

The Salaries of Ministers

by Francis Turretin

The orthodox view maintains that ministers can and ought to live by the ministry, and the church is bound to care for and pay a just salary.

Scripture: Matthew 10:10

Topics: "Church Governance", "Minister Compensation"

Description

Francis Turretin addresses the question of whether ministers of the church should receive salaries, countering the Anabaptists who believed in preaching the gospel for free. Turretin argues that ministers have the right to live by the ministry, supported by the church, based on biblical principles and examples. He emphasizes the importance of justly compensating ministers for their work, drawing from both the Old and New Testaments, and warns against the dangers of denying fair wages to ministers.

Transcript

TWENTY-EIGHTH question: the salaries OF ministers AND ecclesiastical goods:

Is any salary due ministers of the church?

We affirm against the Anabaptists.

I. This question was agitated before this by the Anabaptists, who thought the gospel should be preached gratuitously; either by richer persons who have sufficient means for living, or even by the poorer who procure for themselves support and the necessaries of life by some mechanical (banauso) art and by their own labor, after the example of Paul, who worked at tentmaking and labored with his own hands (1 Cor. 4:12). And they considered the Reformed ministers not to be true ministers, but mercenaries, who take up the ministry as a business and are accustomed to devote and to hire out their labor to those offering the highest wages. They acknowledge, indeed, that the church is bound to see that the ministers called by them are supplied with things necessary (Article 78, Protocol. . . des gesprecks tho Emdden in Oistfrieszlandt [1579], pp. 233-36). But in this case only--if they have no means with which to support their families honestly, either from a patrimony or a business and trade and other vocation of this world. But beyond this case, they hold that ministers are bound to preach from love and gratuitously.

II. The orthodox thus maintain: the minister not only can, but also ought to live by the ministry. And although in case of necessity, when, namely, it can be sustained neither by the church served, nor by

others, it may furnish the gospel without expense (adapanon); nay, even beyond the case of necessity on account of weighty reasons from love and Christian prudence it can remit that debt to any church, and thus revive it by their alms for a time or for ever, still they are not bound by a divine and human right; but on the contrary the church is bound absolutely to the care and payment of a just salary.

III. The reasons are: (1) from the passage of Paul (1 Cor. 9:4-19), where the seat of this doctrine is and the apostle not only claims for himself and all ministers not only this right to receive due wages and this power, but confirms it by various arguments from both divine and natural right and by approved examples. The first is drawn from the apostles. "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" (vv. 5, 6). The second from the analogy of the soldier, farmer, shepherd, to whom natural equity and reason teach that wages are due: "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" (v. 7). The third, from the prescription of the law about the ox treading corn, from the lesser to the greater because the mouth of the ox that treads out the corn must not be muzzled (Dt. 25:4). As God prohibits the driving away of the laboring ox from the crib, how much less should the ministers of the church be deprived of the fruit of their labors. For by this law, he did not so much regard oxen as men that they might not be defrauded of the just wages of their work: "Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? That he that ploweth should plow in hope" (vv. 9,10). The fourth, from a comparison of unequals, the work and the pay: "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" (v. 11). The fifth, from the divinely instituted order, in the Old as well as in the New Testament: "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? They which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (vv. 13, 14*).

IV. (2) From the command of Christ, where sending the apostles to preach the gospel in Judea, he forbids their carrying anything on the way (not even food), but wishes them to live at the expense of those to whom they were sent (Mt. 10:10; Lk. 10:7). He gives a most just reason for this (to wit, that "the workman is worthy of his meat and of his hire"). This shows that a support (ta biotika) is no less justly due to the ministers of the gospel from their hearers than wages are justly due to the hired man for his labor and work. Nor ought the words of Christ ("Freely ye have received, freely give," Mt. 10:8) to be objected. It is plain that he does not speak there of the preaching of the word, but concerning the graces and miraculous gifts of healing and of powers, for which he forbids a price to be received, much less that they should be sold, as Simon Magus maintained (Acts 8:18). "Heal the sick," says he, "cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give" (Mt. 10:8). That this cannot be extended to the just pay of ministers, the words quoted from v. 10 prove. For why does he wish the apostles to be sustained and supported by their hearers, because the workman is worthy of his meat, if they are bound to preach gratuitously?

V. (3) From the salaries of the sacred ministers under the Old Testament (Num. 18:8-12), to whom were given ordinarily sacrifices, tithes, firstfruits, and other similar things, besides certain cities and suburban fields (Num. 35:1-8). Now although in the New Testament, we are not bound by those laws as to the special material from which and the manner in which the pay was given, still they remain as to kind and analogy, as is evident from the passage already quoted (1 Cor. 9:13).

VI. (4) From the example of Christ and the apostles, who did not refuse to receive from believers what was necessary for their support. Christ received from women of their substance (ta hyparchonta, Lk. 8:3), as

also Paul from the Philippians (Phil. 4:10, 15, 16). And in 2 Cor. 11:8, he says that he took wages (opsonion) of other churches to do service to the Corinthians that he might be able to preach to them the gospel of God freely (to wit, to avoid the charge of avarice and of filthy lucre with which the false apostles endeavored to press him).

VII. (5) From the threatenings following a withholding of pay. Because not to pay ministers their salaries is numbered among the most grievous sins of injustice towards a neighbor and of impiety towards God, upon which God threatens punishment and promises his blessing to those doing the opposite (Mal. 3:8,10,12; Neh. 13:10,11; Gal. 6:6, 7). "God is not mocked," says the apostle, "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

VIII. (6) From the absurdities and disadvantages following. For the necessity of wages being denied, it would follow (a) that in the election of ministers the qualities and prerogatives of the flesh would have to be regarded and they should be preferred who could be supported by their own means and preach gratuitously. This would result in the best and most meritorious being often passed by in an election, (b) There would be a most dangerous discrimination between ministers. Some could furnish the gospel without expense (adapanon) from love and conscience towards God; others would burden the church with their necessity and so would be less respected and more disagreeable and less pleasing, (c) Salaries would thus be changed into alms and ministers would be supposed to live by alms (which is false) and their condition would be rendered contemptible. Hence it was wisely provided in the system of the Reformed churches of France that a salary should be assigned to each pastor and that no one should be put in office without it (cf. "The Discipline of the Reformed Churches of France," Canon 42 in Quick, Synodicon [1692], Lxxiv).

IX. (7) From natural justice and equity, the rule of which the apostle indicates (2 Cor. 8:13,14), which does not suffer an advantage to be received to the injury of

another, so that one should be burdened while the entire community is relieved. Nay, equity demands that they who are taught should support the teachers with their substance (Gal. 6:6; Tit. 3:13); and they who receive spiritual things from anyone should give to him at least temporal things.

X. It is one thing not to have the right to seek and demand wages; another to be unwilling to use it for certain reasons. For the right remaining, the exercise and use of it can be intermitted here and now. Paul could have done the latter and actually did it for weighty reasons (Acts 20:33; 2 Thess. 3:8, 9). But he makes a rule neither for himself nor for other ministers which they are bound to follow constantly, since we read elsewhere of his using this right.

XI. Wages (misthophoria) is one thing; the love of money (philargyrid) another. In Mic. 3:11, the priests are rebuked "who teach for hire, and the prophets, who divine for money" (namely, who teach what is false to get money from the rich, who speak agreeable things and promise a happy condition to the state in order to receive a more liberal pay). For they ought the more severely to rebuke the sins of their hearers and to exhort them to repentance by a threatening of punishment. But it cannot be inferred from this that it is unlawful to receive pay, because God had in his law provided for the liberal support of these very priests who are accused of avarice.

XII. It is one thing to enter the ministry for the sake of the pay and of gain;

another to demand wages and to agree for it to discharge the ministry suitably. The former characterizes mercenaries, who do it solely that they may acquire gain from the gospel. But the latter characterizes true pastors. Indeed if no pay should be due to them for the work they perform, if it was to be a truly arbitrary and gratuitous collection (as are alms), then it would not be lawful to stipulate for pay and a stipulation of this kind would be sordid and simoniacal. But because it is due most justly by the prescription of God and Christ, it is lawful for it to be engaged for, when it cannot be obtained otherwise and suitably. Nor in this is there any taint or stain of mercenary disposition or suspicion of it, provided it is moderate, not too burdensome to the flock and sufficient for the honest support of the pastor and his family. The mode of this pay ought to be determined by the counsel of the prudent and the common consent of the church. If any pertinaciously and wickedly and ungratefully (not from poverty) deny this, they are not worthy to have the preaching of the word of God and ought to be deserted by their pastors. (AMEN!!! (MM))

XIII. If any ministers are able from a patrimony to support themselves and family suitably and honestly, they are not on that account to be defrauded of the wages of their ministry. Nor ought they, unless for a peculiar reason, to refuse the reward of their labors (1 Cor. 9:18), lest they may appear to seek for the glory of a certain superior holiness or reflect discredit upon their poorer colleagues; and lest the people, misled by this immunity, may cherish avarice to the great disadvantage of successors and of the whole church, which cannot always secure a ministry without expense (adapanon). However, since each one is master of the wages obtained by his own labor, it is fair that at his own and not another's will he should expend upon the poor and for other uses what seems best to him.

XIV. However, these wages can be paid in various ways; either by the voluntary offerings of believers which they liberally contribute of their goods for the common use of the church from Christian love and justice (as was done by the first Christians in the time of the apostles and for some ages after); or from a mutual agreement and the joint pay of individuals brought together; or paid from the public treasury by the Christian magistrate; or drawn from tithes; or finally, from the annual returns and produce of fields and farms given and left to the church and other ecclesiastical property. Now in whichever of these ways it is procured, it makes little or no difference at all as to the thing itself, provided a sufficient salary is given to the ministers of the gospel. A measure should be observed in it, that it be not too small and less than is sufficient for the honest support of the pastor and his family; nor too large, conducing to luxury and pride more than that which is sufficient and necessary. For both extremes are equally dangerous and to be avoided, lest they be either despised by an ungrateful people from too close domestic economy; or become extravagant and indulge in luxury, ease and vain show from a too expensive and splendid establishment (as was the case in the papacy).

XV. Although a pastor is bound in certain cases to work without pay (*gratis*), if indeed he has means when the church is very poor or just planted and still weak (which would be unwilling to receive the gospel except freely); or when the sects do this and reproach our ministers for not doing it, it does not follow that this right does not belong to them. If the church is sufficiently rich, but is unwilling either from avarice or contempt and disdain of his ministry to give the necessary salary, it is lawful for him to leave that church (all other means having been first tried) and to offer himself to the ministry of another church. For so great an insult towards a minister (I will not say crime) persuades and permits the migration.

XVI. If it is asked what is to be thought of the free services of monks and especially of the Jesuits (which we read as having been prescribed to them by Ignatius, the founder of the order; cf. The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, Pt. VI. 2.7 [566] [trans. G.E. Ganss, 1970], p. 256), the answer is easy--that it is not only bald hypocrisy, but both an impudent and treacherous license to scrape together everything. For

whatever they may feign about their teaching gratuitously, still they are accustomed to receive most promptly the choicest lands, the richest farms and immense returns made to them by way of gratuitous gifts or alms. And so they pay their labor, not gratuitously, adverbially or freely (dorean), but out of favor, nominally (i.e., by those who acknowledge with a grateful mind and remunerate the kindness).

XVII. As to ecclesiastical property, that we may say something about its origin and increase, it is certain that it took its rise even in the time of Christ through the pious offerings and dedications of believers and especially of the women whose names are mentioned in Lk. 8:2, 3. The management of this money was entrusted to Judas, which he was bound to expend partly for the use of Christ and the apostles, partly for the use of the poor (as it is explained in Jn. 12:5, 6). After the ascension of Christ, the first church of the Christians gathered at Jerusalem, partly for the sake of testifying love, partly that it might be less exposed to the attacks of enemies and more ready for migration and flight. They put all that they had in a common treasury, the richer relieving the wants of the poorer even by the sale of their fields (Acts 2:44, 45; 4:32, 34, 35). But this community of goods (not for possession [kata ktesin], but for use [kata chresin]) neither had a place in other churches besides that at Jerusalem, nor continued there for a long while. Thus particular churches had their own treasuries into which each one threw his donation and collections were made (as appears from the defenses of Justin and Tertullian).

XVIII. Writers are not agreed at what time the church first began to possess lands and large estates. It is certain that even before Constantine the churches had obtained lands and farms and that the Roman church had been enriched above others with the most ample donations. These were not only sufficient for the support of the clergy and the poor, but also for the relief of other churches. But profuse largesses (by which the enriched church swelled up so largely) at length prevailed in the age of Constantine. For this emperor, in his zeal for the Christian religion, restored to the churches what had been seized by his predecessors and measured out to them a part of the customs, tributes and public grain and presented most splendid gifts from the gold and silver statues of destroyed idols. But as to giving the city of Rome the empire of the west, which is ascribed to him ("Decreti," Pt. I, Dist. 96.13 Corpus Juris Qmonici [1959], 1:342), it has been remarked and proved to be false and suppositious already by invincible arguments from learned men in the papacy itself: Peter de Vineia, Dante, Marsilius of Padua, (Nicholas of) Cusa, Valla, Otho Friesingen, Volaterranus, Nauclerus; nay, even by Aeneas Sylvius (Pope Pius II) himself. Therefore it seems that this gift (whatever it was) must be ascribed to Pepin (III) rather than to Constantine (although neither did he lavish so many and so great gifts as is commonly supposed). It is far nearer the truth that the popes (Italy being rent with intestine wars) occupied by violence and fraud not a few towns and dominions and now looked for the donation of this or that.

XIX. Afterwards, superstition increasing (fascinated by which the common people believed that there was no wickedness so atrocious and no crime so base that it could not be expiated by donations of this kind), the force of overflowing largess could not be stopped by any dykes, by which as by an immense flood the church was overwhelmed and destroyed and its spiritual glory has degenerated into the splendor and luxury of a profane monarchy. With too much truth was it said, "Religion brought forth riches, but the daughter devoured her mother." Let him who wishes more concerning the origin and increase of ecclesiastical goods consult Hospinian ("De Templis," 5 ["De origine...et bonorum ecclesiasticorum"] Opera Omnia [1681], 1:397-443), Voetius (Poiticae Ecclesiasticae, Pt. I [1666], Bk. IV, Tract. II, pp. 595-797) and the golden treatise of the Italian, Paul Sarpi of Venice (Treatise on Matters of Beneficiary [1686]).

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