

Taking It Seriously - Giving

REVIEW: In this series we have been exploring things that naturally flow out of what we studied in Ephesians. God established His church, and the church is the organization on earth that God works through. In seeing that in Ephesians, there are many things that come out of that. So far we have looked at taking seriously attending church, and why it is vital to our spiritual health. Taking seriously baptism and membership in the church. The church is not some club you join, it is a spiritual commitment you make to a specific part of the Body of Christ. Baptism is commitment to following Christ, and making that commitment public. We take the elements of church seriously - worship, teaching and preaching, and what is it that you should look for in a church. Last week we looked at taking the ordinances of the church seriously - baptism and the Lord's Supper. For baptism, we simply said that we really need to be serious about supporting others when they choose to make that commitment to Christ. The Lord's Supper is a serious matter altogether. As such, we gave you suggestions as to how you can focus your heart and mind on Christ during communion.

TRAN: Today, we are taking seriously giving. "Awww, here it comes - I wondered when the Pastor would get to his high pressured sales pitch about money!" Now trust me, I understand that there are many people nowadays that can hold that view. Three quick things to address before we jump into the sermon. First, the sermon is not all about money - the title is "giving" which is broader than just money. Second, the Bible addresses the topic - therefore, Pastors must address the topic. Third, let me compliment the church when it comes to giving this year. I can only think of one week that we were lower than our weekly target. Most weeks we have met or exceeded that number, which means ministries are not being held back financially. So great job everyone!

I. An illustration from history

A. What would you call this day from history: December 7, 1941

1. Answer: "A date that will live in infamy"
2. We all know what happened that day
 - a) At 7:50 am the Japanese pulled off a brazen attack on Pearl Harbor - the center for naval operations in the Pacific
 - b) Eighteen ships were hit, and 200 aircraft were destroyed or damaged
3. America was caught completely off guard
 - a) For months we had been trying to stay out of the war
 - b) Suddenly the war had come to us

B. The Japanese thought they had scored a brilliant victory

1. However, that victory wound up becoming a large scale blunder

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2. Overnight we went from unconcerned to a unified nation intent on winning the war
 3. All over America there were long lines at recruiting offices
 - a) Some showing up late to work or school to sign up
 - b) Some lying about their age to get involved in the fight
 - c) Grown men wept when they were told they could not fight for medical reasons
 - d) Those same men finding other ways to support the war effort at home
 - e) America was unified, and put everything else on hold to support the war effort
 - C. About 25 years later came another war - Vietnam
 1. This war was not as popular
 2. Almost no one volunteered for the war effort
 3. Many had to be compelled into service
 4. Some dodged the draft altogether, others joined a college to avoid the draft, and still others moved out of the country
 - D. When it comes to serving and giving in the church, many Christians fall into one of these two camps
 1. Some follow the WWII model
 - a) They want to serve - they want to make a difference
 - b) It does not matter the cost or the level of sacrifice
 - c) Something in their heart compels them to do something, anything for the cause of Christ
 2. Some follow the Vietnam model
 - a) They don't come looking for ways to serve
 - b) Leaders have to go to them and draft them
 - c) In this model, people serve out of obligation - often counting the days until the deed is done
 - E. This is our starting point to talk about giving
- II. Service in the church - one form of giving
- A. Did you realize that serving in the church makes you more like Jesus?
 1. Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
 - a) We often key in on the fact that Jesus gave His life for many
 - b) We note what a wonderful sacrifice that was for us
 - c) But do we ever think that He didn't come to be served but to serve
 2. We all know the story of Jesus washing the disciples feet - He served them
 3. We can pick out story after story of how Christ served the disciples
 4. We recognize that Jesus was loving, forgiving, compassionate

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- a) We want to emulate Jesus in all of these things
- b) Being more loving, forgiving, compassionate ourselves
5. Most of us have declared in various ways that we want to be more like Jesus
 - a) Jesus served
 - b) If we want to be more like Jesus, then we need to serve too
- B. Turn to 1 Peter 4:10-11 because I want you to see this - although the version is different than the Greek word
 1. Peter is already encouraging his readers to serve in whatever capacity God has given to them to serve
 2. What I want to point out is at the end of verse 11 - why
 - a) “so that in all things God might be praised...”
 - b) The word for praised is the exact same word as in the next sentence - “To him be the GLORY...”
 - c) Praised is a permissible translation, but the idea is God is being glorified (praised) through our service
 3. Now, notice something else that is important in verse 10, its says “use whatever gift you have received to serve others”
 - a) The word for others is more specific
 - b) It means “one another”
 - c) Peter is writing to Christians - so he is saying the service we give is to the church - to one another - that is what brings God glory
 4. So this idea of glorifying God by our service is similar to people when they understand that the manner in which they work or serve reflects upon someone else
 - a) Like working for your father
 - b) Your work reflects on your dad
 - (1) It can either bring him shame
 - (2) Or it can bring him glory
- C. Hope you are ready for this next one about service, because it is an ouch moment
 1. Malachi 3:18 “And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”
 2. Did you see the ouch factor
 - a) The distinction between the righteous and the wicked - service
 - b) Serving God
 - c) In context service to God is broader than just having a ministry in the church - but you can certainly make the case that it is included in that broader sense

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- D. Number four about serving - serving expresses love for God
 - 1. Hebrews 6:10 “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.”
 - 2. God calls it a work of love by helping His people
 - 3. Galatians adds to the idea as well, “Let us do good to all people, especially to the household of faith.”
 - a) Sounds as if God is taking serving His people seriously
- E. Serving brings pleasure
 - 1. Psalm 40:8 “I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.”
 - a) The word for desire is also translated “delight”
 - b) There is a delight in doing God’s will
 - 2. Serving brings pleasure to the person who is serving
 - a) Did you ever think what would happen if God or the church did not allow you to serve?
 - (1) Most people would feel slighted
 - (2) They would feel as if they were being kept from being of help - of doing what they were good at doing
 - (3) Some people might enjoy not serving for a brief time, but sooner or later you would want to do something
 - b) The reason you would go crazy sooner or later - it brings you pleasure to serve in ways that you enjoy
 - 3. Serving also brings pleasure to others
 - a) In Acts 20 Paul says goodbye to the Ephesian elders
 - (1) They wept openly at Paul’s departure
 - (2) Partly because he said they would not see him again, and partly because he meant so much to them and all the service he gave
 - b) Think about people in your life that have served you, built into you
 - (1) Sunday School teachers, pastors, Bible study leaders
 - (2) You derive pleasure from their service - and others will derive pleasure from your service as well
 - 4. Serving also gives pleasure to God
- F. So a couple of quick questions to help us diagnose ourselves here
 - 1. Do you do a servant’s work with a servant’s heart?
 - a) This is really a heart question - anyone can serve, but do you have a servant’s heart?
 - b) I promise you that every ministry is under appreciated, and everyone gets discouraged sometimes

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- c) So unless in those moments of discouragement or criticism you fall back on the fact that you are called by the Servant to be a servant, you will have a hard time in ministry
2. Are you a consistent worker or a convenience worker?
 - a) Too many people serve occasionally when it's convenient
 - b) What the church needs are people that will make long term commitments
 - (1) Oops I said the "C" word - commitment
 - c) The fact is more and more leaders hear "I'll help out when I can" or "Call me when you really need me"
 - d) 2 Corinthians 6:4-5 - Paul was committed in all of those circumstances
3. Last question: Will you determine never to retire from ministry?
 - a) Here is the sad part about people that retire from ministry in church - usually when you are older and have been working for Christ for so many years, that is when you have the most experience
 - b) That is what is needed - the experience to pass on to new generations
 - c) Paul said "Do not grow weary in doing good..."
 - (1) Why?
 - (2) Because we all do
 - (3) We might need a break from ministry, or even a change of ministry, but we should never just retire from it altogether

III. Giving to the church - yes, money

- A. One of our prime reasons for giving of our material possessions is gratitude for Jesus Christ
 1. 2 Corinthians 8:1-9
 - a) The Macedonian believers had pleaded to be able to give to the collection that Paul was taking up for the Jerusalem believers that had fallen on hard times
 - b) Paul tells us that they gave all they could and even more than they really could just so they could be involved in supporting brothers and sisters in Christ
 - c) Then comes Paul's big ouch moment
 - (1) In verse 8 Paul says, "I'm not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others."
 - (a) Did Paul really just say that?!?!
 - (b) He is comparing one group to another - doesn't that break a cardinal rule or something!

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- (2) The reason he does it is in verse 9 - They knew God's grace in Jesus just as the others did
 - (a) They knew how Christ left it all so we could gain it all
 - (b) But how will they respond to God's grace in Jesus?
 - (c) Look how these folks responded - overwhelming generosity
 - (d) The reason is because they understood the God's overwhelming generosity to us - and THAT is what they responded to
2. So the hand that is giving to God should be an extension of the heart that is captivated by God's love
 - a) It's a general rule - The more generous a person is, the more they understand the love and generosity of God
 - b) Now - is this a hard a fast rule - Answer: Yes and no
 - (1) No, you cannot measure a person's love by the size of their gift - hear "the widow's mite"
 - (2) Yes, because the widow gave out of what she did not have - generosity
 - c) What is expected from God is not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice
- B. So why give to the church - we know we should give to Jesus, but why give to the church?
 1. Matthew 16:16-18 "Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, ^e and on this rock **I will build my church**, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."
 2. The church is the only organization or entity that Jesus ever said He would build
 3. Does that mean other Christian organizations are bad? We shouldn't give to those?
 - a) Of course not - they are parachurch ministries
 - (1) Know what para means?
 - (2) It means "by the side of"
 - (3) These are organizations that come along the side of the church to help or work in areas that support the church's mission
 - b) But it is only the church that Christ died for
- C. Giving to the church helps fulfill the Great Commission
 1. Let's be honest here, not all of us were called to go overseas to share the gospel
 2. But all of us should have a burning desire to see people reached by the gospel - regardless of where they live

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3. One way to support the Great Commission is by giving to the church so we can support missionaries
 4. One of the students that went with me to Mexico one year came back from the trip with a mature perspective
 - a) After having gone on a short term trip, he concluded that missions work was not for him
 - b) He said, “I think what God is calling me to is using my finances that I receive after I begin my career and supporting missions work that way.”
 - c) I was proud of him for two reasons
 - (1) First, he actually went on a trip to arrive at that conclusion
 - (2) Second, he believed in supporting the Great Commission no matter what, including using his finances to do so
- D. Giving is a form of worship
1. Paul says something instructive in Philippians 4:18 “I have received full payment and have more than enough. 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.”
 2. Paul is likening the gifts of God’s people to a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, which pleases God
 - a) All of that language harkens back to the OT
 - b) Our monetary gifts are like a spotless lamb, which is given at the Temple as a sacrifice to God
 - c) It pleases Him just the same
- E. Giving also supports the ministry that supports each of us
1. I think too often people think that their money just goes to keep the lights on or the heat on
 2. But think about the number of things that the church pays for in its ministry
 - a) VBS materials, and curriculum, the Right Now website with 1000’s of Bible studies
 - b) Materials for the nursery, and children’s church
 - c) Children’s ministry on Wednesday nights
 - d) Books and materials for Bible study groups
 - e) The paper and materials to produce bulletins and letters and the Courier
 - f) The multiple ways members are taught the Word of God
 - g) Even all the things that go into holding a public worship service

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3. These are not heat and lights, and salaries, but all those things need to be paid as well, and feed into how each member is supported through the church
 - F. The reality is that it is not “my money” but it’s God’s money
 1. Psalm 24:1 “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;”
 2. Psalm 50:9-10 “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.
 3. Ezekiel 18:4 “⁴For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child”
 - a) It stand to reason that if God owns us, He owns all we have
 - b) So if we were created to bring God glory, if God owns us, than what we have is designed to be used for His glory as well
 4. Deuteronomy 8:17-18
 - G. Finally, God promises blessings for those who are generous
 1. Malachi 3:10 - bring the tithe to the storehouse - test me in this and see if I will not open the window of blessings for you that there will not be enough room to receive it all
 2. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8
 - a) God is promising blessing when we are generous of heart with even our material possessions
 - b) But it is a true generosity not a grudging giving either
 - H. One caveat about giving and then I will close
 1. The first thing you must give, is yourself
 2. Giving your money, no matter how generous will not earn you a place in heaven
 3. It is your heart that God wants
 4. When He has that, your material possessions, your money will follow
- ## IV. Closing
- A. Quote from *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church* by Donald Whitney
 - B. “In the definitive bestseller on Pearl Harbor - *At Dawn We Slept* - Gordon Prange closes with these words”
 1. “Of infinitely more value than the repair of shattered ships was the welding together of the American people into a mighty spear and shield of determination. No more did Americans ask whose fight it was or question what they should do about it... The Japanese gave each American a personal stake in the titanic struggle for the minds and bodies of mankind which raged in Europe and Asia. After December 7, 1941 Americans no longer could look upon the war from a distance as

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an impersonal, ideological conflict. The sense of outrage triggered a sense of direct involvement which resulted in an explosion of national energy. The Japanese gave the average American a cause he could understand and believe to be worth fighting for.”

- C. “After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and after your salvation, Christian, you should not have to ask whose fight the church is in and what you should do about it. These things give you a personal stake in the kingdom of God and its quest for the souls of mankind. No longer can you look upon the war from a distance. Love for God should give you a feeling of direct involvement in the work of God and cause an explosion of supernatural energy for that work. He has given you a cause that you can understand and in which you can have the honor to serve.”
- D. So after this quote, the question is, will you respond like the Greatest Generation to the call of Christ to serve in the church and support the church generously? The choice is yours.