

Give Till It Hurts?

By Steve Higginbotham

You've probably heard the story about a man who had just purchased a brand new Mercedes-Benz automobile and while he was driving home, he lost control of his car. His new car rolled three times, fortunately throwing him from the wreckage just before the car plummeted several hundred feet over a cliff. As the regained consciousness, others arrived on the scene to give him aid. The driver looked over the cliff and said, "Oh no, my brand new Mercedes!" At that point, a man who was giving him first aid said, "Mister, that's the least of your worries. You can always get a new car. You're just lucky you're alive. You haven't seemed to notice that your left arm has been crushed in the accident." To which the man said, "Oh no, my Rolex!"

Ok, so the above story is not true, but only a caricature of the attitudes some people have toward wealth and possessions. As Americans, we have been blessed with so much prosperity, yet we remain unsatisfied. We have so many hi-tech gadgets that make our lives easier, yet we remain unfulfilled. We have the money to "do" and to "have," yet we remain unhappy. Regardless of how much we have, our thirst is never quenched. We want more and more!

However, running counter to this cultural mind set are the commandments of our Lord who said to be content with food and clothing (1 Timothy 6:8); to be rich in good works, ready and willing to share (1 Timothy 6:17); and not to fall in love with money (1 Timothy 6:10). We're warned against covetousness and greed, yet people never see themselves as guilty. Since we seem to have a blind spot in this area, how can I determine whether I am greedy or covetous?

I think a good illustration is seen in the book of Haggai. The Lord asked the people if it was good that they had their paneled houses while the temple of God laid in ruins? In other words, when we have everything we need and nearly everything we could possibly want and the Lord's work suffers, something is wrong. Priorities need to be changed. Budgets need to be re-evaluated. And emphasis needs to be shifted from self to the Lord.

I've heard people to attempt to affect greater giving to God by saying, "Give till it hurts." But I don't know about that. God loves and wants us to give "cheerfully" (Greek - hilaros, from which we get our English word, hilarious). Serving the Lord shouldn't be a pain, but a delight! God doesn't take pleasure in painful giving, but in "hilarious" giving.

The way some of us give may indeed be hilarious, but not for the right reasons. It must be a "funny" thing to God to watch us lavish upon ourselves the world's finest, but have little more than crumbs to give to Him. Listen, be aware of subtleness of greed in your life. Don't let the Lord's work suffer when you live in luxury. Periodically, re-evaluate your giving to God and give in such a way that your giving is "hilarious" for all the right reasons.