

Why Must Kingdom Causes Go Begging?

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Although this will not be published until the spring of the year, as this is being written (January), we've just been through the holiday season which is always accompanied by many appeals for year-end giving to myriad charitable organizations, Kingdom or otherwise. At this same time of year many church consistories also complete their budgeting process for the coming year. The process of personally deciding which causes to support in our year end giving, and our consistories' decisions in compiling congregational operating budgets are never easy. There never seems to be enough money to go around. There always seem to be more needs than there is money to fulfill those needs.

Why is this? And what does Scripture have to say about it?

In Haggai 1:3-6 we read, "Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." God through Haggai rebuked the Israelites who after returning from exile devoted their resources to rebuilding houses for themselves while the temple remained in ruins. Because of this, God says, they remain unsatisfied in their own wants, and it would be as if they were keeping their money in bags with holes. When we neglect the financial needs of the Kingdom, God often chooses to confound and frustrate our own fleshly efforts to gain wealth for ourselves and use it for our own desires.

In Malachi 3:8-11 we read, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts." Here, the same idea is stated positively. If, rather than robbing God in our tithes, we bring all the tithes into the storehouse, so that the Kingdom's needs may be met, "having meat in my mine (God's) house," then God will pour out blessing such that there will be no room to hold it, and our enemies will be rebuked.

In Mark 7:7-13 we read, "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."

But here Jesus warns of being strictly legalistic or manipulative of how we calculate our "tithe." The intention of the Corban laws was for one to set aside assets which would be earmarked, held in trust, for the future work of the Kingdom. The Pharisees twisted the intention of this law in order to shirk their obligation to their families, particularly aged parents. They were saying in effect, "I really would like to help you, Mom and Dad, but this money I have is set aside, is Corban, and dedicated to the Lord's work, so I cannot use it for you." In reality, the giver had full access and use of his assets, and to refuse its benefit to one's parents on the basis of Corban was a legalistic distortion of the intent

of the law. So Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for this and other of their legalistic following of the letter rather than the spirit of the law.

And finally (though this has obviously not been an exhaustive study) what is the purpose of work? In Ephesians 4:28, the Apostle Paul says, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” According to Paul, what is the purpose of our work and the wealth it affords? “To give to him that needeth.”

These and many other passages in Scripture warn us against robbing God in the use of the money with which He blesses us. In light of these admonitions, how are we doing? Are we placing our own material desires above those of the Kingdom? Are we giving the full measure of what we are able to Kingdom causes? Do we legalistically hold to the 10% tithe to justify not giving more if God has so blessed? Do we look upon the fruits of our labor to be used first in our own service rather than in the service of others?

While its easy to accuse the “name it and claim it” folks of making God their cosmic bellhop and expecting Him to cater to their every whim, is our attitude towards our own prosperity really any different? Do we give our time and energy (and often our wives and mothers in full-time employment) to raising our lifestyles beyond the adequate, to satisfy “wants” way beyond our “needs”? If our God-given talents and abilities yield prosperity beyond that necessary to provide our needs, are we free to indulge our wants? Do we get caught up in our longing to have our “dreams” of having things exactly the way we always wanted fulfilled—a new house laid out just the way we always wanted it, the “prestigious” car, the second home—and then enslave ourselves to higher payments, maintenance costs, etc., that go along with them? I’ve heard people say, “We scrimped and saved and sacrificed to send our kids through Christian school and college, and now that they’re grown up we’re spending it on ourselves, on what we want.” But is this what God wants? When there are so many good Kingdom causes begging for money, how can we justify living at the level that most of us do? Do we believe that because we’ve tithed our 10%, God has no further claim on the 90%?

According to Larry Burkett, a Christian financial expert and author, the average American family pays \$6000 per year in interest on debt. For a typical congregation of 150 families, this comes to nearly \$ 1 million per year. If we are even close to “typical” then there are tremendous financial resources which we are squandering and are not being used advance the Kingdom. If we set our minds to move forward in faith, learn to be content, and live just “adequate” lifestyles, the financial floodgates would burst open. But considering the types of automobiles in a typical church parking lot on a given Sunday morning, the houses many of us live in, the summer and vacation homes, the vacations, boats, and RV’s, it becomes clear that the resources are there, but they are not being used for Kingdom work. Incredible financial resources could be unleashed for the benefit of the Kingdom, if we gave up the “American Dream,” became content with just satisfying our needs, and supported Kingdom causes with what we are now spending on “wants.”

Scripture says that God tests us with little things, and then if found faithful, He gives us responsibility for greater things. When we learned to tithe as children, it was relatively easy to tithe \$ 1 of \$ 10 gained. As we got older we struggled more with \$ 1,000 of \$ 10,000 gained, or \$5,000 of \$50,000 gained. What would we do if God continued to prosper us and blessed us with \$100,000? Would my first thought be, Sure! I’ll give 10% to God, and then use my 90% to buy an expensive car, take on more debt and bigger mortgage payments for a bigger house or a second house, take a cruise, buy a boat or RV, all of which will use up the gain not only for this year but presume upon God’s Providence to supply the gain for many years to come? Or would I figure that if I were “getting by” just fine on the \$45,000, why shouldn’t I “tithe” \$55,000 of the \$ 100,000 gained? The cars and home provided by the \$45,000 meet my needs adequately. Can I in good conscience squander “my” \$90,000 remaining after a strict 10% tithe by buying things I don’t really need when there are organizations and missionaries who are sacrificing and doing without even the basic needs I take for granted every day?

As long as there are people who haven't heard the gospel, missionaries who could be sent but for lack of funds, languages remaining for the Bible to be translated into, ministers to be trained in seminary (and on and on, the needs are endless), should I be living with anything more than my needs met? To do so robs God. And if we are honest with ourselves, we also rob ourselves of the joy of being really useful in the Kingdom and fulfilling the Great Commission.

Now some might say that money doesn't buy souls. And, of course, this is true; we are not advocating Simony here. But in Romans 10:13-15 we read, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" The preaching of the Word is essential to the saving of souls. The Holy Spirit does his regenerating work in conjunction with the preached Word to bring about conversion. This is a biblical fact of life. And it is also a fact of life that the preparation, equipping, and sending of ministers of the Word and the support and maintenance of the organizations that prepare, equip, and send them, takes money—lots of money. Yes, we need to pray for our ministers and missionaries. Yes, we need to send them encouraging letters and cards and let them know that we are behind them and are praying for them and their work. But are we "walking our talk" with regard to our financial support for their work? I have often wondered what missionaries must think when they come back on furlough and visit our churches and homes and see the luxury in which most of us live. And often these visits place them in an almost begging situation because many are responsible for raising their own support. Is this really necessary? Are our "wants" more important than their "needs."

This is not a popular subject these days. But can any of this be any more cutting and pointed than the admonitions we find in Scripture throughout Proverbs and in passages such as Matthew 6:19-34, Philippians 4:11, and the entire Epistle of James. As God's redeemed covenant people we should be patterning our whole lives, including our financial affairs, after the principles God has given us in His Word. We need to get past spiritualizing our faith and learn how to put it into action. In order to glorify God in our finances we need to learn how to get out of debt and stay out of debt, how to simplify our lives, how to "own little so that we are little owned," how to break out of the pattern of ostentatious keeping up with the "Jones," and how to face the scorn and persecution that will come on us when we begin to more and more stand out from the "business as usual" society in which we live...in short, we need to learn how, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism says in its first question, to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Christian authors such as Larry Burkett and Ron Blue have written many good books and published many useful materials for personal growth and study groups on these issues.

Burkett has often suggested that the easiest and surest way to get a finger on the pulse of someone's spiritual condition is to take a look in their checkbook. I'm afraid most of us could not survive the scrutiny. We need to take radical measures to change this before we are left to hear the words of Christ in Matthew 7:20-23, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Let's get started bearing fruit in this area of our lives.

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