

Is It Right for a Minister to Live in a Mansion?

It is rather prevalent in America for megachurch pastors and mega-ministers to live in luxury. I could name a few names, but that is not the purpose of this article. God is the judge of every man and every minister. However, it is common knowledge that there are ministers today who own multi-million dollar homes, with some having multiple ones in different places, while living a life fit for kings. Is this right? Is it godly? What does Scripture say about it?

The apostle Paul may be our best example. In 1 Corinthians 9 he writes that his apostolic office entitled him to certain privileges, but he renounced them for the sake of reaching the Corinthians and the lost world with the gospel. Nonetheless, the rights he renounced were not to live in a mansion or to lounge in luxury, but to simply be compensated for preaching the gospel. Think about that in contrast to some of today's ministers who will actually defend their right to be rich, to indulge in extravagance and own a multi-million-dollar mansion.

We should understand that Paul had a right to financial support, and it was perfectly reasonable for him to be compensated for his labor in ministry. In fact, he lists three reasons that justify receiving such support. First, he wrote that society dictates that those who render a service, such as soldiers, farmers and shepherds, ought to receive compensation for their work (1 Cor. 9:7). Second, he writes that the Mosaic Law prescribed a just recompense for those rendering a service—a principle which is applied to even working animals like an ox that treads out the corn (1 Cor. 9:8-13). And third, Paul states that the Lord Himself commands the principle of financial support for those who preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14). Yet in spite of all these scriptural reasons to

receive financial compensation, Paul still did not insist on these rights. Remember, this was not a sin issue. He would not have been out of favor with God if he decided differently. He simply renounced this right for the sake of the people. If he had insisted on the right to remuneration, his motives could have been questioned and the work of the gospel might have been hindered (For more on dealing with the motives of the heart, refer to *Purity Of Heart*).

After Paul makes his case for receiving financial support, ironically, he lists three other reasons for giving up his rights. First, his unique calling as an apostle and the necessity and stewardship of that office caused him to surrender that right (1 Cor. 9:15-18). Second, his evangelistic motivations to reach the Jew and Gentile alike caused him to be a servant to all (1 Cor. 9:19-23). He was constrained by the weaknesses of others that he might win them to Christ. And third, Paul lays out a case for self-discipline, so that after he'd preached to others he would not be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:24-27). It was vitally important to him not to lose his place with God and his crown and reward. Where is this mind-set among ministers today?

The apostle Paul went to great lengths to enter the world of others and lead them to salvation. I believe one of the reasons for the American church's ineffectiveness today in reaching the world with the gospel is because there is a great mistrust of ministers among them. The world is not stupid. They see the wealth of many of these big ministers and the luxury they live in. They are also aware of the many scandals that have come to light in recent years concerning some of these ministers. They see the glaring hypocrisy. They see the superficiality. This lack of holiness and true character has eroded the honor and respect that otherwise the world might have for ministers.

I believe one of the greatest needs in the church today is for ministers to regain the trust of the world. The world needs to

see integrity, humility, servanthood, sacrifice and suffering. They need to see authenticity and the highest form of love. To be candid, the ministry in the West has been contaminated. The church is defiled. It is a travesty, and much worse than many within the church have even thought.

Although the apostle Paul justified his apostleship and his right to be compensated for his ministry, he takes the higher road of humility, servanthood and sacrifice and illustrates the way of love. Love will go to extremes to reach others with the gospel without charge and to make sure the word of God is not made void in people's lives.

In essence, Paul made a vow of poverty in order to reach the world with the gospel. "A vow of poverty?" you say. "Poverty is a curse! We've been redeemed from the curse! You are preaching heresy!" I can hear the screams already—proof perhaps that this topic is a giant sacred cow that many will defend to the death. Hear me out and learn one of the great secrets of the effectiveness of Paul's ministry.

Although I most assuredly believe that God prospers and blesses His people, and there are plenty of Scriptures to make a case for that end of things, we as ministers and people of God, for the sake of others who are weak and do not possess this knowledge, must surrender that right. That's the whole point of this article.

Let me explain further. I used the word "poverty" to get your attention. I do believe poverty is a curse and not a blessing, but the poverty I am speaking of is where you will not abuse the rights of being compensated for the gospel and use it for personal gain. You will not abuse the public trust and financial support you receive from your donors for your own pocket.

It is not my purpose here to delve into the theology of money, but the heart of it. After all, money is not evil, but the

love of it is the root of all evil (see 1 Tim. 6:10). There are many facets of truths and schools of thought concerning money, and there is plenty of content given to it in Jesus' ministry.

Much of what I hear taught today, however, is on God's will to prosper us and how financial prosperity is a part of the gospel. Undoubtedly, some of the more extreme and excessive teachings have done more harm than good to the cause of Christ.

What I'm not hearing much of today is this: What about stewardship and sacrifice? What about doing without, so others can be blessed? What about living to give? There is a higher level of consecration which is determined not only by how much you give away, but by how much (little) you keep (Mark 12:41-44).

Jesus chose not to call on the Father for twelve legions of angels to deliver Him from a sure death (Matt. 26:53) and our redemption. He chose not to heap up riches for Himself. He chose not to accumulate this world's wealth. But He emptied Himself of everything for us. This is the lifestyle Jesus exemplified before His disciples. This is the example Paul set for the church and its ministers.

It's time for American ministers to do the same and to regain the trust we've lost. {eoa}