

ARE MINISTERS PAID ENOUGH?

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Like all my other pieces in this series of 'Final Word', it is the editor who has chosen the topic. The question she poses is not easy to answer, since with our system of independency there is no standard stipend for all Baptist ministers. Furthermore, although those administering our pension scheme will know how much most ministers are paid, that information is not publicly available. The result is that I have no idea how much my colleagues are paid. It is said that roughly a quarter of ministers are on Home Mission, a further quarter are paid as if they were on Home Mission, yet another quarter receive the going rate for Home Mission plus an additional £1000 or so, while for the final quarter the sky is the limit! In fact currently only 300 ministers are in receipt of a 'local ministry grant' – so this means that less than one fifth of ministers are actually on Home Mission. Nonetheless, I guess that most ministers this year are being paid £16,100 (the national standard stipend) give or take a £1000 or so. Compared to the average weekly wage of £465, this does not appear to be generous. But, of course, in addition to the stipend a house is thrown in. So are ministers paid enough? The honest answer is that there are some ill-disciplined and/or incompetent ministers, who are indeed paid too much. Yet most ministers are hard-working professionals, who more than 'deserve' what they are paid. But this is not the issue. We ministers are not in the business of being paid what we are worth. We are not paid a salary but a 'stipend': we are not paid for services rendered, but a living allowance to enable us to fulfil our calling. This difference is more than semantic: it involves a totally different way of looking at money. I, for one, have never stopped thanking God for calling me into Christian ministry and have always felt an immense sense of gratitude to God's people for enabling me to serve God as their pastor. The actual amount I was paid has always been quite secondary. I know that I now write from a privileged position – for not only do I now receive a generous stipend, I also have a high-flying wife who earns well. But this has not always been so. As a young minister, I knew what it was like to apply for additional state benefits; there were times when we only survived financially because of the help given by parents and friends. Once a deacon actually told me that my role was to set an example of holy poverty! And although we now live in our own house (albeit mortgaged up to the hilt), I know what it feels like to be the only couple in the church not owning their own bricks and mortar. So, are ministers paid enough? There is no easy answer. Maybe 1 Tim 5.17 (GNB) might be a useful text for deacons to consider!

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