

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#03-0924

The Love of Money #1.

February 26, 2009

Give Back Four Times

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:10 NASB)

At the outset, there are two points that I need to make.

First, I would never tell anyone to whom or to what ministry they should or should not give money or how much to give; this is between the individual and the Lord. If one believes in the work of a certain ministry and wants to support it, then that is his or her call. However, I do caution that one needs to give to a worthy, biblical cause and not be coerced into giving to a man and his ministry so that he becomes wealthy through one's giving. There is nothing biblical in such a thing, and yet, it seems that many unsuspecting believers have been duped into supporting such men, all in the hope that they too will get rich like them. If this were true, then why are there not thousands of believers driving around in Rolls-Royces and flying around the world in Gulfstream jets in the fashion of their mentors? We must recognize that some men, especially among the prosperity preachers, are driven by the love of money.

Second, I am not attempting to launch into an in-depth study of tithing and giving. I will leave this to my series on *The Kingdom of Our Lord* and an article that, Lord willing, I will write at a later time. Besides, there is nothing new in what I have to say on the matter. There are many sources to which one can turn to understand the so-called prosperity gospel, as well as publications that challenge the current norm on tithing.

Well, it should come as no surprise that, in hard economic times, we can expect pastors and preachers to bring out their well-honed sermons on giving tithes and offerings. Based on what I heard in one day, it has already begun. Generally, these preachers try to instill fear, guilt, and even greed in their followers so that they will continue giving money to their "ministry" or "church." After all, their enterprise is too important to suffer economically along with the rest of the world and even their followers. So, the money-changers must get their flocks charged up again so the money keeps flowing into their bank accounts. Perhaps I am too cynical, but then again, I believe that, in our day, the church is not much different from the world in its thinking and its methods. Much of the church has become one big marketing enterprise with men at the helm who operate according to Babylonian thinking.

I don't see Christendom operating much differently from the way the US government operates, especially as it tries to stimulate us to be good borrowers and spenders, and at the same time attempts to make us totally dependent on government programs. So, the fixers (preachers) of the economic crisis proclaim from their pulpits: "Give us more of your money and allow us to go into great debt so that we will prosper once again. Let us borrow a ton of money for you so that we can pull you out of this mess. Put your faith in us and we will lead you through this crisis and into the land of milk and honey." Soon, as inflation rears its ugly head, we will hear: "Sacrifice for the good of the economy," which will be followed by: "Give (tithe) us your money (i.e., more taxes) so that we can give you more benefits and you can live the American dream." Well, the comparison is not one-for-one, but I think you get the point.

Without doubt, some pastors are quite sincere in what they preach and see the whole matter of tithing as simply a command of God. However, one can be sincere in what he thinks and yet be deceived in his thinking, which is what I see as the norm in regard to this topic. What I find disheartening or even maddening is that some pastors and preachers are taking advantage of a captive audience that they can get pumped up to give to them so that they (i.e., the clergy) will not suffer. Their followers may be

suffering through difficult times, and yet, the words that come forth from the pulpits express little to no compassion on those in need. Instead of exhorting people to continue giving to their ministry or church or else be cursed, where are the ones exhorting to give not to help the man in the pulpit continue with his business but to give to help those in need that have been sitting in his audience week after week?

It seems that some of the ones preaching that the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil are the very ones who continually preach that believers are to give to their ministry. Perhaps, they are the ones that are in love with money since they are always talking about it. After all, if we love something, aren't we more inclined to talk about it or focus on it more than other things?

Just this year, I heard a well-known prosperity preacher, who is acknowledged as one of the wealthiest of the lot, refer to the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) in a very subtle maneuver to get his flock to continue giving. He emphasized that the five wise virgins had bought oil and "of course you all know what oil means." It case you missed it, according to this preacher of wealth, this means that the wise ones invested in the anointing, that is, in an anointed ministry. So, he encouraged his listeners to give their money for the anointing. The subtlety was that he did not mention himself directly, but the implication was very clear that his ministry is the anointed one.

As I listened to this televangelist, I realized that he had another very subtle technique to his message about giving. He did not preach "give or you will be cursed," or "give because you are commanded to by God," or "give so that you will be blessed and all your financial problems will be resolved by God," or any of the other reasons offered by so many. Instead, he said that you are to give because you love God. Now, this really pulls on heart strings. If you love God, then you will give to this preacher who is so rich that he rivals the top CEOs in major businesses. I do not challenge the idea of loving God and being a cheerful giver. What I do challenge is a preacher coercing people into giving to his ministry as an act of love for God. It is almost as if this man's ministry is on the same level as a love for God. This is idolatry!

On the same day, another well-known televangelist with a national and international ministry stated that he was going to give his "clapping-on-cue" listeners a lesson on kingdom economics. He proceeded to tell his flock, along with all that were listening around the world, that if they want to be blessed during this time of crisis, then, based on Malachi 3:8-10, they need to **tithe 10% of their gross income** (by implication, to his ministry) or else be cursed. It matters not to this self-proclaimed expert on kingdom economics that a literal translation of this passage reveals that it was the people that cursed God, not God who cursed the people; that it was about bringing food into the storehouse, not money; and that there was no mention of giving 10% of their gross income.

To add to this; another well-known Christian broadcasting network recently bragged that they had no debt; everything they owned they had bought with cash. This is quite commendable as far as it goes. But why do they have no debt? It is because they continually push "the give to us and get wealthy doctrine" over their network and people respond to the call. To make sure that they stay out of debt, they hold tel-a-thons asking for money using all the same techniques of the "sowing your seed faith" ministries. So, they look into the camera with a straight face and say: "Go to the phone and give now! The Lord just told me that there are some out there that are to sow their seed of \$1,000." It is the exact same marketing technique used by PBS in their effort to raise money so that they can continue on the air.

The problem is that some of these big ministries have gotten their eyes off of Jesus and onto money; their love has waned cold for the Lord and fanned hot for riches. Consider Revelation 2:4 and 3:14-22. They need to get their eyes and their hearts back upon Jesus and Him alone. They need to be like Zaccheus, the rich, chief tax collector, who climbed the sycamore tree to see the Lord.

Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." (Luke 19:8 NASB)

Perhaps it is time for these ministries to be like Zaccheus and give half of all their booty to the poor and give back four times to all that they have defrauded with their false gospel. This truly would exemplify a love for God and would lead to true prosperity for all who have listened and responded to them all these years. Of course, apart from a conviction from the spirit of God that leads to true repentance, this will never happen, for their investment in themselves is too great. Lord, have mercy on all of us!