

Money and the Church

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it” ~Malachi 3:10

Every year during the stewardship drive of the churches I have served, I have wondered why most Christians do not tithe to the church. National polls indicate that people give about three percent of their income to the church on average.

When I was a child and I got a dollar for allowance, my mom told me that ten cents of that was the Lord’s. I have never stopped that practice, and have never missed the money I gave back to the church. Perhaps as a pastor I am bound to take the Bible more literally than most folks, but I think it should be the same for other folks. The question should not be whether to give ten percent of our income to the church. The only question would be is it before taxes or after taxes!

Christians today should reexamine the money they have at a certain period of history, and come to the startling revelation that it is all God’s to begin with. We are only temporary stewards in this brief time of life we have.

The biblical story of the servants and the talent in Matthew 25 illustrates the fact that God gives us possessions to invest and multiply only to return more to him than he has given to us. With church attendance down nationally, if his people would all tithe, give ten percent at least; the trends would reverse themselves, for there would be more money and effort that we could spend to reach out to those who need the Lord.

This column is for all those Christians and churches that scrape by on minimum giving, minimum effort, minimum participation, and have minimum results. God wants us to give the maximum in all areas, and when we do, we will see results like we have never seen before.

He gave his only son so that we might find eternal life. He gave without reservation. And so should we.

Christian giving is an investment in eternity. Many spend their time toiling and gathering money and possessions, only to realize that we cannot take it with us when we die. Some might try.

There was a rich man who was quite distressed over the prospect of not being able to take his riches with him when he died. When he expressed his concerns to his pastor, they prayed about the problem and were given the solution. Before he died, the wealthy man went

to his bank and loaded a suitcase with gold bars from the vault. When he appeared at the pearly gates, he had the suitcase in hand. St. Peter asked, "What do you have in your suitcase?" Very proudly, the man opened his case to display his booty. St. Peter said, "You brought pavement?"

Okay. If you haven't heard that heaven's streets are paved with gold, then you are in worse shape than we thought. If you have, and keep your gold for yourself, then a change must be made. Amaze your pastor by telling him that you have reformed and want to give to make wonderful and powerful things happen.

How's your investment going? Do you give pennies when the church needs dollars? Do you give leftovers instead of the first fruits which God has asked us for? It's a serious question for all of us. The numbers in our checkbooks do not lie.

Our giving habits can also be a bad case of misplaced priorities. Let's pick on the proverbial image of the lawyer, with apologies to all who give and attend like they should.

A local charity realized that it had never received a donation from the town's most successful lawyer. The person in charge of contributions called the lawyer to persuade him to contribute: "Our research shows that out of a yearly income of at least \$500,000, you give not a penny to charity. Wouldn't you like to give back to the community in some way?" The lawyer mulled this over for a moment and replied: "First, did your research also show that my mother is dying after a long illness, and has medical bills that are several times her annual income?" Embarrassed, the rep mumbled, "Um...no." "Or that my sister's husband died in a traffic accident," the lawyer's voice rising in indignation, "leaving her penniless with three children?!" The humiliated caller, completely beaten, said simply, "I had no idea..." On a roll, the lawyer cut her off once again: "...So, if I didn't give any money to them, why should I give any money to you?"

Do we have the mistaken idea that the money we have is ours? Yes, stewardship is about time, talent, money, etc. But if our bank account is prioritized according to God's purposes, the rest of our life would be as well. It is not about amount, as the story of the poor widow and Jesus tells us. It is about the heart.