

Why Give to the Church?

"All the church talks about is money!" We've all heard it. Some of us have said it, or thought it at one time. Some of us have had friends reject our invitation to church with those words. To be fair, there have been ministries that seemed as though appeals for money were endless perpetual fundraising machines. But it doesn't take much experience in churches to know that such examples are the exception, not the rule. This misconception has, in fact, left most pastors fearful of addressing the subject of giving to the church, lest they be lumped with those "religious racketeers."

Our society is in the midst of a financial recession. Over the past few years, each of us has felt the pinch of rising costs for fuel, groceries, utilities, and insurance. Chances are you're Christmas giving this year was less than last. Our family has felt the impact of these changes more than any time I can remember. Why, in light of these pressures, would I risk reinforcing those prejudices by talking about giving today? Because, before the recession hit us, and before any person here today ever heard of a financial appeal for any ministry, God spoke to us in his Word and gave us biblical reasons his children should give to his church.

Why Give to the Church?

1, Giving shows LOVE and GRATITUDE for Jesus Christ.

If you are a Christian, the main reason you should give to the church is that you love Jesus Christ and are grateful for what he has done for you. This is the motivation from which Paul wanted the Corinthians to give. (Macedonians gave out of poverty v, 1-4; Paul uses their example)

"See that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." 2 Corinthians 8:7-9 (NIV)

God inspired and preserved Paul's words from 2000 years ago for us to read today. Despite the differences in time and culture between us and these believers, the motivation for giving should be the same. Notice Paul's words in the next chapter...

"You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

Giving should come from the heart. All true love gives, and love for God is no exception. The hand that gives to God should merely be an extension of a heart that loves God. You should give to the church because you love the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ.

2. The Church is the only organization Jesus said he would BUILD.

"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Matthew 16:18 (NIV)

The church belongs to him; he calls it “my” church. He is the owner and leader of the church; not only as a whole, but also every local expression of it. So when you give to the church you attend, you are giving to what Jesus owns and building what he builds.

It can be good to give to ministries other than your church. But only one organization, the church, is truly the Bride of Christ for whom he died. *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”* Ephesians 5:25 (NIV) If our primary giving is to any other ministry than the local church, we are actually helping to displace the rightful place of the church in God’s program. If you love Jesus, you will want to give to support what he is doing in the world, but you must remember what he is doing in the world.... *“I will build my church.”*

3. Giving supports the MINISTRY that supports us.

When you give to the church, it helps the church fulfill the Great Commission:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

Not only does the local church support global ministries, but it attends to the needs of the local community. It astonishes me that some people seem to overlook the fact that churches have bills to pay. (Water, heat, electricity, maintenance, insurance, cleaning supplies, office supplies) The bulletins you hold on Sunday require the use of computers, printers, and copiers. Our church services have been supported by media, audio and video systems, lighting, and musical instruments. Not to mention the fact that nearly every church I know of has a paid pastor. Question? Where does the money come from to provide all these things? It should come from those who benefit from the ministry of the church. Some people wonder if it is right for a minister to be paid

“In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” 1 Corinthians 9:14 (NIV)

“Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.” Galatians 6:6 (NIV)

“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” 1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV)

How does this happen? From the weekly offerings given through the regular giving of God’s people. Salaries are paid, bills are covered, ministries are funded, missions is supported, and your life is enriched.

4. Giving is a powerful form of WORSHIP.

When the church at Philippi collected money to support Paul’s ministry, he described their giving as a sweet smelling offering...

"I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." Philippians 4:18 (NIV)

He says to them, in effect, ""What you gave to me through your church was, like the placing of a sacrificial lamb on an altar in the Old Testament, an act of worship to God." He also teaches them—and us—that God is well pleased when we worship by giving, just as he is by singing or praise or praying. Although it is true that our giving to the church helps pay the bills of its ministry, it's more important to see the act of putting money in an offering plate as an expression of devotion to God. In fact, we call it an offering plate because it is the container of a gift we offer to God, and giving to God is worship. It is worship because in so doing, you are giving a part of yourself. It is a portion of your life and labor that you give. For that reason, when you give, you might want to utter a brief, silent prayer such as, "Thank you, Lord, for life and all you have given to me." Otherwise, your act of worship may not actually be worship. You can sing a praise song without praising, I can preach a sermon without thinking of God, and we can give without acknowledging that God is worthy of our worship.

5. Giving is a beautiful form of FELLOWSHIP.

Giving is not only worship, but fellowship. Shared giving is part of a shared life.

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had." Acts 4:32 (NIV)

When you give, you provide an Awana book for a Sparky. You provide an overwhelmed mother of a preschooler with a network of friends. You provide an alcoholic with a support group in Celebrate Recovery. You reach a lost teenager for Christ through CrossWalk. You provide a grieving family with a pastor to care for them in their time of crisis.

6. God promises to BLESS those who give.

"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 you will not have room enough for it." Malachi 3:10 (NIV)

Regardless of whether or not you see tithing as an Old Testament practice only, or a New Testament principle, it is clear that God promises to bless those who give. Paul reaffirms this principle in this passage:

"Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others." 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 (NLT)

The Bible nowhere promises prosperity in response to giving, in spite of those false teachers who have led naïve Christians to believe that giving to God is a Christian's way of getting wealth on earth. Yet a biblical case can be made regarding the generous blessing of God both for our

needs in this life and our eternal joy in the next if we are generous and rightly motivated in giving God's work. Reread those verses now. Do you really believe what he says about blessing the person who "plants generously?"

Giving to the church is of absolutely no eternal benefit to you unless you have first given yourself to the Lord.

"They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will." 2 Cor 8:5 (NIV)