

## GIVING: God's Part and My Part

If you determine a certain amount of your income to give, even 40%, whose is the remaining 60%? That is easy to answer, isn't it? The 40% belongs to God and the rest belongs to you. God's part is holy (which means "set apart" or "dedicated to God" which is understood to mean "given to the church"), and the remainder is not. Right? Pitifully wrong!

All of us understand that "Sunday religion" or "church-house religion" is lacking because it segments religion to a part of our life and time, yet it is common for sincere disciples to think that their use of money can be segmented into holy and secular areas of their lives. But let me challenge you: The money you spend on a bag of groceries or a toy for your child is just as holy and God-glorifying as that which you drop into the collection basket.

Paul held up the Macedonian disciples as an encouraging example for the Corinthians. The secret of their generosity was, "*first they GAVE THEMSELVES to the Lord and to us by the will of God*" (2 Cor. 8:5). They belonged to the Lord. If they themselves belonged to the Lord, then it follows that all they were and all they possessed belonged to the Lord. When they served Paul's needs or the needs of those he pointed to in Judea, they were giving to the Lord. To those who had served the needs of fellow-men, Jesus assured, "*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me*" (Matt. 25:40). God is not hungry but he is glorified by our feeding the hungry as well as, or maybe even better than, by singing praise in an assembly. God does not need anything we can offer but the serving of the needs of our fellowmen is serving him.

Emphasis on whole-life offering was urged upon the Roman disciples also: "*I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship*" (Rom. 12:1). In analogy to the sacrificing (offering in worship) of animals under the Law, Paul pictures us as laying down our lives before the High Priest, not to be slaughtered, but to be a living, continuous offering in worship. The limiting concepts of "five acts of worship" and "worship assemblies" are shattered by our whole-life offering of worship.

So the life of a disciple is a constant worship. Living is giving and giving is living. Even as our lives cannot be segmented into the sacred and secular, neither can our giving be disjointed. The Temple and all functions in it were holy – dedicated and spiritually related. In similar manner our bodies and all things related to it are holy – dedicated, sanctified, offered, and spiritually related.

The FIRST and BEST of all we receive belongs to God, we often hear. No, WE belong to God. We FIRST GIVE OURSELVES. Then we provide for ourselves. Jesus was less than complimentary of the person who would let his parents remain in need because he gave his money to God instead of caring for them (Mark 7:9-13). "*If any one does not*

*provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (See 1 Tim. 5:3-8). Charity begins at home. If I deprive myself or my family in order to “give,” I am not honoring God. Neither would I honor God if my “giving” prevented me from paying my debts. Would it be worshipful giving if one gives to the church so the church can provide for a needy family? Then, is not God honored in worshipful service more emphatically when one provides for the needs of his own family, kin, or neighbor?*

The needs of you and your family are not itemized in a sort of legal document; so it is left to your discernment in appropriating your money. Knowing that his yoke is easy and his burden is light, you can believe that God intends that we enjoy a quiet and peaceful life. You may interpret that to mean you may eat well, live comfortably, provide medical care, advance educationally, enjoy recreational activities, surround yourself with artful appointments and music, and defend your family and society. Money spent for these needs is just as much worshipful giving as if it were put in the church treasury. The appropriation of your money for family use depends on your unselfishness and wisdom even as those are determining factors needful for the church to properly use the money you give in the collection.

I can remember painfully the disputes that arose and were used to divide us over what the church can do with its money. The church treasury (vaguely Biblical at best) was thought to be the Lord’s money in distinction from your money. It was God’s part and your part of your income. While you were allowed freedom in the use of your money, the church was narrowly restricted in the use of the Lord’s money. For example, it could not be used to support cooperative child care facilities, medical care facilities, or evangelism; nor could it be used to provide food or recreation for groups of disciples.

To say the least, this segmented approach of the sacred and the secular has been the source of constant debate among those who espouse it. Provision of a multi-purpose room for teaching and social gatherings is ruled out but a vestibule allowing socializing before and after the “worship service” is permitted. With the Lord’s money, grass and flowers may be planted, fed, and watered but the money cannot be used to put up a basketball goal and to supply Cokes for kids who use it. Eating of a meal in the structure is forbidden but water fountains, restrooms, and nursing babies are accepted. In the house bought with the Lord’s money, the preacher and his family may eat, enjoy social meals, have recreation, and worship without restriction. The Lord’s money is given to support the preacher who may then use it to buy food for social gatherings in the church’s house and can buy video games for his kids to watch in it. Did the Lord’s money cease to be the Lord’s money when it was given to the preacher? And if it was already the Lord’s money given in worship to support his work, why is he then expected to give part of it back in the collection – to support his work?

I can truly feel with all sincere disciples who try to explain all the situational problems relating to this separation of God’s part and man’s part in the use of money. I take no pleasure in writing about all the picky things we have made into dividing issues to the dishonor of Christ. The real problem with the things mentioned above is the failure to

discern that we are living sacrifices, totally the Lord's, called upon to use our best judgment and sincerest love in the use of all God has made us to be and put into our hands to use as stewards.

You, rather than the congregation, are responsible for the wise and unselfish use of the resources of your stewardship. You must decide how much to spend on yourself and your family, on the needs you see about you, and on the operation of your congregation. You may work alone in private ministry or join with others in meeting needs beyond your capacity. Who dictates that you cannot work through organizations and institutions in doing either private or congregational ministry? Can you or the church send a child in Ghana to public or private school, to a hospital operated by others, or to a child care home operated by others? Can you or the church work through a radio station, a publication, or Wycliffe Bible translators and Bible publishers to spread the gospel? Such decisions are left to our judgment (which may not always be the best) instead of being outlined in Scripture or legislated by preachers, elders, and party leaders.

How much should you "give"? Use it all!! How much should you apportion to different needs? Nobody can dictate that for you. If there is desperate need around you to which you give half of all you have, have you fulfilled your duty? It is not a matter of duty. Love will constrain you to serve to your limit. Does that mean that you sell your house, liquidate all business holdings, and use up all your savings for old age? No, you must not kill the goose that lays the golden eggs which can be used in helping others. Nor is it wise to impoverish yourself so that you will have to depend upon others for support in years to come.

Jesus said we would always have the poor among us. God knows that, and he is much more able to provide for them than you and I are. But he allows us to share love with those about us, demonstrating love for him by extending it to his creatures.

Recognition that there is no "God's part and my part" in our stewardship relieves us of judgmental specifications we have tried to bind on each other. Responsibility for individual decisions, however, does not make our decisions less agonizing -- unless we are able to accept that God understands our hearts even when our judgment may not be the best. Praying for wisdom and trusting God to give it allows us to live confidently.

For more, read Chapter 14, "Pie-Shaped Religion," in *Free In Christ*. More to follow, if the Lord wills. I am making no effort to review or outline all that is taught in the Bible about the use of our money. I am focusing on areas in which I think the best perspective is not usually taught. Thanks for staying with me. []

(Cecil Hook: September 2004)

Talkin' Texas: The King Ranch, established in 1853, far south near present-day Kingsville, with its 823,000 acres, is larger than the state of Rhode Island.

