

The Myth of Doing Ministry to Get Rich

I'm sure there are pastors, evangelists and Christian leaders who have gotten rich off the gospel, but they are few and far between. The idea that many of us are in ministry for the sake of money is simply a myth.

Still, almost every day, I'll receive hate mail like this: "Stop lying in order to sell your hate-filled book using the media to spew that ugliness within you"; and, "What a disgusting excuse for a human being. You want to lash out & persecute the LGBT community but you sure don't mind making money off of them in your book. The only thing you seem to know about God is that His name is printed on the dollar bill."

Why do people have this notion that Christians go into ministry to make money? Where do people get the idea that there's a lot of money to be made in writing books for a Christian audience?

I've been writing regularly since the late 1980s, and I know very few, if any, Christian authors who are full-time book writers. Almost all of them are involved in other ministry or secular work in order to make a living and provide for their families.

Not only so, but many of us who lead ministries or churches don't receive personal royalties for our writings. Instead, those royalties are donated to our ministry organizations, which in turn use those funds for other ministry work. (For the record, this is the arrangement I have with more than 20 of my 27 books: I receive no personal income from them.)

More importantly, I don't know a single Christian author who writes to get rich. Again, those who get rich by writing

spiritually-oriented books, much less socially-oriented books, are as rare as the latest bird on the nearly extinct list.

We write because we have a message to get out.

We write because we're burdened.

We write because that's one of the greatest expressions the Lord has given us.

It's the same with this article that you're reading right now (on whatever website you're reading it). No one paid me to write it, nor, for the most part, did they pay any of the other writers whose articles you read on these sites. (The exception would be a staff member of the organization, one whose job it is to write and edit.)

Why then do we write day and night?

It's because we're burdened to do so, because there's a message we want to get out, because we want to equip people to do God's work, because we want to expose darkness, because we want truth to triumph. That's why we do it.

Writing is a privilege and joy, a sacred calling from the Lord. At least it is in my book.

It's the same with preaching and teaching and pastoring and doing overseas missions work and evangelism and feeding the poor.

We do all this out of love for God and love for our neighbor, and if the ministry or church is substantial enough, we are able to draw a salary for the work we do (which Jesus and Paul affirmed as a biblical principle, namely, that the laborer was worth his pay and that those who preached the gospel should make their living by the gospel).

But once again, I personally do not have a single close ministry colleague who does God's work to get rich. (Honestly,

even to write those words sounds like I'm making a poor joke.)

Aside from the fact that, generally speaking, you will make less money doing ministry work than secular work, it is only people of corrupt mind (to use Paul's words in 1 Timothy 6) who see godliness as a means of financial gain.

Rather, we do the Lord's work out a holy calling, and since we do it full time, normally putting in a lot more than 40 hours a week (and I mean a lot more), we earn our living from the ministry.

What about those who have gotten rich off the gospel?

If God has supernaturally blessed them for their honest ministry—perhaps a rich donor decides to give them a massive personal gift or they wrote a bestselling book or penned a song that became internationally famous—that's between them and God, and we should not begrudge them, especially if they are good stewards. Let Him bless those whom He wants to bless, whether they're doing ministry work or secular work. We need never make excuses for the Father's provision.

But if they have gotten rich by exploiting others, by setting exorbitant salaries, by merchandising their message for carnal gain, by living off the sacrificial gifts of the poor, then they will have to answer to God for every dime they have received. The Bible renounces ministry-related greed in the strongest possible terms (see, for example, Jeremiah 6:13-14; Titus 1:11; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11), and I would hate to be in the shoes of those who use the gospel to fleece God's flock of funds.

You might say, "But I see large 'love offerings' being taken up for guest speakers. That seems like a lot of money to get for preaching one message."

Yes, it can look like that, but again, in most cases, the money doesn't go to the person but to the ministry they lead,

and if they received \$10,000 or \$100,000, that wouldn't affect their salary. That would only bring in more funds for ministry work.

In the case of the ministry I lead—which includes a daily, live two-hour radio broadcast, a weekly TV show, Jewish outreach, teaching and preaching throughout America and around the world, being a voice of moral, cultural, and spiritual revolution, equipping laborers for the harvest, and helping to support those laborers—less than 25% of the funds we receive are used to pay salaries.

In other words, more than 75% of our income goes out to pay the bills and underwrite the larger ministry work.

That means that if you donated \$1 million to our ministry tomorrow (and we would gladly receive it!), none of it would go into my pocket or the pockets of my team, other than being used in part to cover normal salaries if our funds were depleted.

It's the same thing with your local church (if it is run properly). Your pastor will not keep the extra money that comes in for himself if the offering is large one Sunday. Instead, that money will be accounted for and used to meet the ongoing needs of the church.

And in the cases of smaller ministries or churches, funds tend to be very tight, so that the guest speaker, after the meeting is over, is trying to figure out how to get a check to his wife so she can pay the electric bill, or the pastor is counting the offering with one of his deacons to see if they can pay the rent on their building.

Scenarios like that are a lot more common than the ones we commonly think of, like that of a superstar pastor cavorting around in his limo.

For every one of those guys, there are multiplied thousands

who are just getting by.

Added to this is the fact that many (most?) ministers don't have adequate retirement accounts, which makes it all the more laughable that people would do the work of ministry for the purposes of financial gain.

I can assure you that when we are on our knees praying in funds (and that is quite often), it is not to make us into millionaires. Instead, it is to believe God for the money to do the work He has called us to do.

It really is tragic that a few bad (and very greedy) apples can make everyone else look bad, but it's high time to expose the lie that most ministers are in it for the money.

Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The ministry is sacred work, and the funds we receive enable us to do that work all the more effectively, and as our personal needs are met, we can better meet the needs of others.

And as we each do our part, the body of Christ will be strengthened, the world will be touched, and Jesus will be glorified.

Michael Brown is the host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show *The Line of Fire* and is the president of *FIRE School of Ministry*. His newest book (September 2015) is *Outlasting the Gay Revolution: Where Homosexual Activism Is Really Going and How to Turn the Tide*. Connect with him on Facebook at *AskDrBrown* or on Twitter *@drmichaellbrown*