by the Laity, Restrictions On," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. II: Basilica - Chambers* (1908)

19. See *Let's copy, church* for a thorough exploration of the issue of copyright in Christian ministry and why all Christian resources should be dedicated to the public domain.

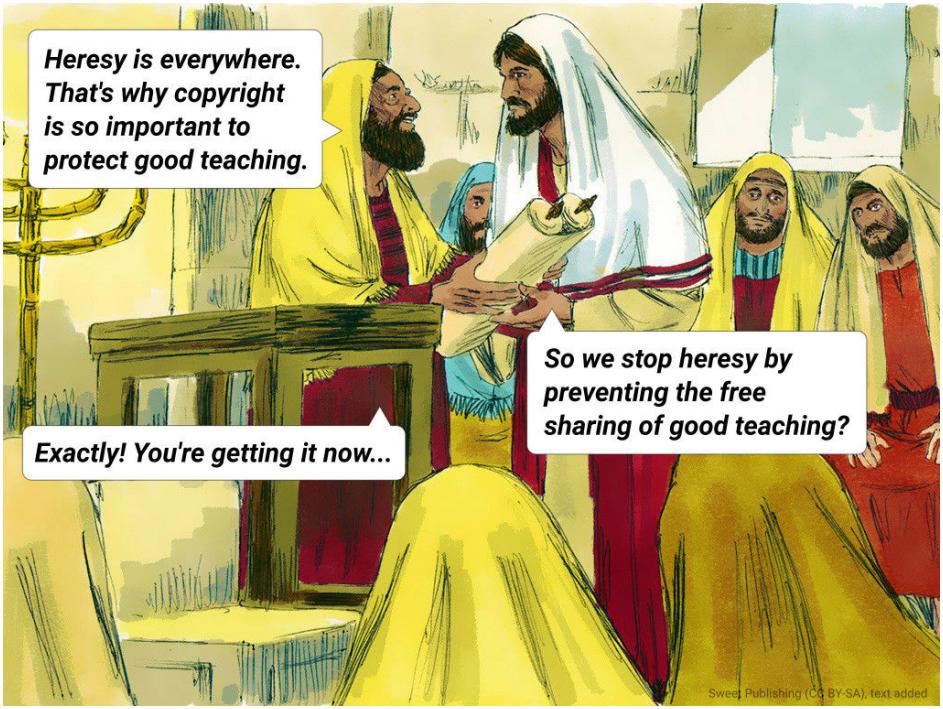
20. I do not endorse this license, as it prevents the church from improving existing translations. All Bible translations should be given freely as public domain. I mention it for the sake of argument only.

21. All publishers are likely to be aware of Creative Commons licenses, as there has been active discussion about open licensing within the bible industry over the last few years. Crossway certainly knows about them, as they explicitly forbid them being used when quoting the ESV.

Are these publishers really worthy of such control? I received the following response from a publisher which was concerned that someone might try make money off their translation, were they to let me integrate it into one of my apps:

> I want to add something in the text that we can find if the text you distribute makes it into a commercial venture. Put your thinking cap on on[sic] what we may do. Maybe we repeat a word in a verse in Eccleslastes[sic] or we misspell a word in John

This was for a modern English translation widely trusted by Reformed Evangelicals. I refused (politely) to corrupt Scripture in that way and they never ended up giving me the permission I needed for their text. They obviously didn't intend on changing the *meaning* of the text, but they were willing to put an intentional mistake into God's holy Word for the sake of controlling it.



Would God want his Word to be "stewarded" in this way?

No. God's Word is the only tangible thing we have in this world that we can truly call "holy" (Rom 1:2), and yet we have let it be commercialized. Scripture cannot be chained (2 Tim 2:9) yet publishers may well sue you if you try and share it in a way they don't approve. They call it "God's Word" but really believe it belongs to them. A handful of monetization strategists at these organizations decide how millions of believers can and

can't use God's Word. We celebrate smuggling bibles into hostile countries and yet forbid anyone from copying and sharing Scripture with their neighbor. We say the Reformation put God's Word back into the hands of ordinary believers, but it has once more been taken away by modern day publishers.

Should a believer be allowed to share some of God's Word, but be forbidden from sharing the whole counsel of God? Should it be lawful to share Scripture with commentary, but a crime to share Jesus using just his own words?

You might think this article is aimed towards Bible publishers. It is in fact aimed towards the church. Commercial publishers have made clear what they think "stewarding" looks like, and have stubbornly resisted numerous calls for freer access for decades now. It is instead up to the church to stop promoting these restricted translations, to ensure a future where God's Word is free to be shared. The church must stop turning a blind eye to the commercial nature of these translations, and start taking seriously free alternatives.

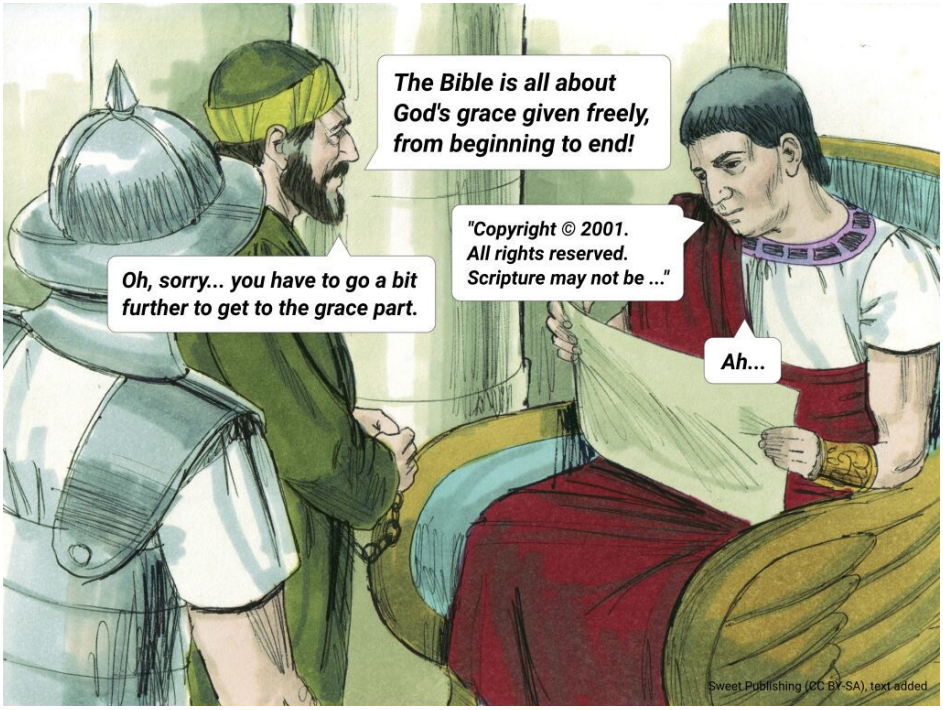
A future generation of Christians will look back and remember the 21st century as the time when the sharing of God's Word was restricted by Christians themselves, and it was called "godly". Even more perplexing will be why churches allowed it to happen in the first place.

It is most fitting to end this article in the words of the translations themselves:[22]

- NIV — "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God"
- ESV — "For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word"
- NLT — "You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach"
- NKJV — "For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God"
- NRSV — "For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many"
- NASB — "For we are not like the many, peddling the word of God"
- CSB — "For we do not market the word of God"
- LSB — "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God"

Instead, we speak with sincerity in Christ, as from God and before God. (2 Corinthians 2:17)

22. Some translations add "for profit" to Paul's statement, but it is not in the original text.



A free alternative

I hope when this article is read in 10 years time there will be plenty of good free translations to recommend. For now, I recommend just one: The Berean Standard Bible (BSB). It is the first modern English translation to be translated straight from the original languages, overseen by scholars, and dedicated to the public domain. Which means you can use it however you need to, without breaking any rules. You are probably not familiar with it because it was only freed from copyright this year (2023).

The most important characteristic of a translation is, of course, accuracy, but the main way Christians adopt new translations is through trust. While the major translations have endorsements from famous pastors, that is not the best way to evaluate a new translation.

Which is why you should start reading the BSB and comparing it to other translations yourself right now. There is no need to "switch" to it, because reading multiple translations is always a better practice. So simply start adding the BSB into the mix. Quote it in Bible studies and discipleship resources without having to worry about breaking any rules. Once you are confident in its quality, you may even start preaching from it, as I have. And so have the joy of knowing the words that come out of your mouth are truly free, as God intended.

THE WORSHIP TAX

How your church's worship profits secular investors via CCLI

Jon Here

You're at church and it comes time to pray together. The person assigned to pray has decided to recite a lovely piece by another author. They display it on the screen for everyone to read. At the end of the prayer you notice the following:

> "How Great Our God Is" words by Tom Christie
> © 2004 Wondrously Made Prayers
> Used by permission. PPLI License #12345

You're a bit confused by this, so you decide to ask the pastor about it after the service. He explains that the church has signed up for an annual license to be able to legally recite prayers during services.[1] The church now needs to pay an annual fee and report what prayers are prayed each Sunday to avoid infringing the law. While they don't plan on praying copyrighted prayers from other authors every Sunday, they need to pay the annual fee anyway. The pastor was at least thankful they could be supporting the work of the prayer writers, who do need to feed their families after all.

While praying published prayers by other authors is usually only common in more liturgical services, the idea of needing to pay to have permission to publicly pray them would be disturbing to most people. Prayer is direct communication with God, and any kind of commerce has no place in such a sacred act. Yet the business model I've just described is a direct reflection of what currently happens with worship music.

The Worship Music Industry

Modern worship songs are almost always copyrighted. While it is very simple to waive copyright restrictions, few artists have chosen to do so. As a result, churches have been limited to either singing old hymns or paying annual licensing fees to use modern songs in their services. For churches that do not want to be left in the past, that has not been a realistic choice.

Nevertheless, many churches are more than happy to comply with this requirement, since they believe it is appropriate to support Christian artists. And it *is* appropri-

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An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/bible-publishers

1. While being fictitious, this illustration is actually close to reality. Published prayers are copyrighted and reciting them in public may infringe the law, especially if the service is recorded or the prayer is copied into booklets or digital slides. Some ministries are already licensing liturgies for church services based on how many people attend.

ate to support Christian artists (we'll return to this later). But where does the "support" actually end up going?

The reality is that most Christian artists will remain in obscurity while a select few rise to the top and have their songs sung in a large number of churches. Some of these artists charge up to $50,000 USD for a single performance at an event[2] in addition to the large amount of royalties they collect from churches.[3] Any subsequent songs they publish are almost certainly guaranteed to make a profit, regardless of their quality. Whether they continue to write songs or not and whether they stay Christian or not,[4] the money continues to flow. Meanwhile, many other artists cannot earn anything close to a living wage from their music alone and must support themselves by other means. There is a disparity between the artists who need financial support and those who actually receive the proceeds from licensing fees. Instead, the current system follows the celebrity model of the secular music industry.

Many of the songs that do become popular come from groups with questionable practices or theology.[5] The most prominent examples are the bands associated with Hillsong, Bethel, and Elevation. According to licensing statistics, at least half of the top 100 worship songs used in church services are by artists with strong connections to one of those three.[6] Some of the royalties for those songs are even paid directly to those churches.[7] While some churches have chosen not to sing their songs, statistics show that a great many still do. Therefore, much of the money churches pour into the music industry goes to artists who already have more than they need, or to entities with whom it would be unwise to be financially connected.

The Business Facilitator – CCLI

The main organization that facilitates this business model is Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) which is used by over 250,000 churches in at least 70 countries.[8] Other licensing organizations exist, but they are focused on different use cases, so CCLI has a virtual monopoly on the standard licensing necessary for contemporary services.[9]

2. From someone who has booked many Christian artists for events: "The common number for mid level christian artists is $50,000, and some of those artists will charge that per day/performance. So if you book someone for two performances over 48 hours, it's $100,000, excluding travel expenses, meals, hotels, etc. I just recently worked with an organization who booked a lower level christian Artist, much less known, for $20,000 for one hour, plus first class flights, sound equipment rental and hotel. These prices are just for solo performances. If you want to book one of these artists with their entire band, you're looking at upward of $75k per performance."

3. *The Lion And The Lamb* produced around $80-90k in CCLI royalties in a single year. Most popular artists will have several big hits, easily exceeding $100,000 in royalties from churches each year.

4. Such as Jon Steingard (Hawk Nelson) and Marty Sampson (Hillsong).

5. See this discussion on the theology and practices of some of these churches.

6. Based on CCLI's top 100 songs in the US on 6 Feb 2024.

7. For example, Hillsong collects the performance royalties for songs by its artists.

8. From the CCLI founder's website.

9. As described by CCLI themselves: "CCLI, Christian Copyright Solutions (CCS), and OneLicense are all organizations which provide licenses to churches and Christian ministries. However, rather than being in competition, each company represents different rights [...] While there may be a small overlap, generally OneLicense represents the catalogs of liturgical music publishers, while CCLI represents a much larger, more ecumenical list."

CCLI originally came about due to a fear that churches could be sued for copyright infringement by Christian artists. They point to a case from 1984 where an author of songs such as "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" sued a Catholic diocese in Chicago (see 1 Cor 6).[10] Despite this legal precedent, I do not know of any other cases where Christian artists have tried to sue churches.[11] Nevertheless, one of the reasons CCLI gives for why churches should pay for their licenses is to ensure that they are legally "covered" from such lawsuits.[12]

Though it describes itself like a ministry[13] and originates from a church in the United States, CCLI has always been a for-profit private company.[14] In 2016, the business was sold to a *secular* company that also sells music licenses called SESAC.[15] This might seem like a natural fit, since they both have similar business models, but they do not have similar clientele. CCLI exclusively serves Christian artists and churches, and even identifies as Christian in its name, yet is now under secular ownership and control.

Presumably, the owner of CCLI carefully looked into SESAC before selling a Christian business that 250,000+ churches rely on and pay millions of dollars to. At the time of the CCLI sale, SESAC was primarily owned by Rizvi Traverse Management,[16] a private investment firm which also owned a significant part of Playboy (the pornography business).[17] SESAC has now been sold (and CCLI along with it) to another investment firm called Blackstone.[18] Blackstone owns many different companies, some of which have concerning practices.[19] But their main goal, like any investment firm, is to simply maximize profits for their shareholders.

10. As explained by CCLI: "Our story begins in 1984 when a Portland, Oregon pastor first learned of a pending $3.1 million copyright lawsuit against the Archdiocese in Chicago". They refer to a case where a Christian publisher sued a Catholic church diocese over a disagreement about copyright infringement and subsequent responses to it. While the publisher was initially awarded $3.1 million, there was later an appeal and they only ended up receiving $190,400. The publisher later shut down, likely due to losing the business of those who have a "preference to deal with suppliers of liturgical music that have not threatened to sue their customers".

11. Even before a substantial number of churches legally protected themselves with CCLI, I still do not know of any other cases of artists trying to sue churches.

12. From CCLI's website: "The law is clear on copyright. Now you'll know the church is covered, as well."

13. From their history page: "Our roots began as a ministry of the church… we remain evermore committed to that cause". In other words, they initially identified as a ministry, and whether one would classify them as a ministry or not, they are committed to acting like a ministry, and provide services almost exclusively to churches.

14. It is assumed that it was originally owned by its Christian founder, Howard Rachinski, though there may have been other investors with shares as well.

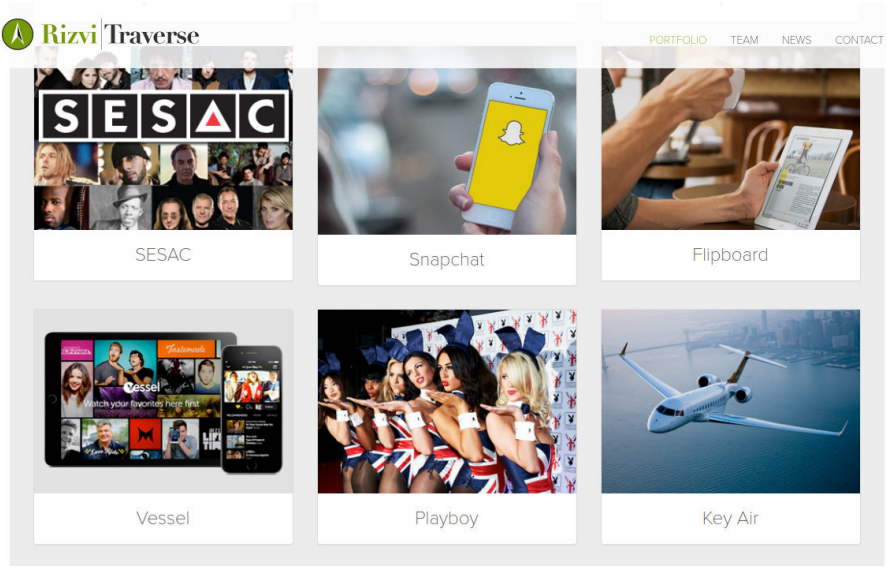
15. As revealed in this article.

16. Rizvi Traverse Management bought a 75% stake in SESAC in 2013.

17. Rizvi Traverse Management helped to privatize Playboy in 2011 and still owns part of it at the time of this article.

18. Blackstone acquired Rizvi's stake in 2017. It is reported that Rizvi's stake had grown to at least 82% by the time Blackstone purchased it. Since SESAC describes itself as being owned by Blackstone, it is assumed Blackstone also purchased the rest of the company from the other shareholders as well.

19. See this criticism section.



This is a screenshot of the public portfolio page for the primary owner of SESAC prior to the sale of CCLI to SESAC.[20] *Noting that the owner (Rizvi Traverse Management) did not merely invest in SESAC but had a controlling interest (at least 75%) and also had an influential stake in Playboy.*

To be clear, the issue here is not that CCLI is engaged in any disreputable business, but rather that it has been *entrusted* to the owners of disreputable businesses. These owners now also profit off of the worship of God. Even if CCLI hadn't been sold to a secular company, there is no reason why it should have been for-profit in the first place.

CCLI only offers annual licenses, which are not based on how many songs are sung in church services. While this can be administratively convenient, it also means churches continue to pay even if they sing public domain songs. A church that mostly sings old hymns and only uses modern copyrighted songs 10% of the time will still pay as if they had used them 100% of the time.

Artists themselves have also taken advantage of public domain hymns by tweaking them and subsequently collecting royalties for their new version.[21] No one collects royalties for the original Amazing Grace.[22] Chris Tomlin and Louie Giglio's version has since become extremely popular. It is the 20th most popular song on CCLI at the time of writing. The success is clearly not due to the added chorus alone. Many churches that would have been regularly singing the original Amazing Grace are now singing Tomlin and Giglio's version, providing the owners with abundant royalties.

20. Taken from this archived copy of the page in late 2015 prior to the sale of CCLI sometime in 2016.

21. This is similar to what Disney has done with public domain fairy tales. While the original stories are still around, it is Disney's versions that have become popular and Disney enjoys exclusive rights to them.

22. Since churches pay annually for a CCLI license and cannot report singing public domain songs, the money that would have gone towards such a song presumably just adds to the value of all other songs.

Secular Investors

CCLI is not the only party entangled with secular investors. It has recently become popular—thanks to new platforms—to sell song rights to investors. Songs earn royalties for both the artist and the publisher, often split 50/50 between them. It is unclear how much involvement artists have in these auctions as many appear to be initiated by publishers for their share of the royalties.[23] The following are examples of worship songs that have had a portion of their royalty rights sold to investors:

- The Lion And The Lamb – Leeland[24]
- I Worship You, Almighty God – Sondra Corbett-Wood[25]
- Ever Be – Kalley Heiligenthal[26]
- Forever – Kari Jobe[27]

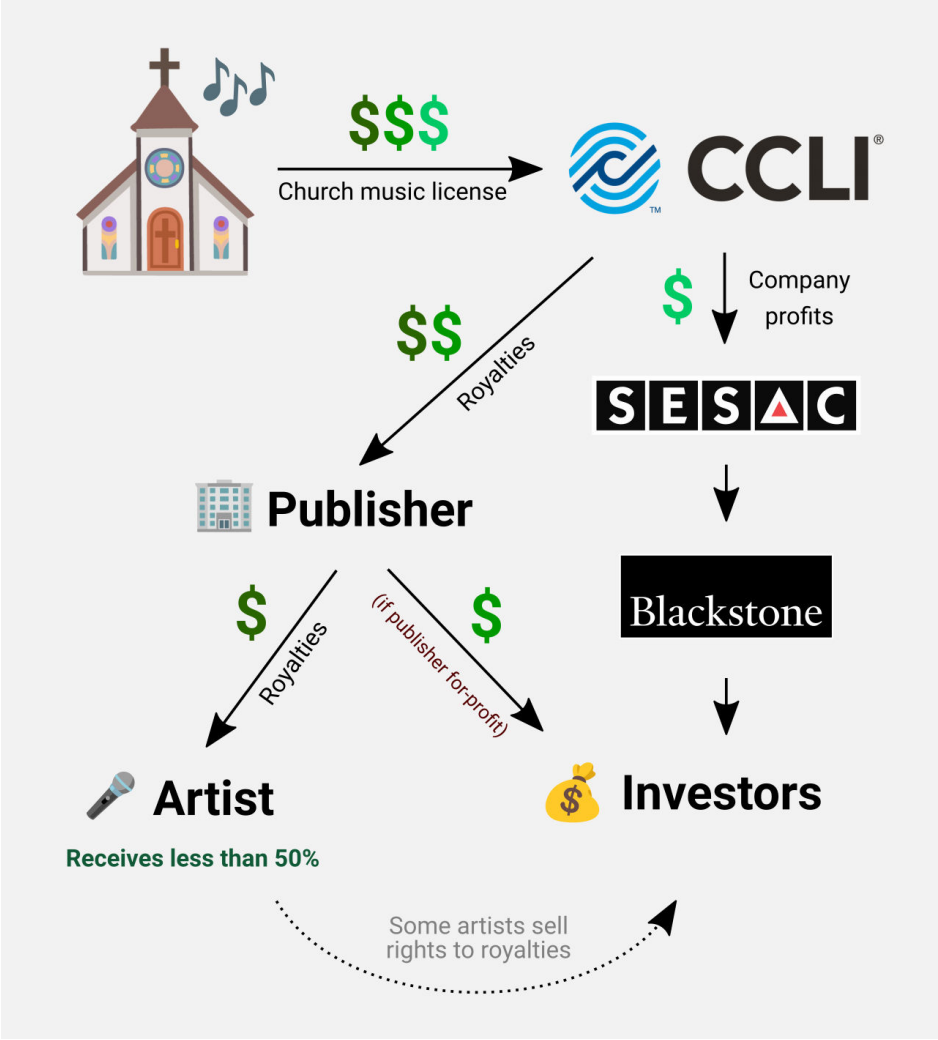
While not designed for corporate worship, many other Christian artists also have songs that have been sold to investors, such as TobyMac, Lecrae, Trip Lee, Kutless, Unspoken, Michael W. Smith, Micah Tyler, Sanctus Real, Tauren Wells, and the list goes on....[28]

Investors certainly see CCLI as an avenue for profit. One musical rights auction remarks, "this catalog earns royalties from a unique and lucrative source: direct licensing to churches [via CCLI]."[29] As Kelsey Kramer McGinnis points out in her insightful article on this practice, the more secular investment there is in Christian music, the more incentive there will be for investors to influence what songs churches sing.

This is not necessarily new or limited to songs that have been put up for auction. Many Christian worship songs are published by for-profit entities that are owned by secular investors. The largest entity is Capitol Christian Music Group (CCMG) that claims "its publishing division currently has a 60% market share of the Top 10 songs sung in church in the United States each week."[30]

So whether auctioned or not, many Christian songs are already benefiting secular investors. CCLI likely takes around 10-15% before distributing royalties.[31] Assuming the common 50/50 split for publishers and artists, artists will end up taking less than 50% home, with the rest eventually flowing down to investors. Some publishers are non-profit,[32] but all of them still collect royalties through CCLI. So while it may be claimed that the licensing system is "supporting" Christian artists, it is also profitable to secular investors who may be taking in even more.

23. Since many auctions include a number of songs from multiple artists, they are more likely to be the publisher's rights. However, some auctions do explicitly mention that the songwriter's rights are being sold.
24. An auction that included *The Lion And The Lamb.*
25. An auction that included *I Worship You, Almighty God.*
26. An auction that included *Ever Be.*
27. An auction that included *Forever.*
28. See Royalty Exchange for the latest list of auctions. Auctions for artists mentioned: TobyMac, Lecrae, Trip Lee, Kutless, Unspoken, Michael W. Smith, Micah Tyler, Sanctus Real, Tauren Wells.
29. Quoted from the auction page of some Bethel Music songs.
30. Quoted from this article on how businesses are trying to profit from the "faith-based" market.
31. BMI used to take 10% (now raising to 15%) and Australian APRA AMCOS takes 15%, so 10-15% seems to be the standard range. CCLI does not publicly disclose how much they actually take.
32. Such as Integrity Music and Emu Music.



Where the money churches pay in licensing fees goes in most cases.

The Sanctity of Worship

While all these matters are concerning, they are merely symptoms of the root theological confusion most Christians have about the commercialization of spiritual things: that it is permissible so long as it is practical. Some may object: Why can't CCLI operate like any other business? What's wrong with artists making money from songs that belong to them? Why can't they sell rights to royalties if they want to? All of these

objections have a common assumption: that there are no biblical prohibitions against commercializing ministry.

Interestingly, secular society has a higher view of worship music in this regard than many Christians do. In 1976, when U.S. copyright law was revised, an exemption was added for religious services[33] which still remains today:

> "the following are not infringements of copyright: [...] performance of a [...] musical work [...] of a religious nature, or display of a work, in the course of services at a place of worship or other religious assembly."[34]

The rationale for this exemption is revealed in this analysis provided with the original submission: "The purpose here is to exempt certain performances of sacred music."[35] That is, the reason why Christians should be able to sing songs for free in church is because they are sacred, they are distinct from other songs because of their spiritual nature.

Even in countries without such a legal exemption, secular licensing organizations may waive requirements for religious services. In Australia, there is an industry consensus that churches should not be charged to sing songs in worship services. As stated by the primary licensing organizations: "APRA AMCOS does not require a licence to be obtained for worship or divine services."[36] Unlike the U.S. exemption, it does not specifically mention the *display* of songs and APRA AMCOS did not respond to my inquiries.[37] Nevertheless, the intention appears to be the same, to prevent sacred worship from being commercialized.

An Outdated Exemption

So, why do churches pay for a license?

When the U.S. religious exemption was added in 1976, most churches would have been singing from memory or song books. The main need was just to be able to *perform* songs without legal restriction. It was only after overhead projectors became popular in the 80s that churches began copying lyrics themselves,[38] first onto transparencies and then later into digital presentations. Since the exemption only applies to the performance and display of a song, *copying* lyrics is not technically covered by the exemption.

This is why when you pay for a CCLI license you are *not* paying for permission to *perform* the song at church. That right is covered by the religious exemption.[39] This has

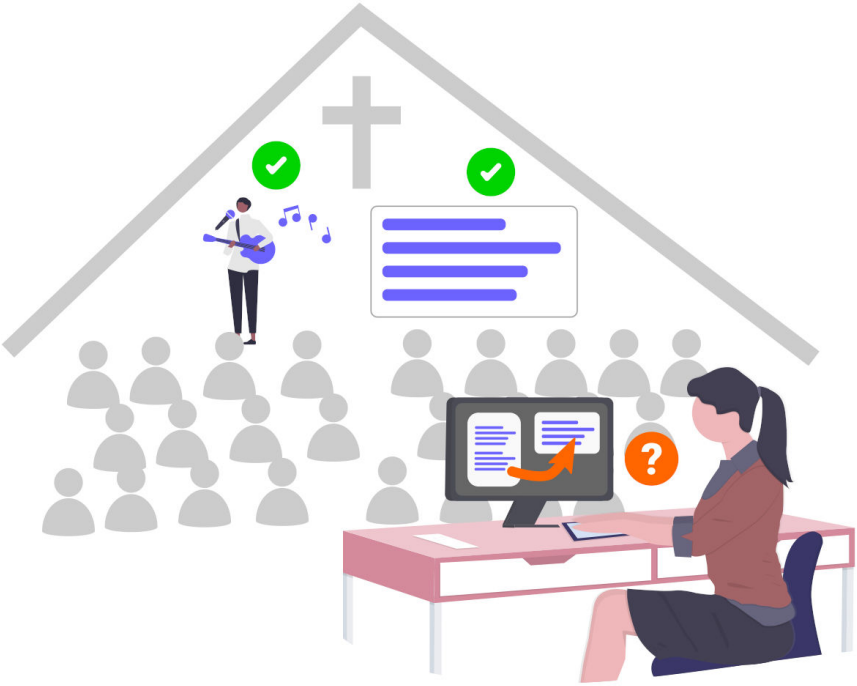
33. This exemption was part of the original Copyright Act of 1976.
34. From Title 17, section 110(3).
35. From the original report by the House Judiciary Committee in 1976. The author is explaining why the exemption specifically includes performances "that might be regarded as 'dramatic' in nature", which are also exempt for "sacred" music.
36. Quoted from the APRA AMCOS website. They also mention "divine services, which are exempt" in their Distribution Practices document.
37. It also explicitly does not apply to "the public performance of music at functions as well as during activities such as youth groups, study groups and socials, etc.".
38. Pete Ward, *Selling Worship* (Paternoster, 2005), p82.

been confirmed by CCLI themselves.[40] Instead, when conducting a simple non-recorded service, you are merely paying for the permission to copy the lyrics into digital slides for the song you are *already* allowed to sing. If, however, you print, record, stream, or translate the song, then those activities would *not* necessarily be covered by the exemption.

In other words, for all American churches that merely project lyrics onto a screen without streaming their services (which was most churches prior to COVID-19), they are allowed to sing without a license, play the music without a license, and display the lyrics without a license. The only things in question are *printing* music sheets (which musicians could buy or memorize instead) and copying the lyrics into physical or digital presentations so they can be displayed. So it is the single act of copying lyrics into slides that churches pay CCLI for, *not* the actual display of those lyrics which is already allowed.

39. In Australia you are covered by the current disposition of the music industry to not demand performance royalties for religious services. This situation may change at any time and there is no legal guarantee it won't. It is also highly unlikely that many other countries have such an exemption, meaning there are probably a lot of legal gaps that are mostly ignored for the time being.

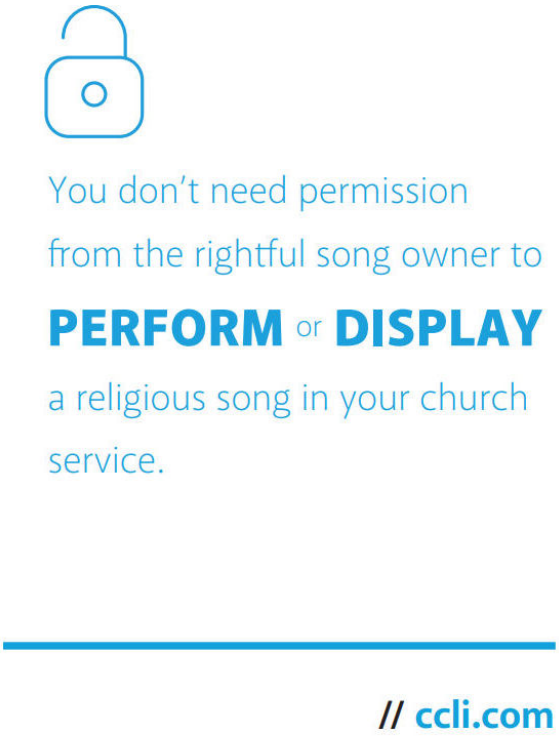
40. As explained in this factsheet from them. I also wrote to CCLI regarding the situation in Australia and this was their response: "While we don't have a religious exemption like the US, APRA AMCOS and PPCA have waived the requirement of their licence for regular worship services".



U.S. copyright law explicitly permits performing and displaying religious songs in religious services, but does not explicitly permit the act of copying lyrics into physical or digital presentations.

CCLI acknowledges the triviality of this legal gap in one of their factsheets: "The DISPLAY aspect sets up an interesting dichotomy for worship leaders. Apparently the law allows you to DISPLAY lyrics for copyright songs without permission, but it doesn't allow you to REPRODUCE song lyrics, or store them in a computer."[41]

41. Quoted from this factsheet from them.



From a CCLI factsheet on the U.S. religious services exemption.

However, U.S. copyright law does have general "fair use" exemptions, and one of the main factors considered is: "the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature."[42] Since copying lyrics into slides for use in church is (1) non-commercial, (2) trivial, done solely to facilitate the legal display of the work, and (3) only creates a single private copy inaccessible to the public, it is highly likely it would be considered fair use. Since this kind of case has never been considered in court, CCLI and Christian artists will be able to continue to cast doubt on its legality until someone attempts to sue for it. We can be assured, however, that the original purpose of the religious exemption was to prevent such issues from ever arising.

Exploiting the Legal Gap

From the days of the early church to the Reformation and beyond it, the sanctity of worship was mostly kept pure from commercial practices. Even secular lawmakers have

sought to preserve it. So when advances in technology put the religious exemption into question, what did the Christian music industry do? Rather than seek to affirm and clarify the exemption, they have exploited the legal gap and sought to profit from the worship of God. Not all artists would be aware of the exemption, but even those who are have continued to commercialize their songs.

Churches that wish to translate songs for another language, or benefit from modern day advances in recording and streaming technology, must pay a premium to do so. The Christian music industry would have greatly profited from the COVID-19 pandemic since many churches were forced to pay for streaming licenses to stay connected with their members.[43] Those that do pay for licenses also have the additional burden each week of having to report what songs they sing, every time they sing them. Congregations are being burdened financially and administratively by fellow believers who do not even participate in their services.

Churches that are unmotivated or ignorant of these legal restrictions are made lawbreakers by fellow believers. This includes believers in persecuted churches who often love to translate and sing Western songs (without permission). CCLI includes as its clients countries where most of the population still live in poverty, such as Malawi and Mozambique. Compliance with copyright restrictions should not be something congregations in these countries need to think about.

Reform

All Christian artists who produce music to edify the church should release their songs free of cost and copyright.

Selling Jesus has published numerous articles on why commercializing any form of ministry is a violation of Scripture's clear teaching. These resources also address common objections that arise when the monetization of ministry is confronted. One common objection is that passages such as 1 Corinthians 9 and 1 Timothy 5:18 ("The worker is worthy of his wages") teach that any ministry can be sold. However, both passages are in the context of those *freely giving ministry*, not selling it. A second common objection is that Romans 13:1 ("Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities") encourages the exploitation of secular copyright law. On the contrary, it does not require any such thing, and artists are free under the law to waive restrictions if they wish to.

This is not to say that Christian artists shouldn't be supported, or that they have bad intentions when they participate in licensing schemes. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, it is appropriate to financially support Christian artists, just as it is appropriate to support anyone who is involved in ministry.

While we can certainly sympathize with the good intentions of most artists, that is not a reason to dismiss Christ's clear command and example. When he entered the

42. Quoted from Title 17 section 107.

temple and discovered it had become a marketplace (John 2:13-17), he was angry—angry enough to drive out and turn over the tables of all those seeking to profit from worship. Some will be quick to object that this took place in the temple which was holy and cannot be equated with churches today. Yet the very act of worshiping a holy God is a sacred act. Jesus was angry with people selling ordinary things in a place of worship, whereas what is happening today is not the sale of ordinary things, but spiritual things. They are "spiritual songs" (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16) exclusively about and directed towards our holy Lord.

These practices are so ingrained in the industry, both culturally and legally, that reform for existing artists will be difficult. Songs that are (1) modern, (2) congregational, and (3) copyright-free are very difficult to find. Should we then turn a blind eye and shrug because things are unlikely to change? That is not a biblical response that honors God. Instead:

- Pastors should start actively raising up a new generation of musicians, teaching them about the sanctity of worship, and admonishing them against any commercialization of it.
- Musicians should release new songs into the public domain and start to build a collection churches can use for free. Those who hope to be supported in this work should ask God to provide through his people, just as pastors and missionaries do.
- Churches in the United States that are willing to forgo streaming their services could sing copyrighted music under the U.S. religious exemption if they wish to,[44] but the future eventually needs to be free of commercial worship music altogether.

Whether immediate or gradual, Scripture requires all churches to abandon this unbiblical system. Let's pray that believers go "back to the heart of worship" and say "I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it," so that it really is "all about you, Jesus."[45]

When contemporary Christian music first started to emerge—and be commercialized—one artist refused to profit from the gospel. Keith Green, one of the most popular Christian artists of his time, was adamant that "if it's ministry, you cannot charge."[46] Keith didn't want anyone to be impeded from hearing the gospel through his music, and was convicted to not charge for tickets to his concerts (which thousands attended) and gave away records for free.[47] He died in a tragic accident at the age of 28, but his music continues to impact hundreds of thousands of people today. Artists have their role

43. Some music ministries did waive some rights during the pandemic. Emu Music gave permission to stream some videos but not reproductions of their songs. Sovereign Grace gave permission to stream performances of their songs but only temporarily and you still needed a church music license for the lyrics etc.

44. I am not a lawyer and you'd need to carefully consider the legality of this based on your own circumstances and at your own risk.

45. From *The Heart Of Worship* by Matt Redman, © 1997 Thankyou Music.

46. As remembered by his friend, Danny Lehmann, in a documentary on Keith Green.

47. Keith lived before there was much guidance available on the negative impacts of copyright and how to dedicate works to the public domain. So his songs were, unfortunately, never freed from copyright despite his good intentions.

model, a man who refused to compromise and took seriously Jesus' words: "freely you received, freely give" (Matt 10:8).

CCLI was sent a draft of this article prior to publication and was invited to give a response that would be published with the article. They did not respond.

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/worship-tax

ACBC COUNSELING FEES

Sarah Owens

[As an introduction to this article, please read *Biblical Counseling Should Be Free*.]

Our Master has commanded us to "teach and admonish one another" (Col 3:16) and to "warn those that are unruly" (1 Thess 5:14) as part of our Christian duty. Yet rather than speaking truth and wisdom to others freely, as they received it from God, some sell their biblical counsel as though it had originated from themselves.[1] By God's grace, this is not the practice of a majority of biblical counselors, but it is unfortunately widespread, even among highly reputable biblical counseling organizations such as the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), as this article will demonstrate.

One of the hallmarks of the biblical counseling movement is the firm conviction that Scripture is sufficient for all non-medical problems. In the words of Ed Bulkey,

> God has provided absolutely *everything* man needs for physical and spiritual life.... If Peter is correct [2 Pet 1:3-4], then God has given us all the information we need to function successfully in this life. *Every* essential truth, *every* essential principle, *every* essential technique for solving human problems has been delivered in God's Word.[2]

If this is so, God's Word should also be sufficient for answering the question as to whether counseling should be supported or sold. We believe that the Bible is crystal clear that Christian ministry should never be sold, but rather freely supported by the Body of Christ, and we want to encourage the biblical counseling movement to embrace this scriptural truth. As long as biblical counselors teach and function as though the Bible is *insufficient* to answer this question, they unintentionally undermine their foundational premise.

The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) is an esteemed organization, devoted to counseling according to God's Word. I myself am an ACBC certified counselor, and greatly appreciate and admire the work they have done in equipping both pastors and laymen to rightly handle God's Word in counseling. However, when it comes to Jesus's teaching that the ministry of the gospel should be offered freely (Mat 10:8), this organization has opted to turn a blind eye. Rather than take the position of its founder Jay Adams, who clearly assumed that biblical counseling would be offered for free,[3] ACBC leaves the door open for individual counselors to decide whether or not they will charge, and how much: "The Bible is clear that ministers of the gospel of Jesus are entitled to earn their living from the gospel.... Biblical counselors ... must seek to love

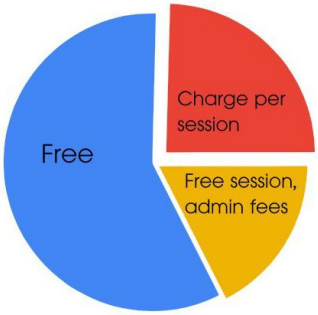
1. See our introductory article "Biblical Counseling Should Be Free".

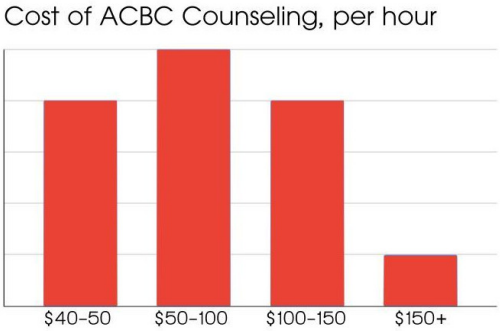
2. Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott, *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture* (B&H Academic, 2015), 27.

3. "Counseling may not be set up as a life calling on a freelance basis. All such counseling ought to be done as a function of the church, utilizing its authority and *resources*." Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Zondervan, 1986), 276. Emphasis added.

their counselees in discerning whether to charge fees and how much to charge."[4] Notice that they wrongly assume that earning a living "from the gospel" means *charging* people for speaking truth in love, putting a price tag on wisdom, and requiring people "obtain the gift of God with money" (Acts 8:20). Also, they imply that it can be loving to charge people for healing, for pointing them to Jesus, and for other spiritual gifts that are involved in biblical counseling. But it is never loving to disobey God by selling access to the ministry of his Word and Spirit. As we'll see in the data presented below, this confusing stance regarding money and ministry has created a biblical counseling landscape in which everyone simply does what is right in their own eyes.

To see how the ACBC financial policy plays out in practice, I have compiled data from all the official ACBC training centers that offer counseling.[5] This information was usually available on the websites of the individual counseling centers, though I occasionally had to reach out via email to ask.





Of all the ACBC counseling and training centers listed, only about 55% of centers offer their counseling without any fees. Of those remaining, 25% charge for each counseling session, while 20% do not charge per session, but still include some administrative fees (such as an initial setup fee or cancellation deposit).

For those centers that charge per session, the average cost for an hour-long session was $100, with the least expensive center charging between $25-40 per hour, and the most expensive center charging up to $260 per hour.[6] To compare this to secular therapy, the average cost of a cognitive behavioral therapy session is reported as being between $60-200 an hour with an average of $130,[7] not substantially different from the cost range of biblical counseling centers. At that average cost of $100 a session, even a diligent counselee may spend upwards of $1,000 before they've managed to resolve their issues. This cost could be daunting and prohibitive to those seeking scriptural help in a personal crisis.

4. "Standards of Conduct", Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, accessed Oct 31, 2023, section III, paragraph C
5. "Get Training", accessed Oct 31, 2023
6. "Counseling", Reigning Grace Counseling Center, accessed October 31, 2023
7. "How Much Does Therapy Cost?", accessed Nov 29, 2023

Even for counselees of greater means, having to pay for biblical counseling puts an unnecessary consideration in the way of growth in maturity. Imagine the pressure a counselee may feel knowing that every 15 minutes more they spend with their counselor, another $20 drains from their bank account. Can there truly be trust or openness in such a situation?

ACBC board member Steve Viars explains the difficulty:

> This is one reason it is so valuable to do counseling ministry in the context of a local church where counseling services are offered free of charge. The conversation is not rushed by financial concerns, and we are free to take the necessary time to get to know a counselee on a deeper level. The counselee, in turn, becomes convinced that we are not simply going to toss out pat answers or shallow solutions.[8]

In addition to the prices that match secular counselors, I noticed another practice that seemed to be borrowed from the secular counseling realm: several centers had a fee scale which was based on the skill of the counselor. Lower fees are charged for counseling with an intern, mid-level fees for counseling with a regular certified counselor, and the highest fees for counseling with a director.[9] The unpleasant implication of this practice is that the true value of biblical counseling is found in the counselor rather than in God and his Word.

It is important to recognize that ACBC, in their same "Standards of Conduct" referenced above, clearly says that counselors "will do everything possible to avoid refusing care to those unable to pay, and will never limit their conversational care only to those who are able to compensate their counselors."[10] In adherence to this standard, most of the centers that charge a fee also have some kind of income exemption, to make counseling more affordable to those of lesser means. This usually comes in the form of a financial hardship application that counselees must fill out, or a sliding fee scale based on income.

Family Size	**Annual Household Income**					
1	$6,000+	$10,466+	$12,881+	$15,296+	$17,711+	$20,125+
2-3	$7,800+	$17,745+	$21,841+	$25,936+	$30,031+	$34,125+
4-6	$11,400+	$28,666+	$35,281+	$41,896+	$48,511+	$55,125+
6+	$13,200+	$35,946+	$44,241+	$52,536+	$60,831+	$69,126+
Hour	Rate					
1 Hour	$25	$30	$35	$40	$45	$50
1.5 Hours	$37	$43	$50	$58	$66	$75

8. Steve Viars, *Counseling the Hard Cases* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 69–70.
9. "Counseling", Timberlake Biblical Counseling & Training Center, accessed October 31, 2023
10. "Standards of Conduct", Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, accessed Oct 31, 2023, section III, paragraph C

Trinity Medical Associates biblical counseling fee schedule[11]

In addition to being cumbersome and potentially embarrassing, this type of accommodation does not always come across as genuinely helpful. On the example fee schedule included above, an unmarried person would have to make less than $6000 annually to qualify for free counseling. If this person made $6001, he would be charged $25 per hour, more than a day's wages for someone at that income. While no genuine biblical counselor intends to lay such heavy burdens on their counselees, these dilemmas are inevitable when trying to force a secular compensation model into what should be a grace-filled and compassionate ministry supported by the free generosity of God's people.

Here are some of the absurd-sounding results that occur when counseling centers offer their ministry in exchange for money:

> "Using a pastoral model rather than a clinical model, our counseling and training proclaim the sufficiency of God's Word through the Holy Spirit to change lives and glorify God"
> – Summit Biblical Counseling (up to $125 per session plus a $25 admin fee)[12]
>
> "I commit to pay before each appointment for the services rendered (1 Cor 9:13)"
> – One Eighty Ministries (up to $210 per session)[13]
>
> "We do everything we can to make our costs affordable. Whether you're seeking counseling or training, you will find our rates are competitive to others in the field. Because we are not affiliated with any insurance plans, your costs are considerably lower than other counseling."
> – Reigning Grace Counseling Center (the most expensive center we found, up to $390 per session)[14]

I agree with the former executive director of ACBC Heath Lambert when he says, "The fact is that counseling is ministry, and ministry is counseling. The two are equivalent terms."[15] Again, Scripture is clear that Christian ministry should be supported, but never sold.[16] ACBC must take a firm stand on this issue by changing their "Standards of Conduct" to reflect a biblical ethic of fundraising by requiring their members to offer biblical counseling free of charge. My hope is that a ministry that I love and admire might one day truly reflect God's radical generosity and free grace to a broken world, and unequivocally condemn the peddling of God's Word (2 Cor 2:17, Micah 3:11).

11. "Biblical Counseling", Trinity Medical Associates, accessed October 31, 2023
12. "Introductory Forms", Summit Biblical Counseling, accessed October 31, 2023
13. "Counseling Guidelines", One-Eighty Ministries, accessed October 31, 2023
14. "Counseling", Reigning Grace Counseling Center, accessed October 31, 2023
15. Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 21.
16. See Conley Owens, "The Dorean Principle", accessed November 3, 2023

An online version of this article, with links to any sources, is available at: sellingjesus.org/articles/acbc

THE KJV IS STILL RESTRICTED BY COPYRIGHT

Andrew Case

One of the common misconceptions about the *King James Version* (KJV) of the Bible is that it is a *universally* public domain work—something many tout as a feature of its superiority to modern copyrighted translations. But most don't realize that *it is still under a special perpetual copyright of the Crown in the United Kingdom.*

Unlike the KJV, some modern translations such as the *Berean Standard Bible* are public domain *worldwide*. So while it's important for a Bible translation to be in the public domain, there are modern translations that fulfill that better than the KJV does.

When the KJV was completed, special printing rights were given to the King's Printer, ensuring that only authorized printers could publish it within England and later the United Kingdom. The legal mechanism that established this in 1611 was the Royal Printing Privilege, granted by King James I. The Crown copyright over the KJV has continued in some form to the present day in the UK. It is managed by Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, and Collins under letters patent, which means these publishers have the exclusive rights to print and distribute the KJV in the UK.[1] Additionally, modern editions or versions of the KJV outside of the UK that include editorial work, notes, or formatting may be copyrighted as derivative works.[2]

To be clear, the KJV has been *treated* as public domain in most countries outside the UK for many years due to international standards regarding the age of the work, but something can only truly be considered to be public domain *if it is public domain in the country of origin*. This makes the KJV an outlier in the world of intellectual property.

The Crown does not attempt to enforce its perpetual copyright over the KJV in foreign countries primarily due to legal, practical, and political reasons. Crown copyright is a unique feature of British law. It is tied to the authority of the British monarchy and does not extend beyond UK jurisdiction. Most other countries do not recognize such perpetual privileges for government works, and foreign copyright laws typically have explicit time limits for works to enter the public domain.

If the Crown wanted to enforce its perpetual copyright abroad, it would face significant legal hurdles. International copyright enforcement relies on treaties like the Berne Convention, which standardizes certain copyright protections but does not recognize Crown copyright or perpetual copyrights specific to one country. Attempting to enforce such a claim in a country where the KJV is already in the public domain would likely result in dismissal by the courts.

1. For more information see the Wikipedia articles on Crown copyright and the King James Version

2. For example, *The New Cambridge Paragraph Bible*, edited by David Norton and published by Cambridge University Press in 2005, presents the KJV text in paragraph format with modernized spelling and punctuation. Also, see *The King James Study Bible, Full Color Edition*, published by Thomas Nelson, which features thousands of study notes, archaeological information, special articles, in-text maps, and annotations.

Terms of Use

The Cambridge website describes the legal restrictions on the KJV in the UK as follows:

> Rights in The Authorized Version of the Bible (King James Bible) in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown and administered by the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. The reproduction by any means of the text of the King James Version is permitted to a maximum of five hundred (500) verses for liturgical and non-commercial educational use, provided that the verses quoted neither amount to a complete book of the Bible nor represent 25 per cent or more of the total text of the work in which they are quoted, subject to the following acknowledgement being included:
>
> > *Scripture quotations from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press*
>
> When quotations from the KJV text are used in materials not being made available for sale, such as church bulletins, orders of service, posters, presentation materials, or similar media, a complete copyright notice is not required but the initials KJV must appear at the end of the quotation.
>
> Rights or permission requests (including but not limited to reproduction in commercial publications) that exceed the above guidelines must be directed to the Permissions Department, Cambridge University Press, University Printing House, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8BS, UK (https://www.cambridge.org/about-us/rights-permissions) and approved in writing.[3]

History

At the beginning, by design, monopolies were established over the printing of the KJV in the United Kingdom. For approximately two centuries, the Oxford and Cambridge university presses, along with the King's Printer in England, maintained exclusive rights to print it. This privilege, known as the "Bible privilege," was not initially a matter of copyright but rather a monopoly granted by royal authority, as the first copyright law did not even exist until the 18th century. The primary justification for this monopoly was to ensure the accuracy of the biblical text and to keep prices affordable. However, over time, these monopolies were criticized for leading to high prices, limited availability of copies, and less textual accuracy.

In the 19th century, campaigns emerged to challenge these monopolies, particularly in Scotland, where the monopoly was more stringent. Activists argued that the monopolies hindered the widespread and affordable distribution of the Bible. By the end of the 1830s, the patent granting a monopoly to the King's Printer for Scotland was not renewed, effectively ending the monopoly there. Despite similar campaigns in England and Wales, the monopolies persisted for another decade.[4]

3. Cambridge Rights and Permissions: KJV

Modern scholars agree that the KJV's long-standing dominance was driven primarily by commercial interests rather than its intrinsic literary or scholarly merits. The KJV was cheaper and easier to print than both the beloved Geneva Bible and the officially favored Bishop's Bible, which sparked fierce disputes and legal battles among London printers. As Daniell writes, "the business of the printing of the KJV became almost at once devious, and at times, vicious."[5]

For example, when bookseller Michael Sparke began importing bibles to bypass the monopoly and cut costs, Robert Barker, the King's Printer, retaliated by seizing those bibles and the equipment of rival printers. And so avarice ruled with an iron fist over the distribution of the KJV. Ironically and sadly, its triumph over rival translations "came about in part because it was an inferior production: in fair competition it would probably have lost, but its supporters had foul means at their disposal."[6]

In short, the KJV's beginnings sowed the seed and set a precedent for Bible publishers to allow the profit-driven strategies of the world to dictate how they operate.

The Biblical Contradiction

Although the KJV is in the public domain in most countries, this status arises not from any spirit of generosity or devotion to freely sharing the Word of God, but *in spite of* historical and ongoing attempts to control it. From its inception, the KJV has been tightly managed under the Crown's perpetual copyright in the United Kingdom. This system of monopolistic control, driven by the Crown's desire to regulate who could print and profit from the Bible, stands in stark contrast to the spirit of the gospel and the very definition of what a Bible is—*God's* Word, not man's.[7]

This fixation on control is not unique to the history of the KJV. Modern Christian publishing is fraught with efforts to profit from and restrict access to Scripture,[8] ignoring Jesus' command in Matthew 10:8: "Freely you have received; freely give."

So please join us in confronting the Bible market, which treats God's Word as a commodity to bind and monetize.

4. British Bible monopolies campaigns

5. David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 451.

6. David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 90–91. See also Norton's detailed *A Textual History Of The King James Bible*, and his two-volume, *History of the Bible as Literature*.

7. For more on the history of the KJV, see *The KJV Copyright – A Sordid Tale Of Intrigue And Avarice* by Timothy Berg, Mar 27, 2020.

8. See our article *Bible Publishers: Stewards or Gatekeepers?*

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BLOOD MONEY AND ITS CONNECTION TO MINISTRY

Andrew Case

When someone needs a blood transfusion, should you sell your blood to them, or give it freely? How much is blood worth? What is the price of human life? These are questions most haven't thought much about, but the landmark 1970 book *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* explores them deeply. The author, British sociologist Richard Titmuss, carefully considers the moral, ethical, and practical implications of turning human blood into merchandise. Through his comparative study of the blood donation systems in the United States and Britain, he exposes the troubling consequences of commercializing blood. And he's not alone. Many others have been wrestling with the issue of whether or not parts of the human body can be turned into products. So the main question I want to raise in this article is: if even unbelievers are questioning the propriety of selling the sacred, why aren't Christians questioning the propriety of selling parts of the body of Christ (i.e. ministry)?

In the early 20th century Americans began offering payment for blood/plasma donations, effectively turning it into a commodity to be bought and sold. U.S. human blood products today total more than $24 billion in sales globally, and account for nearly 3 percent of U.S. exports, which is a higher percentage than soybeans and several other crops that are sold overseas. "So much of the world's bought-and-sold blood parts originate in the United States that it's comparable to a global oil cartel."[1] The United States expanded the blood market into a massive industry that stretches across hundreds of communities, thriving wherever economic hardship has pushed people to the point of selling a piece of themselves.

The World Health Organization set a goal in 1997 for all blood donations to come from *unpaid* volunteer donors, but as of 2018, only 64 countries have reached this standard. In some countries like Brazil, Australia, and the United Kingdom, it is *illegal* to receive any compensation, monetary or otherwise, for the donation of blood or other human tissues.[2] By contrast, in the U.S. most blood is purchased, even though those receiving financial compensation for their blood continue to be called "donors."

So which countries are doing the right thing?

Kat Lanteigne, executive director of Toronto-based Blood Watch says, "I oppose paid plasma all day, every day. [Paying for plasma] preys on vulnerable populations," and undermines voluntary blood donation. "As soon as you get your donor base attached to gaining money it's been proven time and time again that you can't get those donors back into the voluntary pool." She also argues that plasma belongs in the public

1. Kathleen McLaughlin, *Blood Money: The Story of Life, Death, and Profit Inside America's Blood Industry* (Atria, 2023), 42.
2. Wikipedia, *Blood donation*

sector, lest pharmaceutical companies gain control of it and set prices as high as they like.[3]

The Nuffield Council on Bioethics lists a series of values commonly invoked to address this dilemma: altruism, autonomy, dignity, justice, maximising health and welfare, reciprocity, and solidarity. They write, "the role of the state with respect to donation should be understood as one of stewardship, actively promoting measures that will improve general health." And "altruism, long promulgated as the only ethical basis for donation of bodily material, should continue to play a central role in ethical thinking in this field.... We do reject the concept of the purchase of bodily material, where money exchanges hands in direct return for body parts. We distinguish such purchase clearly from the use of money or other means to reward or recompense donors."[4]

> The donation of blood is a voluntary, free gesture and, in accordance with the principle that the human body cannot become a source of financial gain, is not remunerated. The fact that it is free does not preclude some form of reimbursement for the donor, but this should not be of such a kind as to distort the nature of the action, which must remain a donation and a gesture of altruism.[5]

In other words, the Nuffield Council believes that *the giving of human blood should be supported, not sold*. Italy is one of the few countries that has achieved this balance: law 584 of 1967 grants employees a one-day paid leave of absence for donating blood.[6]

I agree with Titmuss that when something like human blood becomes a product on the market, it distorts social relationships, diminishes the dignity of the human body, and undermines values like generosity, trust, and mutual care. Blood/plasma, like other parts of the human body, should never be sold, but rather supported.

My goal is not to persuade you that selling blood is wrong, but rather to invite you to think about how the ethical considerations around this topic are startlingly relevant for the Church. The parallels between the commodification of blood and the increasing commercialization of Christian ministry are profound. Just as Titmuss and many others critique the sale of human blood, wisdom calls us to critically examine the ways in which spiritual things are being peddled in the modern Church.

We are faced with an uncomfortable reality: while a vast number of secular thinkers continue to reflect deeply on the dangers of commercializing human life and stripping the human body of its dignity, *most evangelicals have failed to think about what should be kept holy and not be sold*, such as worship, the Word of God, and Christian teaching. Almost no one has this issue on their radar. Again, the problem is not just that the Church has embraced the commercialization of faith, but that it is simply not even thinking about whether God is honored by its mercenary mentality and practice.

3. Padraig Belton, *Should we pay people for donating blood?*, Nov 15, 2018.
4. Carlo Petrini, *Production of plasma-derived medicinal products: ethical implications for blood donation and donors*, Feb 21, 2013.
5. Ibid.
6. *Donating blood, the ethical principles*

The Gift of Life

There is something inherently sacred about the nature of blood. Blood is more than just a biological substance; it symbolizes *life itself*. This is not only a biblical idea (Lev 17:10-14, Gen 9:4, Deut 12:23), but something many cultures have understood for millennia. The voluntary gift of blood represents an act of communal responsibility and altruism. When people donate blood freely they're participating in a sacrificial social service, offering something of themselves without expecting anything in return, done in a spirit of brotherly love for the good of their fellow man.

But when blood becomes something that can be monetized, the dynamics change. Blood donation becomes *transactional,* based on reciprocity. People give blood not out of altruism but out of financial need or desire. This shift not only undermines altruism and cheapens the value of human life, but also creates ethical concerns. For example, the quality of blood may diminish as people desperate for money sell their blood even when their health has been neglected or compromised.[7]

Paying for blood incentivizes and legitimizes the utilitarian view of human beings as economic units, reducing the value of human life to its marketable parts. In the U.S. this has created disparities, as the wealthy can buy blood and the poor are more likely to sell theirs—a dynamic many find deeply problematic. When the transactional logic of the market infiltrates something as fundamental as the gift of blood, it erodes the ethical and relational fabric of society. Blood, a symbol of life and community, should be shared freely, not parceled out based on economic need or greed. This principle of keeping sacred things from the corrosive power of commodification should resonate with the Church.

Commodifying the Sacred in Evangelicalism

As we've written about at length, contemporary evangelicalism has traded the gift relationship of ministry for a market mentality, despite the fact that *Christians*, of all people, should be most concerned with the sacred nature of ministry. Spiritual things intended for the edification of the Church have increasingly been treated like goods in a marketplace. From selling sermons and worship music to charging fees for biblical counseling and conferences, many evangelical ministries have adopted the same transactional mindset that Titmuss and others critique in the context of blood donation. Have evangelicals at large become vampires of commerce, draining the widow of every last drop of money for access to truth, incapable of holding anything sacred, denigrating the dignity of ministry for financial gain?

Consider the parallel: just as human blood is essential for physical life, the truth of the gospel is essential for spiritual life. Yet instead of God's gifts being freely offered to all, some have decided to lock them behind paywalls, copyright, and subscription services. The very things intended to bring life—both spiritual and physical—have been

7. See real examples of this in chapter 2 of McLaughlin, *Blood Money.*

transformed into merchandise, depriving the most vulnerable of the life-giving power that was given by God to us for free in the first place.

Just as blood donation should rely on selflessness, so too should ministry rely on the obedience and free giving of the Body of Christ. If blood should be freely given to those in need without expectation of payment, why should Christian ministry be treated any differently? If blood donation can be supported, instead of sold, why can't we do the same with Spirit-empowered service for the edification of the Body?

The parallel with human blood is not the only or main reason Christian ministry should never be sold; Christ's command to freely give in the context of ministry is paramount (Matt 10:8). We keep holy things out of the marketplace because Christ, along with the rest of Scripture, mandates it. But analogs with other things like the human body are instructive and valuable for our consideration. They help us see that, even for those who reject the command of Christ, there are good reasons to refuse to sell the sacred. The commercialization of both blood and ministry ultimately corrupts something intended to be a profound and beautiful gift. What is given to save lives, both physically and spiritually, should not be subjected to market forces, but rather offered as an expression of love, given of grace as it was received of grace.

Instead of viewing ministry as an act of self-giving love, many evangelicals have embraced a business model. This worship of worldly market wisdom demoralizes spiritual relationships within the Body of Christ. Believers become consumers, and those offering Spirit-given ministry become service sellers. The holiness of ministry is lost, swallowed up by the same commercial logic that Titmuss warned about with blood.

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CONCLUSION

Andrew Case

As we speak with people about abolishing the Jesus trade, a question inevitably arises: "But where will we get the money we need?" The answer is simple: the Lord will provide. And he will do so through the free generosity of his people. To paraphrase Hudson Taylor, "Ministry done in God's way will never lack God's supply." If God is pleased with a ministry, he will sustain it. And if he is displeased, he will not. This sets Christians at a crossroads—will they choose to trust the worldly wisdom of commerce, or will they choose to trust their heavenly Father for their daily bread? Either way, it is an act of faith. Selling ministry never guarantees the income you need. Rather, it is a conscious decision to put your faith in monetization strategies subject to a multitude of unpredictable factors. This is the road of disobedience, and the financial outcome is uncertain. Put another way, the monetary return on disobedience depends on the whims of market forces outside your control.

But what is the return on obedience? Scripture is bursting with promises of God's provision. He "will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19). And Jesus exhorts us, saying, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles strive after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you" (Matt 6:31-33). The psalmist reminds us that "the young lions go lacking and hungry, but those who seek Yahweh lack no good thing" (Ps 34:10). Do we really believe the Bible when it says, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want"? Many are quick to say, "God will provide," yet believe deep down that God could never supply as much as the Jesus trade does. And so they go on defending the sale of the sacred.

Doubting the provision and care of our gracious Master is anything but new. The Israelites grumbled together about food, only to be surprised by bread from heaven (Ex 16). The disciples also wondered where enough bread could be found for thousands of people, only to see the Son of God feed them more than they could eat (Mark 8).

And today we find ourselves called by the Lord of the harvest to do his work, yet we persist in unbelief that he will provide what we need to feed our families. We have recorded in Scripture the testimony of his beautiful faithfulness over the course of millennia, yet we have failed to learn from it. And we return to the mud pies of the world when a banquet is prepared for those who simply believe his promises. In our unbelief we turn our Provider's blessing and truth into a commodity to be commercialized and controlled for our financial gain.

In the end, this book is calling the modern Church to do something staggeringly uncomplicated and childlike: *trust him*. He is *faithful*. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He will not let you die of thirst in the wilderness. But as long as we continue selling spiritual things and living off the income from peddling God's Word, we will miss out on

water from the rock. If we stay in Egypt we will never taste the manna. The time is now to abolish the Jesus trade, embrace the joy of freely giving, reflect the heart of our generous God, and cast ourselves wholly upon the great Shepherd of the sheep. For the one who calls us is faithful (1 Thess 5:24).