

An Antidote for Materialism

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

These familiar words of our Lord contain a challenge, which we may tend to overlook since we have heard them so often. We know our heart will focus on what we treasure, but have we honestly evaluated what things we do treasure? A good place to begin such an evaluation is to review our spending habits. How much do we spend on what we need versus what we want? This uncomfortable subject receives much attention throughout the pages of the Bible. It is also a topic that was addressed in the 2007 report prepared by the Eastern Missionary Committee, entitled, The State of our Mission Culture. The following is an extract from that report and is used by permission. The internet address for the entire report can be found at www.accmhc.org/emcreport.pdf

The scripture teaches us that loving and giving are intrinsically tied together. It is not possible to love without giving – God so **loved** the world that he **gave**¹. The Apostle James makes it clear that our giving needs to be measured by action not just by kind words². Therefore, a loving church must be a giving church.

A natural question that arises is how much should a believer give? The scripture fortunately answers that question - it is to be a regular part of our Christian life. The Old Testament principle of giving a regular portion of our income was reinforced in the New Testament by both Jesus and the apostle Paul³. It seems our churches are very good at donating to specific causes. Many churches gave generous one time donations to disaster relief efforts for the Asian Tsunami, the Pakistani earthquake, and hurricane disaster relief efforts in the southern U.S. However, the regular pattern of supporting our missions does not seem to be a part of the church culture in a number of our churches.

A question that is frequently asked is where should these funds be given? Some have implied that there isn't really a significant need for their funds and as such, they don't see the necessity for giving. This is where we believe the connection between informing believers about the ongoing needs in the mission field, and the eagerness of believers to distribute their first fruits meet. We see examples of biblical characters who made it a point to seek out places where they could assist with their resources. Job declares he was eager to seek out the poor, fatherless and widows and made it his business to not just wait for their cry but to search them

¹ John 3:16

² James 2:14-16

³ Matthew 23:23, Luke 11:42 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

out⁴. The church in Philippi was highly commended because they actively sought out the needs of the Apostle Paul, not because he kept asking, but because they were eager to do so⁵.

In like manner, we would encourage that the believers be taught the importance of looking for opportunities to distribute their gifts. Their eagerness for distributing their first fruits for the purposes of kingdom work should be considered an essential Christian duty.

We see when little children are compelled to give something up they are often reluctant to do so. The more they are compelled, the more reluctant they become. That is perhaps why the Apostle Paul writes that we are not to give grudgingly or because we are being forced to give. Instead, the church was reminded about the law of sowing and reaping – those who sow sparingly will also reap sparingly, and as such, they were encouraged to give generously and cheerfully according to how much each of them had earned⁶.

A number of elder meeting reports have warned about the dangers of materialism. The accumulation of goods has reached epic proportions in our generation. So much time, energy and talents are being expended to possess items that are temporal. Jesus gives only one antidote to this contagious problem. He describes the antidote over and over again throughout his teachings. We are to use our worldly wealth for kingdom purposes⁷. These were very difficult statements and even his disciples were amazed at times by them. This is another way that we as a denomination can measure ourselves– if our giving is in proportion to what God has blessed us with, it is evidence that we are winning the war against materialism. Although one does not need to be rich to be materialistic, Jesus made it clear that someone who is materialistic will be building up treasures here on earth and not in heaven. Therefore, one vital aspect in the fight against materialism is the sowing of earthly treasures into kingdom projects and thereby storing up treasures in heaven.

Where is our heart?

⁴ Job 29:12-16

⁵ Philippians 4:14-18

⁶ 2 Corinthians 9:6-10

⁷ Matthew 6:19-24, Mark 10:21-27, Luke 12:21, Luke 12:33-34