

Is Everything Free When it's for Jesus?

Written by Steve Marr
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Some in the Christian community believe everything should be offered free for Christians. Granted the gospel is offered free of charge. Salvation is free to all who place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. However is ministry free? Should ministry be free?

Paul provided an example when he wrote:

Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. preacher of the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:13-14, NIV)

I received a request to speak at an event out of town. As I usually do I contacted the person and went through a number of qualifying questions. After praying through, I politely declined to accept the offer. I declined for several reasons. One reason was that I would have needed one day to get to the venue, one day there, and a third day for return. Three days out of my schedule would be difficult to manage. Plus, the organizers said they had no funds to compensate a speaker and asked if I would be able to cover my own airfare? I explained that I have a ministry budget and 100% of the funds that come into the Business Proverbs ministry are used to fund additional ministry. I don't take a salary or compensation for my work. Furthermore, I explained that if I committed the time and expense to accept their offer there would be other ministry opportunities I would need to decline. For this reason, I believed the Lord would not have me accept their kind invitation. I had counted the cost.

During our conversation I mentioned to the organizer that I noticed they were charging for the event. I also asked if their church pastor was provided a salary, and the answer was yes. It made me wonder if the church thought that by inviting me, they would gain some cash flow from the event, cash they intended to keep within the church. The organizer seemed to feel that I should underwrite the event by coming free and not charging my expenses against them. The organizer had some sharp words for me which I absorbed and moved on.

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In another instance an organization I work with had put out some training materials that cost \$2,000. Another organization essentially copied the material and supplied the copied material as their own without offering compensation to the authors. In a follow-up discussion the organization felt that that the training material should be free. Eventually the organization sent a \$2,000 check, but never gave proper credit for authorship.

In other wise counsel, Paul wrote, "The worker deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:18, NIV) If no one paid anyone for ministry, all pastors would be bi-vocational, holding a full-time job while ministering. While historically many churches have gotten their start in this manner; most of us believe a full-time, focused pastor is able to commit more ministry effort and should be paid.

Churches like bargains like everyone else. At the same time, Christian organizations need to exercise good stewardship. However, expecting everything to be free regardless of the cost to partnering ministries and organizations does not fit the biblical model. We need to minister without charge as Paul did when possible. However, there are other circumstances where we pay for ministry and ministry resources.

Everything is not free even when we serve the Lord.

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