

Woods Chapel

Sermon - June 13, 2004 - AM service

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An expositional message from the Book of Philippians on Stewardship in light of our future building plans.

INVESTMENTS IN THE KINGDOM

Philippians 4:15-20

INTRODUCTION

The perception of the church by many in our culture is that the church is a hard-sell organization trying to get into your wallet. “All for Jesus” really means your cash instead of your life. Without a doubt, in some circles of the church, giving money is an abused subject.

When I turn on a Christian radio program or Christian television program, and the majority of the time is used to raise funds, that is wrong. There is often exploitation going on, as Christians use Madison Avenue techniques to raise money, using emotional appeals that lack integrity. We should watch out for slick deceivers who have discovered that they can cash in on religion. They are addicted to money and they will sell religion to get it. They rejoice, not in the truth, but in bank accounts.

On the other hand, there is also much ignorance within the Christian community when it comes to our management of money. We are told that more money is spent on both chewing gum and dog food in the United States than is given to foreign missions. The IRS reports that Americans, on the average, give less than 1.7% of their adjusted gross income for charitable contributions. That equals out to about .25 cents a day for non-Christians and \$1.00 a day for Christians.

Even though money is an abused subject, it is also an important subject. Our lifestyle is centered around money. Psychologists tells us that fifty percent of our waking hours are spent thinking about money. Our skill in handling money will determine whether or not we are living wisely. Paul makes it very clear in 1 Timothy chapter six that poor choices about money can destroy your life. How you handle money can make or break your happiness forever. And the theme of our passage this morning it that a wise use of your money can enrich your life for all eternity.

How can God justify devoting twice as many verses to money than to faith and prayer combined? And how could Jesus say more about money than both heaven and hell? Didn't He know what was really important? The Bible has much to say about money—our giving, saving, and spending—and declares that it is symptomatic. God knows that the way a Christian uses his money discloses exactly

where he is spiritually.

The biblical perspective on money is that all finances are God's and are on loan to us as stewards. God owns it all (Matthew 25:14). “‘The silver is Mine and the gold in Mine,’ declares the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:8). That concept has revolutionary implications.

Since God owns it all, He has the right to whatever He wants, whenever He wants it. The owner has rights, the servant or steward has responsibilities. That means every decision, whether it is giving or spending, is a spiritual decision. What do we do with His money? We will give an account to God for what we do with His money.

The Bible also affirms that it is God who gives us the ability to earn money. Deuteronomy 8:18 says, “But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.”

There is that danger of presumption and pride when it comes to money. We must never forget that we are dependent upon God for our next breath, let alone the power to earn money. All of life is a gift from God and nothing is possible apart from Him.

In the passage before us this morning, Paul changes the subject from the biblical doctrine of contentment to the biblical doctrine of giving. They are related. Contentment in God and all that He gives us, allows us the freedom to give as He directs.

We want to look at four principles from the closing verses of Philippians.

I. God expects His people to be givers. (15-16)

“You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.” Paul praises the Philippians for their giving. He reflects back to his first experience of their generosity. Right after the church was planted in Philippi, soon after Paul left them, they began what was to always be a pattern of giving.

Paul uses the phrase, “shared with me,” (ekoinonasen) which carries the idea of “being a partner.” There was a partnership with the Philippians and Paul—a bond of Christian affection and a bond of Christian commitment to the Great Commission of making Christ known. It showed itself in the practical expression of their gifts.

In the phrase, “the matter of giving and receiving,” Paul was using a metaphor from the business world. He was saying, by your gift, you opened an account with me. There would be a two-way transaction. A financial gift passed

from the church to the apostle Paul, and spiritual blessings flowed from God to the church.

In one church, an elderly woman clipped to her offering check a note that read: "I pay my bills where I get my groceries." It was her way of saying that she had been fed spiritually by the work of the church and wanted to support the work in return.

There is no way I could repay Dallas Seminary for what they have done for me. Four years of study and preparation—godly men pouring truth into my life, changed my life. It is with great joy that Candy and I share financially with the Seminary—remaining in partnership with their ministry. The same goes for Woods Chapel. God has used fourteen years of worship, fellowship, and service together to change our lives. With joy we are in heart-felt partnership with the ministry here. We are excited about the future of Woods Chapel and where God might takes us in the future to make a difference for the cause of Christ.

Many of you have done well in giving to God's work here at Woods Chapel. We are out of debt, but the need for generous giving is just beginning. We are looking forward to expanding our facilities and parking, one phase at a time. The first phase is right around the corner. Phase one will be a large foyer reaching the length of our building with enlarged bathrooms for men and women.

The purpose for phase one is to enhance our fellowship time, our worship experience, and of course, excellent and comfortable bathroom facilities for both men and women. The building committee is working on the details and will present an architectural drawing for us to see. Please consider giving above and beyond your regular giving to the phase one building project.

God expects His people to be givers.

Just for a moment, I want you to play the role of financial counselor. Your first appointment is with an elderly woman. The woman's husband died six years ago. She has this to say: "I'm down to my last two dollars. I have no more money, the cupboards are bare, and this two dollars is all I have to live on. Yet I feel I should put the whole two dollars in the church offering. What do you think?"

What **do** you think? What would **you** tell her? Perhaps you would say something like this: "That's very generous of you, but remember that God gave you common sense and wants you to take care of yourself. He knows you have to eat.

And He knows your heart, that you want to give. I'm sure God would have you keep that two dollars and buy some food for tomorrow. He wants your needs to be met, and you can't expect Him just to send down food from heaven if you give up the little money He's already provided. After all, God wants us to do the sensible and responsible thing."

In Mark 12, we meet a poor widow. She put in the temple offering box two tiny copper coins, worth a fraction of a penny. This was the only money she had. Jesus called His disciples together to teach them a lesson from the woman. Did He question the wisdom of her actions? Did He say she should have been more sensible than to surrender her only remaining resources? No. Jesus came out of

His chair and gave her an unqualified commendation for her choice: “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on” (43-44).

The point here is not that everyone should give everything away. The point is that Jesus loves faith-filled risk givers for the glory of God—where we use our money to show that God, not possessions is our treasure. If Jesus’ evaluation does anything, it shows that our standards of wisdom about money, are not only radically different from God’s, but diametrically opposed to them. God expects His people to be givers.

There is a second principle from our passage.

II. God teaches us that our giving is an investment in His kingdom. (17-18a)

“Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance.”

Paul makes it clear, that although the Philippians did good in giving, his concern was not for the gift, but that they understand that their giving was an investment.

Again he uses business terms—“profit, account”—in relation to their giving. He is thankful that they are a good example in giving, but he wants them to please realize their rich dividends. Their gifts made it possible for the gospel to go forth. This afternoon several teenagers return from Mexico representing Jesus and the gospel, made possible because of your giving. You will have friends in heaven whom you have never met. They came to know Christ through a ministry you have supported—Japanese, Bosnians, Mexicans, Americans. They may greet you in heaven.

Jesus told us to be aggressive in our investing. He never told us it was wrong to lay up treasures. In fact, He commanded it. But He said to make sure that we lay up treasures in heaven, where you will spend eternity. Jesus offers us the incredible opportunity to trade earthly currency for eternal kingdom rewards.

By putting our money and possessions in His treasury, we assure ourselves of eternal rewards beyond our comprehension. We can trade temporal money that we cannot keep anyway to gain eternal possessions that we cannot lose. That is why Paul was possessed to pen the words, “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

It comes from the biblical perspective on giving. It is an investment. God will not allow the Philippian’s giving to go unrecognized or unrewarded. Their account in heaven is building. There is one safe place to put our money and that is to invest it in the kingdom of God.

A man in New York City had a wife who had a cat. Actually, the cat had her. She loved that cat. She stroked it, combed its fur, fed it, and pampered it.

The man detested the cat. He was allergic to cat hair; he hated the smell of the litter box; he couldn't stand the scratching on the furniture; and he couldn't get a good night's sleep because the cat kept jumping on the bed. When his wife was out of town for the weekend, he put the cat in a bag with some rocks, dumped it in the Hudson river, and uttered a joyful good-bye to the cat. When his wife returned and could not find the cat, she was overwhelmed with grief.

Her husband said, "Look, honey, I know how much that cat meant to you. I'm going to put an ad in the paper and give a reward of five hundred dollars to anyone who finds the cat."

No cat showed up, so a few days later he said, "Honey, you mean more to me than anything on earth. If that cat is precious to you, it is precious to me. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll buy another ad and raise the ante. We'll increase the reward to one thousand dollars."

A friend saw the ad and exclaimed, "You must be nuts; there isn't a cat on earth that is worth a thousand dollars."

The man replied, "Well, when you know what I know, you can afford to be generous."

When we grasp the idea and really understand the principle of laying up treasure in heaven through joyful giving to His cause, we then know that we can afford to be generous.

In the game of Monopoly, players buy land and collect money. When one player has enough money and at least one monopoly of properties, he or she can buy houses and hotels and collect rent on them. Eventually one player receives enough rental money through land and building holdings to bankrupt the other players, thus ending the game. Parker Brothers, the makers of Monopoly, take for granted one final instruction—when the game is over, put all the pieces back in the box.

People who live for this present world, who spend their strength and money on what cannot last, are like those who play Monopoly as though it were reality. In the end, we all get put in the box and we are gone.

God wants us to see giving as an eternal investment.

III. God encourages us to perceive our giving as an act of worship. (18b)

"I am supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

Paul speaks of the Philippians financial gift as a "fragrant aroma," and "an acceptable sacrifice"—an act of worship, and emphasizes the acceptance and pleasantness of the sacrifice to God. Giving should be directed to the Lord. Giving does not border on worship, it is worship. When you give to the point that

demonstrates that God is your treasure, that is worship. Usually, when we think of worship, we think of praising God and praying to God in response to who He is and what He has done. Giving is a response of the heart triggered by the grace of God. We consider what He has given to us, then we give out of a sense of gratitude and joy. We give, because He first gave to us. Giving is an act of worship in which God takes pleasure.

IV. God will meet our needs when we are faithful with our resources. (19-20)

In verse 19, Paul tells the Philippians that God will do for them what they can't do. It is a divine promise: "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." I believe this verse is often claimed out of context. The context suggests that the Philippians had given to the ministry of the apostle Paul to the extent that they were now in need. They had given to their own impoverishment. Paul says, "My God shall meet your need." You can't legitimately claim that verse if you are not in the pattern of biblical giving. There is a prerequisite to this verse. If you love God so much and His work so much, that you stretch to give to the point that you are now in need—then God's promise is to meet those needs; God supplies; God provides.

I am often asked, "How much should I give?" I believe that Scripture teaches that ten percent of our income is the place to start, but sometimes God will guide us to give more, even sacrificially.

And notice that God does not give out of His riches in Christ Jesus, but according to His riches in Christ Jesus. He gives to the fullest.

I am convinced that we miss out on a blessing in this area, because many of us don't stretch to give. But if we do and are in need, we often go to the plastic genie, and rob God of an opportunity to supply our needs. If you're faithful with your resources, God will meet your needs.

"Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen." It is no wonder Paul breaks out in doxology—praising the Lord. It is glory to God—not to ourselves.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the bottom line is that we are to trust and obey God in the matter of giving—it is foundational to a great walk with Jesus.

When Zaccheus said he would give half his money to the poor and pay back four times over those he had cheated, Jesus did not merely say, "Good idea, Zaccheus." He said, "Today, salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9). Jesus judged the reality of this man's salvation based on his willingness . . . No!—his cheerful eagerness to part with his money for the glory of God and the good of others.

On the flip side, we have the example of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-30). This earnest, decent, hard-working young urban professional asked Jesus what good things he could do to get eternal life. Jesus recited God's commandments, which the man said he had kept. Then the Lord delivered the bottom line: "Go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me."

What was Jesus doing? Jesus knew money was the rich man's god. If Christ Jesus is not Lord over a person's money and possessions, then He is simply not that person's Lord.

The principle is timeless—there is a powerful relationship between a person's true spiritual condition and his attitude and actions concerning money and possessions. Jesus said it this way: "for where your treasure is there will be your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21).

Notice Jesus is not saying that our treasures follow our hearts. It's the other way around.

Where we invest our treasure, our hearts are sure to follow. How can we cultivate a heart for God? By putting our treasures, our investments in God's kingdom. It is a fact of life that our interests follow our investments.

I can tell a lot about you by the way you read your newspaper. If you have invested in stock you go right to the financial section. There is a guy with a portfolio. If you are addicted to sports—the sports page is the first part of the paper you read. If you are into political debate—the editorial page. If you are going insane—it's the comics.

The Lord says I can tell you a lot about your heart for Me—by what you do with your money.
