

## **Jan 6, 2008 - "Who Brought the Pie?"**

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5

Series: "Check It Out!"

Would you stand with me as we read our message text for the morning? It is taken from 2 Corinthians 13:5. This is not only our text for today's message, but actually for the whole month of January. Let's read it together: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?"

According to Paul, some honest, periodic self-examination of our faith is a good thing. Faith is something that should be regularly tested, and verified, and proven. Why? Because we are all very capable of self-deception...pulling the wool over our own eyes.

This month, our message series is titled, "Check It Out!" We are going to be talking about one important way that we can "check out" and demonstrate the genuineness of our faith.

Now, the Bible actually identifies several different markers of true and genuine faith. For example, one key marker, according to Romans 8, is the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Another core marker of real faith, according to 1 John 3:14, is our love for other believers. And there are other key markers of genuine faith identified in Scripture, but the one we are going to talk about this month is one of the most practical and sometimes overlooked—money.

How we think and feel about money and material possessions...how we use and spend our money... all speaks volumes about the genuineness of our faith. So this month, we are each going to have an opportunity to do a little self-evaluation...to look at our faith and how it impacts our financial attitudes and habits...an opportunity to "check out" just who and what we really love and really worship.

And so, with that in mind, listen again to 2 Corinthians 13:5, this time from The Message Paraphrase: "Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it."

Last week, I was talking with Steve Osborne, our worship leader. We were working out plans for today's service. I summarized what I wanted to say today and the rest of the month. His response was, "Isn't that a little risky?" He was referring to the fact that we recently adopted a new, significantly increased annual budget, and along with that, are currently in the process of trying to raise a \$130,000 to replenish our GAP Fund. Steve understands, as I do, that talking about money can be a highly sensitive and touchy thing

for many people.

And so, my answer to Steve's question was "Yes, it is risky. There may be a few who won't like it, even some who will be offended." But I'm convinced that that if our motives and intentions are right in God's eyes, then talking about money will be a good and positive thing for our church family. So, a little bit of open, full disclosure is in order this morning.

There are four reasons why we are talking about money this month. The first reason is an educational reason. We need to talk about money and material possessions because the Bible talks about money and material possessions...a lot! There are over 2,350 verses of Scripture that deal with money and material possessions.

In the New Testament, Jesus talks more about money than almost any other subject. For example, He says more about money and material possessions than he says about the subjects of heaven and hell combined. Since money and material possessions have such a significant place in Scripture, it makes sense that we need to have a solid grasp and understanding of what the Bible actually says on these matters.

The second reason we are talking about money is a spiritual reason. According to the Bible there is a direct link between our spiritual lives and our financial lives. Quite honestly, some of us here have probably succeeded for many years in a very common form of spiritual self-deception. We have convinced ourselves that our faith in Christ has no real implications for our finances. We have kept faith and money separated and divorced. We have decided that Jesus was wrong when he said that you cannot love and serve both God and Money.

In the Bible this kind of mixed thinking and behavior is called "idolatry" and is described as a form of spiritual adultery and unfaithfulness. Few things today compete as successfully with our love for God as our love for money. It is something we need to talk about.

A third reason we need to talk about money is a very practical reason. You see, to a very large extent, our lives revolve around money—how we earn it, how we spend it, how we save it, how we invest it. A lot of us here spend forty to sixty hours every week just to earn money. We spend several hours each week spending money—shopping or paying bills.

This past week I spent several hours looking at my retirement investments and another two hours meeting with my financial advisor. In a couple of months I'll spend two or three days working on my taxes. Money plays a central role in our lives. And if we don't learn how to use it properly and manage it well, our lives will be filled with frustration, and stress, and turmoil.

One final reason that we need to talk about money...and this is something personalized to our own church family...it is an identity reason. As a church we have built our congregational identity—our vision and mission—around two things: loving God and loving people. And we understand love as not simply something you feel, but something you do.

Now, if the Bible teaches us anything about real love, it teaches us that real love gives. Love gives time, energy, concern...and yes, love gives money. It would be sheer foolishness for us to identify ourselves as “a people of love on a mission of love” without realizing that such a statement has some very clear financial implications. And so, as you can see, there are many good Biblical and practical reasons for us to talk about money.

Now what we want to “check out” and examine this week is the foundational, central, and critical issue of our thinking about money and material things. I want to introduce it with a video clip, one that I know many of you have already seen a few months back. But it will be worthwhile seeing it again. (Video Clip: “Who Brought the Pie?”)

According to Biblical teaching, God lays ownership claim to all things. The Bible says that by virtue of creation, everything and everyone belongs to God. It’s God’s pie... the whole thing. Deuteronomy 10:14 (NIV) says: “To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.” And in Psalm 24:1 (NIV) we read: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”

There are many other passages that present this same truth, often revealing specific items that God owns—land, animals, silver, gold. And so, one of the central truths of the Bible that we each must face is the reality of God’s ownership of all things. He made and brought the pie. It’s His. But quite honestly, that is a truth that many of us have yet to fully accept and embrace.

Now, this reality of God’s ownership of all things becomes even more intensified in Scripture. For not only is his claim of ownership based on his original creation of the world, but, as Christians, it is also based upon his recreation of our hearts and lives. That is why Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV), “You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” Because of Calvary, we no longer belong to ourselves. We belong to God.

Jesus was very clear in his teaching. To follow him and be his disciple, he said, was to make him Lord and Master of our lives... to fully commit everything we are and everything we have to him. In Luke 14:33 (NASB) Jesus says, “So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.” To wear the name Christian, means that we fully agree that “It is God’s pie.” Not ours.

But if God is the “Owner,” then what are we? Well, according to the Bible, we are the managers. While it is God’s pie, he willingly shares it with us. In fact, he puts the pie in our hands and says, “Here, you cut it up. You pass out the pieces.”

On the one hand, God delights to share His world and His wealth with us. But on the other hand, he wants us to oversee and manage what he gives us with great care...to use it wisely and in His best interest. He generously places his assets in our hands, but he also reminds us that their will be a final audit.

Please understand. God certainly wants our needs for food, and shelter, and other essentials to be met. But that doesn’t mean he wants us to devour the whole pie on ourselves. And more importantly, He doesn’t want us to forget who provided the pie in the first place.

Now, if you “buy-in” to what the Bible says about God’s ownership of all things and you acknowledge your role as a manager of his assets...if you honestly believe that it really is His pie, and you have been given the responsible of cutting and dividing it up, then every financial decision you make becomes a spiritual decision...a faith decision.

So, one of the key questions, then, that we managerial “pie-cutters” must ask is “Which piece does God get?” From a great many people, God never gets a piece of his own pie. And if he does, it tends to be a very small piece...usually what is left over. But God makes it clear that when we start cutting the pie, he expects to receive the first and best piece of the pie. He wants his love and generosity to be recognized, appreciated, and reciprocated ...something that is a very good thing. So when we start cutting the pie that God has put in our hands, we are to generously give back the first piece to him...not because he needs it, but because we need to give it.

This principle of “first and best” giving is often emphasized in Scripture. In Genesis 4 we read about Cain and Abel, who both brought offerings to God. We are told that “the Lord was pleased with Abel and his offering...” Why? Because it was a “first and best” offering. Genesis 4:4 (TEV) – “Then Abel brought the first lamb born to one of his sheep, killed it, and gave the best parts of it as an offering”

After the Exodus from Egypt the Israelites were taught to bring the first and best of each year’s harvest to the house of the Lord. And in Proverbs 3:9 (NLT) we read: “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything your land produces.”

Now folks, this “first and best” principle of giving, that we see in Scripture, is directly tied to the truth of God’s ownership of all things. He brought the pie. It’s his. And we acknowledge this when we cut up the pie and make sure he gets the first and best piece. “First and best” giving, then, will be joyful, cheerful, love-driven, manager giving...

not obligatory, duty-driven, guilt-prodded, owner giving

Okay, its “check-up” time. And today we are going to check our grip. I’m going to ask you to trust me for a few minutes. Would you reach in your pocket or your purse and take out your wallet or your checkbook. Would you take that out and just physically hold it in your hand. Just for a moment. You can caress it if you need to.

What you hold in your hand is the primary temple of worship for most Americans these days. Most people in our day believe this little temple contains the real source of happiness and success. What you hold in your hand is the place where the god Mammon lives.

Now, don’t misunderstand. I’m not saying that money is inherently bad. It’s not. Money is a good thing, as long as we don’t turn it into our god. But the truth is, that as fallen creatures, we are tempted to worship and serve money and material things. We’re tempted to give money the power to make us feel secure, and successful, and valuable. And that is why it becomes a very hard thing to surrender control of this little piece of leather.

So let’s check it out. Take what you have in your hand and give it to another person around you...not another family member. Okay, now, we’re going to take a special offering, and I want you to give like you’ve always dreamed of giving, your whole life long.

No, just kidding. We’re not going to do that. Go ahead and give it all back. Breathe a big sigh of relief. Put it somewhere safe. You get the point. Most of us fell very uncomfortable putting our money into someone else’s hands. Most of us hold on very tightly to our money and material possessions. We keep a very tight grip. And that’s why one of the most important lessons that every Christian must learn is how to hold money and material things with a loose grip.

Jesus can teach us a few things about keeping a loose grip. In Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV) we read: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!”

With Jesus, the issue wasn’t money or material wealth, but something far more important and valuable—all of the trappings of Godhood. Jesus was fully God, but he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped... something to be gripped tightly. Rather, in humility, he gave up all the trappings of deity for you and me...he kept a loose grip.

Now, if we are honest, most of us will have to admit that we keep a pretty tight grip on our money and material possessions. We consider them ours. We see ourselves as the owners. And so I have a couple of things for you to do this week that will help you loosen up your grip a little.

Your first assignment is to spend the week reminding yourself of God's ownership. When you get into your car this morning to head back home, say to yourself and to each other, "This is not my car. This is not our car, this is God's car. Our job is to use it for him." Do this every time you get in your car this week. When you walk into your house today, say to yourself and to each other, "This is not our house. This is God's house. How can we use it for Him?" This week, do this every time you walk in your house. You can do the same thing when you open the fridge, when you turn on the TV, when you sit down at your computer. I think you get the picture.

Your second assignment for the week is to begin reading *The Treasure Principle*. *The Treasure Principle* is a popular book written by Randy Alcorn. It is a short book—only six chapters. It is intended to help Christians discover the secret of "joyful giving." While our message series this month is not built upon this book, the book will help reinforce and expanded the Biblical truths we will be looking at. I've read it several times. It is a great book, and you can have it for free. All you have to do is promise to read it over the next three weeks. I hope you will pick one up as you leave this morning.

Two simple assignments. They're not hard. They won't take up that much time. But they can do something very important and powerful in your life. They can help you keep your thinking straight about who bought the pie.

Let's pray...