

WHAT IT MEANS TO GIVE TO THE LORD

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on November 3, 1968 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

Each Sunday morning there comes a time in the hour of worship when the 1250 Christians who make up this congregation give of their means to the Lord. It happens only once a week, but it happens every week of the year. It is purely voluntary and each person's contribution is confidential--known only to him and to the Lord. On an average, the money collected in this manner is approximately \$4,100 per week, or a total of approximately \$215,000 a year. With an occasional call for extra giving for some special cause, the total sometimes rises as high as \$250,000. The weekly average is approximately \$3.30 per person. The money thus collected is then disbursed by the elders of the congregation for three important works: evangelism, edification, and benevolence. This is a gratifying and important part of the activity of this congregation.

I have mentioned all of this in order to ask a very simple question, "Is this activity worship?" In recent weeks I have discussed the Lord's Supper as an important part of Christian worship. On another Sunday I have talked with you concerning the importance of prayer in the worship activities of a Christian. On still another Sunday we discussed the matter of singing as a part of scriptural worship. Another of the avenues of worship set forth in the scriptures is that of teaching from the scriptures. Then, comes the question, "Is giving also an activity of Christian worship?"

What Is Worship?

The answer to our question will depend at least in part on our definition of worship. While there may be many different definitions of worship I would suggest this very simple one, "Worship is the human spirit pouring out adoration and praise to the Creator of the universe. It is man who is made in the image of God worshipping the divine Being who created him." It goes without saying that these evidences of man's inner feelings toward God ought to be offered according to God's desires and directives. This is worship.

What has man done in his efforts back through the ages to worship God? For one thing, he has built temples and erected altars. He has made pilgrimages, as the ancient Hebrews did annually to Jerusalem. He has listened respectfully and responsively to God speak, as the Hebrews did at the foot of Mt. Sinai when God gave his law through Moses. Man has prayed. Man has sung. Man has eaten religious meals, as in the Passover or the Lord's Supper. Man has also fasted. Then, in addition to all these, man has given gifts. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were gifts. Animals and food were given for the purpose of offering sacrifices unto Jehovah. In fact, one of the most important and most consistent acts of worship has been that of giving.

Token or Symbol

There is a very deep significance behind the giving of gifts in worship. Man cannot give himself, or even a part of himself in worship to God, so instinctively he wants to give some token or symbol of himself. This is what he does when he gives a gift to God. It is quite obvious in the Old Testament Law of Moses. The firstborn was to be redeemed by the offering of a lamb, or in cases of less affluence, the offering of a pair of turtledoves or a pair of pigeons. (Ex. 13:1, 2, 13). The firstborn belonged to God but was to be redeemed through the offering of a gift.

In the New Testament we find these words, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service." (Romans 12:1). God does not want human sacrifices to be offered on altars. Dead human sacrifices would be a mockery to God, since man is a spirit made in the image of God. Rather, God wants man to be a "living sacrifice," working during his lifetime for the Cause of Christ. In I Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul emphasized this same point, "Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body." In II Corinthians 8:5, Paul commended the people of Macedonia because "first they gave their own selves to the Lord."

All of us need to realize that as Christians we belong to the Lord. This means that in addition to the giving of our material possessions or our money, we have an obligation to give to the Lord our time, our talents, our personalities, and our skills. It is sometimes easier to give money than it is to give time and effort, but the giving of ourselves is far more important than our money alone. Visitation in the hospitals, doing personal work, individual efforts of other kinds, all of these are giving just as much as giving money.

This very thing was demonstrated this past week by some of our high school young people. They were impressed and disturbed by pictures of malnourished children in Nigeria, as recently shown by Brother Howard Horton who visited there only a few weeks ago. Having no money of their own, these young people decided to have a car wash on last Saturday, the proceeds of which would be given to feed hungry children in Nigeria. It was an inspiration to watch them work--soaping the cars in their random, inexperienced but enthusiastic manner, rinsing the cars with clean water, and then wiping them dry with paper towels. They spent the whole day, and were able to raise something more than \$275.00. They gave themselves, since they had no money to give.

When we consider giving along the lines that we have been discussing, it takes on deeper significance than when considered lightly, merely as a matter of placing a quickly written check or a few dollars in a collection basket. It is giving a token or symbol of ourselves. It is giving ourselves in activities which we are particularly qualified to perform. Also, of course, it involves giving our money. Since giving has all of this behind it, it is rather obvious that it is one of the most significant and meaningful acts of worship in which a human being can engage. When we give we are worshipping.

Five Significant Points

Giving is a concrete evidence of the love we have in our hearts for God. In writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul spoke of giving as “proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity also of your love.” (II Cor. 8:8). Giving for the poor saints in Judaea would be a means of showing the sincerity of their Christian love. Later in the chapter, in II Corinthians 8:24, he said it even more directly as he spoke of giving as “the proof of your love.”

Giving is a Christian responsibility over and above, or apart from, the use to which the gift will be put. In other words, we Christians have a responsibility to give, even when we do not know how great the need for our gift may be or when we do not know how the gift may be used. As evidence of this point we would submit the fact that in the Old Testament God did not need the animal sacrifices that were given. But the people needed to give them. Also, it is true that Christ’s Cause would survive today even without our gifts. God would in some way keep the church alive even if all of us should fail. The apostle Paul in writing to the Philippians in chapter 4, verse 17, says, “Not that I seek for the gift, but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account.”

This is not to be misunderstood. It is vitally important that we give to the Lord, for his Cause does need support. In fact, even more money is needed in order to evangelize the world and care for those in need than we are now giving. Our elders spend countless hours in determining which of the appeals, which of the causes, most deserve the money that has been given. There is a vast, continuing need, but the point that we would make at this time is simply that if the need were not so pressing we would still need to give for our own sakes. Through giving we demonstrate our love to the Lord and we grow stronger by investing a part of ourselves in his Cause.

Giving is to be in proportion to our prosperity. We are all familiar with I Corinthians 16:2 which reads, “Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper ...” II Corinthians 9:7 adds, “Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” We are also reminded of the brief paragraph in the gospel of Mark which tells us of Christ watching the people give into the treasury of the temple. Some gave generously out of their vast riches, while at least one poor widow gave so small an amount that it would hardly have been noticed. She gave two mites, which make a farthing, and which total less than a penny. But Jesus said, “This poor widow cast in more than all they that are casting into the treasury: for they did cast in of their superfluity; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.” (Mark 12:43-44). God evaluates a gift in terms of the total situation, and big gifts sometimes look small, and small gifts sometimes look large.

Most of us in all likelihood need to “up our giving.” Is it not true that our prosperity in recent years has come along so rapidly that we have failed to adjust our giving upward accordingly? We drive better cars; we live in better houses; we eat better; and we are better clothed. Does our giving to our Lord show the same increase? Probably most of us need to find a quiet time and check the matter out to see if we are really giving today as we have been prospered. We are the richest, most prosperous people on earth. Let us recognize the responsibilities that these blessings bring.

Giving should involve some sacrifice. In the Old Testament, we have the story of David at one point in his life needing to offer sacrifices unto God. Since he was the king there were those who wanted to give him a field in which to erect an altar, and even to give him the animals that he would offer as sacrifices. It was then that he said, “Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto Jehovah my God which cost me nothing.” (II Sam. 24:24). David bought the field and paid for the animals in order that his sacrifice to God might not be without cost to himself.

The value of our gifts shows our love to God. If we give only that which we do not need, or that which means nothing to us, then we do not demonstrate very much love or concern for God or his Cause. In the Old Testament only the best animals were acceptable for sacrifices. Only those “without spot or blemish” were good enough. We also must give the best that we have to the Lord. We might also recognize that in the giving of our time and talents we need to be sacrificial in order for it to be very meaningful. We are impressed by Paul’s statement, “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” (II Cor. 11:24-27). Paul must have loved God a lot in order to make all of these sacrifices. We, too, must make sacrifices if our giving of either time or money is to be very impressive as evidence of our love.

Giving brings some of life’s deepest satisfactions. It is in Acts 20:35 that we read, “Remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” We who are parents have learned the truth of this statement. We have learned that giving to our children is far more enjoyable than receiving gifts ourselves. Many of us have also lived long enough to know that giving to the Lord or to one of the causes in his kingdom brings this same kind of deepest satisfaction. It is deeply satisfying to be able

to give something to help youngsters who have no parents of their own. It is rewarding to be able to help young people get a Christian education, when otherwise they would not be able to get it. One's heart is warmed when he provides a meal for someone who is hungry, or clothing for someone who is cold. Some of life's greatest satisfactions come through giving.

Blessings also come as a result of our giving. Jesus said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." (Luke 6:38). In II Cor. 9:6 and 10, Paul wrote, "But this I say, he that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully ... And he that supplieth seed to the sower and bread for food, shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness."

Conclusion

The writer of the Christian hymn, "Give Of Your Best To the Master," includes in it the lines, "Give of your best to the Master; Give of the strength of your youth." Then in a later stanza, "Give Him first place in your service, consecrate every part. Give, and to you shall be given." In the final stanza he says, "Give Him your heart's adoration. Give Him the best that you have." This song puts into words what I have been endeavoring to say in this message.

All of this begins with our giving of ourselves. God so loved us that he sent Christ into the world that we might have the opportunity for salvation. If we will give ourselves through obedience to his commands we have his promise that we will be saved with him in heaven. If we give ourselves, genuinely and deeply, then all of these other aspects of giving will take care of themselves. Christianity centers in giving. God gave Christ through his great love for us. We in return give ourselves to him. All of this is what it means to give to the Lord.