

THE LORD'S SERVANT

In the Local Church

A Study From Scripture
& Application

by Chuck Gianotti

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READ THIS FIRST!

Some may think writing on a subject like fulltime ministry in the local church is a moot subject. What's the big deal—simply hire a pastor and let him do his thing. On the other hand, some think that if the elders are functioning properly, the need for a fulltime pastor will be rendered unnecessary and unbiblical. But there is a middle ground espoused in Scripture that is critical for us today, one that is often overlooked or dismissed.

This subject, fulltime ministry for the Lord in the local church, is significant and warrants in-depth biblical study for a number of reasons:

The church's ministry is greatly impacted by its understanding of the nature of fulltime ministry. How the fulltime worker and the church relate to one another directly affects the fruitfulness of the church. It can affect the health of the body as well as the numerical growth of the body.

The life work of one or more individuals is profoundly affected. Misunderstanding, miscommunication and differing expectations can significantly impact the joy and well-being of the fulltime servant of God and his family.

A substantial amount of money is involved. Support for a fulltime pastoral worker can be one of the larger budget items in most churches' finances.

Very little has been written in depth on this subject. Assumptions are easily made and embraced without a thorough study of this subject. On the one hand the pastoral model is so pervasively endorsed and practiced by the majority of churches that the thought of a church not having a pastor seems extreme and almost cultic. It is assumed that the Bible teaches this practice, yet there is little serious defense of this perspective from the Word of God. On the other hand, the pendulum can swing in the opposite direction, when some insist that having a fulltime person in the local church is *always* unbiblical because it implicitly, in their minds, violates the plurality-of-elders principle and the priesthood of all believers. Again, the arguments

proffered are biblically unconvincing and frequently based on *fear* of a “one-man ministry” rather than sound biblical interpretation.

I believe the Word of God teaches that there *is* a place for those who are called by the Lord into *fulltime* ministry in the local church. Further, I believe the biblical picture differs from the standard protestant “Pastor” model. This short book presents a biblical understanding of fulltime ministry in the church, how it is to be viewed and how it can work in practical terms.

A Special Note of Clarification: What we are writing about in this book has to do with workers who are financially supported in their work in the local church. However, there are many individuals who may serve just as well or give just as much time who are not supported for their work. This may be due to their living on a pension, being independently wealthy or having other means of income. The work and relationship to the local church is the same. The question we are writing about here is the special situation of a worker in the local church who is being supported by that church.

Necessarily, writing on a topic like this will reflect some limitations. On the one hand, this subject will probably not be taken up by one who is not in fulltime ministry because of his lack of time, interest or the insight to write adequately on the subject. A fulltime worker, on the other hand, who undertakes this may be perceived as self-serving or self-promoting. With that caveat I humbly offer the following thoughts and analysis for the reader’s consideration.

Chuck Gianotti, June 2009
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INTRODUCTION

All Christians are called to “fulltime” ministry for the Lord, in the broadest sense of the word, and to live by faith. Some who work in secular employ bristle when they hear it said of fulltime Christian workers that they live “by faith.” The objection is valid, in that all Christians are called to live by faith, not just those who have left secular employment. For most, their fulltime ministry assignment involves being Christ’s ambassador as they infiltrate the secular work world. By secular, however, we don’t mean secondary—the Lord strategically places Christians all over the world into many different jobs, careers and vocations. They are the Lord’s representatives, modeling Christ-likeness and sharing His love and truth everyday as they rub shoulders with non-Christians. Their jobs, no matter how great or menial are important to God and His program for bringing glory to His Son. As one physician confessed, “My profession is really a ‘tent’ repair business. My real work is reaching and ministering to the souls within.”

The Lord at times calls people to spend more time in specific ministry-related activities. This may be a retired person who can live on a pension. Sometimes a person is independently wealthy or otherwise self-supporting. I have known of individuals who have been able to work 3 or 4 days a week for a living, then devote the rest of their time to ministry.

The Lord at times calls some men and women to serve in fulltime vocational Christian ministry, to use their time for ministry that would otherwise be used in secular employment. Sometimes this ministry is connected with a local church; at other times it is performed outside the church. They may be called to serve overseas or in cross-cultural situations or they may be called to serve at home in their own culture.

What does God’s Word say about such individuals? How does the Lord provide for their physical and material needs? Does He always send ravens with food as He did for the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17)? Are missionaries to spend years in

deputation (i.e. fund raising), are fulltime workers to negotiate a salary? What about individuals specifically serving fulltime in a local church? How they do they relate to the leaders and how should they be financially supported?

Perspectives vary widely from denomination to denomination and from group to group. Our task in the limited space of this book is to focus on what God's Word says about those who serve in the local church on a fulltime basis, to provide some biblical clarity and offer some practical application of how it can work in the local church leadership and ministry.

*Therefore, I exhort the elders among you,
as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ,
and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,
shepherd the flock of God among you,
exercising oversight not under compulsion,
but voluntarily, according to the will of God;
and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;
nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge,
but proving to be examples to the flock.
And when the Chief Shepherd appears,
you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
(1 Peter 5:1-4)*

TERMINOLOGY

First, a word about terminology. The words we Christians use both *reflect* our beliefs and also *affect* our beliefs.

Concerning a subject that has such a great impact on the biblical functioning of the church, we ought not take our words for granted. Scripture uses various terms and phrases to describe people who were significantly immersed in the Lord's work in New Testament times. Christian culture of today uses terms and phrases which often convey different connotations than their biblical counterparts. Surrendering to convenience by using "Pastor" or "Minister" or "Priest" to describe individuals in fulltime ministry leads to accepting concepts of ministry that can be misleading. So, we must consider our terminology more closely.

Biblical terminology

Servant

This was the common word used in biblical times for a slave or a subservient one. It is translated from the Greek word *doulos*, occurring 120 times in the NT, and is frequently rendered *bond-servant* or *bond-slave*. It can denote a person who is a *slave* in the common sense of the word today, but it can also simply mean *servant*. The word refers to one whose life duty is in the service of someone else.

In general first century usage, *doulos* was not particularly flattering, commonly used of someone of a lower class. Yet the Lord Jesus, their Master, gave the disciples an example of servanthood in the upper room when He washed their feet.¹ Paul writes that "... [He took] the form of a *bond-servant* (*doulos*)..." (Phil 2:7). It is no wonder the term *servant*, then, became a favorite self-description of the apostles and leaders of the church. They understood the sentiments of the psalmist who wrote,

¹ John 13:5-20

... *I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. (Ps 84:10b NIV)*

Following their example, the term became an appellation among succeeding generations of Christians and it conveyed both an humbleness as well as a sense of honor.

Here are some combination forms found in the English translations:

Bond-servant of Christ Jesus (Rom 1:1, Gal 1:10, Phil 1:1, Col 4:12, 2 Peter 1:1, Jude 1)

Bond-servant of God (James 1:1)

The Lord's bond-servant (2 Tim 2:24, 2 Cor 4:5). Or simply translated as *the Lord's servant* (NIV, NKJV)

Minister

This is the common word in our culture and is also found in Scripture. Our English Bibles use this to translate various Greek words: *diakonos* (used 29 times in Scripture, meaning *servant, or one who serves*), *hupereten* (used 20 times, meaning *an underling, attendant or assistant*) and finally *leitourgos* (used 5 times, meaning *a public or religious servant*). Some combinations occurring in the NT are:

Minister of Jesus Christ (Rom 15:16, Eph 6:21)

Minister of the Gospel (Eph 3:6-7, Col 1:23)²

Worker

This generic term was used frequently in the NT for Christians engaged significantly in ministry. One of Paul's favorite descriptive phrases for his co-workers was *fellow workers*, many of which he named (e.g. Timothy, Urbanus, Epaphroditus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Philemon, Prisca and Aquila). The emphasis was on those who worked hard, and whose work often was discharged in conjunction with Paul's ministry.

² The description, *ministers of God* is used in Rom 13:4 of governmental rulers.

Contemporary terminology

*Pastor*³

This term translates the word *poimen* which can also be rendered *shepherd*. As a title the word is used only of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴ The verbal form refers to the work of elders in watching over the local congregation.⁵

Paul refers in Eph 4:11 to the spiritual gift of *pastor-teacher* where the Greek word *poimen* is listed as one of the four equipping gifts. Although it is rendered pastor⁶ in that passage, the context shows it is not used as a title or “office” of the church. Rather it describes the spiritual gift of shepherding others. Interestingly, nothing in this passage indicates that the gift of shepherding is limited to one person. In fact when speaking of leadership in the local church, the Scripture refers to elders and deacons, but nowhere does it cast a single man in the role or office of “The Pastor.” The leaders are called elders and deacons, there are always more than one, and they are not necessarily in fulltime ministry.⁷

Missionary

While this term is not used in the NT for a vocational Christian worker, many would see in it the modern day equivalent of the biblical word *apostle* (which is simply a transliteration of the Greek word *apostolos*). An *apostolos*, in the most basic sense, is one who is sent on a mission, or to put it more loosely, a *missionary*.

Apostolos is mostly used in Scripture for exclusive reference

³ Variations of this are “Senior Pastor,” “Associate Pastor,” “Youth Pastor,” etc.

⁴ See John 10:11-14, Heb 13:20, 1 Peter 2:25, 5:4

⁵ See Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2

⁶ Many view “pastors and teachers” in Eph 4:11 to be not two but one gift, namely that of “pastor-teacher.” There is some warrant in the Greek grammar for this interpretation.

⁷ An in-depth study of Biblical Eldership and in particular the plurality and functioning of elders in the church is beyond the scope of this booklet. See “Biblical Eldership” by Alexander Strauch (Lewis and Roth Publishers) and www.bible-equip.org/esn, by the author of this book.

to the original twelve disciples plus Paul.⁸ This was a closed group of authoritative eye-witnesses of the Lord. They were part of the foundation for the building of the Church.⁹

The word *apostolos* was also used occasionally in a wider sense in reference to others including Barnabas¹⁰ and James, the half-brother of Jesus.¹¹ Although they did not have the same authority as the Apostles, they were people who were sent out on a mission. Similarly, in this sense, we believe modern day missionaries are sent out to function as this second kind of *apostolos*, sharing the good news and planting churches.

The English word “apostle” today is often wrongly used to refer to an authoritative individual who oversees a group of churches in a geographical region.¹² However, this narrow concept of the *apostolos* is found in Scripture only with the original authoritative, eye-witnesses. Since that time, the clear biblical teaching is that the elders of the local church are the highest human authority in the church and are directly accountable to God. Therefore, although using the term *apostle* in a wider sense of *missionary* can be technically accurate, it is fraught with confusion for 21st century believers.

Bishop

This contemporary word comes from some English translations of the Greek word *episkopos*, which occurs five times in the NT, and is translated variously as elder, overseer or bishop. This refers to the same individuals elsewhere called elders and denotes those who oversee the work of the Lord in the local church. There is no warrant to the modern understanding of one who presides over multiple churches. Nor is there any NT support for an apostolic succession of bishops from the time of

⁸ Acts 1:26, 2 Cor 12:12, Eph 2:20

⁹ Eph 2:20

¹⁰ Acts 14:14

¹¹ Gal 1:19

¹² In some denominations the analogous term used is *bishop*. Ironically, the word *bishop*, as used in some translations as the KJV, is translated in other versions as *overseers*, and comes from the Greek word *episkopos* (which means “one who oversees, watches over”). The references are all to individuals within a local church. There is never a sense of such an individual presiding over groups of churches.

Peter up to the present day. The term *episkopos* simply refers to one of the functions of the elders in the local church.

Because the word *bishop* carries confusing connotations in our modern era, we feel the translation of *overseer* is a better English rendering because it 1) better describes the *episkopos* functioning of elders and 2) avoids the faulty meaning of the word *bishop* today.

Priest

A common term in Old Testament liturgical worship, the word *priest* is used today in Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches as well as in other denominations that embrace “high liturgy,” such as Episcopalian or Anglican churches. The term refers to one who mediates between God and man.

However, since the coming of Christ, “... *there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5). The book of Hebrews argues that the priesthood of Jesus Christ completely eclipses all human priesthoods. He alone is our necessary and sufficient Mediator and Advocate (1 John 2:1)—our Great High Priest (Heb 4:14). There is no longer any human priesthood needed to approach God.

Further the NT never uses the word *priest* for a special, separate class of believers. In fact all believers are called priests,¹³ for we all have direct access into the very presence of God through our great High Priest Jesus Christ.¹⁴ We need no human mediator! Therefore to use the term *priest* uniquely for one who would be considered part of a priestly class or clergy is grossly misleading and contrary to scriptural teaching.

Clergy (clergyman)

These generic terms, although not found in the Bible, are used to describe the formal religious leadership within a given religion. While people use the word in many different ways, our society tends to attach a special implication of a separate and

¹³ 1 Peter 2:5, 9, Rev 1:6

¹⁴ Heb 4:14-16, 10:19-22

holy class of believers. We feel this term conveys unbiblical concepts.

Ordained minister

This refers to someone who is recognized and authorized by a governing ecclesiastical body to serve in an official capacity in ministry. Often this involves an impartation of spiritual authority. While the word *minister* does occur in Scripture, the word *ordained* does not occur in this sense.

The Scripture *does* speak, however, of “appointing” people to the use of spiritual gifts,¹⁵ to travel in service of the Lord,¹⁶ to do the work of an elder¹⁷ and to apostleship and preaching.¹⁸ Paul refers to “laying on of hands,”¹⁹ which apparently was a recognition of and identification with someone in their ministry or spiritual gifting.

Some, without warrant, have seen in this an “ordination” to ministry, in the sense of conveying spiritual authority. The basic concept of “appointing” someone to service seems to be simply a public recognition and ratification of the Holy Spirit’s directive in the person’s life and ministry. It is the Lord who does the appointing, the church simply recognizes it and affirms it outwardly.

In summary, the word *ordination*, as used today, carries ecclesiastical baggage and can be misleading. The word *appointment* may be more acceptable so long as it is made clear that the fulltime worker is appointed by the Lord.

Vocational Christian worker

This describes in contemporary parlance one who draws his or her income from Christian ministry. Certainly, many Christians in the NT are described as *workers* (as we saw above). The term *Christian* distinguishes what we are talking about from purveyors of other religions. The word *vocational* indicates the

¹⁵ see 1 Cor 12:28

¹⁶ 2 Cor 8:19

¹⁷ Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5

¹⁸ Phil 1:16, 1 Tim 2:7, 2 Tim 2:11

¹⁹ 1 Tim 5:22, 2 Tim 1:6

individual spends his or her full time in Christian endeavors rather than in secular money-earning activities—in other words, this is his career.

While the phrase *vocational Christian worker* avoids high ecclesiastical misconception and is an accurate, generic description of what we are talking about, it is quite cumbersome to use.

Commended worker

While this specific phrase does not occur in Scripture per se, the two words do occur and the phrase itself is used in some Christian circles today. The singular term “*commend*” (Greek *paradidomi*) enjoys some prominence in Scripture in regards to our topic, notably in the book of Acts:

From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. (Acts 14:26)

... but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. (Acts 15:40 NIV)²⁰

The term in other translations is rendered “committed” or “to entrust to.” Saul and Barnabas were *commended* by the church in Antioch to a missionary journey (the first of four such trips for Paul) and they reported back to Antioch upon completion of their tour of duty. In each reference, the commendation was “to the Lord” or “to the grace of the Lord.”

While it is possible the word “commended” was used simply to describe an entrusting of the two apostles to the Lord, the repeat of the word at the end of their trip suggests something. In fact, the term is used in 2 Cor 3:1 where Paul refers to “*letters of commendation*.” In the defense of his apostleship and authority, Paul explains that he did not need a letter of commendation

²⁰ In 2 Corinthians 12:11, Paul may have had a formal “commendation” in mind, but this is not certain. The English word *commend* is also used in Acts 14:23 but there the underlying Greek word is *paratithemi*, which means, “to set before or beside.”

to minister to the people he had led to Christ. But his comment gives evidence of such a practice in general.²¹ This is a practice that can be useful for today as a record and introduction of a person being sent out into ministry.

On the whole, the phrase *commended worker* can find some usefulness in capturing the sense of the apostolic example and the support of a sending church.

Fulltime Worker

While this combined appellation does not occur in Scripture, it is certainly not contrary to biblical principle. Its use emphasizes the distinction of those who serve in a directly spiritual capacity in contrast to a secular occupation. All faithful Christians work for the Lord in various ministry capacities on a part time basis, but some give their full time to it, that is, “*fulltime worker*.”

Why is this important?

On a practical level, describing a person as being in fulltime, vocational Christian service who is financially supported by looking to the Lord is accurate but cumbersome. But words like “minister” or “Pastor” carry strong connotations of being a separate, special class of believers. Using such terms or titles minimizes the biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers and the importance of the plurality of elders, as well as minimizing the importance of those with pastoral gift who may not be in fulltime ministry.

This writer tends to favor the terms *servant* and *worker* which avoid the clergy/laity connotations inherent in other terms. The fuller appellations, “*The Lord’s servant*” or “*full-time worker*,” have the advantage of being true to Scripture and

²¹ Some suggest that Paul is contrasting in 2 Cor 3:1 a true servant of the Lord (i.e. himself) who is authorized by the Lord versus those who “need” an official letter of authorization from humans. But this is specious because he makes a similar contrast in defending his apostleship as coming directly from the Lord, and not from the other apostles. In so defending himself, he is not denigrating the legitimacy of the other apostles. So, too, by analogy, in 2 Cor 3:1 Paul simply states that for some of the Lord’s servants, using a letter of commendation is valuable, but for him it is not needed—because he was the one who originally led them to Christ.

convey the true nature and work of one in fulltime, vocational Christian service. The phrase “*commended worker*” is biblically accurate as well and can be useful today, although it may sound sectarian to some.²²

We do not mean by using these descriptions that there is a special class of Christians who have some sort of prerogative or inside access to God. Rather these are simply designations for those who give themselves over to fulltime, vocational Christian ministry.

In this booklet, we will use “the Lord’s servant,” “fulltime worker” or “commended worker” somewhat interchangeably—as they are all consonant with scriptural teaching and practice. These terms may equally be applied to a person who serves primarily in one location or to a person who has a more itinerate or missionary focus.

A Look Ahead

As we continue this subject of the Lord’s servants, we will discover that the Old Testament sheds some backlight (or antecedents) for the practice of the early church and its commended workers. We will then look at the example of Jesus and His apostles during His earthly ministry. Following that, Paul’s and Barnabas’ early ministry will be examined. Finally, we will consider the teaching of the NT concerning this subject along with practical application for our time and our culture.

²² Some could well argue that these three descriptions contain some ecclesiastical “baggage” because they are commonly used among the so-called “brethren assemblies.” This could well be the case, depending on one’s perspective. In time, all terminology can become laden with extra-biblical connotations.

OT BACKGROUND

The Old Testament presents certain individuals who were devoted to the Lord's service, some of whom drew financial and material support from their work. Although the biblical data on this subject is a bit sketchy, we do see that the concept of financially supporting someone dedicated to the work of the Lord is clearly evident long before the New Testament church comes on the scene.

Nation of Israel

The patriarchs were all self-supporting nomadic herders. Abraham, the first of them, was called out by God from among pagans and given a special promise of a land, many descendants and a promised blessing to the world, which ultimately would be the Messiah.²³ Interestingly, Abraham, who worked to supply his own needs, is considered the prototype of faith for New Testament believers:

Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham...So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Gal 3:6-7, 9)

So all Christians, not just those in fulltime ministry, are called to the same kind of faith that Old Testament Abraham lived. Indeed, the Lord tells Habakkuk that, "*The just shall live by faith*" (Hab 2:4 NKJV)—and this statement is quoted three times in the NT!²⁴ Faith is to be a way of life for all followers of God.

Of note during the time of Abraham, there was a priest of "the Most High God" named Melchizedek. Abraham gave him a tenth of the "spoils" of war. The writer of Hebrews makes a big deal about this, relating it to the offerings given to the Levites.²⁵ So even though Abraham was clearly a servant of the

²³ Genesis 12:1-3

²⁴ Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11, Heb 10:38

²⁵ Heb 7:1-5

Lord, he provided some degree of financial remuneration to another who was a servant of the Lord.²⁶

Of Abraham's children the promises were passed on to Isaac.²⁷ He had a special relationship with God because of the Abrahamic blessing. Of Isaac's sons, Jacob was chosen to inherit that relationship with God as the channel of the Abrahamic promises and blessing.²⁸

Some 400+ years later God refers to the descendants of Jacob (called Israel) as "my firstborn".²⁹ This meant that the Israelites had a privileged position among all the nations of the world. They were set apart from the other nations³⁰ for God's special purpose and ministry in the world, to carry the blessing and promises forward and to make God and His ways known to everyone else.

God did not, however, distinguish between the various children of Jacob as He did with Abraham and Isaac—all twelve of Jacob's sons were considered heirs of the promises and were therefore treated as special by God. They became the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

First-born

At the time of the Exodus, when God led His people out of Egyptian slavery, He set apart the firstborn of each family as special to Him. They were to be a constant reminder of the Passover when God preserved the firstborn of every family during the death angel's passing over Egypt. So while Israel was God's firstborn among all the nations, He now wanted to treat the firstborn son of every Jewish family differently:

²⁶ Of course, Hebrews makes it clear that this was a special priesthood that prefigured Christ's priesthood; but the point is clear that Abraham's giving to Melchizedek was a form of "offering to the Lord" in support of his ministry.

²⁷ Genesis 17:19, 22:17, 26:2

²⁸ Genesis 27:29, 35:11-12, 46:3, 48:4

²⁹ Exodus 4:22

³⁰ Leviticus 20:24

Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me” (Exodus 13:2, see also 13:12-15, 22:29).

Levites

As God prepared the nation for the law and the required forms of sacrificial worship, He separated out one of the twelve tribes of Israel, namely the Levites:

Then Moses said, “You [Levites] have been set apart to the LORD today, for ... he has blessed you this day” (Exodus 32:29 NIV).

In fact, the Levites replaced the firstborn in having a special role in Israel:

Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Now, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of every firstborn, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine. For all the firstborn are Mine; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, from man to beast. They shall be Mine; I am the Lord.” (Numbers 3:11-13)

The Levites were set apart for “fulltime service” for the Lord and the rest of the Israelites were to support them.³¹ They were dedicated to taking care of the Tabernacle (a portable worship facility which was in fact a huge, elaborate tent—called also the “Tent of Meeting”) and its contents.³² They were responsible for its setup, take-down and transportation, and they were to assist the priests in various aspects of the worship.³³

Among the Levites, there was a sub-group called the priests. These were direct descendants of Aaron (who was Moses’ older brother).³⁴ The priests’ work was to receive the offerings that

³¹ There is no historical/biblical evidence that the first born children were ever supported by the people of Israel to serve in the worship of Israel.

³² Numbers 1:50-53

³³ Numbers 3:6-9

³⁴ See Exodus 29:9, 40:15

the Israelites brought as part of the worship (Leviticus 1:5) and to perform the hands-on sacrifice on behalf of all who brought offerings to the Lord.

God instructed the Israelites about supporting the Levites: *“Be careful that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land”* (Deut 12:19). The Israelites were to support the Levites with what amounted to 10% of their agricultural produce and livestock. This offering was called a *tithe*³⁵ and was given along with other offerings and gifts.

The Levites in turn were to provide support for the priests by taking 10% of what they received from the people and giving it as an offering to the priests.³⁶ So even the Levites who received financial support for serving the Lord were also expected to give financial support to others of the Lord’s servants.

When Israel entered the promised land under Joshua’s leadership, Canaan was divided among the tribes. The tribe of Levi, however, was the exception. The only land they could own was in the immediate vicinity of a few specified cities scattered among the other tribes. While the other tribes had a permanent connection with a contiguous piece of land, the Levites and the priests had a different situation:

“Therefore, Levi does not have a portion or inheritance with his brothers; the Lord is his inheritance, just as the Lord your God spoke to him.” (Deut 10:9)

In practical terms this meant they did not own a contiguous portion of land like the other tribes did. Their inheritance in the land consisted of living in a few cities scattered around Israel. Though they were allowed to own houses and land around these towns,³⁷ the inheritance of the Levites had a larger perspective than just land and houses:

³⁵ Numbers 18:24

³⁶ Num 18:26-28

³⁷ Numbers 35:2-8

Only to the tribe of Levi he did not give an inheritance; the offerings by fire to the LORD, the God of Israel, are their inheritance... (Joshua 13:14)

But to the tribe of Levi, Moses did not give an inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as He had promised to them. (Joshua 13:33)

Notice that these two verses identify the inheritance both as being the offerings by fire to the Lord and as being the Lord Himself. The Lord is their “inheritance,” and their benefit in the land comes from what belongs to the Lord, namely the offerings. This is an important distinction, for none of the tribes of Israel can lord it over the Levites by claiming to be their supporters. The Levites were to consider their income as not coming from the people, but from the Lord’s portion of Israel’s offering.

The Israelites, in turn, were to consider their support of the Levites simply as part of their worship offerings to the Lord. A portion of that which was given to the Lord was then used for the Levites’ support, but the offerings at that time no longer belonged to the Israelites, they belonged to the Lord.

To avoid the danger of the Levites and the priests getting less than acceptable quality of support, God instructed the Israelites to give the best of what they had to the Lord. In fact, the priests were to get the best of the best portions of the offerings.³⁸

From a human perspective, the livelihood of the Levites depended upon the faithfulness of the rest of Israel. When everyone faithfully followed God and His ways, there would be plenty of support to go around. When either the Levites or the rest of the people wandered from the Lord, the Levitical system would not be supported as God intended.

To summarize, by the time of entry into the promised land, certain people were devoted to the work of the Lord and were supported by the rest of the people. These people, called Levites and priests, drew their living from fulltime work for the Lord.

³⁸ Numbers 18:12

Leaders, Judges & Kings

Joshua was commissioned³⁹ to lead the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan.⁴⁰ Clearly he was set apart for a special role and given authority for his role,⁴¹ although no mention is made of his means of support. Being from the tribe of Ephraim, he was not a Levite and was therefore not part of that support system. However, after Israel entered the land and partitioned it among the various tribes, Joshua⁴² and Caleb⁴³ were singled out for a special allotment of land as individuals. We have no further sense of how Joshua supported himself.

Following the time of Joshua came the years of Israelite judges who were largely self-supporting. The last of these, Samuel, though he was from the tribe of Ephraim, was dedicated by his mother and he “...*ministered before the LORD before Eli the priest*” (1 Samuel 2:11). Presumably while living with Eli young Samuel was being supported as a member of the priestly family. When he grew to adulthood, he continued living a dedicated life for the Lord, though there is little written about his means of support. He may have had some residual benefit from having so closely identified with the priesthood in his younger days, but that is mere conjecture.

We need to digress for a moment by pointing out that, to be sure, where there is “fulltime” service for the Lord, there can also be abuse of that role. The sons of Eli the priest lived wanton lives, taking some of the offerings to which they had no right. Instead of faithfully serving as priests, they consumed their time earning the inspired writer’s judgment of them as “worthless men.”⁴⁴ They were worthy of neither the position of priest nor the support of the people. This unfortunate story serves to warn that great responsibility is expected of all who

³⁹ Or, inaugurated (NKJV), given a charge (KJV).

⁴⁰ Deuteronomy 31:14, see also Numbers 27:18-21

⁴¹ Numbers 27:18-21

⁴² Joshua 19:49-50

⁴³ Joshua 14:14, 15:13

⁴⁴ 1 Samuel 2:12

serve the Lord, for the consequence of dishonoring the Lord is great.⁴⁵

Following the time of the judges came the kings of Israel. The kings were supported by taxes on the people which was different than support out of the offerings brought to the Lord.⁴⁶ This was civil support rather than ministry support.

During the time of the kings, the role of priests and Levites continued and by the reign of Solomon their ministry revolved around the permanent temple rather than the portable tabernacle. The Levites' work expanded to include, among other things, singing,⁴⁷ instrumental music⁴⁸ and organized/structured praise.⁴⁹ The priests continued to serve in offering up the sacrifices.

Prophets

Finally, the prophets were spokespersons of God. Some were priests⁵⁰ and therefore would have been supported because of that connection. Others, like Elijah, were "professional prophets," the living situation of which we know very little. We do know that Elijah and Elisha, for example, saw the Lord provide for their physical needs in sometimes miraculous ways.

Other men belonged to the "sons of the prophets" or as the NIV renders it, "the company of the prophets."⁵¹ Little is known about these groups, but it is reasonable to believe they were devoted to the Word of God and communicating that Word to the people. Some were employed in "secular" vocations.⁵²

While it is clear that the prophets were individually called by God,⁵³ it not so clear the manner or degree to which they were supported in their work *as* prophets.

⁴⁵ see 1 Samuel 2:11-36

⁴⁶ 1 Samuel 8:14-17

⁴⁷ 2 Chr 5:12

⁴⁸ 2 Chr 7:6

⁴⁹ 2 Chr 8:14

⁵⁰ Ezekiel 1:3, Jeremiah 1:1

⁵¹ 2 Kings 2:3

⁵² Amos 1:1

⁵³ For example, Jeremiah 1:5

Conclusion

In the Old Testament various individuals and groups were devoted to “vocational” ministry in which the majority of their focus was on serving the Lord. Often, though not always, these people were supported in their service by the offerings and gifts of others.

NT PRECEDENT

We will now move to the New Testament to consider the examples of Jesus, His disciples and the Apostles Paul and Barnabas. In the next chapter we will look at the specific NT teaching concerning the Lord's servants.

Importance of New Testament examples

New Testament history provides examples of individuals dedicated to fulltime ministry for the Lord. We are specifically encouraged to imitate their example:

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me [Paul], practice these things . . . (Phil 4:9)⁵⁴

Of course, some things the early believers practiced may be peripheral or impractical today. For example, the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul traveled on foot and by ship, whereas we would rather travel more efficiently by car or airplane. Scripture does not assign significance to these kinds of incidentals. But the subject of fulltime ministry was essential to the expansion and consolidation of the early church. Paul in his letters speaks about the ongoing importance of various ministries for the spiritual growth of the body of Christ, and we have examples and teaching regarding individuals who serve fulltime. This subject is *not* incidental and warrants a clear biblical perspective on its precedents, principles and practices.

Jesus and the apostles (pre-resurrection)

Prior to His ministry years, Jesus presumably carried on in the tradition of His earthly step-father Joseph who was a carpenter by trade.⁵⁵ A son following in the vocational footsteps of his father was common among first century residents of Palestine. The situation changed when Jesus was baptized by John

⁵⁴ See Phil 3:17, 1 Cor 4:16, 1 Cor 11:1, for additional examples of Paul inviting people to imitate his example. See also Heb 13:7.

⁵⁵ See Matt 13:55. Commonly thought to be a carpenter, Jesus' father's profession more accurately would have been that of a builder whose work could have involved both wood or stone.

and subsequently devoted Himself to announcing the kingdom of God and teaching His disciples and the multitudes. He spent His time going from town to town:

“... so that I [Jesus] may preach there also; for that is what I came for.” He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. (Mark 1:38b-39)

There is no record of the Lord spending time in money-earning endeavors during His ministry years. At times He used His miraculous powers to provide for His own and His disciples’ needs. When funds were needed for the two-drachma tax, He instructed Peter to go fishing and bring back a fish which had a coin in its mouth, enough to pay the required taxes.⁵⁶ And if He could feed the multitudes with a few loaves and fishes, He could presumably have fed Himself in a similar manner all the time. However, using miraculous powers was probably not His normal mode for obtaining sustenance.

The practice of a roving rabbi or teacher with his band of followers was not uncommon in those days.⁵⁷ The rabbi’s followers (called disciples) brought along their resources to help in the expense of living. Sometimes the rabbi and his disciples lived off the goodness (i.e. financial help) of people in the areas where they lived and traveled.

Jesus’ ministry resembled just such a practice. In our terms, He was a *full-time worker*, giving Himself over to ministry full-time rather than to income-producing employment. Peter, James and John left their fishing business⁵⁸ from which they may have had some residual income or savings to support themselves and Jesus. Matthew (aka Levi) left his tax business.⁵⁹ Some of the

⁵⁶ Matt 17:27

⁵⁷ The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. In Zondervan Reference Software, Colin Brown, ed., Grand Rapids, Michigan, Feb. 22, 1999, s.v. *disciple*.

⁵⁸ Matthew 4:20

⁵⁹ Mark 2:14

women followers provided support.⁶⁰ The family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus received Jesus into their home and their recorded interactions with Jesus give evidence of practical hospitality to the Lord.⁶¹

The Lord, early in His earthly life, had a sense of mission. Luke records His response to His earthly parents, “*Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?*” (Luke 2:49 NKJV). That business was preaching the kingdom and repentance.⁶² Ultimately, His goal was to glorify His Father through obedience and His death on the cross.⁶³

In time, the core group of followers began to gel. He engaged them in various “short-term” mission trips, preparing them to carry on the work He was doing:

He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belt ... They went out and preached that men should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them... The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. (Mark 6:7-13, 30)⁶⁴

Luke gives further record of this same mission trip:

“Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house.” (Luke 10:7)

The mission was well planned and structured: 1) it was clearly defined, 2) they were not to supply their own needs, but rely, presumably, on others along the way, and 3) they reported back to the Lord what had happened on their trip.

⁶⁰ Luke 8:2-3

⁶¹ John 12:1-2

⁶² Matt 4:17

⁶³ John 17:1

⁶⁴ See also Matthew 10:9-10, Luke 10:4-7

At other times, the Lord sent out His disciples and required them to bring along their own provisions:

And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing." And he said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one." (Luke 22:35-36)

So we see that during Jesus' pre-resurrection time He sent out men on both self-supporting mission trips and trips supported by others. If these models of ministry carry any enduring precedence, then both kinds of financial arrangements are valid methods for doing the Lord's work today.

The apostles (post-resurrection)

After the death and resurrection of our Lord, He commissioned the twelve to go into all the world preaching the gospel.⁶⁵ He specifically instructed Peter to shepherd those who would later become followers of Himself.⁶⁶ While all believers are challenged by the "Great Commission,"⁶⁷ the twelve apostles were positioned at the core of this assignment. In the last earthly conversation He had with them, Jesus said:

... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Soon after Jesus ascended, the disciples began to do what the Lord had instructed them. By the time Pentecost was over, three thousand people were saved and baptized, and the newly born community of believers "*were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching . . .*" (Acts 2:42). The twelve clearly had a prominent role in the emerging church in Jerusalem, not

⁶⁵ Mark 16:15

⁶⁶ John 21:15-17

⁶⁷ Matt 28:18-20

only in their teaching ministry (as authorized witnesses of Jesus' teachings) but also through their "wonders and signs" ministry (Acts 2:43).

Peter became the most prominent of the original twelve in the first part of Acts, which records the historic spread of the church after Christ's resurrection.⁶⁸ We see first a consolidation and then an initial spread of the Christian way in Jerusalem. The mission moved into both Judea and Samaria and then finally into the Gentile world.⁶⁹ After the initial expansion, the ministry of the apostle Paul becomes prominent in the biblical record and commands center stage beginning in Acts 9 (his conversion) and from chapter 13 to the end of the book of Acts (which outlines his missionary efforts to the uttermost parts of the world).

The Lord Jesus, as we saw above, had prepared the apostles by example for various means of financial support while engaged in ministry. That they were in fact financially supported through their ministries by the Christian community is evident from Paul's defense to the Corinthians:

Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas⁷⁰? Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense?" (1 Cor 9:4-7a).

The inspired Paul assumed the fact that original apostles (even Peter) were financially supported. We would take this apostolic example referred to by Paul as extending to all individuals dedicated to fulltime, vocational Christian service.

⁶⁸ Acts 1-12

⁶⁹ Acts 1:8 serves as an outline for the book of Acts.

⁷⁰ *Cephas* is Peter's original name, the name Paul customarily used in referring to him.

Barnabas and Saul (Paul) – the early days

Our next historical stop has to do with Barnabas and Paul (aka Saul). Barnabas was a highly trusted believer in the church in Jerusalem and his reputation for being an “encourager” was widespread. In fact, his given name, Joseph, was replaced by the apostles with a new name, Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement.”⁷¹ He risked his reputation among the early church by vouching for the newly converted Saul⁷² who had formerly been a persecutor of the church. Barnabas provided Saul access to the believing community in Jerusalem.⁷³

With Barnabas’ backing, Saul boldly preached the Word in Jerusalem until he was sent away by the believers to his home town of Tarsus. This was necessitated by the disturbance his preaching caused and the believers’ evident fear for his life. Barnabas, on the other hand, apparently stayed on in Jerusalem where he remains hidden from our view until chapter 11.

Barnabas’ standing within the church in Jerusalem carried significant influence, so much so that the believers there sent him to check out reports of a powerful movement among the Gentiles:

The news about [the large number of conversions in Antioch in Syria] reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. (Acts 11:22-24a)

⁷¹ Acts 4:36

⁷² Some assume erroneously that Paul was given his name as a result of his conversion to Christ. However, Paul went by two names: Paul was his Greek name, while Saul was his Hebrew name. The book of Acts uses his Hebrew name until partway through his first missionary journey with Barnabas (Acts 13-14), then switches to his Greek name for the remainder of the story. This booklet follows the same pattern in referring to Saul/Paul.

⁷³ Acts 9:26-27

There had been a startling outbreak of conversions in the city of Antioch located north of Israel, in Syria. This was the first record of another congregation of believers outside of Jerusalem and most of them were non-Jews. Barnabas was selected for this mission because of his exemplary character and reputation.⁷⁴

Barnabas' mission to Antioch consisted of being the "Jerusalem-sent" witness who was sent out to investigate and validate what was happening there. On behalf of the sending church in Jerusalem he encouraged the new converts in Antioch—something he was particularly gifted at doing.⁷⁵

Barnabas, the consummate encourager, perceived in Saul the teaching gift that was needed at Antioch and influenced him to return from Tarsus and use his considerable gift in building up this new Gentile church.⁷⁶ For an entire year they connected with and taught the large number of new converts.

What these men did to financially support themselves is nowhere indicated in the immediate context. We do know from later biblical record that Saul was a tent-maker by trade, which provided some income from time to time, as was the case in Corinth.⁷⁷ In addition, his status as a Roman citizen, having grown up in a Roman city (Tarsus), together with his exemplary Jewish learning and accomplishment, could mean that he may have had some significant financial means at his disposal. At the least, his ability to pick up and move so readily would indicate either he had sufficient finances of his own or that someone was underwriting his expenses.

Barnabas, on the other hand, had been (and possibly still was) a land owner of some means. He had sold at least part of his holdings to provide for the needs of believers in the

⁷⁴ Acts 11:19-21. It may have helped that Barnabas was born in Cyprus (4:36) and one of the main groups of evangelists in Antioch were from Cyprus, suggesting a cultural or ethnic affinity.

⁷⁵ Acts 11:23

⁷⁶ Acts 11:25-26. Whether Paul worked in a "secular" occupation during this time or was in fulltime ministry was apparently not a concern to the author of Acts, thus we have no way of knowing this one way or the other.

⁷⁷ Acts 18:3

emerging church in Jerusalem years earlier.⁷⁸ So he may have sold other parts of his real estate to make resources available for his travels. He could also have helped underwrite Saul's expenses. What is obvious is that they were able to engage extensively in both a local and also itinerate evangelistic and teaching ministry.

Barnabas and Saul gained a growing reputation for being trustworthy. In response to a prophecy about an upcoming famine in Judea, the believers in Antioch took up a collection and entrusted the two with delivering the funds to the believers at the Jerusalem church.⁷⁹ Originally the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to Antioch and now the Antioch church (possibly under the encouraging influence of Barnabas) reciprocates by sending Barnabas with Saul back to Jerusalem. One wonders if Saul's later development of a compassionate heart for the material needs of believers took root during the years spent under Barnabas' influence.

While Barnabas and Saul were in Jerusalem, James and Peter were imprisoned for their faith. James became the first of the twelve apostles to be executed, while Peter was miraculously released.⁸⁰ Despite this persecution of key Christian leaders in Jerusalem, the Word of God kept spreading. There was apparently no further need for Barnabas' and Saul's teaching ministry there in Jerusalem. Nor was such a ministry among Jews to be Saul's primary focus anyway, for he was called of God to be an apostle to the Gentiles.⁸¹ With the mission completed in Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch along with a new member of the team, Barnabas' cousin, a young man by the name of John Mark.⁸²

⁷⁸ Acts 4:36-37

⁷⁹ Acts 11:27-30

⁸⁰ Why the Lord allowed James to die but rescued Peter is a fascinating discussion, but beyond the scope of this study.

⁸¹ Acts 9:15, Gal 2:8-9

⁸² It was in John Mark's mother's home that the believers prayed for Peter's release from prison (Acts 12:12). See also Col 4:10.

Commendation

Back in Antioch, Barnabas and Saul continued their ongoing ministry of teaching and shepherding the young Gentile church there:

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. (Acts 13:1)

Barnabas and Saul both had a background suitable for a ministry outside the context of the Palestinian Jews. Barnabas was of Cyprian background and was comfortable in either Jewish or Gentile settings. Saul was born and raised in the Roman city, Tarsus, with Roman citizenship and was well schooled in Greek thought as well as Jewish learning. Thus, the two were more readily usable by the Lord for reaching the non-Jewish world than the original twelve apostles, all of whom were apparently born and raised in Israel.

Three other men also rose to prominence in the Antiochian church. Together these five leading men of the church are referred to as “prophets and teachers.” They were all men of God, mature in their faith and actively serving in ministry.

God spoke through and to this group of leaders, and as a result we get a first time glimpse into the “commendation” of individuals for the work of the Lord:

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:2-4)

When they finished the ministry trip the writer of Acts records that:

They [Saul and Barnabas] sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:26-27)

A close inspection of this passage will uncover some insights into commending individuals to the Lord's work. The following is a brief summary:

The context

The ones God used to send Barnabas and Saul on their ministry trip were godly individuals, as indicated by the phrase "they were ministering to the Lord and fasting." Fasting was an indication of their commitment to prayer. The ones to be sent (i.e. Barnabas and Saul) were already serving the Lord, utilizing their spiritual giftedness.

The role of the Holy Spirit

- The text specifically indicates that it was the Holy Spirit who selected Barnabas and Saul for this mission.
- The Holy Spirit was the initiator of the matter.
- The Holy Spirit revealed His mind to both the senders and the sent ones (Barnabas and Saul were part of the group to whom the Holy Spirit spoke).
- Barnabas and Saul were not "lone-rangers" doing their own thing regardless of what anyone else thought—all were in harmony with the Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit guided the process.
- The Holy Spirit sent out Barnabas and Saul.

The role of the senders

The whole group evidently continued praying and fasting in response to the Lord's revelation to them. They *laid hands* on Barnabas and Saul, symbolic of setting them apart for that which the Holy Spirit appointed them. This was a form of public identification and commissioning to the work. It signified

that “we affirm God’s call in your life and are willing to vouch for you and stand by you.” Later in his ministry, Paul⁸³ instructed his young protégé Timothy to “*not lay hands on anyone hastily*” (1 Timothy 5:22). He saw the wisdom of requiring sufficient time and maturity for a convert to prove himself in his spiritual walk before being given greater responsibility in ministry. In the case of Barnabas and Saul, they had both been Christians for at least 15 years by this time and had spent much of that time in active Christian ministry.

Notice that verse 3 indicates the church sent them out, but verse 4 says the Holy Spirit sent them also. Who, then, sent out the two new missionaries? The answer is—both the Holy Spirit and the church! Actually, the word translated “sent away” in Acts 13:3 literally means “to release.” The church was releasing Barnabas and Saul to do what the Lord had sent them to do. This is a classic case of the Lord’s people working in concert with God, keeping in step with the Holy Spirit⁸⁴ and agreeing with the Holy Spirit.⁸⁵ He is the sender, they are the means.

The commendation⁸⁶

The writer of Acts identifies the process of sending Barnabas and Saul on their ministry trip: “*they had been commended to the grace of the Lord for the work*” (Acts 14:26). From this we can learn a number of principles that instruct us today in commending people to serve God fulltime.

- Commendation was an action taken by the local church.
- Commendation by the assembly concerned members of their church and thus were well known to them.
- Commendation was *to* the Lord for His work.
- Commendation involved an on-going relationship between the workers and the assembly which sent them out—Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch and reported on the results of the trip.

⁸³ Paul was the name he was known by later in his ministry.

⁸⁴ Galatians 5:25

⁸⁵ Acts 15:28

⁸⁶ Thanks to MSC Canada for some of the points delineated here.

The mission

All involved were willing to trust God's leading in the matter without knowing all the details. But the mission was clear. They were sent to "proclaim the Word of God" as indicated at the first stop of their itinerary.⁸⁷ As the particulars unfold in Acts 13 and 14, we find Barnabas and Saul touring through a series of towns and cities in what we would now call Asia-Minor in the eastern Mediterranean area. Their ministry included the preaching of the gospel and establishing churches with elder leadership in each city.⁸⁸

Finally, Paul⁸⁹ and Barnabas returned to Antioch, their mission completed which they were sent to do. It was of limited duration, about 1-2 years in length. Paul left for a second ministry trip and, according to Acts 15:40, he and his new partner Silas were "committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord." The word translated *committed* in some Bible versions is from the same Greek word *paradidomi* as in Acts 14:23 and can be translated *commended* (NIV, NKJV). Paul was again commended, just like for the first trip. At the end of that second tour he returned to Antioch, the sending church,⁹⁰ and apparently reported on what God had done.

For Paul's third ministry trip, the book of Acts makes no comment about his being commended or returning afterward to report back to Antioch. This lack of historical notation can be explained as the writer's assumption that Paul's commendation did not necessarily have a time limit. We must also keep in mind that Acts was written as a history, not as a detailed manual for missionary endeavors.

⁸⁷ Acts 13:5

⁸⁸ Acts 14:23

⁸⁹ Two things happened in the narrative of this trip relative to the apostle. The writer of Acts (Luke) switches to using his Greek name "Paul." Also, he begins to list Paul's name first when speaking of him and Barnabas. The commonly understood explanation for this is that Paul, on this mission, had become more prominent than Barnabas. The mentoree apparently moved past his mentor.

⁹⁰ Acts 18:22

As noted above, Paul, as a master teacher and inspired writer, often called on people to follow his example.⁹¹ The pattern in his life of ministry seems to be well established, that those going out into fulltime service for the Lord are “commended” to the work for which the Holy Spirit calls them.

Financial support

Paul had no reluctance or hesitation about raising funds for the needs of other Christians, particularly those who were suffering.⁹² But no mention is made in the book of Acts or in any of Paul’s writings about either his or Barnabas’ raising financial support for themselves. He did later assert that they both had a right to financial support,⁹³ but he quickly added that at times he set that right aside.⁹⁴

There is no evidence that anyone in the NT record spent time in “deputation,” a modern day concept where a missionary travels from church to church raising support for his or her ministry. Normally an argument from silence is not convincing by itself. However, in the case of Paul’s ministry trips the silence is noteworthy—especially since he does address the topic of finances in his writings.

The Christian community today is somewhat divided on this subject. On the one hand, many feel that making people aware of one’s needs is simply providing them an opportunity to join the team in prayer and financial support. How can people know what the worker needs unless he actively makes those needs known? On the other hand, some would argue that if “deputation” were a valid, biblically supported activity, there would be some scriptural support for it, or at least some inference. But the Scripture is plainly silent on this subject. Can not the Lord make the needs of the worker known without the worker having to do this? George Mueller is probably the most well-known example

⁹¹ See 1 Cor 4:16, 11:1, Phil 3:17

⁹² See Acts 11:29-30, 2 Cor 8-9

⁹³ 1 Cor 9:3-11

⁹⁴ 1 Cor 9:12

of this kind of “faith ministry,” but many others have served the Lord without using the deputation process.

While we would not suggest that a person is wrong in going through deputation, we feel there needs to be serious cautions when doing so. In such a tangible thing as finances, the opportunity for a real working of God is present. Is God not able to provide for all of the worker’s needs? In the end, we must be careful not to “judge another man’s servant.” Each worker must hold his own conviction on this.

The people of God need to be taught to seek the Lord’s guidance in sacrificial giving. For the workers and the gifted teachers to do this has a ring of self-benefit. It is the elders’ responsibility to make sure the believers are taught the whole Word of God, including giving to the Lord and His servants.

The motivation of Barnabas and Paul was not to develop a career or become financially stable—no mention of that at all. Paul does later talk about the Philippians’ financial support:

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone. (Phil 4:15)

His purpose was *not* to influence their continued giving—but rather to thank them for their financial help (“... *in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now*” Phil 1:5). He pointedly asserts that he does not write to them because he seeks their financial support:

Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. (Phil 4:17)

He affirms them in their support of him because of the spiritual benefit it brings to them.

While we might be tempted to question someone’s ulterior motive in making this statement, we must remember Paul is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Such suspicions might be warranted for TV evangelists or those whose lifestyle is questionable in other areas. But hardly could such

duplicity be characteristic of the Apostle who was fully aware of the high standard of his calling which he articulated earlier in this letter to the Philippians.⁹⁵ When he wrote the Corinthians about not wanting himself to be “disqualified,”⁹⁶ he could well have been including actions such as being disingenuous with the Philippians. Therefore, we take Paul’s statements to the Philippians at face value.

He goes on to seemingly bend over backwards explaining that he has more than enough for his needs:

But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. (Phil 4:18)

So we see that the apostle did not request funds from the Philippians or any other church for his own personal needs.

In addition to the unsolicited support of the Philippians, help came when he stayed in people’s homes where the hospitality of believers would have assisted in meeting his practical needs.⁹⁷

The apostle was also not averse to engaging his tent-making trade at times:

... because he [Paul] was of the same trade, he stayed with them (Aquila & Priscilla) and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. (Acts 18:3)

You yourselves know that these hands [of Paul’s] ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. (Acts 20:34)

This is where the modern concept of a “tent-making ministry” comes from, people serving the Lord in a self-supporting way.

Clearly, financial support for the Lord’s work comes in varied ways. But as a servant of the Lord, Paul’s financial support was never the focal point. He had developed an important

⁹⁵ Phil 3:16

⁹⁶ 1 Cor 9:27

⁹⁷ See Acts 16:34

attitude necessary for anyone who desires to serve the Lord in a fulltime capacity:

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstances I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Phil 4:11-13).

Paul sometimes suffered financial hardship and sometimes had more than enough to live on. Either way he was content because the focus was not on his standard of living but on serving the Lord.

Becoming the Lord's servant in a fulltime capacity means a willingness to accept difficulties, but it does not require a vow of poverty or necessitate constant financial deprivation. Nor should others expect that of the worker. What is required is that finances not be seen as the final goal, as though serving the Lord were just another way of making a living.

Conclusion

The apostolic example shows that there were workers⁹⁸ who traveled from church to church ministering as the need arose and as the Lord led them. Such men were commended by sending churches and received financial support for their ministry and needs. They sometimes refused their right to support from those to whom they ministered, but at other times enjoyed abundant provisions. At times the Lord's servants worked at secular jobs to supplement their support.

⁹⁸ While we have only mentioned Paul and Barnabas, others that were apparently in fulltime ministry included Timothy and Epaphroditus.

NT TEACHING

We have seen the historical background to fulltime ministry as seen in the apostolic examples of Paul (primarily) and Barnabas, whose ministries could be described as “missions” or “itinerate.” Now we move from their example to specific instructions in the New Testament regarding fulltime ministry. We will see that, in addition to itinerate workers, the Scripture also teaches about workers who spend significant time in a more limited area and even within individual churches.

First we must reiterate that a healthy, maturing local church should have a plurality of biblically qualified, functioning elders. This group of men has the overall responsibility for shepherding the flock of God.⁹⁹ That task is not delegated to a single individual apart from the elders themselves.¹⁰⁰

In addressing the teaching about fulltime workers, one must not only interpret correctly what Scripture *says*, but also exercise caution when drawing inferences and conclusions from what Scripture *does not say*. Where the Word is silent, we must use clear interpretative principles to guide us, lest we derive erroneous conclusions conditioned more by our preferences or traditions than sound judgment. Having said this, there are some observations and principles we can draw from pertinent Scriptures.

Biblical basis for a fulltime worker in the local church

The functioning of the local church is Paul’s focus in his first letter to Timothy, which he clearly states:

I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

⁹⁹ 1 Peter 5:2, Acts 20:28

¹⁰⁰ 1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:7-9

Among other things, the apostle instructs the church to identify certain qualified individuals for special consideration:

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Some have attempted to minimize the significance of this passage or downplay its import for our subject. Upon close inspection, this passage instructs that we should identify certain men who are:

- recognized for spiritual maturity (i.e. being elders).
- doing well as leaders in the church (“rule well”—in other words, people follow their lead).¹⁰¹
- serving in the “preaching and teaching” of the Word.
- putting considerable effort into their ministry (“work hard”).

When you have an elder who stands out in these areas, he should be recognized. It is not a criticism of the other elders but simply a recognition of the exemplary work of one who is deemed “worthy.” The apostle Paul assumes the other elders have sufficient character qualities and the spiritual maturity necessary for acknowledging one of their own for honor—and to do so freely without jealousy or envy or fear.

What is the “*double honor*” Paul writes about? First, the concept includes respect. While certainly the church body as a whole should honor those “*deemed less honorable*” (1 Cor 12:23), this doesn’t mean we should withhold honor to those who serve well. This is similar to what Paul says of Epaphroditus:

¹⁰¹ This “rule well” is not so much a matter of control as it is a matter of example and influence. See *Believers’ Bible Commentary: New Testament*, by William MacDonald, A&O Press, Kansas. 1989, p. 912.

Welcome him in the Lord and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, making up for the help you could not provide (Phil 2:29-30 NIV).

When Paul says we should double-honor men who rule well he is talking *also* about financial remuneration, for in the next breath he quotes a verse that occurs two other times in Scripture, “*The laborer is worthy of his wages*” (1 Tim 5:18).¹⁰² Thus, to double-honor an elder who rules well and works hard at preaching and teaching includes showing respect *and* providing monetary support.¹⁰³

Hendriksen in his commentary on 1 Timothy says,

*“[This] does not imply that every elder, or even every excellently ruling elder receive a salary [sic]. All who rule well deserve double honor, and in the case of those who devote themselves entirely to church-work this implies the right of remuneration.”*¹⁰⁴

Why then, some might ask, does the apostle Peter teach that elders should serve “*because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money*” (1 Peter 5:2 NIV)? Does this not contradict the interpretation given above in Paul’s writing to Timothy? No, it does not. Peter’s point is that an elder’s primary motivation is not for monetary reward. That does not mean he cannot receive it, if offered him. By analogy, the Christian who gets paid for his secular work is not by default greedy, is he? Of course not. Likewise, it is specious to claim that an elder who receives double-honor is thereby greedy for money. Having said this, Peter’s caution is well noted, for there

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 912-13. Deut 25:4, Luke 10:7

¹⁰³ See *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. by Walvoord & Zuck, (Wheaton IL: Victory Books, Division of SP Publications), 1 Timothy 5:17-18. William MacDonald, *Believers’ Bible Commentary*, (Wichita, Kansas: A & O Press), 1 Timothy 5:17-18). Expositor’s Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing), 1 Timothy 5:7-18.

¹⁰⁴ New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 1 Timothy 5:17.

can be a danger of greed in all of our lives. Elders particularly need to guard against it, even those who receive double-honor.

Why not give financial support to all elders who do well? Financially, on the surface of it, the church simply may not have enough resources to do this. But what about a financial bonus occasionally? In the business world, the employee who does well often receives a bonus or retirement gift in honor of faithful service to the company. In the church, why not do the same for all the elders who serve well, as a bonus or reward to show appreciation? Certainly, there is no mandate against this in Scripture. But is this ultimately what the honor is about, simply a bonus? No, we believe the “double-honor” is to subsidize an elder so that he can give more of his focused attention to the ministry.

Many who are not elders or leaders in the church serve well. Why single out one individual for this special recognition? The answer is this: given the example Paul uses to support his teaching (“*A laborer is worthy of his wages*”), the principle applies to someone for whom this is (or will become) his primary labor. One can easily see the practicality of this. Providing for the worker can relieve the pressure and time constraints of having to work a secular job in order that he may be able to give more time to the Lord’s work.

Paul is himself an example of someone who labored in one local church for at least two years (Ephesus, see Acts 19:9-10). Though we have no historical record of his financial arrangements, it is clear from his writings (as we saw above), that he practiced what he taught, that the worker should be supported whether in a traveling mode or in a residential mode. If and when people or churches did support him, he gladly accepted their gifts provided the effectiveness of his work was not compromised.

I do not believe the Lord provided an exhaustive list in Scripture of the only situations in which fulltime ministry can be undertaken in the local church. But what we have seen so far does provide an example to follow. I believe we can also apply

this teaching to an individual who concentrates his efforts on teaching, leading, youth work, women's ministries, children's work or a myriad of other special interest works. The principles would apply to anyone who is being used in a significant and exemplary way, in order to free him or her up to spend more time in ministry.

This could be what Paul had in mind when, as we noted above, he exhorted the Philippian believers to,

...welcome [Epaphroditus] in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me. (Phil 2:29-30 NIV)

Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippians to assist Paul and now Paul is sending him back to the Philippians, most likely to minister to them as well. In fact, he also sent to them Timothy¹⁰⁵ who was a proven worker.¹⁰⁶ So there very likely were two fulltime workers at some point in the church at Philippi.

Value of a fulltime worker

There is value to the local church in having a fulltime worker. This in no way implies that every church *must* have a fulltime worker or that those who do have one are in some way superior. While the Lord doesn't specifically outline what that value is, some practical observations may prove helpful.

As the local church grows there is often simply too much shepherding for secularly-employed elders to do or to do effectively. Anyone who has been an elder and shouldered the burden of counseling, teaching, leading, administrating, attending meetings and many other responsibilities associated with being an elder, knows the huge burden this entails. A fulltime worker who assists by carrying the administrative work, for example, provides a huge relief for the other elders so that they can attend to more appropriate, pastoral work. A fulltime worker's gift in the area of teaching or leading or discipling can be made more

¹⁰⁵ Phil 2:19

¹⁰⁶ Phil 2:22

available than if he has to spend 40-50 hours a week in secular employment. He can give more concentrated time to ministry.

Of course some churches don't need this help. For example, the church that has gifted men who are retired and yet young enough to have the energy and stamina to be engaged in ministry to a significant extent, may not need a supported fulltime worker. Their workers would be self-supporting. Or there may be individuals whose secular job situation is such that they can work fewer hours and devote more time to ministry. Happy is the church who has sufficient giftedness, availability and commitment among the leaders to sacrifice huge amounts of personal time for the sake of shepherding the flock of God.

Growing churches with younger elders who have responsible jobs and younger families, however, will have difficulty finding men who have time to adequately shepherd the flock of God. Many spiritually minded younger men have observed children of elders who ultimately stray from the Lord, having been neglected by their over-busy father. And these younger men do not want to repeat this failing. A man's first order of ministry is to his family (his immediate "discipleship group," if you will).

Often there just simply are not enough qualified people, able and willing to devote large amounts of time to the ministry. It is true that in some cases there is lack of commitment and willingness to sacrifice among the leadership, and that needs to be confronted. However, in some circumstances a fulltime worker may be God's provision for the ministry in the local church.

Motivation and accountability

The worker's incentive, as we have seen, should never be to gain financially¹⁰⁷ but rather to give of himself in ministry. Obviously money and resources are necessary to live—this is true for the fulltime worker as well as everyone else. While he is not necessarily called to a vow of poverty, he needs to be as financially responsible as all other Christians—but his level of

¹⁰⁷ 1 Peter 5:2

financial support should be secondary in his motivation to serve the Lord and His people.

The worker's motivation should come from the Lord.

According to conventional, worldly wisdom, people are motivated by salary and a benefits package. Those in management can use such incentives to procure and control the person to accomplish institutional goals. The servant of the Lord should not stoop to such human foibles, but rather be an example of those who are so motivated by the Lord that such things as legal contracts would be more limiting than anything else. The apostle Paul's motivation for ministry was clear, he was under "contract" with the Lord:

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:16-18)

Paul was not compelled by the Corinthians' financial support, in fact he refused their support. On the other hand, we know that he accepted the Philippians' support. Yet he ministered among both groups freely and with sacrificial commitment. The point was that finances were not a motivation and he was free to accept or reject monetary gifts depending on the circumstances.

Following Paul's example, a worker today ought not be motivated by finances, nor should the church consider finances a motivation to hold the worker accountable.

*The worker is accountable first and foremost to the Lord.*¹⁰⁸

But shouldn't there be a system of accountability for the full-time worker? The word "accountable" means "to give an account," that is to give "a statement explaining one's conduct."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Rom 14:12

¹⁰⁹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

Ultimately, the worker does not serve the church. He serves God, he is the Lord's servant. Therefore his actions are to be judged by the Lord. This means that the worker is (in fact, all Christians are) answerable to the Lord. When that is in order the lesser accountabilities will fall into place.

The worker is accountable to the elders. Scripture also indicates that the worker has some accountability to the local church. This is derived from the fact that the Lord uses various means to guide and correct the worker, as He does with all believers. We can see this in early form when Barnabas and Saul reported back to their commending church in Antioch after their first missions trip:

When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them ... (Acts 14:27).

Clearly, the Holy Spirit used the church in guiding Barnabas and Saul into ministry and they felt an obligation to give a report back.

In terms of accountability, the worker has the same accountability as all others in the local church. The writer of Hebrews gives this specific focus:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Heb. 13:17)

The ones to be obeyed are described as those recognized leaders who “watch over your souls”—in other words, the elders. In the local church, all Christians, even fulltime workers, are to be subject to the elders.

What if the worker is also an elder? For that matter what about all the elders themselves, who are they accountable to? The answer is that elders should watch over each other. Ephesians 5:21 tells us to “*be subject to one another.*” While that is a general maxim for life in the local church, it surely suggests that no one is beyond some accountability within the local church.

Accountability would be most poignantly expressed among the mature leaders who watch over the souls of each other. Who else but an elder would understand the temptations and inclinations of another elder? If an elder is charged with shepherding the whole flock of God, that must include the other elders. We conclude therefore that individual elders are accountable to the other elders. This accountability does not supersede his accountability to God, any more than it does for the non-elders, but there must be a recognition that God often guides and protects through godly human leadership.

A fulltime worker is not *more* accountable than any other member of the local church, notwithstanding his being financially supported by the church. The *breadth* of accountability should be commensurate not with the amount of financial support, but rather with the breadth of ministry. Therefore, since a supported worker is most likely involved in more ministry, he has more areas in which he should be accountable.

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Fulltime worker as employee?

Should the worker be an employee of the church or be self-employed? US tax law¹¹⁰ recognizes an ambiguity regarding the issue of separation of church and state—and therefore allows “ministers” to file tax returns as self-employed tax payers and at the same time take advantage of some of the benefits of being employed. Such considerations aside, one’s thoughts on “employment” may affect one’s depth of understanding of the true nature of ministry.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines “employee” as one “who works for another in return for financial or other compensation.” This is opposite of the example Paul gives in 1 Timothy 5:17-18. His perspective is not that the servant of the Lord ministers in *return* for the financial support of the church. Rather, the church provides financial support in *response* to ministry the person already does. This distinction is important because motivation is the issue. The worker is motivated by the Lord, and so he serves. The church responds to his service by providing support.

An example of this is when a worker moves into an area to help plant a church. He sacrifices to make the move and begin ministering, even though the new church cannot afford to give much support because of its small size. In time the support increases as the result of the work growing. Therefore the initiative to serve comes first from the worker apart from the monetary prospects and the church in response then supports him. The worker must be careful to not let the finances control his willingness to sacrifice for the work of the Lord.

¹¹⁰ Canadian tax law somewhat recognizes this ambiguity as well.

Money is a great tempter for churches as well. The biblical record shows no evidence of contractual arrangements made involving the support of fulltime workers. To what degree, then, should the worker and the church formalize the arrangement for the sake of clear communication and accountability? We believe care must be taken so as not to lose the distinction of accountability to God.

One wonders if this too often is lost in negotiations for salary, benefits and contracts. The adage, “Those who hold the purse strings, control the individual,” should not apply to what we are talking about here. The issue is an important one, because it is all too easy for the worker or church to be preoccupied with financial support and power struggles in financial matters.

One worker greatly involved in the local church was offered a contract which stipulated terms of employment, benefits, vacation, accountability, required hours per week, etc. The irony was that the contract called for 40 hours per week, which was less than he was already doing. In effect, the contract would have gotten in the way of his ministry.

The church should never find itself using financial support to exert a subtle, manipulative influence on the servant of God. The attitude could germinate the thought that “we pay him to do that,” resulting in elders washing their hands of their responsibilities. This reflects weak, unspiritual eldership.

On the other hand, the worker should guard against being a “man pleaser” in order to secure continued or additional financial support. This could foster a bitterness that “I am worth more than what they are paying me.”

These dangers do not preclude a church having a fulltime worker, but they should be taken seriously.

Financial support

A right to support

Some might say that this teaching is self-serving. However, the New Testament, inspired by the Spirit of God, is clear in its

advocacy of financial and material support for those serving the Lord in a fulltime capacity. Jesus Himself said,

“Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. (Luke 10:7)

Paul rejoins this assessment, as we noted above:

Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? (1 Cor 9:6-11)

The fulltime worker has a right to be supported. It is true that Paul goes on to say he set aside that “right” when among the Corinthians. He none-the-less affirmed that he had a right to it and did in fact enjoy that right at certain times in his ministry.

Precisely at this point, Paul is aware of the awkwardness of a fulltime worker making this kind of assertion. It *seems* to beg of self-interest, has the *appearance* of a decidedly inferior spirituality and is *suspicious* of questionable motivation. However, Paul could legitimately assert these things because 1) he is inspired by the Holy Spirit, so in that regard is above self-motivation as he writes and 2) he *did not* receive support from the Corinthians (to whom he was writing) nor would he accept it from them—thus he was free to assert the propriety and right to support without being accused of self-interest in the eyes of the original readers, the Corinthians.

Foregoing support?

So what do we make of Paul setting aside the right to support from the Corinthians? Is that to be the standard for all fulltime workers? In our day it would seem a person would be crazy to refuse support, for after all, everyone needs to have the material and financial means to live, at least at a minimum level.

There are good reasons why *at times* a worker might set aside his right to financial support:

When preaching the gospel. Paul says, inspired as he was by the Holy Spirit:

“... when I preach the gospel, I ... offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.”
(1 Cor. 9:18)

He did not want the preaching of the free gift of salvation to be tarnished and laden down with financial requirements. To do anything else would have hindered his boast of providing the gospel “free of charge.” This challenges the fulltime worker today when one of the loudest criticisms of the church by non-believers is that they are always asking for money. Paul wanted to avoid such denigration.

When the motive is in question. Paul was tenacious, almost sarcastic in his own defense when his motive was questioned:

Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!
(2 Cor. 11:7-11)

Now it is obvious from this passage that Paul was financially supported by other churches (those of Macedonia) in his efforts

to preach the gospel. But where the Corinthians were concerned, he safeguarded himself in advance by not accepting any financial help from them. Possibly, Paul saw on his first visit to Corinth some evidence that receiving their financial support would someday come back to haunt him. His rationale was strategic as well as theological (i.e. offering salvation freely). When the Corinthians later challenged his apostolic authority, they questioned his core motives. So in order to prove he wasn't preaching and teaching for financial gain, he simply side-stepped the unfair accusation by reminding the Corinthians that he did not take nor expect any monetary support from them in the first place.

As an example. At times Paul supported himself (e.g. among the believers in Ephesus) to demonstrate sacrificial hard work and the blessedness of being able to give rather than receive.

You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:34-35)

When he can be self-supported. Some people do not need financial support: for example, those who are retired, those who are independently wealthy or those who can adequately support themselves with part-time secular work. This writer is acquainted with numerous individuals who have chosen to live on a reduced work week and a lesser income so they can spend more of their time in ministry.

When there is a lack of resources. One practical reason in foregoing support is when the church simply lacks the funds to adequately support an individual. This is often the case with a new church plant or with reviving a "sick" church. A fulltime worker might be supported by other churches while he serves in a church that has little or no resources.

So, the worker must learn, as Paul did, that at times he may have little income or assets, while at other times he may have an abundance. But at all times the worker must learn to be content and trust the Lord:

... I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:11-14)

Therefore, a fulltime worker is not wrong in expecting to be supported for the work he does—no one should criticize him for this. And at times the worker may voluntarily sacrifice support when appropriate.

Who provides the support?

The Lord provides for the worker. The worker is commended to the “*grace of the Lord*” (Acts 14:26). This grace is pervasive and the worker has the opportunity to experience it in the most tangible of ways, especially in our materialistic, western world. In a very real, down-to-earth, “rubber-meets-the-road” kind of way, being commended to the grace of the Lord means the grace of providing for the worker’s tangible sustenance while he serves. This is why a fulltime worker will often refer to his financial support as “gifts” rather than “pay” (the Greek word for *grace* in Scripture is *charis*, which is also translated as “gift”).

Indeed, this life of faith should not be strange to any Christian, for all are called to “*live by faith*” (2 Cor 5:7) and to look to the Lord to provide the basic necessities of life:

“...for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt 6:32b-33)

The fulltime worker, however, is often more immediately aware of the implications of this as he has left behind regular

employment and the guaranteed paycheck¹¹¹ and relies on the Lord to provide for his and his family's needs.

Despite the overly spiritual imaginations of some, the Lord does not usually provide money growing on trees or falling from the sky! Occasionally He does provide in simply miraculous ways, of which most fulltime workers can regale you with stories. Normally, however, the Lord uses various human conduits: individuals, churches, organizations. However, the Lord's servant, of all people, should never forget that support comes from the Lord. So whether there is much support or little support, it is the Lord who provides it.

The commending church should provide support. It would seem obvious that those who commend a person to work fulltime ought to provide significant support. How can they recommend a person to go out in faith trusting the Lord and yet not also themselves step out in faith by providing for the worker's needs? Clearly, Paul received financial support from a variety of churches at various times, and apparently had ongoing relationships with those churches. It would be most probable that the original commending church at Antioch was part of the support base for him.

The local church in which the worker serves should provide support. This is the basic teaching of 1 Tim 5:17-18 as we have already seen. As for support of those who teach, the apostle is unequivocal:

The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. (Gal 6:6)

This would include both the church as a whole as well as individuals providing "good things" for the one who teaches. The "good things" would presumably include material and financial support.

¹¹¹ Although, as anyone who has lost his job can attest, no paycheck is guaranteed!

The church should be constantly aware that it is a conduit for the Lord's provision. Members should be acting in faith to provide for the needs of the fulltime worker.

Individuals may help support the worker. God's people as individuals play an important role in God's provision. They are like a glove on the Hand that brings the Lord's resources to the worker. As the Lord leads, individuals may provide financial, material or service support for a fulltime worker (as we have seen in Gal 6:6 above). This may be in the form of financial gifts. Or it may be in the form of businessmen providing free or discounted services, healthcare services, material goods at cost—as an offering to the Lord to be used for needs of the worker. Or it could be in the sharing of possessions.

Factors affecting the amount of support

First of all, the primary communication link between the people and the worker is the Lord. As the worker prays about his needs, the Lord can impress those needs on the minds and hearts of the people. It is ironic that in a day when many Christians are claiming miraculous or supernatural happenings, there is so much asking and even begging for financial support in the church! The issue of finances is a very real and tangible opportunity to demonstrate God's supernatural ability to provide for the worker's and the ministry's need. Here are some factors that can help a church or individual determine how and how much to support the worker:

See your financial gifts as an offering to God. We saw this illustrated in the Old Testament (see above). Knowing that supporting the Lord's servants will bring God's blessing affects the way we give.¹¹²

Seek divine guidance in your giving. Though we have some human control over where our offerings may go, we need divine guidance so that we keep in step with the Holy Spirit's desires.

*The workman is worthy of support.*¹¹³ We shouldn't begrudge a worker his support. The old jingle, "Lord, you keep

¹¹² Phil 4:18-20

¹¹³ 1 Cor 9:6-14

him humble, we'll keep him poor," unfortunately can creep into attitudes. But we must remember the worker serves the Lord and He wants to use all of us to support His workers.

Many fulltime workers are notoriously reluctant to express their needs. There are a variety of reasons: a) like most people, they are uncomfortable discussing their personal finances, b) misunderstanding and judgmentalism over how they spend their money is an ever present concern, c) people have differing concepts of what constitutes a need or what standard of living the worker should live at, and d) making his needs known may look like the worker is hinting for a donation.

The worker has real needs to be considered. While this fact should be obvious, it requires some observation and sensitivity. Sometimes asking a few specific but gentle probing questions can be helpful or perhaps looking with a reasonable perspective at his life situation as compared to your own.

The book of Haggai makes a relevant point here:

Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate? (Hag 1:4)

The people of Israel, after their exile, spent considerable time and energy making their own lives comfortable, but allowed the things of the Lord to exist in a state of disrepair. One wonders if the priests and the Levites (the ones who were to be supported in their service for the Lord) were also living in a state of deprivation, or at the very least having to neglect the service of the Lord as they were consumed with supplying their own needs. There was a complete imbalance.

It seems reasonable today that we should not expect the Lord's servants to live in deprivation or see their houses in disrepair (for example), as compared to the standard of living other Christians experience or the state of repair of their homes.

The cost of living in the community in which the worker serves should be considered. Common sense should be used in considering the normal cost of living. What is obvious to the worker is not always obvious to others, namely that the workers

and their families have the same sustenance needs that everyone else has (food, transportation, home, clothing, schooling, health, recreation, etc.).

The church should exercise faith in supporting the worker.

This support is the Lord's money, used for the Lord's work, in support of the Lord's servant—and as such should not be taken lightly. Both the amount of support and the object of the support are to be bathed in prayer and subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As the worker sacrifices, so should the Lord's people in general.

Determining the level of support?

Here are some various ways churches have determined their level of support for their fulltime workers:

- Some church leaders (elders and/or deacons) simply pray for divine guidance without consideration of any specific or on-going needs of the worker.
- Some feel the worker should subsist on minimum support, trusting the Lord will somehow provide through other means. Possibly the support will be equal to the lowest income level represented in the church. It is assumed that this will encourage the worker to live more by faith and not by sight or checkbook. Or it may simply reflect the financial reality of the church's financial situation.
- Some churches arbitrarily set a figure based partly on available funds and partly on guess work. Many feel they simply cannot afford to give adequately.
- Some churches take into consideration factors such as the following:
 - ✓ The average or median income of wage-earners in the congregation.
 - ✓ The income level of those having an equal amount of education and experience in a similar field (for example, human services or education). One suggestion was to

target the income level of a junior college or community college professor.

- ✓ The percentage of time a worker spends in ministry in the local church, as opposed to outside ministry. Keep in mind that fulltime ministry can rarely be boxed into a forty hour work week!
- ✓ Education costs and adequate time off for rest, recuperation and further training or studies.
- ✓ The “benefits” most people receive with secular employment, like health insurance, life insurance,¹¹⁴ disability insurance,¹¹⁵ dental expenses, medications, pension,¹¹⁶ etc.—most of which are quite expensive to pay for oneself.

Some might think this last concern to be a sub-spiritual way of seeking the Lord’s will about financial support. But consider by way of analogy how Paul taught the Philippians to, “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything ... let your requests be made known to God*” (Phil 4:6). Based on this instruction, Christians should look to God when they are anxious for anything. However, this same Paul also told the same original readers, “*I have sent [Epaphroditus] ... so that when you see*

¹¹⁴ There is some debate about whether a worker should buy life insurance, for example, or trust the Lord to provide for his widow when he dies. Each worker must decide these kinds of questions based on his own convictions. However, the decision concerning life insurance, as well as health insurance and pension planning can involve a huge expense; and many fulltime workers settle for minimal or no insurances or pension, only to be hit by huge expenses later, or to leave a widow with serious financial struggles.

¹¹⁵ One church had a concern that if their worker become disabled and unable to continue in ministry, the church would certainly not abandon him or his family. However, the possibility of long term support for someone who could no longer function in ministry would become financially debilitating to the church. The church would not simply stop supporting someone because of unfortunate circumstances and then start supporting someone else. This would be cold-hearted to say the least. The solution they considered was disability insurance.

¹¹⁶ While pension may not sound spiritual to some, the needs of an older worker who is unable to minister as much because of advancing age, must be taken into consideration.

him again, you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you.” (Phil 2:28). It seems Paul himself was *quite* concerned to the point of being anxious, so he took practical steps in sending Epaphraditus back to the Philippians. The point is that while we look to God for help with anxiety, we can also take practical steps to help alleviate the cause of anxiety. Likewise, by analogy, the church should look to God for guidance in how much support should be given to the fulltime worker, but at the same time take practical steps in determining the need. The same holds true for the worker.

Is “regular” support unbiblical?

Some feel that where financial support is consistent and regular, the worker will come to rely on the people rather than on the Lord. The Scripture does not specifically address this concern and where Scripture is silent we must be careful about drawing conclusions. However, regularity is not the same as a contractual salary. Neither is irregularity to be equated with spirituality. Many of the worker’s expenses are regular (mortgage or rent payments, utilities, etc.)—fulltime workers as well as all other Christians desire to be responsible in financial matters. Consistency in support helps the worker plan his financial matters.

When support is not enough

A church may not be able to provide all the needed resources for its fulltime worker, due to financial limitations. The matter certainly needs to be bathed in prayer. Granted, the worker entered fulltime ministry trusting the Lord and was willing to set aside remuneration from a secular job. But the church, like the people of Israel in the Old Testament period, should be generous with their best in offering to the Lord. Remember, the idea from 1 Timothy 5:17-18 is to provide for the worker so that he doesn’t need to spend time in secular work to provide for his or his family’s needs.

Additionally, a church needs to carefully consider how much it can stretch itself financially, how many ministries and workers can be supported adequately. Again, faith is the critical

component in determining the proper priorities and the level of sacrifice needed. The church should extend itself in faith as a group and also as individuals. The worker should stretch himself as well in trusting the Lord when the support is not adequate for his needs.

It is not the worker's desire to become rich—there are other professions where he can do better if that were his goal. But the worker himself can develop resourcefulness in living a frugal, simple lifestyle. The church can develop resourcefulness in meeting the worker's material needs. Indeed, the financial needs of the worker can become a means for developing a deeper dependence on the Lord and an opportunity for developing a closer relationship between worker and church. Walking in faith as the church and the worker struggle with the support issues can encourage a genuine “*fellowship in the Spirit*” (Phil 2:1) and “*fellowship of sharing in His sufferings*” (Phil 3:10 NIV).

Finally the worker could engage for a time in a “tent-making” endeavor to help provide for his needs, just as Paul apparently did from time to time—this of course would mean less time for ministry during that time.

Be careful of superficial judgments

Since a worker may have ministries in areas beyond the local church (e.g. itinerate ministry, conference speaking, camp work, writing) no one group may fully know his total income. However, rare is the Lord's servant who has excess.¹¹⁷ One who is qualified and commended to serve fulltime can be trusted with any excess financial support, should it occur.

We must, however, be careful about superficial judgments.

¹¹⁷ True, there are a small number of highly visible exceptions to this (the most visible of which can include, for example, some nationally known speakers, TV evangelists and best-selling authors). But the norm is that most people in the Lord's work live at a standard well below what would be experienced in secular work.

One fulltime worker was known to drive a Mercedes Benz convertible sports car. People unfamiliar with the situation understandably had a difficult time with this. It turns out that for years he had hobbled along with old broken-down cars (that was all he could afford!) and often missed preaching engagements because of breakdowns. After one such occurrence a Christian car dealer (who owned a Mercedes-Benz franchise) who had been so blessed by this man's ministry, came to the conviction that this servant of the Lord should not have to cancel ministry engagements at the last minute simply because of inadequate transportation. As a result, the dealer gave him unlimited use of a brand new car, with a new replacement every two years.

Often workers may find themselves unbelievably blessed in one area, but suffering difficulty in another. The above worker with the Mercedes had other needs and would sometimes quip: "The Lord is good. However, you can't eat a Mercedes Benz when you don't have enough money to buy food."

Another fulltime worker had been making do with an old suit for years, and people had begun to notice. One winter, he was given money for a new suit, which he used for that purpose. A week later another Christian took him on a surprise visit to a men's clothing store and insisted on buying him a summer suit and a winter suit. About a month later, a recently widowed woman felt led of the Lord to give him a new suit that her recently deceased husband had bought shortly before he died. So, in the space of 2 months this worker had a closet full of new suits! Yet his car was in desperate need of repair and he had limited funds to fix it.

Accordingly we must be careful in our judgments concerning a worker's standard of living and blessings from the Lord.

What is considered “fulltime”?

Scripture is silent on this specific question. However, the fact that a worker is “worthy” of his support means he must be *worthy*. This would have implications as to the amount of time spent in ministry. Consider that the average elder (non-fulltime individual) most likely works a responsible secular job, probably 40-45 hours per week minimum. However, that same elder may serve many hours per week in the church attending meetings, preaching, counseling, e-mailing, planning, leading small groups, etc. Someone has suggested that 10-17 hours per week (including attending the church services) would not be out of line for a conscientious church leader. Therefore, for a fulltime worker to spend comparable time as a secularly employed elder, 50-60 hours a week in ministry would not be far off base. Many workers spend even more than that! Of course, there is not always a clear dividing line between “ministry time” and “personal time,” so setting a time frame is very difficult to do.

It is not so much a matter of how much time a worker should “put in,” but what burden the Lord has laid on his heart for ministering. The church should be vigilant in guarding the worker from over-extending himself, for there is always more work to be done than time to do it.

Clearly, the worker needs his time off and time away on a regular basis in the form of a vacation.¹¹⁸ Even Jesus spent much time away from the crowds for rest and recuperation.¹¹⁹

Home grown or imported?

There is no specific example in Scripture of an existing church *inviting* in a fulltime worker from outside the church. We do see scriptural examples of “outsiders” being sent to minister to existing churches: Paul sent various individuals (like Timothy, Epaphroditus, etc.) to minister to local churches.

¹¹⁸ “Vacation” means to vacate your labor. It is “A period of intermission of regular work or employment, or of studies, the time during which a person temporarily ceases regular duties of any kind and performs other activities (www.Webster-Dictionary.org).

¹¹⁹ Luke 5:16

Some of this could be considered “itinerate” ministry, but some involved long periods of time. Paul himself spent two years in Ephesus on his second visit.¹²⁰ The Ephesians did not want him to leave their area!¹²¹

The distinct teaching of Scripture is that a mature, healthy local church is adequately gifted from within.¹²² But a young church or a growing church with many new converts or many not-yet-mature believers may need some additional help.

The question still arises: can an existing, presumably mature church, invite a fulltime person to minister for an extended period of time? It seems the question is one of duration. Since Scripture endorses travelling preachers and evangelists, instructs about a fulltime worker raised up in his own local church¹²³ and supports by example the idea of extended ministry by a fulltime worker in the local church—it would follow that having a fulltime worker *either* from another locale *or* from within for an extended length of time would not necessarily contradict scriptural principles. But this must be done carefully in a way that does not constitute a move to a clergy/laity distinction or diminish the priesthood of all believers.

The potential worker should be proven and well known to the church¹²⁴ where at all possible.¹²⁵ This will prevent a “getting married after only a few dates” syndrome which is evident in the approach of many churches.

Having said this, the ideal for a healthy growing assembly is that there would be one or more within the local body that would be gifted and have a burden for fulltime ministry rather than having to go outside the fellowship for help in the ministry.

¹²⁰ Acts 19:10

¹²¹ Acts 20

¹²² Eph 4:11-16, 1 Cor 12:27-28

¹²³ 1 Tim 5:17-18

¹²⁴ Philippians 2:22

¹²⁵ To interview an hitherto unknown individual two or three times and then “hire” him is like getting married after two or three dates—not wise.

Some safeguards

Some feel that having a fulltime worker begins the slippery slope that leads to a clergy-laity distinction. However, that need not be the case. The fear of that happening certainly didn't hinder Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 5:18. Having said that, we feel some safe guards are in order. The following are not mandated in Scripture, but seem like the better part of wisdom:

Avoid negotiating a salary or contract where possible. While we don't want to be dogmatic on this point, we believe that when the worker and the church independently seek the Lord in faith concerning financial support, faith is increased and trust is built. As trust grows, there may be times when needs are made known, but we feel it wise that the worker and the church are careful about not assessing too much detail.

At the heart of the matter is the perspective that the church is not *hiring* a pastoral staff member. The worker comes in faith, giving himself and his time and energy as an offering to the Lord. The church, similarly, steps out in faith, making an offering to the Lord of money and resources which the Lord then uses to provide for the needs of the worker. This perspective provides a profound safeguard for both the worker and the church. Negotiations and contracts denote the relationship more as a job with all its rights and prerogatives—and can very easily push faith and trust to the side.

Some might feel this is a precarious position for the worker, particularly if the church does not support him adequately. Others feel the church is in a precarious position for without a contract, the worker can abuse the financial support and trust. However, for both sides the situation is one of faith-testing. Is God really involved, does He really know the worker's need? Can He really provide for the worker's need? As the church sees the individual growing in his trust, the rest of the body of Christ has an example to follow.

Clarify expectations. While expectations for all elders must be clear, it may be even more important for a fulltime worker because of his greater ministry load. There should be some

reasonable understanding of how the Lord is leading the worker in ministry and how that lines up with the expectations of the congregation. Discussion and teaching on this level can help maximize the giftedness of the individual and help the rest of the body plan the ministry appropriately.

Recognize when a worker is no longer “worthy” of support
The elders should speak openly with the worker if his service is seen as no longer worthy of “double honor.” If the Lord is leading the worker to a change of ministry or a different level of ministry, this needs to be made clear—not as a negotiating point, but as an open discussion seeking the Lord’s guidance.¹²⁶ Good, clear communication between the worker and the elders is absolutely essential.

However, if sub-spiritual character is involved (i.e. laziness, greed, pride), the worker should be confronted the same as any other Christian guilty of these things. If the worker’s effectiveness is waning, such that he is no longer serving “well,” the elders must openly, honestly, humbly and gently address this together.

These things should not be seen as a threat or a motivation to get more or different work out of the worker. Rather there must be a recognition of a change in level or quality of ministry. Whatever the case, our deep genuine fellowship in the Lord and consideration for one another mandates that the leadership of the church pursues open communication to work through these genuine concerns.

Conflict of accountability? First and foremost, the worker is accountable to the Lord,¹²⁷ as mentioned above. On a human level, though, he is accountable to the commending church as well as the church in which he serves. Sometimes these are the same church. But where the commending church is not the same as the one in which the worker serves, there can be the possibility of tension or conflict of accountability. Problems can be avoided by making sure the churches are compatible in their

¹²⁶ See Acts 13:1-4

¹²⁷ Rom 14:12, Hebrews 4:13

doctrine and practices. However, the worker should be allowed a wide berth when it comes to *preferences*, practices and patterns of ministry not mandated—such things should be governed not by law, but by grace and love.

Fulltime worker as elder? Should a fulltime worker not be an elder as extra precaution against his becoming too influential or not being under authority, as some suggest? First of all, in 1 Tim 5:17-18, Paul speaks directly to the possibility of an elder being in fulltime ministry, so any blanket argument legislating against a fulltime worker is unbiblical. Second, the best safeguard against abuse is to have a strong group of elders and a worker who is firmly committed to the idea of plurality of elders.

Having said this, the elders need to understand that there is a unique tension that can arise in a team where one elder spends a disproportionate amount of time in the ministry of overseeing the church, as compared to the others. With human nature as it is, jealousy, misunderstanding and expectations can haunt such a team. However, all ministry teams have their struggles, and these must be addressed just as with all struggles in group dynamics. An awareness of these tensions and open discussion bathed in trust is the antidote.

Will this lead to a clergy/laity distinction? The New Testament gives no credence to a religious class distinction or a clergy/laity division—all Christians are now ministers¹²⁸ and priests¹²⁹ before God. A fulltime worker is simply one member of the body of Christ, one who happens to give more time to the spiritual ministry of the church than most. An unbiblical distinction will not arise where the worker and the elders have a firm grasp on the biblical understanding of the priesthood of all believers and the plurality of elders in the church.

¹²⁸ Eph 4:12

¹²⁹ 1 Peter 2:9, Rev 1:6

Is the fulltime worker an “office” of the church? The only “offices”¹³⁰ of the church are that of elders and deacons. The role or function of fulltime worker is not a position to be filled, but a ministry to take place. There may be many ministries in the church with specific needs and a fulltime worker may be involved in one or more of these. But there is no suggestion in Scripture of a biblical *office* of “Pastor” or “Fulltime worker.”

Some have erroneously asserted that Timothy was just such a “Pastor” but the facts don’t support this. The best that can be said of him is that he was an apostolate delegate that was helping a number of churches grow. He is never called “the pastor” nor is it implied that he was “the Pastor” of any church. We conclude that to have an “office” of Pastor goes beyond Scripture example or warrant. Further, we believe that to use the term “pastor” as a title of one “leading individual,” is to do injustice to all others in the church that have the spiritual gift of “pastor,”¹³¹ but are exercising that gift in a non-fulltime manner. In fact, a healthy church will have many “pastors”, including women who shepherd women, young adults who shepherd youth, Sunday school teachers who shepherd junior high schoolers, etc.

Dangers? Yes, there can be abuses, such as treating the worker as the “hired hand” or “paid clergy,” neglecting to financially support the worker, putting the fulltime worker on the proverbial “pedestal” or elders shirking their responsibilities. However, these potential abuses should never legislate against an idea taught in Scripture. By analogy, abuses within a plurality of elders don’t invalidate the biblical concept of multiple elders. Neither should abuses or potential abuses related to a fulltime worker invalidate the biblical concept of a worker worthy of “double honor.” The concerns should make us all the more vigilant in protecting against abuses without prohibiting the freedom God grants. A principled worker and biblically qualified elders will keep a watchful eye.

¹³⁰ Here we use the term “office” in the classical sense of a biblically mandated and necessary position or role in the church that is filled by a qualified individual.

¹³¹ Eph 4:11

CONCLUSION

Fulltime work in a local church is a biblical concept. It is a ministry by faith, for both the church and the worker.

With proper safeguards and a close, honest relationship between the worker and the elders, this ministry can be a real blessing to the growth and maturity of the church. When God raises up an individual who is qualified biblically and the local church acts in faith to support the individual, God's blessing will be evident. This ministry is the Lord's work, the people contribute to the Lord who then uses those gifts to support the worker. To Him, and Him alone, be the glory.

But I [Paul] rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction.

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever.

Amen.

(Philippians 4:10-20)