

# Speaking to the soul



## Church leaders

**Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.” And in another place, “Those who work deserve their pay!”. 1 Timothy 5:17-18**

As the early Church grew, it inevitably had to face the issue of caring for its leaders. One of the very practical issues was that of pay. Paul had often supported himself through his work as a tent maker, but he had always insisted that it was appropriate for churches to take responsibility for paying for their leaders. Here he refers to the Old Testament law concerning oxen. When the sheaves of corn had been harvested, they would be laid out on the threshing floor and oxen would walk across them, often tethered to a post. The farmer was obviously keen not to lose too much of his crop, but he was commanded not to muzzle the ox. That wasn't out of kindness to the ox so much as to ensure that he kept working effectively. It was just good common sense. In the same way, when Jesus sent out the 72 on a mission, he said that a worker deserved his pay (Luke 10:7).

Paying church leaders is, of course, still a really important issue, and Paul sets out here the principles which should guide such pay. It isn't possible to know exactly what was in Paul's mind when he spoke about elders being paid generously, but there can be no doubt that he was declaring the significance of their role, and the importance of them being well looked after. Unfortunately, through the centuries, church leaders have become more famous for struggling to make ends meet. This reflects badly on the whole Church. I don't believe that church leaders should be paid vast amounts of money, but it is vital that they receive pay which reflects the value of their work. If, like Paul, they are able to fund themselves, that is all well and good, but the church would then have the responsibility of finding other ways to be considerate and generous to their leaders.

## **QUESTION**

What can you do to ensure that your church leaders are looked after generously?

## **PRAYER**

Loving God, I thank you for the gift of church leaders. Please help me to honour and encourage them, and to ensure that their needs are met. Amen

*Photo - Entrance to Portstewart Strand. A National Trust facility.*

