

THE HUNDRED-FOLD BLESSING

JAMIE MCNAB

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We have been looking at the subject of money for a few weeks. God has no problem with us having money. But ... money does have a dark side.

I mentioned last week that religion is "BIG BUSINESS" — especially in the USA. \$10 billion per annum.

Lots of people would like some of that money! Churches and TV evangelists are not exempt from covetousness and sharp practice.

Last week we looked at one form of manipulation — exerting pressure on people ... often by guilt or threats of eternal damnation.

2 Peter 2:1-3

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

2 **And many will follow their destructive ways,** because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

2 Peter 2:3 (NLT)

3 In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money.

In the Churches of God — some will be after your money.

Pressure will always be contrary to God's ways. It is not remotely acceptable to God.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

6 But this I say: **He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.**

7 **So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.**

Don't give under pressure! If you are giving — you should be giving cheerfully.

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)

7 **You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure.**

So. How could a church carry out its ministry if it can't "lean on" members to give?

One answer is: Consider the example of George Muller? His ministry supported over 10,000 orphans ... built 5 large homes ... income estimated at \$150 million — yet never solicited even one penny. All by prayer and faith.

I don't personally have a problem with a need being announced — and help sought — provided there is no pressure or manipulation!

The Apostle Paul actively shunned any appearance of being in the ministry for the money. He bent over backwards almost to make sure no one could accuse him of being after their money!

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

1 **Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?**

2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For **you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.**

3 My defence to those who examine me is this:

4 **Do we have no right to eat and drink?**

5 **Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?**

6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?

7 **Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?**

8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?

9 For it is written in the law of Moses, **“You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.”** Is it oxen God is concerned about?

10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.

11 **If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?**

12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?

Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

13 **Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?**

14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

15 **But I have used none of these things,** nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.

16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

18 What is my reward then? **That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.**

Zero pressure!

Paul had rights — but refused to exercise them.

Although pressure and guilt have been (and still are) a common approach — **a very seductive alternative has developed over the past 50 years** — especially in the USA.

It is now very common ... especially among TV ministries.

The teaching is that God will abundantly bless and prosper you — cancel your debts — you can enjoy great wealth — provided YOU GIVE GENEROUSLY TO “GOD’S WORK”.

Lots of clever marketing techniques are used — letters ... emails ... advertising ... prosperity seminars ... debt-cancellation conferences ... buy books ... DVD's — you can hear testimonials.

All you have to do is give generously and expect a financial miracle! God's Word promises you!

Millions of people fall for it. Unfortunately ... including many poor people in debt ... desperate for a way out.

If the Bible promises prosperity and abundance — they're excited.

Yet many end up deluded and deeper in debt. They believed the preacher ... heard the Bible verses explained — gave as generously as they could — but in most cases — nothing.

Though many of the preachers become exceedingly rich! Some of the more successful are multi-millionaires ... driving Rolls-Royces ... have private jet planes ... huge waterfront homes. All paid for by their audiences.

They are usually very persuasive and convincing. But they claim to have scripture on their side?!

So let's look.

Acts 20:35

35 I have shown you in every way, by labouring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' ”

Often quoted to believers to give generously to be blessed. **In context — it's the ministers who are to give.**

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

These verses are often applied to giving generously to the minister/church.

“If you really need a big blessing ... make sure you give very generously — a big offering. If you have a big debt — give big”!!

Then you’ll get a big harvest — verse 8.

2 Corinthians 9:8

8 And **God is able to make all grace abound toward you**, that you, **always having all sufficiency in all things**, **may have an abundance for every good work.**

But ... check the context. Paul’s not talking of giving to his ministry.

It’s talking about giving to the saints. It’s a gift for those saints who were struggling in Judaea. (And who clearly weren’t enjoying super prosperity).

The offering is most likely to be foodstuffs ... fruit ... grain ... oil?

Compare:

Acts 11:27-30

27 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.

28 **Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world**, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

29 **Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.**

30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Scripture is full of admonishments about helping the poor ... especially the Household of Faith (and don’t forget the widows ☺).

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

1 **Now concerning the collection for the saints**, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

3 And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.

4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

Most churches apply this to “regular giving” — to the ministry/church — every Sunday.

But — if it’s not for the church leadership — not gospel-preaching expenses.

It’s a collection of essentials for the saints in Jerusalem.

(Once Paul has been through and collected it ... no need for further collections? Or just “as and when” ... if there was another need).

Romans 15:22-28

22 For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.

23 But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you,

24 whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.

25 **But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.**

26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

27 It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

28 Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.

Paul was quite active in seeking support for poorer members.

But — for himself? Almost completely silent! Indeed ... he often worked and paid his own way!

A very popular scripture that prosperity preachers quote to encourage giving:

Luke 6:38

38 **Give**, and it will be given to you: **good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.**"

This verse appears on lots of letters and emails.

But — there is no mention of money! No mention of giving money to a church or ministry (or to God even).

It just says "Give". Give what? It could be encouragement ... a helping-hand ... moral support ... a shoulder to lean on.

Why assume "money" — to go to a TV evangelist?

The context: verses 35-37. Love ... mercy ... forgiveness.

Luke 6:35-37

35 **But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great**, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

36 **Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.**

37 **"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.**

You'll receive what you give. If you're kind ... compassionate ... quick to forgive ... patient in judging — you'll get the same!

Jesus didn't "jump tracks" in verse 38 and suddenly start talking about giving generously to your church!

It's inaccurate for preachers to use Luke 6:38 to encourage giving money to themselves.

Remember Peter's warning (similar to Paul's in Acts 20).

1 Peter 5:1-4

1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, **servicing as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;**

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, **but being examples to the flock;**

4 **and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.**

1 Peter 5:2 (NET)

2 ... **not for shameful profit but eagerly.**

1 Peter 5:2(NCV)

2 ... **Do it because you are happy to serve, not because you want money.**

The warning is necessary. And plenty of people out there are in it for the money — status ... nice home ... car. Many are mere hirelings.

Another popular scripture:

Mark 10:28-30

28 Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

29 So Jesus answered and said, **“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s,**

30 **who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time**—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.

The 100 fold return!

A number of famous evangelists: “Give to this ministry and I’ll believe with you for the 100 fold return. Establish in your mind what you need — then give 1/100th”.

Jesus mentioned hundred fold — including persecutions. Result of sacrificing your own ways for God’s.

It says nothing about giving big offerings to a wealthy evangelist or rich minister.

And mathematically:

Give \$1 — \$100

Give \$100 — \$10,000

Give \$10,000 — \$1 million

Give \$1 million — \$100 million

Give \$100 million — \$10 billion

Give \$10 billion — \$1 trillion

So all believers who have at least \$1 can look forward to maybe \$1 trillion???

Just a gimmick. But plenty believe ... and give — expectantly.

Compare to Jesus' Ministry:

Mark 10:17-22

17 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, **“Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”**

18 So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

19 You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Do not defraud,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ ”

20 And he answered and said to Him, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.”

21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, **“One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”**

22 But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Jesus told this wealthy young person to give his fortune to the poor. Not to Jesus Himself or His Ministry.

Some churches would say — “Go ... sell your assets and give the proceeds to this ministry”. ☺

There's a few other scriptures ... but those are the main ones.

Religion is big business. \$billions at stake.

Many covetous men and women — lovers of money.

Jesus ... Peter ... Paul — warned often! For a reason!

So ... BE ALERT! It's good to be generous and give where you can ... especially to the Household of Faith. The workman is worthy of his hire and we should respect that.

But watch out for pressure ... especially when accompanied by guilt or threats.

And watch out for preachers who'll promise you wealth and prosperity if you'll only send the "a love-gift of \$100 or \$1,000. God will bless you one hundred fold" ... etc.

If you're happy to give ... done your homework ... fine!!

But keep your wits about you! \$billions given "to God" ... merely supports carnal men and women in their chosen lifestyles. God never saw any of it!!