

A Biblical Theology of Supporting Pastors and Vicars

Note: This paper is on the topic of church members supporting their pastors and vicars. This information should be understood by pastors and vicars and taught to their congregations. However, these topics should be covered first:

1. The Bible is true!
2. God created the world and all good things!
3. All have sinned and are helpless to save themselves!
4. Jesus lived in our place (without sin), took our eternal punishment, and is risen victorious!
5. God is calling everyone to repent – to admit their helplessness, confess their sins, trust in Jesus alone as their Savior, and honor Jesus as Lord by doing all that He commanded!

After those topics are taught, understood, and believed; *then teach what follows!*

The Bible presents a clear and consistent pattern of supporting pastors and vicars: those who are called to devote themselves to preaching, teaching, and shepherding God's people may rightly receive material support from those they serve. At the same time, this support is never viewed as a commercial transaction or a means of personal enrichment. Rather, it is an act of gratitude to God, a recognition of the value of the ministry of the Gospel, and a means by which the Church carries out Christ's mission. Below is a biblical theology organized around the major themes.

I. God Established the Principle Before the New Testament

1. The Levites were supported by God's people Numbers 18:20-21

"The LORD said to Aaron, 'You shall have no inheritance in their land... I am your portion and your inheritance... To the sons of Levi... I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform.'"

Key Principle

- Those devoted to God's public ministry were freed from ordinary occupations.
- God provided for them through the offerings of His people.
- The support ultimately came from God, though delivered through the congregation.

2. Deuteronomy 18:1-5

The priests and Levites received portions of the sacrifices and firstfruits.

Principle

God Himself arranged for His ministers to be supported.

II. Jesus Established the Same Principle

1. Jesus sent out the Twelve

Matthew 10:9-10

"The worker is worthy of his support."

(compare also Luke 10:7)

Jesus instructed His disciples:

- do not accumulate wealth
- accept hospitality
- receive support
- devote themselves to preaching

Key Principle

Those preaching Christ should ordinarily be supported by those benefiting from their ministry.

III. Jesus Himself Was Supported

Luke 8:1-3

Women including:

- Mary Magdalene
- Joanna
- Susanna

"...were contributing to their support out of their private means."

Principle

Even Jesus accepted financial support for His earthly ministry.

IV. Paul Teaches That Ministers Have the Right to Support

This is the clearest biblical section.

1 Corinthians 9:3-14

Paul builds several arguments.

Argument 1

A soldier does not serve at his own expense.
(v.7)

Argument 2

A farmer eats from his vineyard.
(v.7)

Argument 3

A shepherd drinks the milk.
(v.7)

Argument 4

The Law of Moses
(vv.8-10)

"You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing."

Paul explains this principle applies to Gospel workers.

Argument 5

Spiritual blessings are greater than material blessings.
(v.11)

"If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?"

Argument 6

Temple priests received support.
(v.13)

Argument 7

Jesus commanded it.
(v.14)

"So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel."

Observations

Notice Paul says:

- the Lord commanded it
- ministers have the right
- this is not merely Paul's opinion

V. Paul Sometimes Refused That Right

Paul also explains:

"I have used none of these things."
(1 Corinthians 9:15)

Why? To remove obstacles to the Gospel.

In places where false teachers charged money or where his motives might be questioned, Paul voluntarily supported himself.

This was:

- voluntary
- exceptional
- not presented as the normal model

VI. Churches Shared Financially with Paul

Philippians 4:14-18

The church repeatedly sent gifts.

Paul calls them:

- a fragrant aroma
- an acceptable sacrifice
- pleasing to God

Supporting ministry became worship.

2 Corinthians 11:8-9

Paul says

"I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you."

The point:

Other congregations supported Paul's ministry elsewhere.

VII. Those Taught Should Support Their Teachers

Galatians 6:6

"The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him."

This is perhaps the simplest statement in Scripture:

- Teacher
- Learner
- Material sharing

VIII. Elders Who Preach Should Receive Compensation

1 Timothy 5:17-18

"The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."

Paul then quotes:

"You shall not muzzle the ox..."

and

"The laborer is worthy of his wages."

"Double honor"

Most conservative commentators understand this to include:

- respect
- financial support.

Paul immediately quotes passages about wages.

IX. The Church Has Responsibility Toward Its Ministers

Hebrews 13:17

The congregation is instructed to obey and support faithful spiritual leaders.

Although financial support is not explicitly mentioned, the entire context assumes ongoing pastoral ministry that requires the church's care.

X. Peter's Balance

1 Peter 5:1-3

Pastors are not to serve

"for sordid gain."

Two truths exist together:

Pastors

- should not seek ministry to become wealthy.

Congregations

- should willingly support faithful pastors.

XI. The Biblical Purposes of Congregational Support

Support allows pastors to:

- devote themselves to prayer.
- devote themselves to preaching.
- teach God's Word.
- visit the sick.
- evangelize.
- disciple believers.
- administer Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- shepherd the flock.

This echoes the priorities described in [Acts 6:2-4](#), where the apostles devoted themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

XII. What About Vicars?

The Bible does not mention the modern office of "vicar" as understood in many Lutheran churches. A vicar is a pastoral intern or apprentice rather than a separate biblical office. Nevertheless, biblical principles support providing for those who are preparing for and actively participating in Gospel ministry.

Relevant passages include:

- [2 Timothy 2:2](#) — training faithful men who will teach others.
- [Acts 16:1-3](#) — Timothy accompanies Paul in ministry.
- [Philippians 2:19-22](#) — Timothy serves alongside Paul like "a son with his father."

Since vicars assist in preaching, teaching, visiting, evangelism, and pastoral care while receiving practical training, it is fitting for congregations to support them according to the same principles that apply to those engaged in Gospel ministry.

XIII. Biblical Safeguards

The New Testament also establishes safeguards.

Pastors should:

- not love money ([1 Timothy 3:3](#)).
- not serve for dishonest gain ([Titus 1:7](#)).
- not exploit the flock ([1 Peter 5:2-3](#)).
- be examples to the flock.

Congregations should:

- willingly support faithful ministers.
 - not neglect those who labor in preaching and teaching.
 - recognize that supporting Gospel ministry is part of Christian stewardship.
-

XIV. Summary of the Biblical Teaching

The Bible consistently teaches the following:

1. God established the principle of supporting His ministers in the Old Testament ([Numbers 18](#); [Deuteronomy 18](#)).
2. Jesus affirmed that "the worker is worthy of his wages" and directed those who proclaim the Gospel to receive their living from it ([Matthew 10](#); [Luke 10](#)).
3. Jesus Himself accepted material support during His ministry ([Luke 8:1-3](#)).
4. Paul strongly defended the right of Gospel ministers to receive financial support, even though he sometimes chose to forgo that right for the sake of the Gospel ([1 Corinthians 9](#)).
5. Congregations are instructed to share materially with those who teach them ([Galatians 6:6](#)) and to provide "double honor" to elders who labor in preaching and teaching ([1 Timothy 5:17-18](#)).
6. Ministers must never view the ministry as a means of personal enrichment, but congregations should regard supporting faithful ministers as an act of worship, stewardship, and partnership in the Gospel ([Philippians 4:14-18](#); [1 Peter 5:1-3](#)).

Taken together, these passages present a coherent biblical theology:

- Christ has ordained that those who devote themselves to the ministry of His Word ordinarily receive their material support from the Church, so that they may give themselves fully to preaching, teaching, prayer, and shepherding God's people.
- This support is not payment for the Gospel itself—which is freely given—but the Church's faithful provision for those whom God has called to serve in that ministry.