

The Dark Side of Megachurch Money: When Fundraising Replaces the Gospel

A growing conversation within the church today revolves around a simple but difficult question: Should megachurch pastors make money from ministry, and at what cost?

In a recent discussion on the Shawn Ryan Show, filmmaker Nathan Apffel wrestled with the tension between the biblical call to discipleship and the modern reality of running churches as institutions.

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On the surface, many agree that it is not wrong for pastors or ministers to be compensated. After all, buildings require maintenance, technology needs to be managed and congregations expect basic comforts like air conditioning, child care and security. “I don’t think it’s a bad thing,” Ryan said. “I think it is a good thing that people congregate together in the name [of Christ]. People want to be comfortable when they worship.”

However, underneath these practical needs lies a deeper concern for Apffel. According to his perspective, no matter how well-intentioned a pastor begins, the financial pressures of sustaining a church often reshape the message being preached.

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A new pastor, full of zeal to point people to Christ quickly discovers the cost of running even a modest congregation. With monthly expenses easily reaching six figures, the pressure to secure funding grows. Tithing sermons become a regular necessity. "One out of eight weeks, your message is on tithing," Apffel explained. "As the budget grows, suddenly it's two out of eight weeks. Then three, with fundraising appeals added at the end."

The cycle intensifies as churches compete for members, often upgrading facilities to match or surpass neighboring congregations. What starts as preaching the gospel slowly tilts toward sustaining the institution. "Every pastor that plays in that game dies to the game," Apffel concluded.

This critique does not dismiss the need for resources, nor does it deny the good that comes from community gathering spaces. Yet the core question remains whether churches are continuing to focus on the main thing: Jesus Christ.

"Christ said to pick up your cross and follow me and make disciples of men," Apffel emphasized. "He did not say to build buildings. And I'm not saying that's necessarily bad, but everything you just described is just men building things."

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From this perspective, true ministry begins at home – raising children in Christ-centered values, discipling within families and living out faith in everyday community. The biblical model of church, above all, is believers connected in authentic relationships.

Ultimately, the challenge for pastors and congregations alike is whether resources can be used without being ruled by them –

whether the message of Christ can remain central amid the weight of institutional demands.

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