

## What're You Doing With Your Money?

We can't finish our study of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians without thinking further about giving. It was one of the most important issues in this letter. There are 2 chapters of text given to persuading the Corinthian believers to give their money to help the poor Jewish believers at Jerusalem.

Why was this gift of money so important to Paul? For one reason, it's because that demonstrated or established a bond of unity between the Jewish and Gentile believers within the universal Church. The Jewish believers (thru Paul) extended the Gospel to the Gentiles, so that the Gentiles could be saved (spiritually). And in return, the Gentile believers (thru Paul) would help out the Jewish believers so they could be saved (physically). It was important also because giving money to help others is a tangible and practical expression of love. Giving to others is one way by which we can express God's sacrificial love for us. It was exceedingly important to Paul that the Corinthian believers show love instead of the animosity that some of them had toward him. Giving money shows the kind of person we are, our character. We're either selfish, or we're generous and loving; we're one or the other.

Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also" (Matthew 6:21). In other words, our giving money to God's work indicates what's important to us. But . . . God's work? Why does God need money? Two reasons come to mind: Because (a) there was to be unity among all the Israelites, each was a "brother" to the others, and this was something that God had ordained and effected. So helping each other in their need was giving to God. The same holds for us in the Church. And (b) because in the Bible, God is on mission. It's called in theology the *missio dei*, and it's God's history-spanning work of bringing fallen people into relationship with God. And this work is done in this era not by God Himself, nor by angels, but by us believers. Funding for this is necessary.

Let's think deeper about this matter. Giving money to the local church may certainly be necessary, but that's a gift that bounces back to enrich the giver. It's not really sacrificial giving; it doesn't show grace. Likewise, giving money out of our "disposable" income (this also is known in economics as discretionary spending), in other words, giving out of our excess income, money that's beyond the minimum that we need to live on, isn't sacrificial giving. It's money that we don't miss and wouldn't miss by giving it away. It's not the kind of giving that God, who sent the Son to die on the cross to save us from deserved wrath, expresses. Furthermore, what God wants is not just our money. He wants *all of us*, our time, our energy, our thoughts, our love, our lives. In view of all that God has done for us, in view of who God is, in view of all the rich blessing that awaits us in the future, how can we withhold from God *anything*?

We in America are not just comfortable, we're not just prosperous, we are incredibly wealthy! We have riches people in other lands – and people in other eras of history – never dreamed of having. This puts us in great danger, because in 1 Timothy 6, Paul warns believers about the dangers of wealth. Inevitably, we start to trust in it. We suppose that it gives us power. It makes us proud and exalted. We suppose that God's blessing rests on us because we're special. It takes our mind and heart away from godly living. It separates us from communion with God, from reflecting deeply on His Word. It's thought that there exists a demon called Mammon, and we risk worshiping him by our love of money. How can we avoid these dangers? By giving our money away, profligately.

There is also subtle danger in giving money to others in need. It's necessary to make this explicit: Giving money can trigger self-righteousness. We need to be always on guard, because no merit is accumulating in heaven by our giving – however generous the gifts may be. We're saved by grace, not because of how much money we gave to charity. Our plea when we arrive at heaven will be, "I'm an unworthy servant, I did what I was expected to do. I'm only here thanks to You." (See Luke 17:10)

Another caveat we should mention is this, your money is not really your money. Everything we have comes to us by God's grace. He ultimately is responsible for whatever we have. We're entrusted with whatever we have to use thoughtfully for His glory. But hey . . . If you think your money is yours because you earned it by your hard work, or you inherited it from your family, or you won it by some lawsuit or lottery drawing, or whatever, I advise you to drop to your knees immediately and devote it all, every dollar of it, to Christ. And then use His money faithfully to glorify Him.

So, what should we do with our money? Following are some suggestions. You may already have better ideas than these, but I offer these for you to think about. These involve sending gifts individually, they would not go thru the local church.

First, there are a number of very excellent missions that seek to spread the Gospel in areas of the world where missionaries can't go. **Far East Broadcasting Company** is one example. They send the Gospel message and Bible teachings by radio into closed countries. These missions need to be supported by God's people; there's probably no better way to get the Gospel into parts of the world inimical to Christ. Second, there are missions that support believers who are persecuted. One example of such a mission is **Voice of the Martyrs (VOM)**, but there are others. VOM was founded by Richard Wurmbrand, a name you may be familiar with. Third, there are missions that offer material and medical aid to people in the poorest countries of the world, such as **Samaritan's Purse**, headed by Billy Graham's son, Franklin. Fourth, there are missions that support missionaries, such as **Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF)**. MAF flies missionaries and local pastors and food and medicines across jungle and mountains, where ground transportation doesn't exist or is dangerous. There's a missionary organization called **Operation Mobilization (OM)** that discipless young believers by sending them to do missionary work in distant countries. OM also has ships that go from port to port to share the Gospel. A mission exists that works to free people from slavery in various parts of the world, called **International Justice Mission (IJM)**. IJM doesn't advertise itself as a Christian organization for obvious strategic reasons. Fifth, there are missions that help people locally, such as the York Rescue Mission (now called **Lifepath**), or even the Salvation Army. There's also a mission on South George Street in York, ironically in the old Planned Parenthood building, that helps women to avoid having an abortion, called **Human Live Services**.

The above is only a short list. Many other worthy missions need monetary support. Some are unique and special ministries, such as trying to reach Jewish people for Christ (for example **Jews for Jesus**), or spreading the message of young-earth creation (**Creation Ministries International, Institute for Creation Research**), or translating the Scriptures into indigenous tongues (**Wycliffe Bible Translators**), or trying to end abortion (**Life Dynamics**). There's even a medical outreach to Muslims (**Health Outreach to the Middle East**). And a Christian orphanage in Mexico (**El Rancho del Rey**), and a mission that offers free legal aid for churches called **Christian Law Association**. There are countless Christian schools, colleges and seminaries that are worthy, too. For one example, there's **Singapore Bible College**, which trains young people from all over Asia in Bible ministry. There also are individual missionaries on the field who need support, other than ones already supported by the local church, but they can't be named here. This is speculative, but it may be that God has blessed America so uniquely and so greatly precisely so that all these good ministries around the world may be possible.

If you send \$5.00 just once to some of these missions, they will place you on their mailing list and send you appeals for more money, sometimes weekly for the next 200 years. They classify fund-raising as "education." But certain of them will send you newsletters and updates that are invaluable. VOM, for example, sends a monthly newsletter that is mind-opening. So does IJM. Some are desperate to stay afloat. Others are so bloated they resemble a government bureaucracy more than a Spirit-led ministry.

Be careful: you're responsible for using the Lord's resources for His work and His glory. Don't squander His money on things that may seem important to you but aren't His work. I'm referring to giving to political organizations such as Judicial Watch, or the Republican Party or its candidates, or giving to the various gun clubs. Or even the SPCA. Think carefully about what it is you're investing the Lord's money in!

There's no better way for a believer to experience the blessing of giving and to expand our Christian horizon than by supporting with money and prayer already established works such as these that are serving the Lord. When we give sacrificially to these works, we are participating in what they are doing. It's another way by which we can serve Christ.

The opportunities to give generously to the work of Christ are many. The big problem is, Do we really want to? *"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinth 9:6-7). And then in verse 11, we read that God has enriched your life so that you can be generous to others, and your generosity results in thanksgiving (and praise, v. 13) to God. Giving to the Lord's work is, in v. 14, a "surpassing grace" that God gives to us. Be responsible!