

BEWARE OF MANIPULATION PART 2

JAMIE MCNAB

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We are continuing to look at the subject of money. The last couple of weeks we have looked at how abuse within church organisations can occur.

Covetousness ... love of money ... and its attendant evils ... affects people in all walks of life ... including churches and church leaders. You get covetous people everywhere.

Religion is BIG BUSINESS. In the USA ... the annual donations are approximately \$74.5 billion. You can't be surprised when a business that big ... attracts plenty of ravenous wolves ... plenty of experts in relieving you of your money.

Last week we looked at how church members can be pressured to give. Typically this approach involves ... guilt or threats of hell-fire ... if you are so selfish to keep money for yourself. Some leaders/ministers ... are very gifted at psychology and know how to manipulate the brethren.

So ... forewarned is forearmed. We should be aware. If you've examined the situation carefully and you are perfectly happy ... fair enough. But ... watch out for those who look like sheep ... but are actually devouring wolves ... and they're after devouring your assets.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV)

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. *(they are going to take advantage of you)*

2 Peter 2:3 (NLT)

3 In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction will not be delayed.

Last week we focused on the pressure ... the threats ... compulsion that is brought to bear.

We can't always judge hearts perfectly ... but we can judge the method ... the "techniques".

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NKJV)

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.

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.* "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

2 Corinthians 9:7 (GW)

7 You shouldn't feel sorry that you gave or feel forced to give"

There should not be emotional pressure/manipulation ... or heavy threats of ecclesiastical or spiritual authority ... as one man states.

So how could churches or ministers survive without leaning on members and exerting pressure?

Last week we saw the example of George Mueller. He looked after 10,000 plus orphans ... which he fed and clothed and gave Bibles to. He probably received about \$150 million to run his orphan homes. In 60+ years ... he NEVER ASKED ANYONE FOR MONEY! **PURELY ON FAITH!**

We spent some time last week on the widow's mites. The lesson is virtually the opposite of what we normally hear.

Mark 12:38-40 (NKJV)

38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "**Beware of the scribes, (the top leaders and evangelists of their day)** who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces,
39 the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,
40 **who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers.** These will receive greater condemnation." *(They were exploiting the very poor)*

Jesus as Lord of the Old Testament had set up a complete system to provide for the poor ... but these religious guys here ... made the Word of God of no effect and taught the commandments of men ... so the poor got poorer.

The widows were vulnerable. Perhaps too trusting of men of God. They were being encouraged to leave their homes and assets "to the church" ... "to the Lord".

It still happens.

Philadelphia Church of God

*The latest issue of **The Philadelphian** includes a report on the 2017 ministerial conference.*

There is comprehensive information on the newest Herbert Armstrong icon to be acquired by the PCG - a Gulfstream 450 jet aircraft ... "A tool for a Global Work"

Gerald Flurry intended to use the plane for his first personal appearance campaign since 2008. "Mr. Flurry and a handful of staff members planned to use the plane to fly to Mr. Flurry's public appearance campaign in Chicago, Illinois, but a minor accident at the hangar grounded the aircraft, meaning that the group had to charter a jet for the campaign."

*Gerald Flurry, writing on February 3rd of his desire to buy a private plane, said: "We are also working on a **few estate donations** that ..."*

often provide a surge in income that enables us to take on large projects like this.”

Their efforts to persuade members to bequeath their wealth to the PCG have proved to be successful. Treasurer Andrew Locher reports in The Philadelphian:

“The year 2017 got off to a tremendous start. January donation income was our third-best ever, just barely behind our second-best January in PCG history.

We received more estate income in January 2017 than all of 2016 combined.”

God’s not out to get the last few “mites”/dollars from a poor person ... but a minister might!

PAUL ALMOST TOTALLY SHUNNED ANY APPEARANCE OF BEING IN IT FOR THE MONEY. He frequently paid his own way ... and his crusade team’s way. He bent over backwards to avoid taking from the brethren.

1 Corinthians 9:1-18 (NKJV)

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. (***We are entitled to receive support***)

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. (*Paul said that he has the right ... but he has chosen not to exercise it*)

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.**

Paul had rights. He was entitled to support ... but shunned it on many occasions.

Although pressure ... occasional threats ... have been a traditional way of exploiting brethren ... and still is ... of course. A very seductive alternative has arisen in the past 30 to 40 years. Particularly in the USA ... but it is spreading.

This way is extremely common ... especially with TV evangelists and ministries. Essentially ... people are told that God wants to bless and prosper them (and of course ... there is some truth in that) ... and the way to unleash God's financial blessings is to give their offerings ... generously into the church or ministry.

It plays on human nature. Plenty of people are covetous ... have a desire for more ... or frequently ... people are in debt and anxious about getting by ... so the promise of financial prosperity is very alluring. All you have to do is give generously to God's representative.

Modern marketing techniques are often employed ... letters get sent out to people ... emails ... TV programmes. There are prosperity seminars ... debt-cancellation conferences ... a huge amount of advertising of prosperity DVDs and books. And lots of scriptures quoted to show that this is the Word of God ! Often ... testimonials from "ordinary people" who've moved from poverty to abundance by virtue of giving generously to a particular ministry.

And ... millions of people fall for it ... big time! \$100s of millions are sent in ... often by poor people ... as they chase God's financial blessings in their lives.

As we've said before ... not all ministers and churches are dishonest or out for your money. But enough are. So we do need to be alert.

Here are some well-known examples:

KCM (Kenneth Copeland Ministries)

- assets circa \$750 million
- 18,000 sq ft home/tennis court/boat docking
- private airport
- six aeroplanes including \$20 million Citation jet
- has a ranch
- thousands of cattle

They have hundreds of teaching tapes and DVDs on being a generous giver "to God".

CREFLO DOLLAR

- \$ million properties in Georgia and New York
- Rolls Royce
- Jet aircraft
- net worth \$30 million

LEROY THOMPSON

- 20,000 sq ft home
- at least 2 Rolls Royces
- Jet aircraft

He sells books such as “Money Cometh” ... “Becoming a Commander of Covenant Wealth”. There is an appalling video at church of him kicking dollar bills around with Creflo Dollar. Is this true religion?

In one sense ... there is nothing wrong with big homes ... nice cars ... jets. If you’ve worked for it and earned it ... fine. After all ... Abraham was wealthy. King David was wealthy. Job was wealthy.

The catch with these guys and others is that they got wealthy by taking money from church members and donors ... often the very needy. Or ... by selling their prosperity teachings for \$25 ... or \$100 etc.

The core message is often some variation of: “Look How God Has Prospered Me. He wants to prosper you too and the key is to give into this ministry. And ... of course ... Give generously. Make it significant. You can’t outgive God! Then watch how He’ll bless you”.

Unfortunately ... many poor people get sucked into this. They see it as their only way to break out of lack and debt. They covet the prosperity. So ... they go deeper into debt as they give more and more to wealthy evangelists ... whilst they wait for their miracle.

And they’re being duped ... manipulated ... losing billions to what some call “pimps for Christ” or “pimps in the pulpit”.

When I watch the poor ... financially struggling ... being encouraged to give generously to some very rich evangelist ... I always think of:

Proverbs 22:16 (NKJV)

16 **He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches, (addressed to these ministers)**

And he who gives to the rich, will surely come to poverty.

Some of these ministers and evangelists are very very rich! They shouldn't be manipulating the poor.

Let's look at some of the most popular passages they use ... to abuse.

Acts 20:35 (NKJV)

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.' ”

This is often quoted to brethren to encourage them to give ... but ... in context ... it's being addressed to the ministers ... to remind them ... that they should give (not focus on receiving).

Let's go back to:

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NKJV)

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.

This is often applied to giving to the ministry or evangelists ... or for their pet church project. You are encouraged to give generously ... or else. The message often is “if you really need a big blessing from God ... make sure you give big! If you've got big financial needs ... big debts ... you need to give a very big offering to me/this ministry”.

Then ... if you do ... BIG HARVEST ... verse 8.

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NKJV)

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 in context. Paul wasn't talking about any money going to the church itself or himself. This was a collection (fruit/grain/clothing?) for poor brethren in famine conditions in Jerusalem.

Compare: verses 1-3

2 Corinthians 9:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;

2 for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.

3 Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready;

Paul wants them to get ready to send this collection to those who are really in need.

Acts 11:27-30 (NKJV)

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 instructions about helping the poor ... especially those of the household of faith. Paul knew that ... he was encouraging the brethren to give to those who had real needs. Showing love to the brethren. (Famine ... similar to hurricane impact perhaps?)

Another example of a scripture used and abused.

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 (NKJV)

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.

This verse is usually applied to the need for regular giving ... to the church.

But: Not collecting for the ministers ... or the church ... or its leadership. It's not a collection for Paul.

It's for the saints ... at Jerusalem ... in their distress.

Once Paul had called into Corinth ... and taken charge of the collection ... and gone on his journey ... there would be no further need of any more collections?

So. You can't use this to teach "you must give regularly to this church and we'll take up an offering every Sunday".

Romans 15:22-28 (NKJV)

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 (where Corinth was) 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 arranging for support for poor church members. What about Paul looking after himself? Almost silent! He often worked and paid his own way. Very rare to see Paul looking after Paul.

A very popular scripture ... quoted out of context ... but used to encourage high level of giving is:

Luke 6:38 (NKJV)

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 is extremely popular ... it often appears on letters seeking donations. Give ... and if you want a lot back ... give big!

But ... actually ... it says nothing here about money. There are many things we can give ... comfort ... encouragement ... mercy ... forgiveness ... moral support.

Again. It says nothing here about giving to a church or TV evangelist.

The teaching is taking the verse out of context. Jesus is in the middle of a long explanation ... from several verses earlier ... about how to live the Christian life.

Context.

Luke 6:35-37 (NKJV)

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.

Love ... do good ... give mercy ... give forgiveness.

You're going to get back what you give.

If you're merciful ... quick to forgive ... don't hold grudges ... aren't self-righteous ... judgmental ... great: you'll receive the same!

It's good advice for us to judge fairly and honestly ... recognise human nature ... not be too quick to condemn. We'll all need mercy and understanding in due course.

Matthew 7:1-2 (NKJV)

1 **“Judge not, that you be not judged.**

2 **For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.**

We will be judged by the same measure.

So ... in Luke 6:38 Jesus hasn't jumped from talking about how to live with people ... to suddenly ... and out of context ... talking about money.

It's wrong of pulpit-pimps to quote Luke 6:38 as a guarantee that you'll be financially blessed once you've sent in your generous offering to this ministry.

Remember the warning of Peter. It was necessary.

1 Peter 5:1-4 (NKJV)

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, serving 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 (NLT)

2 **Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—*not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God.***

Another popular scripture to encourage generous giving is:

Mark 10:28-30 (NKJV)

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 blessing.

Many TV evangelists use this scripture to promise 100 fold blessing “once you give generously to this ministry”.

Jesus certainly promised 100 fold ... it looks like it’s in terms to relationships ... hospitality ... persecutions(!) ... eternal life.

That’s the result of giving up our own ways and committing to follow Jesus.

It doesn’t say anything here about giving financial offering to a wealthy TV evangelist or rich minister.

And ... mathematically ... the so-called 100 fold return is a nonsense.

Give \$1 → \$100
Give that \$100 → \$10,000
Give that \$10,000 → \$1M
Give that \$1M → \$100M
Give that \$100M → \$10B
Give that \$10B → \$1 Trillion
Give that \$1 Trillion → \$100 Trillion

So ... all the brethren who started with \$1 could look forward to getting \$100 Trillion?

Just a gimmick. To get gullible people to send in their cash ... and somehow hope they’ll be miraculously prospered.

Here’s an example:

Dear Friend,

Plant your seed of faith during a famine, and the rest of the world thinks you’re crazy! The ground is dry, and nothing can grow ...

But when it's a seed planted in obedience to God's command, the dry ground and circumstances of famine mean nothing, because He will bless you!

It happened to Isaac in the Old Testament. In a dry season (a famine of months with no rain), God promised him if he would just sow a seed, he would experience an abundant harvest –

In Genesis 26:12, we read that Isaac obeyed God: "Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him."

***He sowed the last of his seed into land which looked, to the human eye, so dry and parched that NOTHING could take root there ...
... and the Bible says his harvest was 100 TIMES what he planted!!!***

Sow your seed of faith in the fertile soil of xxx today, helping me reach a lost and hurting world with the good news of Jesus Christ through our xxx television ministry and claim God's promise for your 100-fold blessing!!

The only thing that can hold you back from receiving this 100-fold blessing is if you let FEAR stand between you and obedience.

Isaac knew his family would starve if he cast the last of the seed on dry desert ground - but rather than FEAR the future, he chose to TRUST in God, and his faith was rewarded 100-fold.

You can look at your parched circumstances and say, "I can't afford to sow a seed of faith," and close your hand to God ... but that fear of the future will deprive you of the blessing God wants to give you.

Don't choose fear over faith. Sow your seed now!

In my powerful book you will read:

- *How to move from shortage to surplus.*
- *How to reap a harvest - even in a famine!*
- *How to live in endless abundance.*
- *And much, much more!*

When you give online, you will see the 100-Fold Blessing Form as well. This is a place for you to write out the sum total of all your indebtedness, every debt you want to see paid off, and then calculate what 1 percent of that would be.

Sow a seed of 1 percent of your total indebtedness, and I am going to believe with you for a 100-fold harvest which will allow you to completely pay off every debt!

God has appointed me to guide you on the way to victorious living, and this message of the 100-fold blessing is critical.

I will pray with you for a 100-fold harvest!

Compare that to Jesus' ministry.

Mark 10:17-22 (NKJV)

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,' 'Honour 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. **(Or rather ... the possessions had him)**

Give to the poor ... not to Jesus.

Compare that to some Church of God groups ... “sell your assets and give it to me!”

When Judas rushed out at the last Passover ... most disciples thought he'd gone out to give to the poor ... because he had the treasury box. (Jesus must have been quite commonly ... “giving to the poor”).

Neither Jesus nor Paul nor Peter leant on people ... twisted arms and bullied them to give money. None promised people financial miracles ... provided they “got theirs”.

It's unfortunate that money drives so many bad behaviours ... including among religious people.

So all of us need to be alert. It's right and good to be generous ... and help others where we can. Equally ... the workman is indeed worthy of his hire and we should recognise that.

But religion is **BIG BUSINESS**. \$Billions change hands. A number of people are savage wolves.

So. Watch out. If you're happy with what you see ... great. But ... be alert to financial manipulation ... under pressure ... or those who work on our human nature (such as covetousness) ... promising us great blessings if we contribute to their next Rolls Royce!

Forewarned is forearmed. So let's be very careful with our money.