

Promises to God, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 23051023  
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 and Matthew 22:34-46  
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It's difficult to be a messiah. Everybody is out to get the one who is faithful to God. When Jesus silenced one threatened group by his wise answer, another group tried to trap him with a different question. He silenced the groups of Herodians and Pharisees when they asked him about paying taxes to the emperor. Then, he silenced the Sadducees when they tried to trick him with a question on the resurrection. Then, as we heard in today's scripture, he silenced the Pharisees when they set him up with a dilemma about law. They asked Jesus which law was most important. He said to them, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus was not creating a new theology here; he was merely quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." It matters little that Jesus changed "might" to "mind." Mark's quotation of the same incident includes all four: heart, soul, mind, and strength.<sup>2</sup> The Greeks valued the mind greatly, so Mark thought it important to include it in his quote of Jesus. Jesus' words simply mean that we are to love God with the totality of our being: everything we are and have.

When we joined church, we confessed our faith publicly. We promised that we believe Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God and that we accept him as our savior. Our covenant or "promise" to God is a response to God's covenant of love to us. We promise to give our whole selves to God because God first promises to love us. Our promise to God means loving God with everything we have and are.

Our Promise to God means loving and caring for God's creation. This is the meaning of the term "stewardship." To be a steward means to be a Christian manager of what God has given to us: our time, our talents, and our treasures. It means we promise to love God with all we are and all we have. It is to say, we will love God with our bodies, our minds, our clothes, our daily planners, our checkbooks, our bank accounts, our electronic funds transfers, and even our cars.

What kind of a revolution would it start if we drove our cars as though they were dedicated to God? If our cars were God's cars, and they had "God is love" written all over them, would we cut in on those other drivers as readily? Would we race across the intersection trying to beat the other drivers if our car said, "God loves you"?

If at the top of each page of our daily planner we had written the words, "This is God's time, not mine to squander," what would our daily schedules look like?

If we had "This money is borrowed from God" printed on our checks, what would we buy with them? We are to respond to God's promises to us by managing all that we are and have as Christian managers.

To be a steward is to be a giver. A Christian is a giver of time, talents and money, because we know what God has given to us. We are givers because that is what it means to be human. We are made in God's image, and God is a giver! We are not authentic humans until we give.

When the church reminds people about giving money, time, and abilities back to God, people

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:37

<sup>2</sup> Mark 12:29

have one of two reactions. There are those who are uncomfortable because giving is not easy for them. They are takers. They have already taken from God and have difficulty giving back to God or to others in kindness. "I'm not going back to church because they pass the offering plate, and I'm not getting anything in return for what I've given." They deny their very nature as human beings.

On the other hand, there are those who are joyous when the church talks about giving because they welcome the opportunity to fulfill their promise to God. They are responding to their very basic human nature as givers.

We are givers, because we know what kind of world God and we want this to be! I want to live in a world of givers. It is much nicer to be with givers than takers.

To be a giver does not make worldly sense. We conserve our resources. We keep them to ourselves because we think we may need them some day. In fact, the world even calls people who are kind and giving "foolish."

That is not the way it was with Jesus. Jesus used the word "fool" as a description of misdirected people more often than he used the word "sinner." Those who didn't give, those who wouldn't help build a kind and caring world for God were the ones Jesus called "fools."

Doesn't it feel good to spend money on a child or grandchild? To watch them smile when we buy them a hamburger, or candy, or a winter coat? Why does it feel good to give our money away like that? We are responding to our basic human nature of being created in God's image as givers.

Love the Lord your God with everything you are and have, and you will find life to be very, very good.