

# Titles and Salaries for Church Leaders

by Zac Poonen

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*Church leaders should not use titles of respect and should be sensitive to the situation when handling financial support, following the example of Jesus and Paul.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 23:8

**Topics:** "Servanthood in Leadership", "Financial Integrity in Ministry"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that church leaders should avoid titles that elevate them above their peers, as Jesus taught that the greatest among us must be servants. He critiques the common practice of church leaders demanding salaries, advocating instead for a model where leaders support themselves and rely on voluntary gifts from the congregation. Poonen highlights the importance of financial integrity, urging leaders to be careful about the sources of their support and to prioritize the needs of their families and the poor. He calls for a return to the New Testament principles of ministry, where respect and appreciation are the primary forms of compensation for church leaders. Ultimately, he stresses that true ministry should be motivated by love for Christ rather than financial gain.

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## Transcript

### Titles

"Do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." (Matthew 23:8-12)

Jesus' command in the above passage is very clear. Church-leaders must never use any titles. They must be "brothers", just like all the other brothers in the church. The reason why many church-leaders use titles of respect in front of their names is to exalt themselves over others in the church. But in the church, only Jesus has the right to be exalted as Head and Lord. Every exaltation of self in any way - by the use of titles such as Reverend, Right Reverend, Metropolitan, Apostle, Prophet, Pope, Cardinal, Bishop, Pastor etc., - is to compete with Christ for recognition in the church.

But a church-leader's calling is to be "a servant" (Matt.23:11)

### Money Matters

In money matters, full-time Christian workers and church-leaders must follow Jesus' example - for He was also in full-time ministry for 3½ years:

Jesus never told anyone at any time about His financial needs. He never advertised His ministry or sent out reports about His work (for that would have been indirectly begging for money). His Father prompted some people to give Jesus gifts voluntarily - and Jesus accepted such gifts, because Jesus had to support His 12 disciples and their families financially. The fact that Jesus needed a treasurer (Judas) to keep all that money and the fact that Judas could steal from the bag, without anyone noticing the missing money, indicates that there must have been a lot of money in the bag.

Luke 8:2,3 says:"Mary Magdalene and Joanna (the wife of Chuza, Herod's palace-manager), and Susanna, and many others contributed to the support of Jesus and the 12 disciples, out of their private means". And Jesus accepted their gifts.

Jesus was however, very careful in the way He spent the money He received. He used it mainly for two purposes only (as hinted at in John 13:29): "(1) Buy what is needed; and (2) Give to the poor".

This is the example we must follow as well - in our homes and in our churches. Don't waste money on unnecessary luxuries. Buy only what you need. And don't forget to share your excess with poor believers who are in need. And if you are in full-time ministry and God has provided you with private resources to live on, then don't be dependent on any church to support you. Support yourself financially and serve the Lord.

In 1 Timothy 5:17,18, Paul says that" the elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honour, 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'"

Paul does not use the word "money" here, but "honour". If this were referring to money, then it would mean that God is commanding that the elders in a church be paid double the salary that everyone else in the church is getting. That is ridiculous and is obviously not what the Holy Spirit is saying. Paul is speaking here about giving double honour (appreciation and respect) to the elders of the church. We must give honour to church-elders, just like an ox is allowed to eat the grain it is threshing. The elder's primary wages therefore are " respect and appreciation and gratitude " from his flock - and not money.

Paul speaks of financial support for full-time Christian workers in 1 Cor.9:7-18:

"Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel."

So it is perfectly proper for full time preachers and elders to receive gifts from those they minister to.

But Paul continues to say in the same passage:

"Nevertheless, we did not use this right , but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. It is true that the Lord has directed that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living from the gospel. But I have used none of these things. It would be better for me to die than to have any man make my boast an empty one. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am

under compulsion. 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 still have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward (salary)? Just this, that, when I preach the gospel, I can offer it without charge to everyone. So I do not make use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel."

Paul did not preach for a salary nor did he move around expecting to receive gifts from other believers. He preached because he was "compelled by his love for Christ" and because God had committed the stewardship of the gospel to him. So he wanted to proclaim the gospel freely, so that no-one would imagine that God charges people for the gospel.

So we see that the New Testament does teach that every servant of the Lord who labors in the ministry of the Lord is entitled to receive gifts for his support. But at the same time, we observe that:

(1) No-one was paid a regular monthly salary. Jesus never promised His disciples a salary. The apostles never received a salary. They trusted their heavenly Father to move people's hearts to support them financially (as in Jesus' case). Such a life of faith was essential for them to have power in their ministry. It also protected them from covetousness.

(2) In situations where Paul saw that this provision of support was being abused by preachers, he decided not to take any money at all from anyone but to support himself, in order to protect the testimony of the gospel that he was preaching. He says in 2 Cor.11:7-13 (Living):"I preached God's Good News to you without charging you anything..... Instead I 'robbed' other churches by taking what they sent me and using it up while I was with you so that I could serve you without cost. And when that was gone, I still didn't ask you for anything, for the Christians from Macedonia brought me another gift. I have never yet asked you for one cent, and I never will. And I will tell everyone about it! I do this because I want to cut out the ground from under the feet of those who boast that they are doing God's work in just the same way we are . God never sent those men at all; they are 'phonies' who have fooled you into thinking they are Christ's apostles."

So we see that Paul did receive gifts occasionally - from the Christians in Macedonia (Philippi) who sent him money at times. But he never took any money from the Corinthian Christians (as we see above), because he wanted to demonstrate that he was different from the fake Christian preachers in Corinth.

Paul did not take any money from the Thessalonian Christians either: He says in 2 Thess.3:8-10: "We never accepted food from anyone of you without paying for it; we worked hard day and night for the money we needed to live on, in order that we would not be a burden to any of you. It wasn't that we didn't have the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to show you firsthand how you should work for your living"

And Paul didn't take any money from the Ephesian Christians. He says in Acts 20:31-35: "All these three years I was with you, I did not seek for anyone's money or clothes. You know how I worked with my own hands to support myself and the men who were with me. I showed you by working hard in this way, that we must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus Who said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

So you must be sensitive to the situation you are in - in this present time in your country - and see what stand you should take to maintain a pure testimony for the Lord in your situation.

In all the scores of CFC churches that the Lord has planted, every one of the one hundred and more elders work to support themselves and their families - and not one of them receives a salary. This system has worked perfectly in our churches for over 40 years now (both in the rich city churches and in the poorest village churches of India). It has also saved us from being infiltrated by covetous preachers who quote the Scriptures and seek to live off other Christians.

Almost all pastors in the churches in the world are paid a monthly salary. We do not judge them. And we do not tell them to stop receiving their salary either. But we would say to them that if they accepted the pastorate of a church because of the large salary-package the church offered them, and not because of a clear calling from God, then they are not in the will of God.

If you do decide to accept a salary, then you must accept it as a voluntary gift given to you by your church and not as a salary. The difference between a salary and a gift is this: A salary can be demanded and a pay-rise can also be asked for. But a gift can never be demanded or even expected.

This was the position that the apostles took in relation to money-matters in New Testament times. Christendom has declined greatly from that standard. And because of this failure in money matters, the sad result is that God's anointing and spiritual insight are missing from much of Christian ministry today. There is very little revelation from God in the ministry of most pastors today. Jesus said that only those who are faithful in money-matters would be given the true riches of Divine revelation by the Lord (Luke 16:11).

We must also be careful about who we receive money from. We should NOT receive money from every believer. Here are the ones from whom we should not receive any money or gifts:

1. We should not receive any money from those who are not born-again children of God. It is a great honour and privilege to support the work of God on earth. But that privilege is given only to His born-again children 3 John 7.
2. We should not receive any money from those who don't have enough money for their own family's earthly needs? They must take care of their family's needs first (as we read in 1 Tim.5:8 and Mark 7:9-13). Our heavenly Father is a multi-trillionaire. And like any rich earthly father, He does not want any of His children to starve or suffer financially, because they give money for His work.
3. We should not receive any money from those who have debts to repay? God wants His children to live restful lives, free from all debt. Such believers must "first give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and only then give anything to God". God does not want Caesar's money, or anyone else's money Matt.22:21; Rom.13:8). [A house-loan however is not to be considered as a "debt" (in the meaning in these verses), because the house is an asset that has equal in value to the loan taken. For the same reason, a vehicle-loan is also not a debt - if the vehicle has been insured for the value of the loan taken].
4. We should not receive any money from those who are not reconciled with those whom they have hurt in some way (SeeMatt.5:23, 24 ).
5. We should not receive any money from those who give reluctantly or who expect God to give them some reward, because they gave. God loves cheerful givers and so must we. (2 Cor.9:7).

You can read more about this at our church website: <http://www.cfcindia.com/our-financial-policy>

We don't judge other churches or elders who do things differently from us. But in CFC churches, we seek to preserve the standards the Lord has laid down in His Word, very strictly.

He who has ears to hear let him hear.

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