

The Four Pillars of the Church

3. Gifts Luke 6:38

We are talking about the four pillars of the church. The church is built on the foundation of Christ. We exist so that Christ can work through us to continue the ministry he began 2,000 years ago. But the church also rests on four pillars, which determine how high the church rises and how effective it is in fulfilling its mission. Those four pillars are the support the church members give the church through their prayers, their presence, their gifts and their service. You will recognize those as the four elements of the membership vows, in which you were asked if you would support the church with you prayers, your presence, your gifts and your service.

The week before last Shannon talked about the importance of supporting the church with your prayers, which this church does very well. Last week I talked to you about the importance of supporting the church with your presence. You enhance the sacredness of the worship experience and encourage the members of the church by your attendance.

This morning I'll be talking to you about the importance of supporting the church with your gifts.

And let's not beat around the bush. By gifts we are talking about money. –Did he say the “m” word? Yes, I said the “m” word. I said “money.”

Isn't it interesting how we are embarrassed to talk about money? We used to be embarrassed to talk about other things. I recall early in my ministry I made the mistake of announcing that a woman in the church was pregnant. I was told after the service that we don't use the word “pregnant” in church. It causes people to think about things we don't want them thinking about in church. I should have said she was expecting. Our attitudes have changed greatly. Nowadays when I do marital and pre-marital counseling, young couples talk to me openly and honestly about their relationships. They are not embarrassed. I find that their attitude is much healthier than when we were embarrassed to talk about those kinds of things.

But it seems we have to have something to be embarrassed about. So now we're not supposed to talk about money. It's just too embarrassing. If you want to create an awkward social situation, ask somebody what they make. Or ask them what they are worth. If they don't tell you that's none of your business, they will probably say something like, “I really don't know. I don't pay much attention to those kinds of things.” Of course, the truth is that most of us can tell you to the penny what our salaries are. And most of us have a pretty good idea what we are worth.

There is something unhealthy about not being able to talk about things. We can't deal with them in a rational, intelligent and healthy manner if we can't talk about them. False gods have the most power when they can work in darkness. That is certainly true of money. Money is a false god for many people. They live to make money. But when we are willing to talk about money, we can often convert from living to serve money to using their money to serve them, which is the way it is supposed to be.

So, I'll be upfront with you. When we talk about supporting the church with your gifts, we are talking about giving money to the church.

A lady once said to me, "Preacher, giving money to the church is like throwing money down a rat hole. No matter how much you give, the church always needs more." Well, I had to admire her honesty. It almost made up for her lack of tact. Comparing the church to a rat hole when you are talking to a preacher is not the best way to win friends and influence people.

However, at least she was being honest. And I'm guessing she was saying what a sizeable group of people believe. In every church about a third of the members give nothing to the church. I'm guessing that is true of this church as well. This church doesn't like for the pastor to know how much people give. It's considered an invasion of privacy. Of course, that's like telling a physician he can't take his patient's temperature, because that would be an invasion of the patient's privacy. A person's level of giving is an important indicator of his spiritual health. But, this church is careful about guarding that information. So, I'm guessing that a third of the members don't give any money to the church. Evidently they agree that giving money to the church is like throwing it down a rat hole.

So, let's look at her statement straight in the eyes. Is it a waste giving money to the church? Does the church always need more, no matter how much you give? Let's look at those two questions one at a time.

First, is money given to the church a waste? Let me answer that question with another question: Is money given to the grocery store a waste?

My wife and I go to the grocery store about once a week. Every week we make a contribution to the grocery store. Sometimes it's a large contribution, other times it's a little less. But we give something every time we go. You would think as faithful as we are, they would be a little more solicitous. You know they actually make people stand in line to make their contribution at the grocery store. You would think they would give them a padded bench to sit on and come get the money from them.

I've been thinking about stopping my contributions to the grocery store. I don't really enjoy going to the grocery store. The other shoppers aren't very friendly. Sometimes when we go to the store, none of them speak to us. The manager doesn't even try to learn my name. I could stay home and rest and watch TV or play golf instead. I could save all that money.

There's something wrong with that thinking, isn't there? Grocery stores exist for a reason. We give our money to the grocery store because we get something important from it—food. If we stopped making our contribution to the grocery store, we would soon be very hungry.

Well, the church exists for a reason too. We exist because people have needs other than for food. The Bible says that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. People have a hunger for God and God's word. The church was created by Christ to bring people into the presence of God and to proclaim God's word.

The money we give to the church is not wasted. Just as surely as grocery stores provide the food we need to satisfy the hunger pangs of our stomachs, the church provides the spiritual food we need to satisfy the hunger pangs of our souls. Your giving makes that possible. If not yours, then somebody else's giving makes it possible. One of

the ways that we are different from a grocery store is that the church doesn't insist that you give for what you receive. You can come in here and feast on the Word of God to your hearts content and not give anything, and no one will yell "shoplifter" as you walk out. We can do that because someone else is giving enough to cover your part.

But because of those who give the church is able to feed the Word of God to its members and to the world that is hungry for God's word.

But what about the second statement? No matter how much we give to the church, it's never enough. It always needs more. That's what the lady said. Is that true?

I'll just tell you straight out. No, that's not true. I can tell you how much the church needs. It needs enough to pay a preacher to come in once a week and preach a sermon. It needs enough to pay the utility bills. And it needs enough to pay its conference apportionments. That's all the church needs.

I know that's all the church needs, because in the early years of my ministry, I served many little churches that did nothing more than that. They were little country churches in communities that were all but gone. They just had enough to keep the doors open. They were struggling to survive. They had no future, because they had so little to offer. People went to the bigger churches that had more ministries for them and their families.

Chapelwood has an annual budget of \$740,000. It could survive on a tenth of that. But the members of Chapelwood don't want their church to just barely survive. They want it to thrive. Chapelwood is a thriving, growing church with dynamic programs and ministries. Peoples' spiritual needs are being met. Lives are being changed.

Without the generous giving of the members, this would be a small church struggling, not striving to change the world and to change people's lives, but struggling to survive.

The more you give, the more Chapelwood can do for the world, and the more Chapelwood can do for you.

"Give, and it will be given to you, in good measure, shaken, pressed down and overflowing." The more you give to the church, the more the church will give to you.

Going back to the grocery store analogy: My wife and I are very different when it comes to shopping. When I go to the store, I try to give them as little money as possible. I'm pretty good at it. I have my list. I go straight to what I came in to get. I pay no attention to all the come-ons in the store. I comparison shop. I buy the cheapest brands. But when my wife goes to the store, she could care less how much money she ends up spending. She figures that if one brand costs more, it must be better. She enjoys strolling around the store looking for things she hadn't thought about putting on her list. It's like a treasure hunt for her. If something is on sale, that means to buy a lot of it. It always costs a lot more when she goes to the store, especially if she goes by herself.

When my wife comes home from the store, our minivan is full of groceries. It takes half an hour to unload it all and get it into the kitchen. When the kids were home, they would go through the sacks looking for all the goodies. It was like Christmas. When I come home from the store, I don't have much to show for my shopping trip. It usually fits in one little plastic bag, and nobody is very excited about it. You see, I don't get much because I am not willing to give much. My wife gets a lot, because she's willing to give a lot.

That's an eternal principle. If you don't give much, you don't get much. If you give a lot, you'll get a lot. It applies to all of life, and it certainly applies to the church. You will get out of the church what you put into it. It's your church.

This church is doing all that it is doing because of your generosity in giving. The world benefits from your giving. The members of this church benefit from your giving. You benefit from your giving. Because you give, you are a pillar of the church.

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