

Ministry For Sale

Unfortunately I have forgotten which book, otherwise I would give it credit. But I remember reading in a book many years ago where the author was saying how God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, (Psalm 50), but when so many churches need money we sell hot dogs or sausages and our second hand junk to the community to get a few dollars. The author was lamenting because God will provide for his ministry and he doesn't need to sell sausages, and he certainly doesn't need to beg for a few dollars from our non-Christian neighbours.

Now while I imagine there are many well meaning and lovely Christians out there who sell the sausages and bake the cakes, I have to agree with him.

If God wants a ministry done, he will surely provide the resources, and all we have to do is pray and trust him to do so, and give him the opportunity.

Somehow related to all that, is the modern trend of charging for ministry.

Firstly, it is not biblical for Christians to all pay the same amount for anything. In the Bible contributions were always supposed to be related to the ability to pay. If you have more, you should contribute more, if you have less, you need contribute less. In fact, if you don't have enough you shouldn't have to pay at all.

So if we have to pay at all for ministry, it should be by donation and nobody should be made to feel like they need to contribute any particular amount.

I believe that charging for ministry is built on our lack of faith in God to provide. (The other option is that we're just plain greedy and we love money, but let's assume the best and go with lack of faith).

Keith Green was a famous Christian musician in the early 1980's. He had already signed a deal with a recording company when he came to the realisation that God did not want him charging for his music because it was a ministry. (After all, if your ministry is done by the Spirit of God, it's hardly fair for you to get paid for it is it!). He tried to convince other musicians and Christian authors, but with little success. His record company also wouldn't let him out of his contract. So he declared that if you felt you couldn't afford his music, all you had to do was write to him, and he would send you one for free. He paid the record company himself, and sent it out to those who asked, for free. Nice.

In 2 Kings 5 we read how Namaan, a foreign military commander, came to Israel to see Elisha. Namaan was seeking healing for his leprosy from Yahweh, God of the Jews. After Elisha prayed, Namaan washed in the Jordan and he was healed. Namaan offered to pay, but Elisha refused to accept payment for ministry. His servant Gehazi was not so honourable. Gehazi chased after Namaan and told him that Elisha had changed his mind. When Elisha found out, he cursed Gehazi with the leprosy from which Namaan had been healed.

God doesn't need money from non-believers. And he certainly doesn't want us charging fees for work that he has done through his Holy Spirit. Whether it's healing, preaching, teaching, music or writing. If God does it then it should be free.

(Of course if you think God is not in your ministry and it's all you, then go ahead and charge).

Now I'm not saying that if you are a full time worker in the church that you shouldn't be paid. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paulus says that he does have the right to be supported by the church where he was teaching. (But he didn't exercise it, he would rather do extra work on the side than have anyone be able to say he was just trying to profit from the gospel).

And even then, there is a big difference between being supported while you work there, and charging for a specific ministry. This is very different from charging admission. Or charging a fee to copy or download a sermon. Or even charging for a song or a book which has Christian teaching. I know there are costs involved with some ministry. But let's trust God to provide those costs instead of just doing the math and charging everyone for something that should be free.

Let's stop begging from non-Christians. In fact, let's start refusing to take their money.

And let's give God the chance to bring glory to himself by providing for our needs as we minister for him, rather than just opening ourselves up to the, (justifiable), charge that we are just after people's money.