

Are You a Cheerful Giver or Do You Want Your Dollar Back?

A three-year-old whose parents were trying to introduce him to what it means to be in church and what it means to give an offering to the Lord gave him a one-dollar bill that he was to place in the offering plate. When the plate moved down the pew, his parents held it in front of him and told him to place the dollar in the plate. He wanted nothing of it. Finally, his mother gently took the dollar from him and placed it in the plate. Suddenly the stillness of the offertory was shattered by a voice demanding, "I want my dollar back! I want my dollar back!" He thought he had been robbed and he wanted everyone to know it. His parents tried in vain to quiet their son, but he was insistent, "I want my dollar back!" Everyone in the congregation was fighting a losing battle against laughter and he continued to scream, "I want my dollar back!"

Eventually, his parents gave him another dollar to hold and he was content enough so that the congregation could make it through the choir anthem. When the pastor stepped into the pulpit, he knew he needed to talk about what had happened. Looking out at the smiling faces he said, "We shouldn't laugh. It may be that this three-year-old is only voicing the feelings that some of us have after having given to God. We do so, not joyously but out of a sense of obligation. We do so unwillingly. We may not say it, but some of us think it, 'I want my dollar back!'"

Jesus, as you may know, talked more about money than any other one subject. He knew what money could do to people. And he knew the proper place of money in our lives. Money is important. We spend much of our life working for money. Some of us spend even more time worrying about money. The lack of and the abundance of can bring us much pain when we have too much of it as well. For some people, money becomes their God. Nothing matters as much as holding on to their wealth.

In the 1890s there was a Turkish professional wrestler named Yousouf who competed in Europe and the United States under the name "The Terrible Turk." He insisted he be paid for his matches in gold. Following his retirement, Yousouf headed back to Turkey with the gold he had won. On its second day at sea, however, the ship ran into a storm and started to sink. Yousouf jumped into the sea near a lifeboat, but the weight of the gold in his belt, estimated to be \$10,000, pulled him downward and he drowned. It's hard to say which is worse. To have money and lose it or to become so obsessed with money that it costs you your life and/or your soul.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, which was relatively well off compared to some of the other churches that Paul had started. Some of these other churches were struggling to survive. Some members of these churches were literally on the verge of starvation. Paul's message to the Corinthians was basically, "share the blessings of your abundance!" He writes, "But since you excel in everything in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love, we have kindled in you see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

Whether it is giving to the local church or giving to missions, or giving to the homeless on the street there is one motivation for the Christian to give. Christ gave all and as a Child of God our daily motivation is, "Do to others as Jesus has done to us." So, everything we give to His work is an act of charity in response to His gift to us. When we give to the work of God, we are declaring our freedom from materialism. Remember we serve God, not mammon.

The Bible doesn't say that money is the root of all evil. It says that the love of money is the root of all evil. Money can't buy us happiness or fulfillment or salvation. Giving is the Christian's response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Giving is also the Christian's recognition of the proper place of money in our lives. Frances Ridley Havergal wrote these words in her hymn, *Take My Life and Let It Be*: "Take my life, and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to thee; take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise. Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love. Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee. Take my voice, and let me sing, Always, only, for my King. Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee. Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold. Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose. Take my will and make it thine; It shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is thine own; It shall be thy royal throne. Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store. Take me, and I will be ever, only, all for thee."

Giving is the Christian's response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Giving signals our recognition of the proper place of money in our lives. Giving is our declaration of faith in Jesus Christ. There may be some reading this who think in their hearts, as the offering plates are passed, like little the three-year-old, "I want my money back!" I suspect that most of us, however, are filled with gratitude for God's gift to us of Jesus Christ. Our desire is to give more, as Christ has given to us.