



Gifted to Give

Ralph Blair 1993

Ralph Blair is a psychotherapist in private practice in New York City. He founded Evangelicals Concerned in 1976. This booklet is an expanded version of Dr. Blair's keynote address at connECTion 1993, the summer conferences of Evangelicals Concerned, which were held in Pennsylvania and California.

MONEY: THE STANDARD OF VALUE

An English satirist once said that "The three most important things a man has are ... his private parts, his money, and his religious opinions." That was back in the Victorian Age, before many women except Queen Victoria herself were thought to have really "important things." It wasn't a new observation. As a Bible scholar puts it: "Israel understood—long before Marx and Freud—that money and sexuality are the primary zones of life where responsible humanness is enacted, and where abuse and distortion are most readily practiced." [Brueggemann]

In making his “Indecent Proposal” of a million dollars for a night of sex with David’s wife Diana—an implausible scheme the ads promise to be “an irresistible proposal”—the slick billionaire cajoles that “The night would come and go but the money would last a lifetime.” Don’t count on it. In the real world, the unintended effects of such a night don’t come and go so easily. And a million dollars doesn’t last that long nowadays, especially in and out of the hands of a couple trying to gamble into security by way of Las Vegas and infidelity. But people are so hung up on fantasies of quick bucks and hot sex that they were titillated into spending \$25 million to see the film in its first week. One reviewer raves that the film “makes us believe without questioning,” even though she says that sex and money are “the two issues that even the most sanguine individuals are least sanguine about.” But another reviewer sees that “not once in the whole silly exercise does [the film] approximate a genuine emotion. ... [it’s] perfectly unreal,” he says. Other reviewers gushed that this farfetched display of greed and broken vows was “the year’s most enjoyable movie,” “powerfully seductive,” “thrillingly romantic,” and “a genuine romantic spirit.” They called it a great “dating movie.” Well, it’s only a film, right? Wrong. In a poll on the Oprah Winfrey Show, women in the audience were asked: “If you were offered a million dollars, would you sleep with a stranger?” More than half said they would. Many, of course, think that “the price is right” at far less than that.

Dorothy L. Sayers worked for nine-years at an advertising agency so she knew what she was talking about when she spoke of “the furious barrage of advertisements by which people are flattered and frightened out of a reasonable contentment into a greedy hankering after goods that they do not really need.” She noted that “every evil passion—snobbery, laziness, vanity, concupiscence, ignorance, greed—is appealed to in these campaigns.” Today, advertisers know more than ever what importance we put on money and sex as Alpha and Omega. Imagine a car called Infinity! The ads assert: “It’s not a car. It’s an aphrodisiac. ... Something indefinable. It’s what happens when you cross sheet metal and desire. ... It’s everything that’s possible.” In both sexual and fiscal metaphor, the ad promises that with Infinity, “you can conquer life’s curves and bumps.” And imagine a perfume called Eternity! Imagine calling after shave “relief balm” that allows “Living Without Boundaries!” — perhaps even on pricing. I now see in the *New York Times* that fragrance companies “have spent millions, if not billions, trying to isolate human pheromones ... that, like those of [our] animal counterparts, would enhance sexuality and excite Eros ... [and produce] a financial mother lode” for the multibillion dollar fragrance business.

Money. Sex. Religion. We haven’t forgotten religion. You realize, don’t you, that while we’ve been talking about money and sex we’ve been talking about religion as well. All of this emphasis on sex and money is about our ultimate fantasies and our relentless fixation with self as god. You don’t have to label this stuff Eternity and Infinity and Omega to see that.

Well if these are called the most important things, which one do you think is valued more? To ask which is “the bottom line” gives us the answer right away. Dorothy Parker was asked what she thought were the two most beautiful words in the English language and she replied: “Check enclosed.” According to George Bernard Shaw, “Money is indeed the most important thing in the world.” Marx held that “Money ... dominates [people] and [they] worship it.” The German satirical love poet and essayist, Heinrich Heine, said that money was “the god of our time.” As though to prove it, his Will stipulated that his widow inherit his estate only on the condition that she be remarried so that, as he put it, at least one man in the world would continually mourn Heine’s death. Mark Twain allowed that some people “worship rank, some worship heroes, some worship power, some worship God, and over these ideals they dispute—but,” he assured, “they all worship money.” Did you see *The New Yorker* cartoon showing two overstuffed members of a posh gentlemen’s club conversing over Scotch and the recession: “I used to worship the almighty dollar, but now I’m an atheist.” Don’t believe him. He’s still a believer and his dedication to dollars never wanes.

A three-year sociological study at Princeton found that “68 percent [of Americans] say they would be willing to work even longer hours each week to earn more money”—even though dissatisfaction on the job is one of the most common complaints of Americans. “Nearly half say they would do less interesting work or take a higher pressure job if ... they could make more money. And these figures are as high among people who are already in the upper

third of the income scale as among those with lower incomes.” The more one seems to get the more one wants. “In addition,” according to the study, “46 percent say they would play the lottery to make more money.” With the popularity of all sorts of gambling, that’s easy to believe.

But then there is sex! Doesn’t sex give money a pretty good run for its—money? Not so long as money’s the standard for the running. Can’t you imagine those two members of the gentlemen’s club haggling with a prostitute over the price? And don’t forget all those women at the Oprah Winfrey Show. No, money is valued more than sex. The head of the Princeton study calls money “our deepest obsession.” He reminds us that “We spend huge sums on consumer products, mount increasing credit card debts, and perceive ourselves to be under enormous financial pressure.” Isn’t this our own personal experience? And the Princeton study found “that faith makes little difference to the ways in which people actually conduct their financial affairs” and that “money and morality are kept in separate compartments. ... Indeed, 68 percent in the survey agreed that “money is one thing, morals and values are completely separate.” Maybe our personal experience should have prepared us for this finding as well.

A Fundamentalist theologian was asked after the Presidential election: “If there is a ‘moral majority’ in America, why did Falwell’s man, George Bush, lose?” He gave an astonishing reply that illustrates the Princeton findings on money and faith: “I still believe there is a moral majority. But regrettably, Americans vote money over morals. While they have the moral position, they don’t always vote it, especially if their pocketbooks are hurting. This is not because we don’t have a moral majority, but because so many people aren’t that committed morally; and they’ll vote their purse over their principles.” The fact that this Fundamentalist got so tangled up in such moralistic double-talk and seems not even to have noticed shows that long ago Chrysostom was right: the love of money “seizes all, some more, some less, but all to a degree.”

“All” includes us, of course—and this makes us a bit nervous. We’re caught between anxiety over loosening our grip on money and guilt feelings over being too tight-fisted. No wonder it’s been observed that a church’s “stewardship drivels is usually met with resistance and that “we have no hymns that go with [Stewardship Sunday].”

In order to understand better what’s going on here, one Bible scholar says we must recognize what Paul did in writing to Timothy: “the key issues of life and faith are fought in the economic realm.” [Brueggemann] And if we can see behind all its materialistic superstructure, we’ll see that this battle is really a spiritual warfare—as Paul also taught. It’s a deep conflict of basic values. It’s a wrestling in the realm of the very first commandment. It’s nothing less than the choice Jesus said it was: the choice between God and Mammon.

I’ve noticed that when I first ask my clients in therapy about their values they think I’m asking them about some rather narrow, maybe even irrelevant, esoteric or optional issues of morality as popularly defined or ethics or whether they are “religious” or go to church. But, of course, I mean: What do you think is really valuable? What’s important to you? What, to you, has real worth? What’s your life really all about? What is your time and attention really dedicated to? What’s the big deal so far as you’re concerned?

When you think about the way we speak of value and worth you soon see that we do think of value and worth in monetary terms. We speak of “a person’s worth,” “the Big Deal,” “the most valuable” player or baseball card or whatever. Value, worth: these are commercial terms.

We say that “money talks.” It doesn’t. We talk. Money says what we say. And what we say is that *money is the standard of value*. Even those who would choke on the frank admission tend to live out the standard in daily life.

But what about health? Don’t people say that health is more important than money? Some do. But just look at the terrible lack of health care in our society—37 million uninsured citizens—and the obscene cost of health care. Or look at the fact that every fifth child in America faces hunger while, each year, the rest of us wastes \$3.6 billion on our potato chips. And look at the rabid opposition to universal health insurance or socialized medicine in this

country. No. Money's seen as more important than health. Woody Allen captures the irony of this in his one-liner: "Money's not everything, but it's better than having your health."

We take our health for granted. We don't take our money for granted. We miss health when we don't have it. We miss money even when we have it. We abuse our health by going after quick fix pleasure—overeating, smoking, recreational drugs and sex—but much of this is in an effort to escape the emptiness that is killing us in our exhausting pursuit of financial security and material happiness.

MAMMONISM: THE MISUSE OF MONEY

Two thousand years ago a Roman poet said: "You, O money, are the cause of a restless life! ... a premature death ... the seed of our cares." [Properties] But he was mistaken. Money, as such, has never been the problem. It's the misuse of money that's always been the problem. It's inordinate devotion to money as idol that has brought on the restlessness, the cares, the death.

Jesus well knew that such devotion to money was not wise. Remember that when the rich young man was asked by Jesus to prioritize his monetary welfare and his spiritual welfare, he was stuck in devotion to money.

According to Luke: "Jesus, fixing his eyes upon him, said, 'What obstacles are placed in the way of those having money when it comes to making their way into the kingdom of God! To tell the truth, it's easier for a camel to slip through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to move into the kingdom of God.'" Paul, too, knew that such devotion to money was not wise. His observation that this "love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" was not a new idea to either Jews or Greeks. But notice that Paul did not make that poet's mistake. He did not say, as he's often misquoted as saying, that money is the root of all evil. It's not money itself that's the problem. It's moneyism—an idolatrous love of money.

Even our leading economists know that such devotion to money is not wise. A former chair of the Federal Reserve System asks: "What's the subject of life—to get rich? All those fellows out there getting rich could be dancing around the real subject of life." [Volcker] The 20th century's greatest economist wrote volumes on money and concluded: "The moral problem of our age is concerned with the love of money, with the habitual appeal to the money motive in nine-tenths of the activities of life." [Keynes]

But few money "experts" are as wise. Many aren't even competent. They're confused and confusing. They say: "Invest for the long term, the short term is unpredictable." Or they say: "Invest for the short term, the long term is unpredictable." Some say: "Never sell too soon." Others say: "It's never too soon to sell." Money-hungry investors pour \$200 million a year into 500 different financial investment newsletters to try to beat out others in the race to get rich. But research shows that the advice in half of them would have lost you money. Conclusion: "You'll do better tossing a dart at the stock pages." Wiser conclusion: You'll do even better if you know what you're trying to hit and whether it's even up there on that board!

All that's on that "Big Board" is mammon. Does that sound bad? "Mammon!" It might not sound too good since we think of mammon in connection with Jesus' saying we had to choose between it and God. But mammon, as such, is not a bad word. It does not designate something bad in itself. It's just the biblical word for "money" or "property" in Jesus' native Aramaic. But since we're so easily tempted to be devoted to money instead of to God, Jesus saw that we are faced with a question of basic commitment when it comes to money. Jesus warned: "You cannot be servants to both God and Mammon."

Why did Jesus pick money as that which especially fits his warning about serving that which is the very opposite of God and God's priorities? Well it's quite believable that "mammon" may derive from a term which means "that in which one trusts." The contrast, then, was most fitting. For in those days, as now, people were so easily tempted to trust in money and therefore to give ultimate loyalty to the pursuit of money and money's end. It may say "In God

We Trust” on our money but that’s defensive. After all, it’s on the money! Jesus knew that our ultimate loyalty belongs to God alone. To replace loyalty to God with loyalty to money is to engage in idolatry, to trust in that which cannot save, that in which there is no life. So when Jesus warned that we cannot serve both God and money he was simply recognizing that we cannot divide loyalty between God and a God-substitute.

Now notice how Jesus phrased the warning. He did not say: Love God instead of money. He did not say: Value God more than money. He was giving no commandment. He was stating a warning. He was describing reality. He was asserting the obvious: Nobody can be loyal to two masters. This is plain to anyone who has ever had to work under two bosses with two different agendas. It can’t be done.

But Jesus is describing something else as well. When he says that nobody can serve both God and money he’s teaching that the choice is service to one or service to the other. Either way it’s service. It’s not our service rendered to God or our being served by money. It’s our service rendered to God or our service rendered to money. That’s the only choice that is open to us. We’re either under the power of God or under the power of money. We’re God’s servant or money’s slave.

And Mammon is a ruthless slave owner. The god Possession is jealously possessive. It claims our very self. It demands that absolute attention be paid. In full. Every day. We say we “own” it. But in reality it owns us. And it binds us in an ever-tightening headlock that is killing us.

And, of course, what if what we’re looking for isn’t even on the “Big Board?” After all, if all that’s on it is mammon, even if we get it all, all we’ll ever have to bank on is mammon. And “For greed, all that is, is too little.” [Seneca] Said Horace: “Care clings to wealth: the thirst for more / Grows as our fortunes grow.” Even as a young man of 19, Erasmus knew that. “Why do you consider riches and money so valuable?” he asked. “You will say that riches enable you to withstand need. ... You are deceived, I assure you, for ... with the abundance of goods and riches, your desire to have more just increases. And whoever seeks after more, shows himself to be needy.” In our own day, psychoanalyst Erich Fromm observed that slavish devotion to money is motivated by that greed which “is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy the need without ever reaching satisfaction.”

Why is this the case? Why has it always been so? It’s because we’re made for something more and other than can be satisfied by mammon and by what we tell ourselves mammon will buy. In “this Age” we’ll never get what we really want. In “this Age’s” priorities we cannot be satisfied.

We’re so slow to recognize, with Wordsworth, that this world really is “too much with us; late and soon, / Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.” Failing to properly identify the chains with which we bind ourselves, but feeling the binding nonetheless, we seek freedom. I suppose that the most popular argument for devotion to mammon is that money buys freedom. But how many rich and famous celebrity tragedies do we have to see to learn that selfish freedom is the burden of boredom? When we run after self-indulgence, is it any wonder that we run right into self-isolation? And being around other rich people won’t help. Logan Pearsall Smith spoke from experience when he reported that “It is a wretchedness of being rich that you have to live with rich people.” But listen to another man who knew something from experience. Hear Phillips Brooks on what he called the “energetic holiness” that truly frees us from the burden of mammon. Brooks knew what it was to be both materially and spiritually rich, belonging both to one of New England’s most blue-blooded families and later, to the Lord he faithfully served as rector of Boston’s Trinity. Said Brooks: “When a man sacrifices his own self-indulgence and goes forth a pure servant of his God and his fellow-men, there is only one cry in the whole gospel of that man, and that is the cry of freedom. As soon as he can catch that, ... [he becomes] a larger and not a smaller, a freer and not a more imprisoned man. ... Everything which is necessary for the full realization of a man’s life, even though it seems to have the character of restraint for a moment, is really a part of the process of his enfranchisement, is the bringing forth ... to a fuller liberty.” And, of course, Brooks meant that the same was true for women.

In addition, we need to also recognize that that which is available to us is easily missed because what we tell ourselves we want is about an unmixed fantasy and all we ever get in “this Age” is a mixed bag of reality. So we’re always wanting the “more” and the “other” of our fantasies. Disappointed, we again go after the unattainable fantasy. And again we’re disappointed. Calvin put it well when he said that “our anxiety extends to a thousand lives which we falsely imagine.”

In short, when we mistake money as an end in itself instead of a means by which we might serve God and others, we end up serving what is nothing. Going after money as an end in itself is like what Gertrude Stein said about going to Pittsburgh: When you get there there’s no there there.

GOD’S GIVING AND OUR THANKSGIVING

Why are we so tempted by money? Because we sense that we’re totally dependent. And even when we’re too pompous to admit that we’re totally dependent, we’re nonetheless anxiously aware that we are totally dependent. Acknowledging that we’re totally dependent is one of the most self-evident facts of life. It takes no faith at all. And this awareness that we are totally dependent—if we go only by what is seen—scares us into a desperate idolatry in service to money. But because money is a false god, it gives us nothing of real value when we place ourselves at its service. Not being satisfied with such nothing only increases our frightening sense of our utter dependence.

But instead of turning to mammon’s dead end, we may turn to the living God. We may recognize that all that is life, all that is really worthwhile—including every hour of each day and all our energy and abilities and intelligence and opportunities that get converted into paychecks and cold, hard cash—is given to us. All of it is God’s doing and not ours. These are God’s good gifts and not our own independent earnings. Said Calvin: “All things which make for enriching of this present life are sacred gifts of God.” All that we are and all that we have and all that we will ever be and all that we will ever have comes from our gracious God.

But as Christians we know still something more than that we are gifted with all creation by God our Creator. We know that in spite of our rebellion against God, we’re being recreated by the grace of God our Redeemer. So Luther said: “The gift above all gifts is Christ with His Word.” However generous the gift of the whole wide world is, as C. S. Lewis remarked, “it costs God nothing, so far as we know. But,” said Lewis, “to convert rebellious wills cost Him crucifixion.” Said Bonhoeffer: “God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life.” Failing to see that it is our inexhaustible God who supplies our needs, we’re tempted to become anxiously dependent on exhaustible supplies. But knowing the deep Love who is the source of our supply, frees us from the fear that freezes us. With a full plate of guilt we’re paralyzed. Knowing God’s forgiveness frees us.

If we realize that all we need here and hereafter does come to us from God, doesn’t it make sense that our most reasonable response is gratitude to this One in whom and by whose grace “we live and move and have our being” now and always? Isn’t it simple decency that lives out that gratitude that is called “the most exquisite form of courtesy?” [Maritain] Is it not simply fitting to be thankful? If Christian theology is grace, then as it’s been said, Christian ethics is gratitude. “Thankfulness,” said Luther, “is the worship of God at its best” and “the terrible vice of ingratitude ... has always been the greatest abomination.” He added: “Our Lord God endures intolerable ingratitude.” “Thankfulness” is the title of the section on Christian obedience in the Heidelberg Catechism.

Before meals we say we “return grace.” We mean we give grateful acknowledgment that the meal is a token of God’s grace given to us. It may be hard for us to see the source of our food much beyond our local supermarket, but we must remember that whether it’s at the level of the retailer or wholesaler, farmer or cook, the food comes from God’s grace at all levels. Surely we’re smarter than Bart Simpson who refused to say grace because “we paid for all this food!”

Writing on “Grace Before Meat,” essayist Charles Lamb observed that “The custom of saying grace at meals had, probably, its origin in the early times of the world, and the hunter-state of man, when dinners were precarious things,

and a full meal was something more than a common blessing; when a bellyful was a windfall, and looked like a special providence.” G. K. Chesterton knew well that God’s grace was behind all of life and so a graceful word of thanks was always appropriate. “You say grace before meals,” he wrote. “All right. But I say grace before the concert and the opera, and grace before the play and pantomime, and grace before I open a book, and grace before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing and grace before I dip my pen in the ink.”

All right, we say, but life’s not all swimming and dancing. Yet while the Pilgrims were making seven times more graves than huts on cold Cape Cod, they were also holding a thanksgiving feast. The Pilgrims were thankful *and* hard-pressed. Back in Old World Saxony, Martin Rinkard was struggling through the Thirty Years War and Plague. He was conducting over four thousand funerals a year and ministering among the blackening bodies of the dying. But also he was writing the hymn text “Nun Danket alle Gott”—“Now Thank We All Our God.” Rinkard was thankful *and* in affliction. A hundred years ago a successful Chicago attorney, Horatio Spafford, planned a European trip for his family following the death of a son. His wife and four daughters left for Europe but business kept him in Chicago for a few more days. He was to follow them a bit later. Crossing the North Atlantic, the SS *Ville du Havre*, carrying his wife and daughters, collided into another ship and, though his wife was saved, their daughters were lost at sea. His wife cabled Spafford from Wales: “Saved alone.” He boarded the next available steamer and near the spot where their daughters drowned, he wrote the hymn text: “When peace like a river attendeth my way, / When sorrow like sea billows roll, / Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, / ‘It is well, it is well, with my soul.’” (The hymn’s tune is *Ville du Havre*.) Spafford was thankful *and* in grief.

Charles Lamb, who knew constant financial hardship, lived with his parents and sister who, in a psychotic episode, killed their invalid mother. He gave up any prospect of marriage to devote himself to the care of this sister, and was, himself, later committed to a mental asylum. Nonetheless, he wrote: “I am disposed to say grace upon twenty other occasions in the course of the day besides my dinner. I want a form for setting out upon a pleasant walk, for a moonlight ramble, for a friendly meeting, or a solved problem. Why have we none for books, those spiritual repasts—a grace before Milton—a grace before Shakespeare—a devotional exercise proper to be said before reading the Fairy Queen?” Lamb was thankful *and* troubled. When Lamb died Wordsworth wrote: “And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle, / Has vanished from his lonely hearth.” Christina Georgina Rossetti was another Christian who, in declining to marry men who did not share her faith, never knew the warmth of sexual intimacy. And yet she’d say: imagine being “in this glorious world with grateful hearts—and no one to thank.” Rossetti was thankful *and* lonely. William Cowper was chronically depressed. And yet he poetically paraphrased the faithful testimony of Habakkuk: “Though vine nor fig-tree neither / Their wonted fruit shall bear; / Though all the field should wither / Nor flocks nor herds be there: / Yet God the same abiding, / His praise shall tune my voice; / For while in Him confiding / I cannot but rejoice.” Cowper was thankful *and* depressed. As C. S. Lewis pointed out: “We ought to give thanks for all fortune: if it is ‘good’ because it is good, if ‘bad’ because it works in us patience, humility and the contempt of this world and the hope of our eternal country.”

If God’s grace to us calls forth our gratitude to God, what form might our thanksgiving take? For “God, to be God,” as Lewis said, “has no needs.” Luther agreed: “We cannot give God anything; for everything is already God’s, and all we have comes from God.” What do you give to Someone Who has everything? “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands” —and on His Hands!

Paul concludes that the only reasonable response is to give to God as God gives to us—to give God all for God gives all to us. Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome: “I urge you, therefore, with eyes wide open to the mercies of God, to give your whole selves as living sacrifices, dedicated, set apart and pleasing to God.” Such living self-sacrifice “demands not the destruction but the full energy of life,” as Leon Morris says, “It is positive and dynamic.” No wonder Paul called it intelligent and sensible. The term Paul uses here is the technical term for animal sacrifice that was familiar to his readers. But there’s a big difference. He urges the offering of our own living bodies instead of the dead bodies of animals. Charles Spurgeon rightly cautioned against misreading Paul’s use of “sacrifice” here. “I

scarcely like this word *sacrifice*,” he said, “because it involves nothing more than a reasonable service. ... [we’re] gainers by the surrender.” Eugenia Price calls the arena for such living sacrifice “the wider place.” We’ve now “been freed,” she writes, “to explore the wider place, to wander in it, to delight, to think with new liberty, to wonder as [we] have never wondered before at the greatness of God.” Paul says that such “constantly repeated offering of ourselves in all our concrete living as a sacrifice to God” [Cranfield] will be at odds with the priorities of the rest of the world. And such living will not only be at odds with the secular world but with the self-righteous and self-seeking religious world as well. “I have never been aware of a narrow way *since* I received life from [Jesus],” says Price, “I have been many times aware of a squeeze from other people, but never from God. ... Faith in Jesus Christ should not breed masochism or the restricted life. It should breed liberty and joy.” This is the way Phillips translates Paul at this point: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands, and moves toward the goal of true maturity.” [Romans 12:2]

According to Paul it is through a living gift of self that we will “find out by practical personal experience, what the will of God is.” [Erdman] We’ll “prove” it to ourselves, he says. But the Apostle says that the only way to see all of this as reasonable is for our minds to be changed from the way things are seen in the majority culture to the way Jesus saw reality.

We’re familiar with how Paul’s own worldview had to be turned upside down before he could call the Romans to such sacrificial thanksgiving. But remember that nobody’s born with Christian commitment. The mind of the young author of the Heidelberg Catechism had to be changed before he could confess that “my only comfort in life and death [is] that I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” That idea wasn’t natural for him. It isn’t from out of her own impoverishment that Mother Teresa now prays: “Give them through our hands / This day their daily bread.” Jonathan Edwards wasn’t always the Jonathan Edwards we know. He had to see reality differently in order to resolve “never, henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were my own, but entirely and altogether God’s.” Calvin’s mind had to be transformed in order for him to say: “We are not our own; we are God’s” It was only then that his motto could become: “My heart I give, Lord, eagerly and sincerely.” Since the heart represents the whole person at one’s very deepest, Calvin was saying that he was offering his all back to the God who offered Calvin His all. And he was doing so eagerly and sincerely. It was not by merely natural inclination that Frances Ridley Havergal could write her poetry of consecration: “Jesus, Master! wilt Thou use / One who owes Thee more than all? / As Thou wilt! I would not choose, / Only let me hear Thy call. / Jesus! let me always be / In Thy service glad and free.”

CHEERFUL GIVING

Paul said that God just really does love a gay giver! Well, it’s usually translated “cheerful giver.” [II Corinthians 9:7] The way Calvin offered his heart to God: “eagerly and sincerely,” the way Havergal offered her service: “glad and free,”—that’s the way God loves for us to give.

Now this cheerfulness is not a constant “high” of emotional giddiness. Just because we get our word “hilarious” from the Greek word behind this “cheerful” giver doesn’t mean, as some silly preachers breathlessly harangue, that we’re supposed to be “hilarious” in giving. We may be sad or depressed or sick, but we can still give to God cheerfully.

Our selfishness and greed are prompted by fear and fruitless attempts to overcome our sense that we’re not loved. But cheerful giving is prompted by the glad awareness that we are generously loved. If we know we’re loved, the more we receive, the more we can afford to give. And the more we give the more we have and will receive. But unless we know we’re loved, all that we receive will be hoarded against our fears and estrangement. So love and a loving community are powerful motivators for cheerful giving. If we know we’re loved by God we can love and give to others gladly. If we love them and give to them, we’ll help them to experience love and to gladly give to

others, including ourselves, thereby helping us to experience love received as well as given. This is the way God builds a mutually loving Christian community. God gives through the cheerful givers and then, throughout the community, there is an overflowing of further thanksgiving to God for all the very practical manifestations of the cheerful givers' confessions of the good news of Christ.

Cheerful giving comes out of plenty, not out of poverty. That's one of Havergal's objections to returning to "the fairy realms" of childhood. She wrote: "There was all to receive and nothing to give." But when we grow up and learn that we're given God's all, we can afford to give our all. And our all not only includes money, it cannot be our all without money. That's because, as we've seen, money is our immediate standard of value in this world. In holding back money from others or from God—it's the same thing, "the poor, And Thou within them," as George Herbert put it so well—we show what and who we value. "We can't give our heart," as Luther said, "without giving our purse." Cheerful givers give in imitation of the One who, "though rich, became poor for our sakes, so that we all might become rich." [II Corinthians 8:9]

A colorful demonstration of cheerful giving is to be seen in the Presbyterian churches of Ghana. The members of the congregation dance down the aisles bringing their offerings to the front of the church. Does this stand in sharp contrast to the level of joy with which the average congregation greets the collection plates?

Psychiatrist Karl Menninger observed that "Money-giving is a good criterion of a person's mental health." Do you think so? He said that "Generous people are rarely mentally ill." I agree. Notice that the money-giving shows that there is mental health, it doesn't buy mental health. I also think that the social philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul was right when he said that "If we feel too much sadness in giving, if we feel tom or irritated, it is better not to give. But we must clearly understand what this means," he warns. "It means that we are still under mammon's power, that we love our money more than God, that we have not completely understood forgiveness and grace." He's right, of course. Nobody can out-give God. If our giving is grudging and forced, we're valuing what we're trying to keep for ourselves more than we're valuing God's giving to us.

God does love a cheerful giver. But so few givers give cheerfully. *We* so seldom give cheerfully. Why is that? Let me suggest ten reasons that giving is so seldom cheerful. You may see some overlap in these and you may think of reasons I've missed. But here are at least ten.

1. The first reason giving is not cheerful is this: We lack a strong commitment to those to whom we give—whether to other individuals, a church, a charity, or whatever. Does this describe you? It's a basic non-involvement. The giver has no real input into the life of the recipients or "their" group, doesn't feel a part of what's going on. The giver doesn't really share "their" vision. It's something unfamiliar, even foreign. This is the case with those who are just beginning to look into issues of serious faithing. They really shouldn't be expected to give cheerfully when their hearts are not really into that to which they're giving.

2. Here's a second reason that giving is so seldom cheerful: Giving, by definition, involves our letting go of something. And the something we're thinking of letting go of is what we perceive to be the most important thing in the world—money or material possession. Paul knew a remedy for this mourning over money: Don't take your money so seriously. Don't be its slave. "Chill out" from under its power. How? He reasoned that life's too short to get stuck on stuff. Let's reset our priorities, he said. "Let those who buy something be as though it were not theirs to keep, those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them." [I Corinthians 7:30f] A church historian puts it this way: "What God wants is a 'take it or leave it' attitude about money." [Charles White] Don't you think that such disinterest would free us to be more cheerful givers?

3. A third reason our giving is not more cheerful is this: We fail to see how dangerous it is to depend for our security on what is not secure. "Jesus always requires from one just that earthly security upon which one would lean." [Earle Ellis] It might be money—but it might also be position, intelligence, looks, education, clever wit—misused. You

see, if we really do lean on a false security, it will give way sooner or later. It can't hold us, no matter how tightly we try to hold on to it. Said Paul Scherer, the Lutheran pastor: "To take all that we are and have and hand it over to God may not be easy; but it can be done and when it is done, the world has in it one less candidate for misery."

4. Here's a fourth impediment to cheerful giving: We have been guilt tripped into thinking of giving as coercive, something inevitably to be done under duress. But "all of Paul's special vocabulary about giving ... and his explicit teaching on the subject ... indicate that for the Christian giving is voluntary, an act of free will, a non-compulsory sharing of his [or her] material possession with no stipulated amount such as a tax or tithe, demanded." [Gerald F. Hawthorne] Paul took pains to rule out giving under pressure when he said that giving is an individual decision: "Each person should give what she or he has decided at heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion." [II Corinthians 9:10] Commenting on this, Calvin observed that the size of the gift is not as important as the disposition of the giver. "To part with money in a charitable cause and then to grieve over its loss is not to give but to grudge. To contribute under compulsion, whether of superior authority or of public opinion, is likewise no act of Christian giving." [Phillip Edgecombe Hughes] In the words of Charles Spurgeon: "In the religion of Christ there is no taxation. Everything is of love."

But what about tithing? Isn't that a required Christian tax? Well fewer than 10 percent of American church members do tithe. And it's not that some people can't afford to do it financially, for we do spend 12 percent of income on leisure. Given the tithe's economic inequity, however, G. Campbell Morgan said that "Some people rob God when they give only a tenth, and others have no business to give even as much as that." Tithing is never mentioned in the New Testament instructions to Christians. Jesus never commanded his followers to tithe, though he did not criticize the Jews for giving their tithes as they should, "for starters," as it were. Paul certainly did not command tithing. The tithe is found in the Old Testament economy but it was much older than that. It comes out of the mists of the ancient world, possibly because ten was a sacred number or maybe simply because people counted on ten fingers. But it has nothing to do with our having "freely received" to "freely give" as Jesus said we should do good. [Matthew 10:8]

5. A fifth reason that giving is not usually cheerful is this: Our giving is not thanksgiving. We give for reasons other than gratitude for what we've already received. It's an attempt to get something more. It's a bribe, it's a sweetening of the pie, a kind of pre-payment—and so, of course, there are all sorts of strings attached to the giving. And whenever there are such expectations for a return on what is seen as an investment, there will be anxious anticipation in the giving and there will be disappointment in the failure to procure the desired prize. What one tries to buy with a bribe is a fantasy and if fantasy is lost, all seems lost. Cheerful giving is not like that. Cheerful giving is thankful for the grace already given. It's our reinforcement of what we've already received of the everything that is ours because we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. That's why it's cheerful giving.

Even the expectation of a "thank you" note from those to whom we give can set us up for disappointment, personalizing, hurt, resentment. Jesus wisely said that when we give we should not let even our left hand in on what our right hand is giving away. [Matthew 6:3] If this is so, why should we inform the recipient or others about what our right hand is doing? Someone at table once complained to Luther that he'd give more if people showed more gratitude. Luther reminded him: "Benefactions should be bestowed secretly and without boasting; they should be given quietly and without seeking one's own benefit." A bonus here would be no disappointment when recipients don't know enough to say "thank you."

6. Here's a sixth reason giving is so seldom cheerful: Our giving is not an expression of loving community. Paul sees "love as the only valid criterion for evaluating good actions ... involving possessions. If one's willingness to give away one's possessions to the poor is not an expression of love, the giver has no gain from the action." [Friedel Selter] Thus the giver is not cheered by the giving. When love gives, the giving itself is gain.

In the New Testament, one of the ways in which the early church thought of itself was as *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is a Greek word that means "sharing," "partnership," "fellowship." It's a close bond, a mutual relationship of giving and

receiving with clearly financial connotations. *Koinonia* not only means fellowship, *koinonia* is, itself, a *means* of fellowshiping.

For Paul, *koinonia* is not “a group of individuals united by a common idea The idea of an earthly society grounded in human nature is foreign to Paul. For him, *koinonia* refers strictly to the relation of faith to Christ ... mutual recognition of being in Christ. ... It is birth into a new existence ... incorporation in Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection and glory.” [Johannes Schattenmann]

You remember that in the beginning the Christians held possessions in common because they saw themselves as the family of Jesus Christ. Their focus on the family was not what American suburban fundamentalism calls the family. They met in each other’s homes. They were sometimes not welcome in their own. So they turned to each other as sisters and brothers, just as Jesus had urged them to do. Here they experienced mutual love. And the love was given and received in material, practical forms. In fact, it wasn’t until the Christians came along that *philadelphia*, the ordinary Greek word for love between siblings, took on the meaning of love between people who were not naturally related to each other. The Christian meaning of brotherhood seemed ludicrous to the non-Christians of the day. The second century satirist Lucian of Samosata ridiculed the Christians for their sharing all things in common. He chuckled to his friend Cronius that “their original lawgiver persuaded them that they should be like brothers and sisters to one another. ... Therefore, they despise all things equally, and view them as common property.”

Thus Augustine called for emptier closets: “That coat which you preserve in your closet belongs to the naked; those shoes which are rotting in your possession, to the shoeless; that gold which you have hidden in the ground, to the needy. Wherefore, as often as you were able to help others, and refused, so often did you do them wrong.” Said Luther: “If there is anything in us, it is not our own; ... it is a gift of God. But if it is a gift of God, then it is entirely a debt one owes to love. That is the law of Christ. And if it is a debt owed to love, then I must serve others with it, not myself. ... Thus my wisdom belongs to the foolish, my power to the oppressed. ... my wealth belongs to the poor, ... we must ... with the same love, render them service against their detractors and those who are violent towards them; for this is what Christ did for us.”

In his letter to the Romans, Paul “saw the offering as symbolizing the unity of believers. It was a token of fellowship,” says one biblical commentator. [Morris] Says another: it was “a means of cementing the fellowship. ... For Paul it was a spontaneous gesture of brotherly love, a token of grateful response ... to the grace of God.” [F. F. Bruce]

Don’t you think that the bitter loneliness and depressing isolation that is so easily expressed as niggardliness would find an antidote in such an experience of open-hearted and open-handed community? Don’t you think that such full maturity would foster a cheerful give and take? If you’ve ever experienced it you know it can do just that.

7. Here’s a seventh reason for the lack of cheerfulness in giving: We are too scrupulously concerned about how the money might get spent. “The homeless just waste the money on drugs!” “The pastor doesn’t need so much money. It’ll only get spent on more books and theater tickets!” These complainers probably don’t read books or go to the theater. Their objections are merely rationalizations for cheapness and the ingratitude that spawns it. They show that they give—if they give at all—with strings attached. Of course there’s a place for wise stewardship of funds and there are ways to aid the homeless that won’t involve drugs. But if people are taught the grace of God by their teacher, what should they care if their gifts get flushed down the toilet? They don’t seem to mind how the megabucks sports stars spend what they pay to see them play! In fact, they’re impressed by the high life of their heroes. What the pastor does with the money is between the pastor and God, just as what they give for the teaching is between them and God. According to Paul, their sharing out of “all good things” with the teacher was supposed to be in exchange for what they already received from the teacher, an expression of value received, and not based on what the teacher might now do with the money. [Cf. Galatians 6:6]

When Jesus praised the widow for giving her all at the Temple, he did not criticize her for giving it to the corrupt religious establishment he was castigating and that would conspire in his execution a few days later. Jesus saw that the poor widow gave those two mites eagerly and sincerely, cheerfully. When another woman broke open her beautiful alabaster bottle to pour its expensive oil on Jesus, he did not attack her for her extravagance as did his disciples who said she should have sold it and given the money to the poor. Jesus saw that she gave cheerfully out of gratitude in love. It is added that “Wherever this gospel is preached, see to it you tell what this woman did.” [Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3] The gospel and the thanksgiving go together.

8. An eighth reason giving is so infrequently cheerful is this: We don’t see the impact for good our giving makes. If we were better able to understand what a difference our giving made in someone’s life, we’d see how needed we are and we’d be more likely to give cheerfully. It’s gratifying when we do see the difference for good our giving makes. But we simply can’t always see it. We’re not often in a position to see it. And we really don’t need to see it. For we can faith that in partnership with the One ultimately to whom it was given—indeed, by whom it was given — it will be significant in some way. And for that we are thankful and cheerful. Says Lewis: “God, in His kindness, having created us so full of needs, implemented a program whereby we could share with Him in the eternal rewards of His work, joint heirs with Christ, by feeling that truly we are needed because God has implemented a program where our contributions have a part in it.” God gives us a part in God’s own impact for good when we take advantage of the gift of giving back to God by giving through others. We thus know we’re needed. And this cheers us.

9. A ninth reason giving is not a cheerful experience is this: We so woodenly read the call to give “all.” If we think that “all” means that every last penny we have must be given away at this very minute, whatever short of that is given will seem to be short of the “all” we owe and we’ll give the less-than-“all” with guilty feelings. That hardly will mean cheerfulness. Or, frustrated by the demand to give such an “all,” we give up giving at all. But such interpretation of “all” is a symptom of perfectionism. The New Testament, far from calling for perfectionism, calls us to maturity.

Now it is true that Jesus did tell one rich young man to go and sell everything, give the money away, and then come back and follow him. But that was what Jesus told *that* guy because in *his* life, apparently it was his utter love of money that stood in his way to the Way of Life. What is it that stands in *your* way to the Way of Life? What stands in *my* way? It’s not a matter of how *much* of something is called for. It’s a matter of how much something gets in the way. It’s a matter of priorities, a matter of quality rather than quantity. Says Helmut Thielicke: “God never comes through the door that I hold open for Him, but always knocks at the one place which I have walled up with concrete. But if I do not let Him in there, He turns away altogether.”

In urging the Corinthian Christians to give some economic assistance to the Christians back in Jerusalem, Paul makes it clear that “Of course I don’t mean that others should be relieved to an extent that leaves you in distress. It is a matter of share and share alike.” [II Corinthians 8:13] George Herbert put it this way: “Give not Saint Peter so much, to leave Saint Paul nothing.” But again, as you see, Christian giving is a matter of sharing—of mutuality, partnership, *koinonia*. As Luther explained, “Possessions are not given that we may rely on them and glory in them, which is futile and foolish, but that we may use and enjoy them and share them with others.” Sharing of course presupposes that we never divest ourselves of everything, for then we could no longer share

The worldly idea that we should give until it hurts us and then to give even more is not quite found like that in the Bible. We’re to give only as we have chosen to give in the deep privacy of our heart, says Paul. The trouble with giving until it hurts and then giving more is that it so easily can become an effort to put God in our debt. Nonetheless, sharing does involve a serious cost. And the cost is not only the stuff we share but ourselves as well. “The Holy Supper is kept, indeed, / In whatso we share with another’s need; / Not what we give, but what we share, / For the gift without the giver is bare; / Who gives himself with his alms feeds three: / Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me.” [James Russell Lowell]

10. A tenth reason giving is not a very cheerful experience is this: We have the idea that the bottom line in giving is loss rather than gain. But Luther countered: “I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.” The Reformer is here describing his surprising experience that one really is better off in giving than in getting, but that such a giving is a kind of getting that can’t be had when getting is the end we seek. Luther knew what Jesus had said to his disciples when Peter boasted of having given up every possession to follow Jesus. “I’m telling all of you this truth,” said Jesus, “There is no one who has given up a family and home, or the possibility of marriage, or one’s brothers and sisters, or parents, or children or any possession or property for my sake and for the sake of what matters to God, who will not be repaid many times over in this age, receiving a new family and possession—yes and persecutions as well—and in the age to come eternal life.” [Luke 18:29f; Mark 10:24ff; Matthew 19:29ff]

But what are we saying? Should we try to buy God off? Is pleasing God a merit system? No! Are we to have a market mentality toward God? No! This is not a scheme for “health ‘n wealth” here or hereafter. We’re not to use people as objects—even objects of charity.

But what if we speak of rewards? “The New Testament ... is never afraid of the reward motive,” says Bible commentator William Barclay. We’re really still talking about the cost of discipleship, but “obedience has its reward although not a ‘merited’ one.” [Ellis] The rewards of leaving all for the sake of Jesus and what matters to God are built into created reality as God ordains it. Thus, as Luther knew, “you must give if you want to have” and as John Bunyan knew, “A man there was, though some did count him mad / The more he cast away the more he had.” Here we see that whole dying-in-order-to-live reality that permeates the New Testament.

Paul says that it is as we give generously to the ones in need that we invest in the age to come. [I Timothy 6:19] Jesus said to his disciples: “Don’t be afraid, little flock. Your Father plans to give you the kingdom. So give money away and get wallets that can hold the treasure of heaven that will never be stolen and never be destroyed.” [Luke 12: 30ff] This is all metaphor. But it does speak of a perspective on what is and is not really lastingly important. So there is a sense in which we *can* “take it with us.” By giving away what we value, by setting aside as of relatively no importance that to which otherwise we can so easily become attached, we find that what we have left is wonderfully new and beyond all imagining, kept for us in Christ—in God. Augustine said: “Nothing can be really lost on earth except what one would be ashamed to take to heaven.” Wouldn’t we be ashamed to try to take mammon to heaven? But we may faithe that the justice and the mercy and the kindnesses and those for whom we lovingly spent what we had will follow us into that reign.

Right after Paul’s praising of God “who gives us the victory [over death] through our Lord Jesus Christ” and his reminding his “beloved sisters and brothers to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your work is never wasted and never lost,” he says: “And now concerning the collection to help God’s people.” [I Corinthians 16:1] The Apostle then gives them practical and pointed instructions on their financial sharing with others. Here again, as in the account of Jesus and the woman with the alabaster bottle, the connection between the good news and thanksgiving is seamless.

So: Do you want to give cheerfully? Then give in grateful response, only as you freely see your way clear to give of all that ultimately means so little, to God from whom alone comes all that means so very much. And give in loving partnership with Christ and the faithing community, trusting God to use the gifts for the good of all, and mindful that we need not and cannot ever out-give the God of all grace and peace.

WHAT’S THE GOOD NEWS WORTH?

Entertainment Weekly published a feature article entitled, “Is Dave Worth It?” It was about David Letterman’s \$67 million deal with CBS. It went on to spotlight a couple dozen more superstars, asking about each one: “Is he/she worth it?” None of us needs ask: “Worth what?” Of course it’s money. Money, as we’ve seen, is the standard of

value in this world system. Well, the magazine thinks Dave's worth it. (And so, by the way, are Danielle Steel, Michael Jackson and Madonna. But Eddie Murphy, Diane English and Prince are not.)

If what David Letterman and Madonna bring us is "worth it,"—up there in the megamillions—what would you say is the worth of the Good News that God was in Christ reconciling the world to God? Does the question itself seem sacrilegious or even silly? "O, the good news is priceless," says one who has never found a collection plate quite as appealing as her plate collection. Saying the good news is priceless can be religious rationalization for ducking the collection plate.

What a person thinks is the relative worth of anything is rather easy to calculate. It can be as simple as looking at the person's checkbook stubs and monthly credit card statements. Who's getting paid? Is it harder to pay for the proclamation of the gospel than it is to pay for more CDs? Do we get carried away with overspending on the gospel or on almost anything but?

Suppose it depended on you to preserve only two sayings of Jesus. What would they be if you were to make the decision? A beatitude, maybe? The Lord's Prayer? "Except a person be born again ... ?" In Paul's day, our four gospel accounts had not been written. But there were the sayings of Jesus that were in circulation. Did you realize that in all of Paul's letters preserved in the New Testament, he cites a saying of Jesus only twice? What do you think they are?

Well one is Jesus' statement in the Upper Room on his last night with his disciples: "This is my body which is for you; ... my blood ... Drink it in remembrance of me." [I Corinthians 11:23ff] And what's the other one? Actually the other one is cited verbatim in one letter and alluded to in another letter so this one really appears twice in Paul's letters. If we had taken the time for you to reflect on what two sayings of Jesus you'd think most important to preserve, you might have chosen the saying from the Upper Room. But I'm sure that this other saying Paul quotes and alludes to would not be one of yours.

Paul quotes the saying in a letter to Timothy. He cites it exactly as his friend Luke records it [cf. Luke 10:7] Here it is: "The worker has a right to his maintenance." That's it. Are you surprised? Not one of your favorite sayings of Jesus? Not very "spiritual?" We've done such a thorough job of disconnecting what is consistently connected in the Bible: spirituality and money; God's gift and thanksgiving. Only two quotes from Jesus and one is about money—and that one's found twice. Paul writes: "Let the elders who do well while acting as leaders be counted worthy of a double stipend, in particular those who labour in preaching or in giving instruction. For, this is what scripture says: 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the corn.' And then there are the words, 'The labourer has a right to his maintenance.'" [I Timothy 5:17f, Cassirer translation]

The term translated as "double stipend" by Cassirer and the New English Bible and as "double pay" by the Good News Bible and by Barclay "includes at least pay." [Gordon D. Fee] One translator notes that it means literally "double price" but he puts it this way: the preaching and teaching elders "should be considered as deserving twice the salary they get." [Williams] Sounds generous for cheap. "That financial ... rewards are primarily intended cannot be evaded ... the elders concerned are entitled to look to the church for their maintenance.... While [Paul] preferred not to take advantage of it himself ... he always stood up vigorously for the right of the apostles and their coadjutors to be materially supported by the community." [J. N. D. Kelly]

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul reasons that "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?" [I Corinthians 9:11] In Barclay's translation: "If we have sown for you things which nourish the spirit" and "if we reap from you things which nourish the body?" And even though Paul did not exercise this right for himself, he insisted that "the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." [I Corinthians 9:14] (In England, each parish is still known as "a living.")

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul states that “anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with the teacher.” [Galatians 6:6] It is with this very point on material support that he makes the often-quoted warning: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A person reaps what a person sows” and he goes on to apply this responsibility of ours to meeting the real needs of those both inside and outside the family of faith.

Paul is here instructing that, from all we have, we’re to share with those who teach us God’s word. From all we have includes all our good things, not things we don’t want. Here again we find the mutuality of the relationship within the fellowship. As F. F. Bruce puts it: “The teacher relieves the ignorance of the pupil; the pupil should relieve the teacher of concern for his subsistence.” Bruce points out that Paul’s emphasis here is “on the duty of those who are taught to make material provision for their teachers.” This sharing from all we have is not cheap. And it is not a mere suggestion—“Wouldn’t it be nice if maybe, now and then, we’d give our teacher a little something or other,” It’s not optional. Here, right in the midst of Paul’s greatest letter of Christian freedom, is this uncompromising command! And it’s about money! Money for preaching and teaching the good news. As a biblical scholar states, this duty of the fellowship toward its teachers “certainly cannot be understood apart from material sustenance—probably more directly financial support.” [Richard Longenecker] As another commentator notes: “When Paul says *koinoneito*, ‘let him have fellowship,’ it is a Christian euphemism for ‘let him make a financial contribution.’ To Paul, this phraseology is more than an exhibition of oriental courtesy; such Christian giving is the only fit expression of that *koinonia* ‘sharing,’ ‘fellowship,’ which marks the common life in Christ.” [Alan Cole]

Moreover, the material participation with the teacher signifies the value of the teaching. Paul clearly knew that there’s no question that money is our standard of value in this world. So he tells those who do receive instruction in what he valued as the most important thing in the world—the good news that God was in Christ reconciling the world to God—to share with the teacher of that good news out of all that stuff they so dearly value as the most important thing in the world—money. If they resist this commandment, their resistance reveals how much they don’t value the teaching of the good news. If they respond with cheerful giving to their teacher, they confirm how very much they do value the teaching of the good news. It’s as simple as that.

IN CONCLUSION

“We have fallen in love with toyland and our playthings are so dear.” That’s what Peter Marshall said about how very hard it is to turn from childish fixation on what really matters less to the maturity of what matters most of all. But sooner or later at least the wiser know, in John Updike’s words, “what a quick idle thing a life is, in retrospect. ... [and that] sex, like eating, has its limit ... and all the screwing in the world will not rattle bank foundations or bring down the walls of the Pentagon. The earth only *seems* to move.” Sooner or later the wiser among us know that we can’t really serve two masters: the fast track as well as those George Herbert called “the poor, And thou within them.” Sooner or later we learn the truth we’ve heard all our lives: that money can’t buy happiness, that there’s no profit in gaining the world and losing one’s very self. Sooner or later we finally learn the profound truth of the little Sunday School slogan: “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, / Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Faithful Christians have always known that what matters most is that it’s from that with which we’ve been entrusted by God that we’re gifted to give back to God by giving to others. Jesus said that it is as we are kind to others that we are kind to him, that it is as we neglect and abuse others that we neglect and abuse him. He said that this is what life is all about, what Judgment is all about. All of this is as much about money as it is about faithfulness, for it is as we use money and all of God’s “countless gifts of love” that we serve God and our neighbors or are slaves to mammon. So forgiven for giving and gifted to give, let us do it. And when we do that it will be with a cheerful heart offered eagerly and sincerely.

As usual, C. S. Lewis says it well so I’ll close by quoting him for summary: “When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, God claims all.”