

Norman C. Schwab  
Yacolt EV Free  
March 26, 1995

### **Stick em' up!**

A Catholic, Baptist and a Free church member were discussing their method of giving. The Catholic said, "I draw a circle, throw the money in the air and whatever falls outside the circle is God's." The Baptist said, "Well, I draw a circle, throw the money in the air, and what falls in the circle is God's. The Free church man said, "I draw a circle, throw the money in the air, and whatever God catches, He can keep."

Giving is always an interesting subject...especially for Pastor's to preach on. Some may enjoy it. I frankly feel kind of uncomfortable. I not interested in being a money grubbing preacher trying to squeezing the congregation for all they've got. So, I'd just rather not preach on money. However, when the topic comes up in the book I'm studying, and God says to preach the Word...I feel I must. I can't avoid subjects that I'd like to avoid...nor can I continually preach a pet topic of my own.

I asked myself this week. Why do I feel so uncomfortable preaching on biblical giving? I think part of my problem is that maybe I really don't believe it all comes from God. I get to thinking that it's people who are ultimately responsible for meeting my needs and not the Lord. It could be that some of you feel that same uncomfortableness when you hear the preacher is talking about giving. It could be you too might have the same problem I do, we aren't totally convinced that every thing we have comes from God.

I want welcome those who are guests this morning to listen in, but this really is directed for the Christian believer who is committed to Christ and is called to minister in giving. I don't want this to be a guilt trip or a pressure time, I do want to follow what the Spirit and the Word of God would say in regards to Biblical giving.

When you go to a doctor for your annual physical, he or she will often begin to poke, prod and press on various place of your body while asking "Does this hurt? How about this? If you happen to cry out in pain, one of two things have happened. Either the doctor pushed too

hard, without the right sensitivity. Or, possibly there's something wrong. The doctor may advise some further tests because, pain like that means something isn't right. So when the pastor's preach on biblical giving certain folks may cry out in discomfort, criticizing the message or the messenger. One of two things has happened. Either the pastor pushed too hard or, perhaps there's something wrong. If there's a genuine pain then we need the Great Physician to do His work...because it's not supposed to hurt there.

(PRAY)

As we near the end of our study in Nehemiah. We see a leader who is inducted into the hall of reality. He realizes that it is much easier to rebuild a city wall than to reform the lives of people. The people seemed so committed in chapter 10. They had dedicated themselves to the Lord and signed on the dotted line. 10:39 "We will not neglect the house of our God" They joyously dedicated the wall and seemed to be refreshed in the Lord in chapter 12. Had Nehemiah's book ended at chapter 12 we all would have thought him to be a complete rebuilding success. The reality of chapter 13 exposes the failure of man. Nehemiah was the last historian of the Old Testament. Only 400 years after Nehemiah and the Messiah would come. I believe he knew that God wanted to fulfill His mission of bringing all people of the earth to Him seeing the attractive example of the chosen people...but chapter 13 tragically exposes a plan that was not to be.

In the first 9 verses of chapter 13 we found out that the high priest had prepared a luxury suite for an enemy of God. A place that had been built for the holy had been filled with the unholy. The storehouses that kept the grain tithes, wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers, gatekeepers and contributions for the priests had been cleared out and filled with Mr. Tobiah's furniture. Nehemiah decided it was time to do a little spring cleaning. The evil was thrown out and replaced with the good stuff.

There was a reason the storehouses were empty. The people weren't filling them up. Nehemiah could fill the storehouses up once but he needed to deal with the root problem of the people. They needed to be filling up the storehouses. This morning we go to look at the issue of giving. First some of the problems then some of the results.

Lets pick up the story at verse 10 (READ)

The problem. What was it? The people just stopped giving to the Lord. Why? Maybe some of these people in Jerusalem were those who just gave when someone was watching, encouraging giving, excited about giving. They had the "Look at me give" syndrome. Nehemiah had been gone for two years. He had been generously setting the pace of giving at the temple. He had modeled sacrificial giving to the people. He wasn't a priest but he was a very influential leader in the Jerusalem community. He encouraged giving to the Temple and providing for the singers, Levites, gatekeepers, and priests. He was a cheerleader for pastors. But, without someone encouraging, without prodding without watching...the people lost interest. I think of those people who use their wealth in giving to bring attention to themselves. They give large sums of money so that buildings will be named after them. They use their money for power and influence in the church. It makes me think of the New Testament Pharisees who paraded by the offering box and with a great show dumped in a ton of money. Jesus said those types folks have received their reward. All their going to get is some temporal awe by people here on earth. Jesus calls us to not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. Giving is just between us and God. It's a personal act of worship. We try very hard to keep the giving that occurs here as anonymous as possible. There is only a couple people who know how much and who gives what for your tax records. And I'm not one of them. I don't have a clue how much you give...and I don't want to know. I don't want my relationships, decisions or ministry any way affected by money. Here at Yacolt E Free your are not going to see someone getting up front and say "I've got 100 dollars to give to the Lord, who'll match it?" Why I'll raise ya 500 Brother Gumball." Nope. Giving is just between you and God. Giving just when folks are watching is a poor motivation. First it fosters the pride of comparison looking down on those who are not able to give more. Secondly, when people stop looking, the giving stops as well. One problem in Jerusalem may have been the "look at me give" syndrome.

Another problem in Jerusalem may have been the "twist my arm" syndrome. These are the folks who give only out of compulsion. They live life compelled by the shoulds. Without Nehemiah there to encourage

people to give. Without the reminding, they conveniently forgot. When they remembered, they were filled with guilt. What's driving your giving? Are you compelled by your own shoulds? That's not a great motivation for giving because when the arm twister is gone. It doesn't happen. Be assured we don't do any arm twisting at this church. We preach the Word and lay out what it says. We may preach to the people and allow the Spirit to work but we certainly would never speak to individuals. In verse 11 Nehemiah does a little "preaching" reprimanding the group of officials "Why is the house of the Lord forsaken?" Wasn't it this same group that I signed a covenant with in 10:39 (READ) What's the deal? He lays out the problem and the truth to the group, but allows the Holy Spirit to move in the individual. The only arm twisting for money around here is going to be done by the Holy Spirit. So, if your feeling a dislocated shoulder, you'll have to take it up with him. That's the "arm twisting" syndrome.

Maybe deep down your convinced by the "it's a rip-off" thinking. Notice in verse 13 Nehemiah comes in and put people in charge who were reliable. That tells me maybe those who were handling the storehouse tithes before, were not reliable. The temple leaders may have been skimming off the top, using the funds for their own personal gain. The fact that Eliashib's relative Tobiah had a luxury suite in the temple tells us that maybe things were not all well with the leadership. We need to know that we can trust the ministry we are giving to, that it will be used for the purpose we intend. Here at Yacolt Efree our Financial secretary and Treasurer keeps accurate accounting of all the money coming in and where it goes out. Monthly reports are available to anyone who wants to see them. Here at this church not the Pastor or even a small group that decide where the resources should be allocated. It's decided membership of this church.

I think at the root of the giving problem in Jerusalem was a lack of spiritual vitality. A giving problem could be an lack of biblical knowledge on giving, but more often it's a spiritual immaturity. Giving directly corresponds to the relationship one has with God. One with a greater faith often loosens more funds from under our fingers. If someone is just a new believer, the relationship with God has not developed to infiltrate all areas of his or her life. The Holy Spirit's work takes time. We cannot

expect to be a fully mature Christian all at once. The transformation to spiritual maturity and sanctification is a process...it takes time. New believers need to grow in this area as well. In *I talk Back to the Devil*, A.W. Tozer says that "Money often comes between men and God. Someone has said that you can take two small dimes and shut out the view of a panoramic landscape. Go to the mountains and just hold two coins closely in front of your eyes-the mountains are still there, but you cannot see them at all because there is a dime shutting off the vision in each eye." It doesn't take large quantities of money to come between us and God, just a little placed in the wrong position, will effectively obscure our view.

If one is flat with God spiritually, he or she has difficulty seeing the blessing that God has placed in their lives. Without seeing God working, without looking for God's working in his life...they see no need to commit resources in worship to Him. Spiritual deadness dries up resources. Spiritual vitality causes them to overflow.

J Oswald Sanders book, "Enjoying Intimacy with God" states "If the true Spirit of grace has gripped my heart, I will not be calculating the minimum I can get away with, but the maximum I can give to my Lord." The more intimate we are with our Savior the more dependent we will be on His provision for our needs. The more dependent we are on His provision, the more willing we will be for Him to place them where He wills.

We've been exploring possible problems with the lack of giving in our lives. They tend to be attitudes, don't they. It's not a matter of the amount. The question is the attitude of my heart? Am I a "look at me" type giver? Or a "It's a rip off" thinker? How about a "twist my arm" type giver? These attitudes are symptoms of a greater disease that needs further tests. These are symptoms of a spiritual disease.

What are some of the results of a giving disease? The giving problems in Jerusalem left the storehouses in the temple empty. That gave room for some furniture for evil Tobiah to come on in. I have found that if I'm not doing what I know God wants me to do...I open myself up to other evil wanting to take up residence in my life. When my life is filled with God's stuff, it leaves less room for Satan's stuff. Result #1? A

giving disease can open you up to room for evil to squirm it's way in your life. You give Satan an opportunity...he'll take it every time.

Result #2? Look at verse 10. There were no resources for the Levites, singers, gatekeeper or priests...so they had to go home and get a second job. Ministry is affected when people fail to give. This is pretty basic. The priests needed to eat. The singers families needed clothes. They could not minister forever living off their savings. They were forced to get a second job to provide...but that also limited the hours they could spend up at the temple. The more resources, the more ministry they were able to do. We could just stop here and dream about more classroom space. About bringing on a Youth Pastor. Getting that building all finished.

One thing I sure appreciate about all you folks. You are very giving and it's your desire to provide for our family as well as the needs of the ministry that goes on here at Yacolt Efree. Result #1 It could give evil an opportunity. Result #2 Ministry could be adversely affected.

Result #3 Your spiritual health could be affected. Nehemiah calls on the officials and leaders of the community in Jerusalem. He said, do you remember your vow? A few years back you made a vow to God. It wasn't to me...you made it to God. Broken vows to God put a splinter in your relationship with God. Are you keeping your promises in giving to God? Are you putting first things first financially in your budget? Or have things begin to crowd God out of the financial part of your life.

This past week Erin and I reviewed our budget for January and February. We have it on one of those computer spreadsheets. We punch in our expenditures and it will tell us where we spent too much or too little. A portion of our tithe to the church is being taken out of our salary up front for tax purposes, but other giving to missionaries and ministries we keep track of. It was the budget that told us we had failed for two months to fulfill our commitment to a certain ministry. so this week we wrote out a check for three months. I tell you this as a practical application.

All of us need to go to the doctor for an annual checkup. Maybe it's time for you to take a look at your budget. Have you got together with your spouse and decided what God wants you to give to ministries this year? If your enjoying the meal, whether via the radio or seminars

or here at church...we need to be picking up the tab. Are you allocating God's resources where He wants you to? Are you doing it cheerfully? The Bible says God delights in a cheerful giver

Tax time is just around the corner. By law we give to the government. This proves it is possible to give without loving. Anyone here love giving money to the I.R.S.? You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving. Giving to God does not come naturally and can only be motivated by love for a Savior who done so much for us. Simply giving is loving. Not yourself...but God.