

Biblical Principles for Compensation

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The Bible is the Christian's rule for faith and practice. As such, it provides precepts and principles that apply to the practice of daily living. It provides guidelines for the economic aspects of life, as well as the spiritual. The matter of work and compensation is a major part of this economic aspect and a concern to employers and employees alike. Although biblical principles may be identified for both employer and employee, it is the specific goal of this discussion to consider the biblical responsibility of an employer to his employees. A study of the Bible suggests six principles for the employer-employee relationship and compensation.

The principle of responsibility. The Bible makes it clear that every man has certain responsibilities to fulfill in his life. These responsibilities comprise several areas, including the spiritual (Amos 4:12; John 1:12; 3:3, 36), physical (1 Thessalonians 4:4), marital (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:21-6:4), governmental (Romans 13:1-7), and financial. It is the area of financial responsibility that is to be considered here.

Man's basic relationship to the world around him and to the things which he possesses is one of stewardship. The Scriptures affirm that God, by virtue of creation, is the possessor of all that exists and that man is totally accountable to Him. All men, but especially Christians, are to acknowledge God's ownership of what they possess, and to steward those possessions for His glory. Though there are innumerable intermediaries involved in the production of one's job and possessions, it is God who ultimately is the source of who we are and what we have (Deut. 8:17-18). This relationship of dependence and stewardship increases the seriousness of the Christian's financial responsibility.

For the Christian, financial responsibility involves provision for himself and his family. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Paul refers to a principle which he had already given to the Christians there, namely that "if any would not work, neither should he eat." In contrast to the practice of disorderly men (v. 6), who evidently wanted to be supported without working for it, Paul says that a man must earn his provision. That this provision extends to the family is shown in 1 Timothy 5:8—"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." In the context, Paul is instructing Timothy, his "son in the faith," in the care of the many widows who were a part of the early church. The strict interpretation of this verse, as shown by a comparison with verse 4, is that a man with a widowed mother or grandmother should provide for her himself and not relegate that responsibility to the church. It must also be noted, however, that verse 4 in-

dicates that both immediate and more distant dependent relatives are in view. It is inconceivable that a man should be exhorted to care for a widowed mother or grandmother and not be required before God to provide for his immediate family as well. The passage clearly takes a broad view of the dependents for which a Christian is responsible.

In fact, Paul does use this principle of provision for one's immediate family as a physical illustration of a spiritual principle in 2 Corinthians 12:14—"Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children." In an attempt to show the Corinthians that spiritually he stands *in loco parentis* to them, Paul draws on the accepted fact that the father provides for his children, and not the children for him. The spiritual point is that Paul's desire is to benefit the Corinthians and not to benefit from them, but the practical application is that it is right for a man to provide for his family.

There is a further application of 2 Corinthians 12:14, for the matter of planning and saving for the future is contained in the word *thesaurizo*, "lay up." The one who plans for the future is often commended in the Bible. In Genesis 41:33-36, Joseph reflected godly wisdom in the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and in his plan to store up part of the bounty of the good years to meet the need in the lean years. For this wise foresight, Joseph was commended, both by Pharaoh and by God. It is interesting to note that the bountiful years preceded the years of famine and provided opportunity to make provision for the future. The writer of Proverbs also commends the principle of foresight: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Prov. 22:3; cf. 27:12). The principle is that foreseeing and providing for the dangers and needs of the future is the mark of a wise man. This commendable provision for the future is not to be confused with the hoarding of one's possessions in a selfish manner. The parables of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-20), the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27, Luke 18:18-27), and the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) all reveal God's rejection of such an amassing of material wealth for selfish purposes.

With regard to providing for the future, the Bible also commends the man who leaves an inheritance to his children. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22). While it is true that the best heritage a man can leave his family is the example of a godly life, this verse is speaking of material inheritance as shown by the reference to the "wealth of the sinner" in the second clause. Proverbs 21:20 seems to say the same: "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up." The fool uses up all that he has, but the wise man, with trouble and care, collects an inheritance.²

The preceding discussion suggests this principle: A Christian employer should seek to provide a living wage for his employees, a wage sufficient for the employee to provide for the needs of his family and to prepare for the future.

The principle of giving. It has always been a principle of man's fellowship with God to worship Him by the offering of a portion of his material substance. In the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, God gave Israel very clear guidelines for the presentation of tithes and offerings, but the practice of giving to God preceded the Law. Cain and Abel brought the first recorded offerings to the Lord (Gen. 4:3-4). Abraham also gave tithes to Melchizedek, "the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:17-20).

In New Testament revelation, the amount of one's giving is not so clearly delineated, but the importance of giving is maintained. Mark 12:41-44 is the account of the widow who was praised by Christ Himself for her offering of two mites. The quantity of her gift did not begin to match any one of the rich men's, but the quality of it surpassed all the others combined. The gifts of the others were contributions, but her gift was a sacrifice.³ The Lord is blessed by this kind of giving.

2 Corinthians 9:1-9 provides further insight into New Testament giving. In this chapter, Paul encourages the Corinthian believers in the collection which was being taken to help the church in Jerusalem. He commends their zeal in giving (v. 2) and refers to their gift as "bounty" (v. 5). The use of the term suggests that this was a spontaneous act of love and generosity, not a grudging relinquishment.⁴ The principle that giving must be free, personal, and deliberate, not compulsory or casual is set forth in verse 7. This kind of giving also pleases the Lord.

The same offering is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, where Paul lays down several principles for New Testament giving: (a) giving is to be centered in the local church, for it is a local church addressed here; (b) giving is to be universally practiced among Christians ("let every one of you..."); (c) giving is also an individual matter ("lay by him..."); (d) giving is to be regular ("Upon the first day of the week..."); and (e) giving should be proportionate ("as God hath prospered him...") A man's giving should be in proportion to the way he is prospering, but every Christian should be involved in supporting God's work.

The preceding discussion suggests the following principle: Every Christian is to give to the support of the Lord's work. Such giving is to be voluntary, personal, and proportionate. A Christian employer should compensate in such a way as to enable his employees to fulfill these scriptural guidelines. The concept of the employer "withholding" the tithe of his employees is counter-productive to these objectives.

The principle of sacrifice. An integral part of following and serving the Lord Jesus Christ has always been a willingness to sacrifice materially to do so. It was this very point which kept the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 18:18-27) from becoming Christ's disciple. He loved his riches more than the Lord, and so he went away sorrowful. Probably no better positive example of sacrificial service to Christ can be found than the apostle Paul. Several New Testament passages reflect upon this aspect of his service.

In 1 Corinthians 4:11-12, he refers to the sacrifice of his manual labor: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; and labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it." Paul evidently worked hard, laboring to the point of weariness. Godet refers to this work as "Paul's voluntary obligation to gain his livelihood by his own work." Paul voluntarily gave up his right to be supported by his labor in service to the Lord. Instead he provided for his needs by tent-making (Acts 18:3). He also seems to be referring to this secular employment in 1 Thessalonians 2:9: "For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." The word translated "labouring" *ergazomenoi* "denotes working for wages, especially manual labor or working at a trade."⁶

At the same time, Paul maintained in several passages his right to be supported by the gospel he preached. In 1 Corinthians 9:6, he implies the right that he and Barnabas had to cease manual work: "Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" The expected answer to this question is "yes." A second significant passage with regard to Paul's right to be supported by the gospel is 2 Thessalonians 3:8-10: "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

Paul makes several important points in this portion of Scripture. In verse 8, he duplicates much of the content of 1 Thessalonians 2:9, declaring that he was not supported or maintained by the Thessalonians, but worked with his own hands. Verse 9 states that this situation was for the purpose of being a right example to the church there, and not because Paul had no right or authority to be supported. Paul seems to have voluntarily sacrificed his right to support to provide a positive example in contrast to others who demanded support without the authority to do so.⁷ According to Lenski:

Paul and his helpers had the right to accept full support from their converts, but did not use this right as Paul states regarding himself in 1 Cor. 9:12, 18. Jesus gave them that right in Luke 10:7, 8, nor can it ever be abrogated.⁸

The preceding discussion suggests the following principle: Godly Christians may be expected to sacrifice on behalf of the Lord's work. The Christian employer, however, should avoid seeking to impose upon employees a standard of sacrifice that would negate the personal and voluntary aspect.

The principle of charity. An important test of the genuineness of one's Christianity is whether or not he loves other Christians (1 John 4:7-21). Furthermore, real love is verified by deeds (James 2:14-20). This concept is not unique to the New Testament, for the Law of Moses required the Israelites to be charitable: "For the poor shall never cease out

of the land: therefore I commend thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land" (Deut. 15:11). This principle of extending help to those in need is reinforced in both Psalms (37:21; 112:5) and Proverbs (3:27, 28; 28:27).

In the New Testament, two passages bear special consideration. 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 contains Paul's encouragement to the Corinthian Christians to complete the collection of the love offering for the church at Jerusalem. He suggests that this act of love proves the sincerity of their words of love (v. 8). He reminds them of the supreme example of the Lord Jesus Christ, who "became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (v. 9). He goes on, then, to suggest that the material means of the Corinthians were intended by God for the purpose of supplying the need at Jerusalem. The idea contained in the word "equality" (*isotes*, v. 14) is that, by means of the Corinthian gift to Jerusalem, both the material need of Jerusalem and the spiritual need of Corinth can be supplied.⁹ This act of Christian charity will have beneficial results for the givers as well as the recipients. A note of balance is sounded by Tasker:

Christians are always called upon to give generously, but not normally so generously as unduly to impoverish themselves or those dependent upon them, especially if by such impoverishment all they are doing is to increase the ease of others beyond the demands of necessity.¹⁰

A second important passage is Ephesians 4:28: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Paul says that the Christian motive for earning is not only to meet one's own needs (personal and family), but to share with others in need. A Christian should find satisfaction in giving, out of the earnings of honest labor, to help needy brothers.

The preceding discussion suggests the following principle: A Christian employer should seek to compensate in such a way that he encourages his employees to reach out in love to help others in need without impoverishing themselves or their dependents.

The principle of recompense. The principle that a worker, no matter what his or her station in life, deserves fair treatment and recompense for work accomplished is a recurring theme in God's Word. In the Old Testament, the Law laid down guidelines for the employer-employee relationship. Leviticus 19:13 says, "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning." Because the withholding of a day-laborer's wages until morning could cause great hardship to a poor man and his family, Israelite employers were encouraged to pay promptly. Kellogg states: "I have not fulfilled the law of love toward the man or woman whom I employ merely by paying fair wages; I must also pay promptly."¹¹ God's people were to be concerned about the economic status of their brethren. This concern was to extend even to the provision of support and employment (Lev. 25:35-36).

This theme appears again in Deuteronomy 24:14-15: "Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee." God is concerned that men should not be taken advantage of, but should receive their just wages. Failure to pay promptly falls into the category of sin. God hates injustice in financial relationships. In Deuteronomy 25:13-16, the use of "diverse weights" to gain an economic advantage is called an abomination to God. Schultz comments: "This represented a warning of great magnitude, since the one who ignored or mistreated the poor would be accountable to God for his neglect."¹²

God is also concerned for the just recompense of his servants. Concerning the Levites, Numbers 18:31 says, "And ye shall eat it in every place, ye and your households: for it is your reward for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation." For their faithful labor in the tabernacle, the Levites and their families were to eat from the tithes and offerings which the people brought. The priests, in turn, were supported by the tithes and offerings of the Levites (Lev. 27:30-33). Huey says this:

The regulations of this chapter clearly establish the principle that those who were unable to earn their own livelihood by reason of their dedication to the Lord's service were to be supported by the offerings the people brought to the Lord.¹³

The principle of just recompense is found in several verses in Proverbs (12:14; 22:16; 28:3). Proverbs 28:3 declares, "A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food." The "poor man" may be better understood as the "head" or "master":¹⁴ In this case, the verse suggests that a master who renders evil instead of good to his workers is comparable to rain which is expected to bring life to the crops, but brings devastation instead. It is interesting to note that even deceptive Laban inquired of Jacob concerning a fair wage for Jacob's service to him (Gen. 29:15). Finally, the Old Testament prophets record numerous denunciations of the neglect of fair recompense (Jer. 22:13; Amos 2:6-7; 5:12, Micah 6:11; Malachi 3:5).

The New Testament provides further revelation concerning the matter of just recompense. Reference is made to the general principle in several cases. James 5:4 says regarding its violation, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth." In 1 Corinthians 3:8, Paul draws on the principle that "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." And, in Luke 10:7, the Lord Himself states the principle that "the labourer is worthy of his hire."

Two New Testament passages deal with the specific relationship of a master to his slave. While the master-slave and employer-employee relationships are not synonymous, principles from the former may be applied

to the latter. Ephesians 6:9 states: "And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him." Colossians reiterates: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven" (4:1).

Two significant points emerge from these verses. First, by his reference to God as the master's Master, he implies that the master/employer should treat his servants/employees in the same manner as his heavenly Master treats him. Such treatment would be fair, equitable, and even generous. In the second place, Paul further defines the master's responsibility as doing "the same things," and "just and equal." He seems to be exhorting masters/employers to righteously fulfill the responsibilities which are theirs by virtue of their position. Lenski says this:

"Equality" thus = "the same things": as you masters want the slaves as slaves to do the right thing by you, do you as their masters do the equal thing by them.¹⁵

There is a human tendency to be most concerned with the responsibility of the other party in a relationship. Paul says that each, master and slave, employer and employee, must attend to the particular responsibilities associated with his position.

Two passages shed light on the particular matter of recompense for labor in Christian ministry. The first of these is 1 Corinthians 9:3-18, where Paul defends his right as a minister to financial support. He presents the problem at hand with a series of questions:

Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? (1 Cor. 9:4-6)

The mention of Barnabas here indicates that Paul is defending the right of all ministers to be supported by those whom they serve. Furthermore, support adequate for a family is in view, as shown by the mention of wives.

In verses 7-14, Paul argues his claim from several bases. First, he defends his right to support from the basis of human analogy (v. 7). The soldier, the vinedresser, and the shepherd are all supported by their respective occupations. Godet observes, "The man who consecrates his labor to a work ought to be able to live by that work."¹⁶ Second, the Old Testament Scriptures contain the same principle (vv. 8-9). The Apostle applies the statement of Deuteronomy 25:4 to their circumstances. The oxen were not to be muzzled so that they could eat the grain which they were treading out. Paul makes it clear that this precept was intended to promote a gentle and generous spirit in the Israelites, a spirit which would extend beyond animals to the human workmen whose help they engaged.¹⁷ Third, Paul appeals to common sense: "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" (v. 11). The same sentiment is expressed in Romans 15:27. Barnes writes:

We make you acquainted with God; with the plan of salvation; with the hope of heaven. We instruct your children; we guide you in the path of comfort and peace; we raise you from the degradations of idolatry and of sin; and we open before you the hope of the resurrection of the just, and all the bliss of heaven: to do this, we give ourselves to toil and peril by land and by sea. And can it be made a matter of question whether all these high and exalted hopes are of as much value to dying man as the small amount which shall be needful to minister to the wants of those who are the means of imparting these blessings?¹⁸

Fourth, Paul draws upon Old Testament practice, as set forth in Leviticus 7:6, 8-10, 14, 28-36. Both the priests and the Levites were supported by a portion of the substance that was brought to the temple for sacrifice (Num. 18:8-32; Deut. 18:1-8). This longstanding practice of supporting God's special servants is to be continued in New Testament times as well. Paul's final proof for financial support is the command of Christ Himself (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7). The fundamental principle is that God's servants should live of the gospel, and not by secular occupations.

They should receive so much as to keep their minds from being harassed with cares, and their families from want; not so much as to lead them to forget their dependence on God, or on the people. Probably the true rule is, that they should be able to live as the mass of the people among whom they labor live; that they should be able to receive and entertain the poor, and be willing to do it; and so that the rich also may not despise them, or turn away from their dwelling.¹⁹

Although Paul goes on, in verses 15-17, to explain his voluntary sacrifice of this right to support, it is nevertheless clear that such support is a God-ordained principle.

One final passage which deals with recompense for God's servants is 1 Timothy 5:17-18: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward." In this reference, which deals with the treatment of the pastor, Paul commands that pastors who are overseeing well are worthy of double honour. Concerning this idea of double honour (*diples times*), Liddon writes:

The context shows that *time* here means "honourable support" or perhaps an "honorarium" paid by each congregation to the presiding presbyter. Such a stipend is to be *diple*, that is, not strictly double of the sum paid to deacons or widows, but ample.²⁰

This view is echoed by Guthrie²¹ and Kent.²² The conclusion is also substantiated by the following verse. The content of verse 18 is intended to support the principle just stated. Paul again quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 to encourage adequate remuneration of pastors. Although the interpretation of these verses is to pastors, the principle set forth may be applied to all who serve in ministry. Guthrie says the following:

He (Paul) intends Timothy to understand that a divine sanction underlies the principle of fair provision for those who serve the Church.

If God ordained ample provision for oxen treading out corn, it is incumbent upon Christian communities to see that those who devote time and energy to their service are adequately rewarded.²³

The preceding discussion suggests the following principle: The Bible demands just recompense for labor expended, whether that labor is physical or spiritual. God hates unjust or withheld recompense. He particularly desires that those who serve in ministry should be adequately supported by that ministry.

The principle of debt. The Word of God has very little good to say regarding debt. The Mosaic Law contained provision for a sabbatical year every seventh year (Deut. 15:1-6) and for a year of Jubilee every fiftieth year (Lev. 25). Both features were intended, at least in part, to control long-term debt in Israel. Personal debt often resulted in servitude, for debt is essentially a form of servitude (Prov. 22:7). In the days of Elisha, God performed a miracle to relieve the debt of the widow of one of His prophets (2 Kings 4:1-7).

The New Testament contains one clear pronouncement regarding debt. In Romans 13:8, Paul writes to the Roman believers: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." The exhortation is for Christians not to be owing anyone. The key here is that it is not unchristian to contract a debt, but it is unchristian presumptively to obligate oneself to more debts than can be paid or to neglect their payment. Even in the case where debt can be repaid faithfully, however, the basic enslaving nature of all debt still prevails. Ideally, a Christian ought to owe only godly love to those around him, for this debt will motivate positive service to Christ.

The preceding discussion suggests the following principle: The Scriptures repeatedly exhort God's people to avoid the bondage of debt. Therefore, an employer should seek to compensate at a level that would not necessitate the violation of these scriptural guidelines.

Conclusion

Every Christian employer, whether institutional or individual, must be guided by biblical principles for compensation. These guidelines are important for churches and Christian schools as well as Christian businessmen. In light of the biblical importance of adequate compensation, Bible principles must be translated into daily economic practice. Such practice is a vital part of obedience to God and love for the brother in Christ.

Endnotes

¹R V G Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 182

²F Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon* transl M G Easton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 2:75

³R A Cole, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 196

⁴Tasker, *Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 125

⁵F Godet, *Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, transl A Cusin, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) 1:227

⁶D E Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistle: A Call to Readiness* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 98

⁷*Ibid*, 342

⁸R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937) 460

⁹R C H Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937) 1147

¹⁰Tasker, *Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 117

¹¹S H Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus* (reprint ed, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) 398

¹²S J Schultz, *Deuteronomy: The Gospel of Love* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 78

¹³F B Huey, Jr, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 67

¹⁴Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 224

¹⁵Lenski, *Colossians*, 186

¹⁶Godet, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2:9

¹⁷*Ibid*, 11

¹⁸A Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 158-159

¹⁹*Ibid*, 161

²⁰H P Liddon, *Explanatory Analysis of St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy* (reprint ed, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) 63

²¹D Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistle: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 105

²²H A Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1958) 182

²³Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 106