

A Challenge

Having sat in elders' meetings as a preacher for several years and now having sat in them as an elder myself for nearly two years, I have experienced many joyful discussions as well as many that are heart-wrenching in nature. Among the most difficult to hear are those that focus on the church's finances, particularly when they are not as they need to be. Sadly, we had to broach this subject in our most recent elders' meeting.

On the surface, economics is a fairly simple study. One facet of it maintains that if your expenses exceed your income, in order to stay afloat you can either increase your income, decrease your expenses or do both. In a business as well as a personal context, it's reasonably easy to find ways to cut costs. However, in church business, talk of cutting costs takes on a very personal tone. Overhead such as building payments, property maintenance and insurance are pretty much fixed expenses. That being the case, the elders have to determine what is expendable and generally that means decreasing funding for mission work and the local spreading of the Gospel. Then the burning question becomes, "Who (or what) shall we cut?" When a congregation supports nothing but spiritually profitable works such as we do, that question demands a Solomon at his wisest to answer. Which of the works that we currently support would you want to eliminate? Which of the people involved in these works would you like to tell that we're defunding them?

The dilemma is obvious but the answer is just as obvious. While we are not in a position to take on additional works at this time, we must do whatever it takes that is scriptural to increase the weekly contribution and maintain the commitments we have made to the current works.

At present we find ourselves running behind a little more than \$300 per week. By my count we have around 80 families who attend here on a regular basis. Do you realize that with that number a mere \$4 per week increase per family would get us where we need to be? Let's just round that up to \$5 per week so we'll have a surplus. Who among us can't find \$5 per week in our personal budgets to take from spending on earthly pleasures and devote to spiritual needs?

If you've already had to do some financial belt tightening, what did you sit down and decide to cut out? Why did you select those items in particular? Suppose that your cost cutting put your expenses dead even with your income. Now suppose that tomorrow your employer said he was going to decrease your income by \$5 per week. Still wanting to balance your personal budget, what else would you cut out? If you can think about that then you can think about where you can find this extra money for the Lord's work each week. Be it a daily soft drink, a weekly meal out or just some of those impulse buys in which we all engage from time to time, the money is there somewhere.

This is getting really personal, isn't it? Did you notice though that not one time have I accused any member here of not giving enough? A discussion of how we should give is the stuff of another article. I'm actually assuming that everyone here is already giving sacrificially. The point is that there are times when it takes just a little bit more to carry out the work of the Lord and this is one of those times. Just like that woman in Jesus' parable searched diligently for a lost piece of silver (Luke 15:8), we would all do well to look a little more closely at our finances to see what we can do to make sure that the works we support here go on.

God's people have always been known for their generosity. We've seen this evidenced many times in this congregation. While the denominational world resorts to car washes, bake sales, spaghetti suppers, and other unscriptural efforts to raise money, the Lord's church relies on that simple yet powerful command, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (1 Corinthians 16:2). I believe it's because of our devotion to that single scriptural method of supporting the work of the church that Christians are so generous.

Times are tough, but souls are still being lost at an alarming rate every day. Maybe we can't do everything to get the Gospel to everyone, but we can do something to get the message to some. We cannot afford to go backward by cutting out vital works in the Lord's kingdom. May each of us this week examine ourselves and our finances and redouble our efforts to ensure that we continue to move ahead in the work of the Lord in 2010.

Mike Gifford