

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(August 9, 2009)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Operation Liberation!

The Point

(Galatians 6:6-10)

Study #14

Introduction: Returns on investments...

Investing money in the stock market has always carried with it a certain amount of risk. Those who invest know that there will be bull-ish “up” years and bear-ish “down” years.

Conservative investors seek to minimize that risk by putting money in blue chip stocks. Or they may buy shares of mutual funds that spread the risk over hundreds of individual stocks. But, as the last couple of years have shown, investing in the stock market still carries plenty of risk.

The savviest investors have lost - and most have lost big - since the downturn of 2007. It doesn't matter whether we're talking about the Dow Jones Industrials, the Nasdaq, or the S&P 500. It has been a bumpy ride for just about everybody.

Wisdom would say that it is better to invest in something than to put money under the mattress, but for many people, the mattress has been looking better and better.

Now I still believe in making financial investments. I'm careful about it and I always consult an advisor or two prior to making any changes. But there has been a change in my perspective on investing over the past twenty months.

I've come to have a certain wide-eyed realism (skepticism?) about investments that was not in place before.

(Contrary to beliefs popular among the youth) I wasn't around when the market crashed in the late 1920's. And Kathy and I hadn't started saving much when the market had a major correction in the mid 1980's. We saw everything go down and then come right back up after 9/11. But the current downturn is different. It's more serious. It's more sobering.

I've now come to REALLY believe that investing in the stock markets is an iffy thing. There are no sure winners. (One of the stocks I used to own was General Motors...) The markets are unpredictable.

They may very well be the best bets we have for investing for retirement, but most of us are now impressed that, when it comes to investing, there are no guarantees.

Today, in our next to the last study in Paul's letter to the Galatians, we turn our attention to investments. Now Paul's not going to tell us in which mutual fund to put our nest egg. But he does have sage advice about loooooong-term investing we'd do well to heed.

Here at the end, Paul wants to convince us that the investing that makes the most sense is investing in the work of God and in people who have been made in the image of God.

He wants us to realize that life presents us with a divine opportunity to make a difference; that the greatest investment we can make is to give the love we have received from God to others; that we have received so that we can give; that people are hungry and thirsty for a taste of God's love - and, guess what? - Tag! We're it!

And he also wants to assure us that this kind of investing is the one investing that is guaranteed to have really, really high rates of return over the very, very long haul.

Over the past couple of weeks we have been dwelling on the power and the beauty of a Spirit-led life. Walking with the Spirit of God is all about grace and faith and living on the basis of God's wonderful promises.

Walking by the Spirit results in the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control - stuff like that.

Here, in the last chapter of this letter, Paul lines out one final aspect of walking with the Spirit. He tells us that people who walk by the Spirit are to be generous.

I'd like to consider the theme of financial generosity this morning on two levels. First, we'll consider the immediate application Paul has in mind.

The Ministry of Generosity (v. 6)

[6] The one who is taught¹ the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.

Christian “sharing”

Context

Clearly, Paul is thinking about a local church context. A church setting like Northwest.

In local churches around the world and through the centuries, certain people have been set apart for the ministry of the Word and for other formal ministries. From the very beginning, the church considered the ministry of the Word critical to the health of the church, so congregations have paid these servant/leaders for their ministry.

Jesus legitimized this practice when He told His disciples that the laborer was worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7). In another place, Paul bluntly taught that those who preach the Gospel should get their living from the Gospel.

In our church there are those who have been set apart for the ministry of the Word and for other, more general ministries. The congregation has seen fit to pay money to free those people up for those ministries.

¹ The Greek word translated “the one who is taught” is directly related to our English word “catechism.” The idea is that of a measured, intentional, teaching process designed to equip a Christian with essential biblical and doctrinal knowledge.

But I want to be quick to point out that the word Paul uses when urging the exchange of cold, hard cash for ministry is one of the warmest words in the Greek language.

Koinonia

The word he uses is koinonia. We often translate it “fellowship.”

Koinonia can be used of any close relationship in which there is **partnership** (as in Luke 5:10, Peter’s fishing buddies) or **intimacy** (as in a husband-wife relationship, Malachi 2:14).²

Koinonia speaks of shared life. The reference may be to the sharing of **spiritual riches** (Philippians 1:5) or the sharing of **material riches** (2 Corinthians 8 and 9).

Here in Galatians 6, Paul is urging that Christians who benefit from the consistent teaching and shepherding ministry of those who labor in the congregation should be supported, materially.³

And this is nothing more than an outworking of the principle of **reciprocity**.

The Principle of Reciprocity

Each person in a church is to “*share all good things*” with the ones who bring the Word of God on a consistent basis or who (more broadly) minister to the spiritual needs of the congregation.⁴

² The root meaning is “to have something in common,” and when the early church in Jerusalem was described as growing together spiritually, temporarily living in a near communal condition, and having impact on greater metropolitan Jerusalem, the word Luke (the author of Acts) used to describe their interaction was “koinonia” (Acts 2:42).

³ We should note that a paid teaching and preaching position developed very early in the church (probably even in Acts 6).

⁴ An extended application of this verse would probably include the need for Christians in 2009 to support other ministries which bring spiritual benefit, radio and TV shows, publications, etc...

The church member benefits spiritually from the teaching ministry of a pastor or other leader, and should reciprocate by paying supporting that person.

Now, the financial arrangement between the church and a teaching leader or other paid staff is a fragile arrangement that the enemy would love to exploit. You may be aware of situations where it has been exploited.

The arrangement can certainly be poisoned through a pastor's greed or lack of integrity. And on the other hand, a church might withhold financially from a pastor, or seek to manipulate with money.

It is a tragedy when either of these things happens. It presents an awful testimony to a watching community and it always leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of those who see it happening.

Money paid to staff in a local church is to be extended in grace and it is to be received with gratitude.⁵

I am glad to say that over the years, Northwest Community Church has been fair and generous when it comes to "sharing" with the staff, and I want to commend you for that.

From a financial standpoint, our fellowship/koinonia has been sweet. And I would ask you to pray that God would continue to protect our church from the ugly abuses that have sometimes occurred in this regard.

Now that is the immediate and direct application of Paul's words in Galatians 6:6. But his comments about the need for koinonia between pastor and congregation make me think of money, stewardship, and generosity more broadly.

As you know, we don't talk about money a whole lot here at Northwest. But when the subject appears in the text, as it does here, I practically feel invited to address it - so I will!

Paul has cracked the door to the subject of money and I'll just swing that door all the way open for a couple of minutes this morning.

⁵ Note, too, that this is a right which may be respectfully declined, as Paul did.

To begin with, it wouldn't be fair to address the theme of money without highlighting the dangers money brings with it. The Bible has a lot to say about money's dangers. In fact, I sometimes wonder if money ought to carry a warning sign: Owner beware!!

More on Generosity

The dangers of money

The apostle Paul said that the love of money can shipwreck souls (1 Timothy 6:9-10)⁶ and James tells us that the lure of money can misshape values (James 2:1-4).⁷

Jesus said that the lust for money will cause some people to fall away from following Him (Matthew 13)⁸. And on another occasion He said that money will force a choice of Lordship for the believer. (*Matthew 6:24*) **No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.**)

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon tells us that riches are slippery and tough to hold on to, so *[23:4-5]* **Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.**⁹

⁶ *But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.*

⁷ *My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' and you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?*

⁸ The parable of the sower and the soils includes these words about the man who falls away from the faith, *And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

⁹ There is an ancient Roman fable told by the satirist, Lucian (first century AD), about wealth. In the fable, Wealth (personified) **comes** to someone in the form of

Contrary to popular opinion, the Bible never says that money is the root of all evil.

BUT IT DOES SAY that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil and that some, by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves with many a pang! (1 Timothy 6:10)

So money comes with some attendant dangers. At the same time, when properly handled by a wise Christian who is walking with the Spirit, money brings tremendous opportunities and opens many doors.

The opportunities money affords

When accompanied by an honest, generous heart, money will provide a way for you to demonstrate a God-honoring **integrity**.

Generosity with your financial resources will provide a way to **show the love of Christ** to people who are in desperate situations.

Christians who are generous with their worldly possessions and with their money are able to **resource the work of God on earth**.

And generosity aids spiritual growth by being **the drain plug to our greed!**

Sure, used improperly, money can do untold damage. But put to proper use by a God-honoring believer, money is a tremendous resource for good.

Now, I'll wrap up this part of the message by highlighting what I have come to believe are some of the essentials of growing in the grace of generosity.

Generosity's essentials

First, if you want to learn to imitate the giving heart of God, give **regularly**.

Paul told the Corinthians to put aside money at the first of every week (1 Corinthians 16). People I know who have become A+ givers give consistently. They may give weekly, every other week, or monthly. But they give with regularity. They have a plan and they stick to it. They give intentionally.

Second, give **cheerfully**. Listen to what may be some familiar words from the apostle Paul.

[2 Corinthians 9:7] Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

This brings to mind one of the few Dave Smith principles on giving. I don't have many, and haven't seen this list published anywhere, so I am going to feel free to refer to them as mine (but I really think they are Paul's). Ready? Here goes:

"Give what you want to give."

And, of course, its corollary: *Don't give what you don't want to give.*

See, God doesn't want His children grimacing at the thought of having to give money to support His work on earth! He wants us to give, jazzed at the thought that the money we give supports church ministries, funds cross-cultural missions, and feeds hungry people. Wow!

Thinking about giving in that light might just put a smile on your face. It might just turn you into a cheerful giver.

Third, give **sacrificially**.

Sometime soon, take a few minutes and read through 2 Corinthians, chapters 8 and 9 on your own. As you read it, recognize that Paul is writing to urge his readers to give generously to support the work of God. You will hear him commending a group of Christians who gave sacrificially.

You'll see that while it is true that God loves for us to give cheerfully He is also delighted when we give sacrificially.

an old man, weary, slowly, walking with a cane. However, in **going away**, Wealth finds strength and outstrips all of the birds in its speed of flight!

I am not one of those who subscribes to the idea that if you give \$100, God will see to it that you get \$1,000 back. I don't doubt that God can do that. And I know that He has done that with some people - so that they will be able to give even more!

But I do subscribe to the idea that if you give money to support the Lord's work or to provide for the needs of people, you will have less money to spend on yourself. I'm no mathematician, but I get that. And God loves it when we prove by our generosity that we are more concerned for His work and are more concerned to meet pressing needs in His Name than we are with our own comfort.

And **fourth** - oh, well, we'll get to that one later...

For now, jump on down to verse ten of Galatians 6 where we see that Paul has broadened the whole theme of generous living by telling us to do good, to care about people, to meet needs.

The Ministry of Care (v. 10)

Doing Good to Fellow Christians

[10] So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and ESPECIALLY TO THOSE WHO ARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE FAITH.

In a message recorded in Acts, chapter 10, the Apostle Peter said that Jesus went around "***doing good.***" - you know, stuff like casting out demons, healing the sick, feeding the hungry. Here, Paul says that Christians are to follow in Jesus' footsteps by going about doing good, too.¹⁰

Far from being an innocuous, milquetoast call to "*be nice,*" Paul's words here provide solid, strong direction for the energies of the Christian.

There are brothers and sisters in Christ who are in real need. Some of them are here in our church. You know some of them in other settings. And some of them are in far-flung places around the globe.

¹⁰ Check this out - ***[Titus 3:14] Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.***

These fellow-members of the family of God will benefit from your generosity. You will have fellowship (koinonia!) with them by meeting their material needs.

Over the years I have seen people in our church blessed with gifts as practical as groceries, cash, painted houses, appliance and automotive repair, and cars, given as an outworking of Paul's words here that we are to do good to those who are of the household of faith.

There is no end to the good that you might be able to do, the love you could show to those in the church as you open your eyes and ears to see and hear the needs all around you.

And if our generosity is to start with the household of faith, it is certainly not to end there. Paul says that we are to do good to everybody.

Doing Good to ALL People

[10] So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good TO ALL PEOPLE, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

One of the ways that the love of Jesus penetrates a culture is by the sincere love that Christians lavish on a needy world. And throughout the centuries, the church of Jesus Christ has historically "*done good.*"¹¹

Christians have built orphanages, hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. They have battled for prison reforms, child labor laws, safety in the workplace, and the abolition of slavery.

Today, we oppose the evil of discrimination. We affirm the value of life in the womb, life for the elderly and life for the infirm.

We build decent housing for the poor, deliver meals to shut-ins, and provide shelter for the homeless.

¹¹ Not perfectly, of course. There are plenty of warts and blemishes visible as we view the history of the church of Jesus. Yet it is also true that in substantial ways, Christianity has benefited the cultures where it has been introduced.

And this is an exciting season in the life of our church. You may have heard the buzz recently about the ministry that our college group has started called, “Bread and Water.”

For the last several weeks groups of them have been pooling their financial resources, bagging up breakfasts or lunches and feeding some of the 20,000 homeless people living in San Antonio - many of them living in camps within a few miles of our church.

Along with the food, our college students are distributing Bibles, collecting prayer requests and making friends. Wow!

I know that our Youth Pastor, Scott Kiolbassa, has a vision for seeing this “doing good” sort of service become a mark of the Youth Ministry.

Brothers and sisters, there is no end to the good we can do, the help we can provide, the benefits we can offer, the impact for God we can make - when we are walking by the Spirit and caring for people in need!¹²

Now, to this point, we have skipped the verses embedded in the middle of this passage. The time has now come to pay attention to them.

Paul speaks of a future “harvest” and “reaping” - and in so doing addresses a theme that appears over and over again in the New Testament.

There was a reference to it near the end of chapter 5, but here he comes right out and says it as clearly as it is said anywhere in Scripture.

He says what? He says that the way we conduct ourselves during this life, here and now, is shaping our eternal harvest.

¹² Granted, of course, there is the possibility that we might become tired in our “good-doing.” We might get used by others we are trying to help. We might not be thanked for services we render. And, there might be no reciprocity back towards us for the good that we do someone. We might lose heart in doing good, and Paul certainly knew firsthand that active service for the Lord is tiring! (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-29). That is why it is so important for us to keep an eternal perspective as we serve, remembering that we are ultimately serving Him - who knows how to reward His own!

The Law of the Harvest (vv. 7-9)

[7] Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. [9] Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

General Thoughts about Harvests

The self evident truth of “the Law of the Harvest” (think “cause and effect”) is so deeply ingrained in us that it is almost too self evident to remark upon - but you know I will. We know that we will reap what we have sown.

That is true in every arena of life.

- Agriculturally, the farmer harvests what he sows.
- In the educational world, our grades generally reflect the diligence of our study.
- Mechanically, if a car is not regularly serviced and kept in tune, generally speaking, its engine life will be shortened.

Well, what is true on farms and at schools and with cars, is also true in the spiritual realm.

What we sow in this life in terms of a generosity and care, we will reap when we stand in the presence of God!

Mocking God

To doubt for a moment that this is the case is, as Paul says, to turn up our nose, give an eye roll and mock God!

To believe, “*What I do in this life doesn’t really matter,*” or “*I can sin with impunity*” or “*God doesn’t really reward those who live for Him*” (see Hebrews 11:6 for that one), is to smirk at the Lord.

God will not reward but will judge the Christian who does not learn the grace of generosity! (No, God won't condemn a Christian to Hell. But He won't reward that Christian who doesn't keep in step with the Spirit by giving and caring).

The Law of the Harvest is one of the immutable Laws of God's universe. All the New Testament passages that speak about the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the passages that speak of rewards and lack of rewards¹³ give ample witness to the idea that faithfulness - or lack of it - in this life affects the harvest we will reap in the next life.

And now we arrive at that fourth "generosity essential" I told you earlier we'd come back to.

In addition to giving *regularly, cheerfully and sacrificially*, we are to give *expectantly*.

Living For a Rich Harvest before God

God will reward that Christian who invests his or her life in loving service to Him and in loving service to the people he or she knows. (see 2 Corinthians 9:6; Hebrews 11:6)

We are to give with a view to a harvest. Listen to these words from 2 Corinthians 9 - ***[6] Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.***

While, as I said a few minutes ago, God doesn't guarantee that He will repay *in kind* those who give money, He does promise that He will richly reward *in some way at some point* those who are generous in this life.

God wants you to enjoy a rich harvest. And, as Galatians 6:9 makes clear ("***.....while we have opportunity....***"), this earthly existence is the only opportunity we will ever have to sow seeds for that bountiful harvest. The open doors we have to be generous and caring won't remain open forever. So we must take advantage of those open doors we have now, NOW!

Robert Louis Stevenson didn't say it any better than Paul, but he may have said it more memorably. When speaking of the Law of the Harvest, Stevenson wrote, "*Everyone, soon or late, sits down to a banquet of consequences.*"

You and I are making the preparations for that meal today. We are sowing the seeds right now that will issue in a future harvest.

Conclusion:

So, what is the point of the whole church thing? It is to take church out of the church to a hurting world of found and lost people.

We are nearing the end of our worship service, but that end marks the beginning of our faith walk.

We have been blessed to be a blessing to others. We have received so that we can freely give.

That's the point!

***[15] Thanks be to God for His
indescribable gift!***

¹³ See Philippians 1:3, where Paul says that he lives in such a way, ***that I might win the prize***. See also 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5 and Romans 14 for major passages dealing with the Judgment seat of Christ.