

An Exercise To Discern Both Good and Evil (Hebrews 5:14)

“I Haven’t Prospered This Week”

Scenario:

A new family has begun to assemble with the congregation. There is a man, his wife, and two young children. The man and his wife profess to be Christians and from all they have said, appear to have properly obeyed the Gospel. They come each Sunday and are interested in being part of the congregation. They appear to have a lot to learn, but seem eager to do so. As studies occur with them, they are willing to make corrections where needed. As a couple of months pass, some brethren have noticed that the man and woman partake of the Lord’s Supper weekly. However, in a manner that is impossible for some not to see, they choose not to give. This has troubled a few of the brethren. Apart from each other, some have approached the man and asked if there is a reason he does not give on the first day of the week.

Statement That Arises From Our Scenario:

In separate discussions, the man tells multiple brethren this: “I do not give on a weekly basis because I do not believe such is required. I am paid monthly. I haven’t prospered this week. I choose to give as I have prospered. The word prosper means to be successful. I am not successful. Just because I don’t give on Sunday that doesn’t mean I don’t spend money on the Lord’s work. I do, but I will not tell you what I do. That is between God and I.”

A Later Statement Is Made:

In a study with this man, he tells one brother this: “Besides all that I have told the three brethren that I have talked to, I also have another reason I don’t give on the first day of the week. I have only been here for a couple of months. I am not giving to this congregation until I am sure everything here is right.”

For Discussion: What do you see in those statements?

- Occasions wherein assumed brethren come to join the local fellowship of the saints often brings mixed emotions. There is joyous excitement that we can receive faithful brethren (**Psalms 133:1** and **Romans 15:7**). There is also a righteous sense of caution (**Ephesians 5:6-11** and **Colossians 2:8**).
- It takes time to know a person as words, actions, and fruit are altogether different matters to consider (**Matthew 7:15-20**, **Matthews 23:25-28**, **John 7:24** [cf. I Samuel 16:7], and **Titus 1:16**).
- It appears, from what they have said, that they have correctly obeyed the Gospel [at least initially] (<https://www.wordsoftruth.net/tobesaved.html>). Here in El Paso, we meet with prospective members about six months after they have been assembling with us to learn more and answer questions. They have been attending for a couple of months, so we would dig in deeper as time goes on.

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- Someone coming to every worship service is good (**Hebrews 10:25**), but it is not all there is to it. Remember, Judas would have appeared faithful from his walking with Jesus, but he was not faithful (**Mark 3:13-21** and **John 12:1-8**).
- On the other hand, sometimes congregations can appear faithful in all visible ways, but not be right with the Lord (**Revelation 2:1-7**).
- Interest in being part of a congregation does not necessarily infer anything either. Some join faithful saints to only later depart (**Acts 20:28-31**, **II Timothy 4:10** [cf. **Philemon 1:24**], and **I John 2:19**).
- Having a lot to learn is not necessarily an indictment on one's faithfulness (**II Peter 3:18**). There is a time wherein that may be the case (i.e. **Hebrews 5:11-6:3**), but we don't know enough to think that in this scenario.
- A willingness to learn is certainly a good thing (**Proverbs 1:5**, **Proverbs 9:9**, **Ephesians 4:15-16**, and **I Peter 2:1-2**).
- Things even appear better as they are willing to make corrections as they learn and grow (**Proverbs 10:17**, **Proverbs 15:31-32**, and **Acts 18:24-19:7**).
- One of the main reasons I want to discuss this scenario is in the following few points. Giving, as we will address, is a private matter. However, it is done in a public assembly. It can be delicate to deal with.
- In an assembly of the saints things become noticeable over time. Even in erring ways, brethren notice things and sometimes [erringly so] make judgments on such things (**James 2:1-5**). In this scenario, their choice not to give is impossible for some not to notice. Take, for example, those here in EP that take up the collection. The same men do it for 4-5 weeks at a time. Sometimes, a brother might do so two months in a row. This can become a situation wherein he'd have to be blind not to notice something like this.
- Why would it trouble some that time has passed and followers of the Lord have taken the Lord Supper, but have not given on the first day of the week? First, the instructions... We have an example of saints assembling on the first day of the week and breaking bread (**Acts 20:7**). Thus, they followed instructions given by the Apostles (cf. **I Corinthians 11:16-34**). There is also an instruction that authorizes a collection on the first day of the week (**I Corinthians 16:1-4**). So, this would bring about some honest questions. The Old Testament principle (which only serves as an example to learn from and not a standard of authority - **Romans 15:4**) of not giving being robbing God would cause concern for souls (**Malachi 3:8**). Aside from the instructions of God, could there also be other good reasons for the questions?
- If a Christian is not giving at all, could there be concern that they aren't doing well financially (**James 2:14-17**)? A family of four at that! This does require some judgment by sight (**I John 3:14-18**). As stated earlier, such judgment could be flawed. One would have to get the whole story (**Proverbs 18:13**). That would be through inquiry.
- If it is a matter of them not giving as they should, how could that be ignored once noticed and confirmed (cf. **Acts 5:1-11**)?
- Once this becomes a spiritual concern, whether members of the congregation or not, it is good to address it as souls could be at stake (**Galatians 6:1-2** and **James 5:19-20**).

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- The Statement That is Made: As the answer comes about, the language used in **I Corinthians 16:1-2** needs addressed. If one does not believe this is a weekly requirement, why do they partake of the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis?
- The word translated "prospered him" means: "To help on the road, i.e. (passively) succeed in reaching; figuratively, to succeed in business affairs: — (have a prosper(-ous journey). To grant a prosperous and expeditious journey, to lead by a direct and easy way; to grant a successful issue, to cause to prosper; to prosper, be successful" (Strong's # 2137). This can turn into a long debate as you start defining words. Caution needs applied there (**II Timothy 2:14-18**).
- Does his argument hold water (**Mark 12:41-44**)? When you go and read the second instruction to Corinth about the collection, do you find such reasoning used therein (**II Corinthians 8:1-9:13**)? NO!!!!
- What this person does aside from the assembly is not under discussion. There is no authority to substitute the instruction in **I Corinthians 16:1-4** with some other form of supporting the Lord's work! He is right, what he does in such a manner is between he and the Lord (**Matthew 6:1-4**).
- Having said that, I would inquire what he believes the "Lord's work" is without specifically asking what/who he gives to. The reason I would question this is that it is a common error for people to send monies to human organizations (i.e. orphan homes) to do the work that God instructed saints to do personally (**James 1:21-27**). Also, he could be giving out money to those whom he should not be doing such. The fact that he has a lot to learn may mean he has not been taught such passages as **II Thessalonians 3:10** and such.
- A Later Statement Is Made: While what has been said is troubling, this is even more troubling. It is a misunderstanding of fellowship. How can one partake of the Lord's Supper, which is fellowship (**I Corinthians 10:16-17**); and yet question the faithfulness of the saints?
- I am NOT saying he should not test the congregation. That is right (**Proverbs 14:15, Isaiah 8:20, Amos 3:3, I Thessalonians 5:21, and I John 4:1**)! You cannot be part of a congregation that is not faithful and be right in the sight of God (**I Corinthians 1:10, II John 1:6-11, and Revelation 2:14-16**).
- The problem is the inconsistency; the hypocrisy (**Matthew 23:1-5 and Romans 2:19-24**).
- Secondly, the idea of "giving to the congregation" is problematic. Is it just a wording matter? Does this man not understand that you give unto God (**Proverbs 3:9 and II Corinthians 9:7**)?
- For more on giving, consider a previous study in the discernment class series: https://www.wordsoftruth.net/mycontributiononfirstdayweek_2020.html
- Hopefully, this man will correct his thinking. Hopefully, he will continue to be willing to learn as the pattern of his behavior had been up to this point (**Proverbs 25:12**). If not, that will certainly hinder the future regarding fellowship with these individuals (**Philippians 2:2; 3:16**).