

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

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THE ^{Spiritual} IMPORTANCE OF GIVING

BY TIM KELLER

THE "HORIZONTALNESS" OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

Giving, stewardship—let's be frank—money, is not something I am very comfortable talking about. I was warned when we first came to New York that New Yorkers would let you tell them what to do about anything—sex, marriage, career, whatever—before they'd let you tell them how to handle their money. Combined with my natural bent toward being a people pleaser, I took that as a "prime directive" and have talked as little about the Biblical teaching concerning money as I possibly could (much to the despair of the church's Stewardship Committee, I might add!) Last year I didn't even give a stewardship sermon.

However, this past year I started to become convicted that I was avoiding a subject that the Scripture was very direct about, so I began a study of what the Bible really had to say. I was deeply impressed by the "horizontalness" of giving. I always thought of this as a "vertical" category—one more duty of the Christian life alongside of evangelism, prayer, mercy, discipleship, and so on. I have begun to realize, on the contrary, that generous giving is horizontal—it "cuts through" all other duties. Radical generosity is at the heart of everything we are called to do and be as Christians.

THREE "LENSES": CREATION, FALL, REDEMPTION

If the teaching on giving is so comprehensive, how can we get a

handle on it and see its dimensions? The Bible tells us that whenever we look at the world, or anything in the world, we know three things about it. 1) It was created by God; 2) it is currently distorted and polluted by sin; and 3) redemption is available through Christ. If we look at our money through each of these three "lenses", what do we see?

THREE THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS Through the Lenses

First, since all things are **created**, our money is God's. "We have only given you what comes from your hand." (I Chron.29:14). Because of creation, our money does not belong to us, and we must not act as if it does. That means Christians must live as stewards, honoring God through their giving. If our money was ours, a lack of generosity would be merely stinginess, but since it is not, non-generosity is really robbery (Mal.3:8; cf. I Chron.29:17). So we learn that, when it comes to money, Christians must be like stockbrokers investing.

Second, since all things are distorted by **sin**, our money is now a "Master". "You cannot serve both God and Money" (Luke 16:13). Because of sin, money has a power to master and delude and control us, and we must not act as if it doesn't. That means that Christians choose to live a simpler lifestyle, using their giving to liberate their hearts. If

our money did not have this power, a lack of generosity would be merely stinginess, but since it does, non-generosity is really slavery (Mark 10:21-23). So we learn that when it comes to money, we are like slaves escaping.

Third, since all things can be **redeemed by Christ**, our money can be a channel of grace. "Men will praise God for...your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else." (2 Cor.9:13). Because of Christ's redemption our money is both the result of grace and is now a channel of grace, and we must not forget that it is. That means Christians must live modeling God's grace, using their giving to change lives. If we do not use our money to access this opportunity, a lack of generosity would be merely stinginess, but since it does, non-generosity is both a lack of vision and heartless (II Cor.8:8). So we learn that when it comes to money, we are like brothers and sisters sharing. Only when the world sees us being astonishingly generous with our money will it believe that God has been generous to us (cf. Acts 2:45, 47). There is no more concrete and effective way to spread God's grace than to model the grace of the one who became poor for us.

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One reason that we don't give is a lack of trust in God to care for us

THE ^{Spiritual} IMPORTANCE OF GIVING (continued from page 1)

THREE MOTIVATIONAL DYNAMICS Through the Lenses

First, the “lens” of **creation shows us that Christians are obliged to give**. Matt.25:14-30 shows us that God gives us our resources, not simply to hold on to (like the wicked servant) but to invest in causes the Master loves and brings him joy (Mt.25:19-21). The Bible tells us that the causes that the Master loves are the spread of his kingdom (cf. Exodus 35-36; Acts 4:32; 1 Cor.16:2), the poor (Matt.6:1-4; 25:31ff.), and individuals with needs, both Christian and non- (Gal.6:10; Luke 10:25ff). A steward is like a stockbroker, who must send God’s money out generously but strategically. So why give money “away”? Because a) it is the only way to be a just steward, and b) it is the only way to be a wise steward. The only “wealth” you can keep is that which bears fruit for God—it is the only investment the dividends of which last eternally (Matt.25:23, cf. v.30; Luke 16:9-11).

Second, the “lens” of **sin shows us that Christians need to give**. In the account of the rich young ruler, Jesus calls him to give away all his wealth, but this is not an absolute rule. In Luke 19:1-10 he accepts Zaccheus’ offer to give only 50%. Why? Jesus calls us to give until the power of money in our lives is broken.

At Sinai we see that money is not so much an “idol” as it is the way we always serve the real idols of our heart (cf. Exod.32:2-4, 33:4-6; 35:22). We always spend our money most readily and painlessly on the things we most put our hope in (Matt.5:21). Idols

of status, approval, control, and power all use money to dominate us, though in radically different ways. Some people’s idol of approval makes them spend money on beautiful homes in order to enter certain “circles”. Other people’s idol of control makes them amass large savings and investments while living frugally and stingily. Some people’s idol of power makes them give money to causes and people they wish to control. Others need money to cover over deep feelings of inadequacy. So why give money away? Because it is the only way to a) identify, and b) starve out the real masters of your life.

Third, the “lens” of redemption shows that Christians want to give. In Acts 4:31 we see that when the power of the Spirit comes down on the disciples, assuring them of God’s love (cf. Matt.3:16-17; Rom.8:16), they begin to give their money away with joy and enthusiasm (Acts.4:32-37)—with “boldness”. If you believe you are saved by your good deeds, you will be too insecure to give (“will God really take care of my needs?”) and too proud (“I earned what I have!”).

But if you believe you are a sinner saved by grace, you will see everything you have as an undeserved gift (1 Cor.4:7) and you will want to model the free grace Jesus gave to you. Thus in Luke 6:30-36 Jesus says that the sign that you know God has been merciful to you (though you were wicked and ungrateful v.35) is that you are generous with money to all kinds of people (v.34,36). The grace of Christ actually creates a pressure to give, a compulsion from inside far greater than any

coercion from the outside (2 Cor.9:6-7, 13). So why give money away? Because it is one of the best ways: a) to change lives, b) to build community, and c) to live out the truths of who you are in Christ.

THREE PRACTICAL GUIDELINES Through the Lenses

We keep saying that giving must be “radical” or “generous” or “bounteous”—but how do we define that practically? First, **the lens of “creation” shows us that we must give the tithe**. Imagine that a client went to a stockbroker and said: “Invest my money and only give me 10% of the dividends—you can keep the rest”. That would be quite a deal—but that is what God gives us. In Luke 11:37-42 Jesus approves the Pharisees for tithing very little bit of their wealth, yet condemns them for doing it mechanically, without creativity and inner passion. So the tithe is the general guideline.

Second, **the lens of “sin” shows us that we must give the excess**. 1 Tim.6:6-9 and other texts simply tell us that the power of money is such that it will convince us we don’t have enough for our needs, but we must see that we really do. There is always an excess, if we stop letting our idols delude us that we cannot live without more wealth.

Third, **the lens of “grace” shows us that we must give the sacrifice**. 2 Cor.8:1-15 says we have not given enough until it hurts. For many of us, even the tithe does not make a difference in the way we live or feel. We must give until there is a sacrifice.

Because it is the only way to a) identify, and b) starve out the real masters of your life

REDEEMER REPORT

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TIPS ON GIVING AT YEAR-END

BY DREW FIELD

Every year, many people at Redeemer give significantly larger gifts to the church at year-end. These year-end gifts are specially helpful as we look ahead toward new ministries in the following year. With all of the major changes in Redeemer's vision for 1998, we particularly need a strong base of resources.

In order to help you plan, we offer the following selected general information. (Always consult IRS guidelines or your financial advisor for specifics regarding your situation.)

- **Tax Deadlines.** Don't delay. According to recent IRS regulations, a gift of cash is complete upon delivery or mailing of cash, a check, or other cash equivalent. Therefore, your checks must be dated and mailed before January 1, 1997. Since our office is closed the week between the holidays, any checks received after Monday, January 5 must be credited in 1998 regardless of the date on the check.

- If you itemize. Charitable gifts can bring significant tax savings. Generally, you can deduct all gifts to Redeemer of cash, property, and certain out-of-pocket expenses. You will receive a receipt from the church in late January 1998 for your tax records. Plus, receipts from actual out-of-pocket expenses that result from volunteer work may be deductible. Save these receipts.

- Gifts of stock bring added tax benefits. This has been a great (but wild) year in the stock market. By giving a stock donation, you can deduct the current market value and avoid capital gains at the same time. Call 808-4460x18 for more details.

- What's not deductible. The value of any "substantial benefit" received from a contribution to a charitable organization. Therefore, tapes, books, certain dinners, etc. that you might have been in-

FYI

Special Offering Taken for Diaconal Fund

Historically, as the church celebrates the birth of Christ in a humble manger, we have also considered our response to the needs of the poor. On Sunday, December 14, Redeemer will take a special offering for our Diaconal Fund. This fund is used to help people within our congregation who have special physical, often emergency, needs for financial resources.

Tapes as Christmas Gifts:

If you want to purchase sermon tapes as Christmas gifts, you need to get them now! You can visit our ministry table located in the East Lounge, call the Tape Office at (212) 758-6591, or e-mail us at RedeemerTape@aol.com. All orders must be in by December 7 to insure timely deliveries. We now accept Visa and MasterCard for orders of \$25 and up.

CHRISTMAS OPPORTUNITIES WITH HOPE FOR NEW YORK

Its not to late to get involved with the needy for Christmas

Angel Tree Christmas Party for children of prisoners will be held on Saturday, **December 6**, at Manhattan Bible Church in Washington Heights. If you would be interested in helping out, call Myla Yee at (718) 383-1965.

His Toy Store project for needy children will be held on Saturday, **December 13**, at Bronx-Lebanon Hospital. Donations of new and clean used toys still needed, plus helpers for the day of the store operation. Call the Toy Store hotline at (212) 780-3327.

Christmas for the elderly on Sunday afternoon, **December 14**, at DeWitt Nursing Home. Come sing and pray and talk with the residents. For details, call Lisa Maynard at (212) 307-6149.

Christmas dinner for the homeless will be served on Tuesday, **December 16**, at Holy Cross Church across from Port Authority. Many workers needed before, during and after the dinner. Call Marie Carnivale at (212) 722-8637.

AIDS Hospice Christmas dinner: Sunday, **December 28**, at the Bailey House on Christopher Street in the Village. Catherine Traiforou wants to know if you are available to help cook and serve: (212) 879-1507.

involved in throughout the year may not be considered charitable donations. Also, the value of any personal services that you provide is not deductible, although the cost of materials and other expenses may be deducted.

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RACIAL UNITY MINISTRY RETREAT

The Racial Unity Ministry will be holding a weekend retreat in February that can help you learn how to develop relationships with people of different races and ethnic groups. The retreat will be Feb. 13 through Feb. 16 at the Hotel Coolidge in Vermont. It will use "story telling" and outdoor activities to help people build relationships. For more information, contact Jerome Walford, 718-783-4390 (evenings).

Its not to late to get involved with the needy for Christmas

SERVICES AT WHICH
YOU CAN
HEAR YOUR
FAVORITE MUSIC

Dec 7 AM – Redeemer Choir
sings Christmas motets by Poulenc

Dec 7 PM – Mindy Miller,
soloist

Dec 14 AM – Redeemer Chil-
dren's Choir and the Redeemer
String Quartet

Dec 14 PM – Lorraine Ferro and
Stephanie Lewis (songwriters for
many noted contemporary
Christian artists)

Dec 21 AM – Annual Service of
Lessons and Carols: selections
from *Messiah* performed by the
Orchestra of the Redeemer and
Redeemer Choir; George Merritt

Dec 21 PM – Annual Service of
Lessons and Carols with the Jazz
Band and soloists Holly Krueger,
Tom Barrett and Angela Horn