

FOR SALE

Today there is an increasing trend among those professing Christ. This trend is to profit from the sale of God and religious things. Yes, I said they are selling God! I realize we cannot limit this to our day because it has been going on for a long time. In Bible times, we see they were already making idols of wood, gold and silver (Isa 40:19, 20) and profiting from the sale of these worthless objects. In many ways, those involved in such commerce will not readily admit to the motive I propose here, but they should examine their motives because there are levels of involvement in which they could be ignorantly engaged. Of course, there are those who are engaged with the only motive- to profit.

We should know that many are selling the word of God today and profiting greatly. Many are selling Bibles, books about the bible, pictures and statues of Angels, Jesus, the disciples and just about everything else that can be visualized. If you go to a Christian book store, you will find all this and more. Some would immediately say that I am being too hard on those involved in this commerce. As I said, there are levels of involvement. I will illustrate this by using 3 levels of involvement in the sale of God.

Level 1

At this stage, those involved do not care anything about the cause of God or God's people. Their only reason for involvement is to profit. They may sell Christian and religious material, but only because people want to buy it. Their goal is to make lots of money and if this product sells, then they will sell it. This is just like merchants selling Christmas or other seasonal items. Some of these merchants live in countries where Christmas is not celebrated and they do not care anything about the real meaning of Christmas. People know that many spend large amounts of money around the holidays, so they make sure they have what sells available in their store. At this level, there is a pure profit motive. They don't care about Christ or God or the cause of Christ, their objective is to benefit from the demand for religious products.

A believer may be involved in Level 1 activity. They may assure themselves that they have to make a living. They may feel it is simply a demand which they choose to supply. At this level, most will understand that these merchants are simply seeking a profit. No one will look to them as religious authorities or leaders; most know they are simply selling religious material for profit. We should know that if enough people want something, someone will sell it. No one is really surprised at those profiting from the sale of religious material at this level. Store chains pride themselves in having something for everyone. One stop shopping is the order of the day and religious material is not exempt.

Level 2

At this level, you have merchants targeting Christians. They know there is a large Christian market of hungry souls. At this level, you will find many religious broadcasters, on radio and television. Their motive is now focused on profit but mainly from those who will buy religious material. They may own Christian book stores, where they will seek to stock things to satisfy both Catholic and Protestant. Also, at this level, we should include the hucksters, swindlers, those who would prey on the ignorant or elderly. These are the televangelists who give 15 minutes of motivating talk and they spend the next 10 minutes trying to sell you their wares. They have tapes and books that

you must have in your library. Many Christians have tape libraries where they collect sermons and speeches about God. They collect gospel music, CDs, DVDs and some still have tapes. They are told that they need this and they believe it. These hucksters also sell holy water, prayer cloths they say they prayed over or touched. They encourage people to call in for prayer, or offer them something free. The goal here is to get a listening person on the other end that they can send endless promotional mail. In this mail, they will simply ask, beg and plead for money. They always have some important need for the cause of God to go forward. Further, they promise healing and prosperity if you would simply support their ministry. Many have resorted to asking for you to send a gift and then they will send along religious material. In this way, they avoid having to put a price on their products. Some will say, "You can get this DVD for your best gift of at least \$20. Their hope is that you will send more than \$20.

In level 2, scams abound. Many are trying to get in front of the tremendous flow of money from un-suspecting Christians. I have heard many ask for offerings, gifts, love gifts, seed money and many other clever pleas, all to simply get the Christian to send in their money. Many will plead and beg every week because they say they are behind on their bills, and if they don't get your money they will no longer be able to keep the broadcast on the air. Many of the programs show the same programming over and over. It reminds me of an infomercial because toward the end of the show, out comes their products and the prices. But, at least infomercials have disclaimers to tell the public that this is all staged and the audience is getting paid for their enthusiasm and love for the products. I wonder if those people are getting paid in some of those healing services?

Level 3

At this level, the Churches are very involved. I guess about 30 years ago, it became very popular for Churches to have a tape ministry. Church services were routinely recorded and made available to those wanting to hear sermons in the privacy of their own homes or vehicles, or for those who were not able to attend regular services. This convenience quickly progressed to selling these tapes. This became a source of revenue for many of these Churches. Videos of Church services began to be popular as well. Today, just about every Church records their services. Recording is one thing, but then they sell these tapes, CDs and DVDs to whoever is willing to pay the price. In many cases the tapes would be \$5 or \$6, and they would say they are only trying to recoup the costs associated with the tape or the postage to send them. The tapes or the postage to send them does not equal to \$5, so there is definitely some profit margin there. Many Churches have this process so organized that they will offer the tape for sale as you walk out of the service! You are directed to go to a location and they will have the service you just attended on tape, of course for a price.

This level is very dangerous because they have reduced the word of God to a price. In fact, everything seems to have a price and it doesn't seem to matter to the members that they are selling *and* buying God's word. This level is the most deceptive and many think it is perfectly acceptable to sell the word of God. I have asked some about this and they quickly defend this practice by saying that there are expenses involved. Pastors have become marketing advertisers for their books, tapes, CDs and DVDs. Everything has a price and is advertised by the Pastor and the members at every opportunity. There is a revenue stream flowing into the Church and this is viewed as a good thing. Other Churches and Pastors are envious of this revenue stream. They see it as a goal to attain or achieve. They do their best to copy this model and employ it at their Church. No one seems to have a problem with it, which is why it is the most deceptive of the three levels.

In fact, I bet some are reading this right now and saying in their heart, "What is wrong with that?"

The Testimony of God

Since this practice is so prevalent today, I think we need to hear from God on this issue. The bible has many things to say about this. In fact, this is nothing new as we said already, so we would expect to word of God to address it. We will consider some passages.

Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God. 2Cor 2: 17

Paul begins this verse by saying that this practice was also common in his day. There were many who realized that God can be marketed. Many in Paul's day were "*peddling the word of God*" to make a profit. There were not just a few, there were many! I could say this is also true in 2006! Certainly this is negative, and there needs to be no defense mounted for such practices. Especially since the word of God comes right out and says it is negative. I cannot believe today there are many who have tried to justify this practice when it is clearly a practice of those who were false apostles, eager to cheat, steal and part believers from their hard earned money. Why should we look favorably upon them? Why should we seek to speak in their defense or act as if they are involved in an honorable pursuit?

Light is not for sale

First, anyone who receives light from God cannot sell that light! Everything we have belongs to God. Every spiritual principal, every detail of the spiritual life has been given to us. "*For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*" (1Co 4:7). God has leveled the playing field here. Even a Minister/Pastor/Elder or Church leader is not superior because they are better than anyone else, but God has commissioned them to serve the body. Do they deserve special honor? Yes, God has given them a responsibility, "*for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you*" (Heb 13:7b). But, they are not celebrities, they are servants of God. They are not to be lauded for their wit and wisdom; they do not walk on water as Jesus did. They are simply servants, which is what the word "minister" means. The word on their lips is not theirs at all; they simply received it from the Lord. How could they charge money for the word? It is not original with them? They are not the authors of the light, but simply light bearers. We must put their contribution in its proper perspective. If God were a human being, this would be plagiarism.

Many were selling the word of God in Paul's day. Let us look into the word he uses which is translated "*peddle*", kapeleuo

Thayer Definition:

- 1) to be a retailer, to peddle
- 2) to make money by selling anything
- 2a) to get sordid gain by dealing in anything, to do a thing for base gain
- 2b) to trade in the word of God

2b1) to try to get base gain by teaching divine truth

2c) to corrupt, to adulterate

2c1) peddlers were in the habit of adulterating their commodities for the sake of gain

Part of Speech: verb

A Related Word by Thayer's/Strong's Number: from kapelos (a huckster)

There is much in regard to etymology with this word, even though it is only found once here in the word of God. A common trick of those who sold wine in the ancient world was to water it down. Those who had been drinking for awhile would not realize they were getting watered down wine after inebriation set in. In this way, the wine sellers would be able to sell watered down wine making more profit. This is where we get the term "huckster". The same idea is found in the Old Testament (Isa 1:22). Paul picks up this common term and applies it to those false apostles and teachers in his time. He noticed that their objective was to make a profit from the word of God. Just as in the time of Paul, there are those who fall as victim to their schemes. Things haven't changed that much when it comes to those seeking to deceive and part the unsuspecting from their money. Be aware that this same thing is going on today. In fact, it is very common. You should be aware and on guard for this type of racket.

In many cases, the so-called truth they peddle is not the truth at all. I am not saying that all those who are involved in selling the word of God do not have any truth; I am saying that as soon as someone wants to sell the word to me, my antennas go up. First, I will not buy the word of God since I know that God provides it free to anyone who desires to know the truth. I'm so glad that God sent the Holy Spirit for this very purpose, for "*He will guide you into all the truth*" (John 16:13b). It doesn't say that God would provide this for a price. I say that often these hucksters do not have the truth at all. This may be because their motive is not to handle the word accurately, but to come up with some clever idea, some quick fix, or some easy way to get God's favor or blessing. Many who are really not willing to allow God to change them through growing in grace and being transformed by the renovating power of the Spirit will fall prey to these deceiving and enticing messages.

These believers are like children, "*tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming*" (Eph 4:17b). Children will quickly be parted from their money because they are looking for a one shot fix. They do not operate based on experience, but on what appears exciting and enticing. These hucksters always have some new tape or CD series ready to sell. They promise deliverance, prosperity or some miraculous healing. One example is the Jabez phenomena. All you have to do is pray this prayer for X amount of days and you will be prospered. Well, this caught on in a large way. There were Jabez CDs, tapes, books, tee-shirts, posters and on and on. Many simply wanted the blessing and figured that whatever money was being asked of them was worth the price. You can go in bookstores today and still see Jabez things for sale. They remind me of those seeking to take advantage of those who want to live a healthy lifestyle. There is always some new herb or vitamin out that will simply transform your body into a lean mean energy machine. This is certainly nothing new, because it has been going on for years. Some examples would be Coral Calcium, Sea Silver, Noni and Gogi Juice, and too many more to name. Some of these products are OK, but *do not* deliver what they promise. When it comes to the word of God, *do not* fall for these schemes.

Since their goal is to profit, they do not care that they are selling the watered down and word. In many cases they appear to be mature or anointed (a popular term used today) but are themselves unbelievers or spiritual children. Many today are very rich from the sale of their wares and their constant begging for money. They are very good at what they do. They are experts at marketing their products and have even done demographic studies to best take advantage of the public. They parade their lifestyles before their victims and tell them they also can be super rich if they follow their instructions and buy their new CD series. They love gimmicks, which is why they are great advocates of tithing. They talk much about sowing and reaping. They are focused on parting you from your money. Our text in 2Cor 2:17 says they peddle the word for profit. Already, their motive is set on getting money, not building you up in your spiritual growth. My objective here is not to discover them because they have been around for a long time. My goal is to expose them and help those unsuspecting children of God to avoid them. Do not buy their tapes, CDs, DVDs or books. You do not need their watered down word.

A good idea used in a bad way

The modern technology of recording a message is a wonderful convenience. The benefits can be great. Those sick and shut in can still learn bible doctrine in their homes. Those in the hospital can still learn doctrine. Those incarcerated can learn and I can think of more situations where others can benefit from the word of God in this format. The internet has opened up a new medium of information for many and these recordings can easily be put out there for the world to hear. However, the moment a price is placed on this material; those selling it are sending a message. The message is clear to me. It is that you must pay in order to grow up in Christ. The new believer is said to be a babe in Christ (1Pet 2:2), and is encouraged to take in the sincere milk of the word. Our Lord said that we cannot live on bread alone, "*but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*" (Matt 4:4b). Our objective is to grow up, "*to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ*" (Eph 4:13b). Listening to recordings from those God has given the gift of Pastor-Teacher is an excellent way to assist in your spiritual growth. When a price is placed on this material, they are placing a price on spiritual growth, which should be free from God to everyone. Those who do not have any money are excluded from this information. Many do not see a problem with this but it is a problem for those who want to grow but do not have money for this material. As I mentioned earlier, this idea of profiting from those hungering and thirsting for the word is nothing new. It has been going on and is recorded in the word.

Examples from the word

We have the scriptures here to enlighten us to these practices. A prophet was an interesting character in the Old Testament. There were always those who claimed to know the future and could tell it for a price. Kings and Rulers depended on the supernatural to decide their course in going to war or not (see 1Kings 22:5-8). We find many examples of Kings consulting prophets to see if they would win in battle. Israel was a great nation but they failed God in many ways. Their weaknesses are recorded for us in the word and are too numerous for us to mention. However, there are a couple of passages which touch on our subject.

Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us. Micah 3: 11

Greed had become a source of corruption. These spiritual leaders could be bought and sold. Worse than that, it says the “*priests teach for a price*”. Does this sound familiar? It should because it is exactly what is going on today. These priests are not being commended, they are corrupt and are operating from a profit motive. God *hates* this motive in his leaders and priests and pronounces judgment upon them. “*Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest*” (Micah 3:12). If God judged this activity most severely then, we can expect Him to respond in a similar way now. We also have good council in the New Testament regarding this profit motive.

³If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, ⁴he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions ⁵and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. ⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1Tim 6:3-10

This whole passage precisely describes the problem. Note, the passage starts out by stating that these individuals are teaching false doctrine. Later in the passage their true motive is exposed- *greed* and the lust for riches. I believe this passage speaks loudly to the huge prosperity movement today in the Church, they think “*that godliness is a means to financial gain*”. They use Christianity to get rich. They tell those who support them that they also can be rich and that this is God’s will for their life. Many fall for this temptation. They promise financial blessings, healing and prosperity and today the lure of people to get rich is a strong temptation and a distraction for those who would pursue the spiritual life. Notice also it says that many have “*wandered from the faith*” because of their false motives. This means they have strayed from the way of doctrine while pursuing financial windfall. They are blinded by their greed and will not listen to sound doctrine.

This behavior is seriously wrong, especially for the leaders of the Church. God gives instructions to directly deal with this problem. The leaders should have the right motives, “*not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money*” (1Tim 3:3). There are plenty of other passages in the word dealing with this subject. Please take time to read some of them (1Tim 3:8; Tit 1:7, 11; 1Pet 5:2). These passages are in the word to help us avoid this temptation. Certainly our leaders need to be *free* from this lure if they are going to teach sound doctrine. The moment I see a Pastor or Church leader involved in selling the word of God, I think of all of these passages. I am certainly not interested in anything they have to say since they require that you *pay* first. Now, this is not to say they have nothing to say, for they might have something good to contribute, but I know they are involved in the commerce of selling the word of God for profit. Some will say that they use the money to further God’s kingdom. If that is their

logic, then providing it for free is certainly a greater motive since it has the potential of reaching even more people. The moment you place a price on the word, you *exclude* the many people you claim you want to reach!

If you really want to serve the body as a faithful minister, *do not* put a price on the word of God. What sacrifice and service are you providing if you ask to be paid for everything you provide? Give the word to whoever wants to hear it. If you cannot afford to do this, then you simply cannot do it. Many Churches collect large sums of money from donations and gifts; why not use that money to spread the word of God? If I received a request for a million copies of a CD, I would provide what I could afford to provide free of charge and trust God to make a way. Those involved in this commerce will find endless ways to justify themselves. Instead of justifying themselves for selling the word, they should be ashamed of their wrong behavior and confess this evil to God.

Partnering with Evil doers

Many will read these passages and say to themselves that they are free from this behavior. They will reason that they have never sold the word of God for profit and are convinced that it is wrong. Well, you may still be on the wrong side here. If you are involved in buying their products and supporting them financially, then you are a part of the problem. I'm going to have to take a stand here and resolve not to promote this behavior in any way. Many would never think of stealing from a store, to them, this behavior stinks. Yet, those same people may gladly buy stolen (hot) goods from those who steal them. I hope I don't have to tell you that this is dreadfully wrong behavior, and that you are supporting the thief and their criminal behavior when you simply buy their products. In a similar way, when you buy tapes, CDs, DVDs or their books from these modern day hucksters, you support them in their evil deeds. If you ask me, I will not buy their products and I will not support them in *any* way. I will not donate or give money to their ministries, organizations or to their Church; I will not give a dime to support them in their quest to profit from the word of God. I realize when I make this statement that so many of the Churches today practice this. The Church you belong to right now may practice this and you may have purchased many of their messages. This message is not given to pick on any Church or denomination in particular; it is to expose this evil practice which is spreading like gangrene.

For this commerce to take place, there are two willing participants, a buyer and seller. You have all heard of the expression, "buyer beware", this is certainly appropriate here. If you buy materials from a ministry, you should be aware that you are supporting a minister or ministry which *sells* the word of God. I should also re-phrase this to say- "giver beware". If you give to an organization involved in this behavior, you support them in their evil deeds. Before you support any ministry you should be aware of what they teach. We should know that God wants us to give. In fact, giving is a part of our worship, but that giving must be responsible. Since we already know what God's attitude is toward this practice and those who engage in it, we should make sure we follow His will and give to those who are seeking to do His will. No ministry is perfect, if you look long and hard enough, you may find someone or something you may not like. However, in this case, we know that God is against those who sell his word and promises judgment.

Appearances

There are some unbelievers who declare they will never come to Church because they are convinced that Churches are all greedy for money. They usually can site some examples of this behavior and they pat themselves on the back because they are too smart to be duped by this con. Is God concerned about this behavior? Yes! This is why He makes the point of Church leaders not being lovers of money. This is ugly and the world can see right through it. These unbelievers will listen for awhile, but they are just waiting for some clever pitch to part them from their money. Unfortunately, in many cases they are right. These Churches with hidden motives to get their money exist in abundance. Many Churches are all about the money. Some pass the offering plate 3 or more times until they get what they want. They use manipulation, emotion, gimmicks and anything else they can think of to prod people to give money. As a result, it is very easy for these unbelievers to confirm their suspicions when they see Churches involved in doing everything they can to get money. Many Churches practice tithing, this is not grace giving and is not an obligation in this age for those under grace. They put guilt trips on believers who cannot meet this obligation, which they borrowed from the law (See the Giving Policy). They tell those who can tithe that they are being blessed abundantly by God. So, with all this begging for money, the selling of books, tapes, CDs, DVDs, dinners, pies, bingo and any other revenue stream they can think of, these Churches do not appear to be for God, but for the almighty dollar.

Many Churches pleading that they are altruistic and honest insist they are doing God's work, but on the other hand are involved in all the things which appear to be greed for money. We have already noted God's opinion in many passages. The Church is to represent Christ on the earth. Churches should examine their practices in the area of finances to make sure they have not adopted ways and practices not according to the word of God. What is popular is not necessarily biblical! The Apostles accepted donations from believers, but they did not charge anyone for the word of God, or to teach them. This is why Paul admonishes, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil*" (1Thes 5:22). If your motives are pure, then depart from the ways of those who have false motives. There were many peddling the word in Paul's day. Paul would not be involved in selling the word, even if he thought it was for a good purpose. He said, "*We are not like so many...*" He separated himself from these false teachers and their ways. Furthermore, he wanted the Corinthians to know that he was different.

The Proper Attitude

Instead of seeking to make a profit from what God has given freely, what should be our attitude? "*On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God*" (2Cor 2:17). Speaking with sincerity means to speak with clearness or purity of motives. In this context, that would mean to be free from the profit motive. Notice that the sincerity is "*like men sent from God.*" The message we carry is not something we cleverly created, it is the precious message of God! Paul has been called to be a faithful messenger of that word. There are more important things than making money and being wealthy in this world. Paul realizes that he is a man sent from God. The message he carries is a message of deliverance of the lost. Instead of being paid, Paul

said, “*I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish*” (Rom 1:14). Instead of being paid, Paul felt he owed them! He felt he was under obligation to give the gospel to those who are lost. Then as he ministered among them after they were saved, he realized that even though he had a right to receive support from the Corinthians, he did not exercise that right.

Paul’s Boast

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. (1Co 9:15).

In 1st Corinthians 9, Paul makes his boast that he did not take any support for his needs from the Corinthians. Paul is letting us know that this must have been a point of contention with this Church, for he says that before he took anything from them, he “*would rather die...*” At the same time, he asserts that he has rights. He refers to his rights to be paid and supported by the Corinthian Church. He gives biblical support for his support and reasons with them to establish to them that he should be paid, but he would not take a dime from them. This also establishes the principle that Pastors of flocks should be paid. The congregation has an obligation to provide for the Pastor’s support. Many Churches today understand this principle, but many do not and feel that the Pastor should support himself just as they do, but this is the force of Paul’s argument that they do in fact deserve to be supported. Take time to read the reasoning of Paul’s boast.

⁷Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? ⁸Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ⁹For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain. "Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? ¹²If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. ¹³Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? ¹⁴In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. 1Corinthians 9:7-14

Paul could not boast at all if he did not have the right to receive compensation from the Corinthians. The fact that he did not take any payment is the point of his boast. From this we firmly establish that those who labor in the service of God should also receive compensation. I believe that God wants His people to take care of the minister’s needs in order that they may devote their full attention to His work. We can learn much from this portion of scripture regarding compensation. It is not wrong for a Pastor to work, and we see Paul working with his hands in order to support himself. However, this is not God’s ideal design. The Pastor is God’s under-shepherd, leading and keeping watch over the flock. This job is a tremendous responsibility and God wants the Pastor’s full attention on this work. If the Pastor’s attention is divided into two or three jobs, they

cannot effectively provide for the flock. However, because this is commonly known, there are many lining up to be Pastors whom God has not called! Many are looking at the qualifications of a Pastor and thinking to themselves, "I can do that." As a result, there are many in ministries who have not been called by God, but by their own greed.

God's system for support

We should be careful to make sure we do not develop an attitude of despair. Many have withdrawn from Churches and feel that every one of them is just in it for the money. God has established a support system for the leaders of the Church- and it works! Some have lost their confidence in God's system, but it is ordained and God expects His people to follow through with it. It is like the notion that some have developed that they do not need a Pastor to lead them at all. They feel they can grow up on their own by reading and studying their bibles at home. Again, God has a system for each to grow up in Christ. We cannot avoid His plan to depend on the Pastor-Teacher and think we will make it to maturity. It simply will *not* work. God's system does not need tweaking, it does not need to be updated or modified, it is perfect! If you are one who thinks God system of supporting those in the ministry is not to be followed, read the following:

¹⁷The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." (1Tim 5:17, 18).

First, we should see from this verse that God has indeed ordained the compensation of his Pastors. In fact, Paul notes those doing a good job should be doubly compensated. In other words, this calling must be very important to the body. God does not want Pastors to focus on money at all or worry about making their way in this world. Then Paul quotes two verses to show from the scripture that this has always been God's design. He quotes one verse from the Old Testament and the other from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ (Deut 25:4; Luke 10:7). This compensation consists of food, shelter, clothing as well as money. I want to be sure that it is understood that I am *not* against God's system of payment, but am all for it. I believe that the Church will be blessed as they free up the Pastor to devote his full attention to "*preaching and teaching*." Paul also believed in God's system and while he was determined to not take any compensation from the Corinthians because of their arrogance, but he did gladly receive it from others (see Phil 4:14-18).

No price on the gospel

In all this, Paul did not put a price tag on the gospel. Paul knew he had rights to receive payment for his labor in the word, but he did not charge for the word. The Pastor receives compensation from the congregation, or from other believers, but he is *not* to be engaged in the commerce of the word of God. There is a difference and I hope you are able to see it. The Minister should be paid, but not by selling the word of God. He is to be paid by the congregation, or by believers moved to give to him. If you do not see a difference in this, all you have to do is look at Paul's own testimony- "*For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word...*" (2Co 2:17a). Paul says here that he is not engaged in the sale of the word of God for profit. The moment you put a price on the word, you are selling it!

In Conclusion

The Church is unique in this world, there is nothing like her. She is made up of believers all over the world. Every saved person is a member of the Church regardless of denominational boundaries. The Church is the body of Christ in this world and in this role, we are Christ's representatives in the world. With the ministry of the Spirit, we can bring Jesus Christ to this world in a real way. I believe this buying and selling has gotten out of hand, and it is dishonoring to the ministry. Paul said, "*We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited*" (2Cor 6:3). Many see Christianity as a joke, a scam and do not take the Church seriously. There are many who look at televangelists and envy them. They aspire to be just like them and try to copy their model.

Many are determined to be wealthy in this world. Many have ambitions of gaining a position of wealth in this world and *then*, when they finally reach that goal, they will be better able to serve God. You don't need to be wealthy to serve God. I think many justify the lust for riches by using the idea that they will somehow be a great benefactor of the Church if they are rich. They would really be able to give *then*, they would have all the time they needed to serve *then*, they would be free to be in the ministry full time *then*, but for many the "*then*" never comes. It is like a carrot dangling before them, always just inches from their grasp; it is just enough out of reach to keep them bound in their false motivations. However, making commerce of the word of God is not the answer to getting rich. Just because many are doing it today does not mean it is a noble pursuit. In truth, if you follow the crowd, you will likely be led into evil.

I was just listening to the radio and there was a voice advertising a minister's products. In addition to offering sermons for sale, they were now offering excerpts from sermons which were humorous. So, if you want to have fun and laugh, buy this CD of a collection of funny things this minister has said from the pulpit. I am not against humor at all, but now, since they have realized a revenue stream from selling the word, they are branching into comedy to get even more money! This is not the first time I have heard of this, but it is certainly not something to be admired and duplicated. As minds are motivated by money, they will devise even more ways for them to make a profit from the sale of God. What would Jesus do? I have no doubt what he would do if He was present based on what he did in His day.

¹⁴In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" John 2:14-16

What can we do?

The only way we can hinder this practice of selling the word of God for profit is to first be knowledgeable of God's thinking on the subject. Once we know it is wrong, we can begin to place it where it belongs. We should know that this is not God's plan for supporting the ministry. Those involved in this practice should begin to evaluate their lives in the light of this. I have never sold the word of God, but I have purchased it. I will not

purchase another CD, DVD or tape from anyone selling the word for profit. Anything Word-is-Truth produces will be free to anyone who wants it. God is not pleased with this behavior. If you want to lend support to a ministry, look for a grace ministry not engaged in this practice. You may have to take some time to find one, but they are out there. The Word-is-Truth ministry will certainly stand on God's word and *never* sell the word of God. There are other ministries out there who are true to the word of God in this area. Remember, this is not the only criteria for supporting a ministry or Church; they should be true to the word of God and teach the gospel of grace and whole realm of bible doctrine. We must learn to give responsibly. Before you support a false ministry, I would suggest keeping your money until you find a grace ministry.

We have already established that God desires to support those with double honor who labor in the word, preaching and teaching. This says that God values what he has gifted them to bring to the body of Christ. They have an important calling and God wants their full attention to be on the word. Their needs are to be taken care of so that they can focus on the word. Many ministers are more focused on marketing than the word. They are busy thinking of how they can strike it rich in this world instead of digging deep into the word for precious pearls and communicating them to everyone who will listen. A Pastor needs a supporting congregation. Behind every good Pastor is a loving and caring congregation, made up of individuals who understand the value of how God is working through the Pastor-Teacher. The members are blessed by growing in grace through the leadership and teaching provided. The Pastor must understand their first responsibility is supporting congregation. They must take care of home before they can worry about the world.

What would the body of Christ be like if it were free from greed? Many think that this selling the word will enable them to spread the gospel. I think this selling of the word of God is a drag on the growth of the Church universal. Many ministers are working hard to produce a product, write a book that will be a best seller, put out a CD/DVD series that will be a great sell. Do they really want to impact the people of God? We cannot really know unless the profit motive is removed. If they are selling everything they produce, how can it be known that their motive is pure and free from greed? I submit the only way is to make everything free. Knowing that what is produced will not create a revenue stream that will make them rich, they may just produce for the proper motive- *"to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ"* (Eph 4:12, 13). Would they produce if they were not getting a revenue stream? Maybe this may separate those who are sincere from those who are seeking riches.

Finally, whatever truth we have, it comes from the Lord. Truth from God must not be turned into a good idea to get lots of money; it is illumination from the word of God, it is God revealing Himself to us. Truth does not originate in us; it *belongs* to God, *"thy word is truth."* If you seek to sell this truth for profit, you should know that is spiritual plagiarism in the worst way. You are taking something that did not belong to you and selling it as if it was yours. As the scripture says, *"Freely you received, freely give"* (Matt 10:8b). We Pastors are not light brokers, we are light bearers. Personally, I find great joy in studying and teaching the word of God. In one way, I already have my reward in the word, and it is a blessing to be able to teach the word. Let me leave you with a couple of passages to think about in closing.

First, this passage speaks to Pastors:

¹To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ²Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1Pet 5: 1-4.

This next passage is addressed to all:

¹⁰Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1Pet 4: 10, 11.

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