

## When God Inclines the Heart to Pray

*Benjamin Beddome (1717–1795)*

When God inclines the heart to pray,  
He hath an ear to hear;  
To Him there's music in a groan,  
And beauty in a tear.

The humble suppliant cannot fail,  
To have his wants supplied,  
Since He for sinners intercedes,  
Who once for sinners died.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### **Is The Laborer Worthy?**

*Kevin T. Bauder*

Can we talk? There's a problem that I'd like to share with you. It's not one that I can fix, but maybe you can.

Since I've been at Central Seminary, the Lord has permitted me to occupy many pulpits. I've enjoyed visiting the churches, getting to know the people, and fellowshiping with new congregations. In some cases I've been invited to return to those churches many times, and the relationship has grown deeper each time.

The truth is that I would be willing to donate my time and efforts to help God's people. My income from the seminary meets my expenses and even allows me a bit extra. I don't need extra income from itinerant ministry to pay the bills. I would never turn a church down for meetings just because the congregation was unable to pay me.

In fact, there have been times when I have not been paid. Sometimes the pastor has explained that the church just can't afford to give me anything—and that's fine with me. Other times I've agreed that the church's giving should go to some other project. There have also been occasions when the church has given me nothing but the pastor hasn't told me anything about it. When that happens, I find myself faced with dilemma: should I say something to the pastor or shouldn't I? On the one hand, I don't want to sound mercenary. On the other hand, the lapse could be the result of an unfortunate oversight, an administrative bumble, or (just possibly) dishonesty. I've known of situations in which some crooked church fiduciary would skim the honoraria for guest speakers, counting on the speakers not to complain. Well, I wouldn't complain—but if the pastor says nothing and no honorarium appears within a month or two, I will ask him what his intention was.

Churches vary widely in their handling of expenses and honoraria. Most churches will cover transportation expenses and provide at least a modest honorarium. Some churches receive a love offering in lieu of either covering expenses or providing an honorarium. A few churches provide an honorarium but do not cover expenses. Among the churches that provide honoraria, the smallest are about fifty dollars per service, while the most generous can run to several hundred dollars per service. Interestingly, the size of the



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honorarium is often not proportioned to the size of the church. Some of the most generous churches in which I've ministered are also among the smallest.

And here is where I want to bring up the problem that I hope you'll help me solve. Many of those smaller honoraria are not adequate to cover even the speaker's cost to travel to the church. A guest speaker actually loses money every time he fills one of those pulpits. He effectively pays for the privilege of preaching to those congregations.

For me, that's not a problem. Central Seminary pays me enough that I can afford to take a financial loss on some engagements. And besides, my next engagement will usually make up the difference.

Not every speaker has that flexibility. For example, seminary students are often tapped to fill pulpits. Their incomes are usually stretched already. They are supporting young, growing families. They are paying tuition for their schooling. Sometimes they are actually trusting God for their next meal, and they may see a speaking engagement as God's provision. If, however, the church neglects to compensate them—or even delays compensation—this neglect may result in genuine financial hardship.

Scripture is clear on this count: the laborer is worthy of his reward (1 Tim 5:18). Paul quoted these words when he was teaching about paying those who "labor in the word and doctrine," i.e., preaching and teaching. He elsewhere taught that God has ordained that people who "preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor 9:14). In other words, a local church has a duty to care financially for those who minister the Word in its midst.

So what should a church do? How should it fulfill its biblical obligation to care for the preachers who stand in its pulpit? I suggest the following.

First, every church should be sure to reimburse the expenses of the speaker. The church should cover all expenses for lodging and meals for the speaker and for his wife (if she comes). If a speaker flies to the engagement or rents a car, then the church should reimburse the exact amount of the expense. If he drives his own car, a fair way of calculating his expense is to approximate the per-mile figure that the IRS publishes (currently about \$.57 per mile). For example, if a church reimburses at just \$.50 per mile, a speaker who travels two hours (120 miles) away should receive a reimbursement of \$120 for the round trip.

Second, a church should also remunerate the speaker fairly for the time he invests in his teaching and preaching. This includes not only the time actually spent in the pulpit but also the time spent in preparation and transportation. Suppose a speaker is traveling two hours to an engagement where he will teach Sunday school and preach for two Sunday services. For each lesson or sermon he will likely spend five to ten hours in preparation. Taking

the minimum figure, he will have invested fifteen hours in preparation, four hours in transportation, and three hours in the public services, for a total of twenty-two hours on one day's ministry. Minnesota has a minimum wage of ten dollars per hour. If the church pays this man a \$200 honorarium, he will receive substantially less than minimum wage for his labors. That is one reason why, under ordinary circumstances, an honorarium of \$100 per service should be viewed as minimal.

Third, some churches will choose to receive a love offering for the speaker. This custom provides a wonderful opportunity for individual church members to exhibit gratitude for the day's ministry. It is entirely appropriate. Nevertheless, the church should also adopt a policy that the love offering will be supplemented from church funds if it does not reach a stated minimum amount. That amount should be adequate to cover expenses plus reasonable compensation for the speaker's time and effort.

Most churches handle this situation magnificently. I am deeply grateful for churches that have ministered to me in a material way. On the other hand, I would never begrudge ministry to a church that cannot pay as well—or even at all. While I'm willing to absorb a loss, however, not every preacher is in the same position. Christ lays the obligation upon the church to care for these men who minister the Word.

How can you help? If you are a church member but not an officer, then show this article to your pastor. If you are a pastor, then reprint this article for your congregation. If you are a deacon, then bring this article to the next deacons' meeting so you and your peers can review your church's policies. That would be a first step toward fixing the problem.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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