

Question: “What are your comments on the new electronic collection plate?”

Answer:

As with every question we address in this column, let us investigate this one also with an open Bible. The Wall Street Journal reported recently, “In an effort to enhance donations to the offering plate, hundreds of churches are taking Sunday-morning donations automatically out of the congregants’ bank accounts.” Some are calling it “Divine accounting.” It is being touted as “a new way of settling your debt with God.”

There are several things about this new practice and what others are saying about it, that are highly questionable and entirely out of line when compared to the word of God.

In New Testament times, by order of the apostles...

1) Collections (offerings) were made on the first day of the week.

Why is that so? We may not know all the reasons, but the most obvious is that it was a time when all the saints were together in one place (1Co 11:18, 20; 16:1-2). More importantly, though, it was a practice ordered by the apostles. The electronic collection plate, on the other hand, makes it possible to transfer funds at any time. That may be a convenient way of doing things, but it certainly does not match the apostolic pattern. Even if you could set it up to deduct your funds on Sunday, it still misses another important detail...

2) Collections (offerings) were a collective act of service to Christ.

Individual members contributed jointly on the same day and in the same place. For example, notice how it was done in the Jerusalem church before the dispersion, “...the proceeds of the things that were sold, (were) laid at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (Ac 4:34-35). The church in Corinth, when following Paul’s order (1Co 16:1-2), caused other Christians to “glorify God for the obedience of (their) confession to the gospel of Christ” (2Co 9:13). Worship activities authorized by God are meant to encourage the sincere and honest participation of every member. But when such activities, including our contribution, are shifted into a private setting, the temptation to deceive others increases dramatically (Ac 5:1-11).

3) Collections (offerings) were not a way of settling a debt with God.

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings...rivers of oil...my first born...for the sin of my body? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:6-8).

Although stated to the Israelites in Old Testament times, it nevertheless holds true today. The collection or offering was not represented by the apostles as an attempt to “settle up” with God. If our lives are out of harmony with His will, putting our money into collection plate will not restore us to His favor. Peter once told a man who thought money would satisfy God, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money” (Ac 8:20)! The debt mankind owes God was paid by Jesus Christ. The debt was sin, and the price paid for it was the blood of Christ (Ro 5:6-10). In return, God calls us to believe, repent and obey His word. In short, to completely resign our wills to the will of His Son (Mt 11:28-30). We will not placate Him for our sins by throwing a little money His way.

Finally, with respect to the “electronic” collection plate, many are concerned about the stigma of letting the “Sunday” collection plate pass them by without putting anything into it. The solution to this dilemma, for some, is to affix an empty envelope with a special sticker indicating they have already given. I wonder if that would work for other congregational activities. Why not send the elders a letter saying that you will not be at services Sunday because you did your singing, praying and Bible study during the week? Remember to document the time and place! Now that reasoning could not stand the light of Biblical review, could it? Wonder why so many see it as logical to treat the collection in this manner? Could it be that people are more concerned with convenience than with obeying the word of the Lord?

The prophet Samuel spoke these words to King Saul, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.” Saul replied, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (1Sam 15:22, 24). Will you float along the stream of human innovation, or will you, rather, fix your eyes and heart upon New Testament teaching?

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