

# Stewardship is . . . . . . a privilege for Christians.

The scene was the Divine Service of one of our Asian churches in the Los Angeles area. The time had come for the offering. The pastor rose and quietly surveyed the assembly. Most of the people were recent converts to Christianity, many from Buddhist backgrounds. In the congregation were some non-Christians, spouses of members, or visitors invited by their friends.

The pastor spoke: "And now we come to the time when we bring our offerings to the Lord. With all respect, I should say to our visitors that this is not a collection of money. This is not a collection for charity. Those who are not Christians are not permitted to contribute to this offering.

"This is a privilege," he continued, "a spiritual and holy ritual for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are baptized to *respond* to God's love and grace. It is their opportunity to fulfill their loving obligation as the children of God as they return part of the money they have received from Him to build the church and reach out to the world."

The pastor bowed first to the people, then reverently toward the altar. Then the ushers appeared with the offering plates. . . .

"Those who are not Christians are not *permitted* to contribute to this offering." Now that's a new one! Or is it?

The Old Testament speaks often of offerings that were acceptable to God (see Gen. 4:5; Prov. 15:8; Is. 1:11, 66:3; Jer. 6:20, 14:12; Amos 5:22). In Acts 8:9-24, Peter told a man who was captive to sin, "May your money perish with you!" (V. 20). And in 3 John 7, the apostle notes that he received "no help from pagans."

These principles also relate to the Christian's reason for giving, as the pastor noted. Paul wrote the Philippians that they should have an offering, but added in effect, "Not because I desire a gift, but because *you* need the spiritual exercise!" (see Phil. 4:17).

Paul didn't need the money. The people needed the opportunity to give. They needed the spiritual *discipline* of stewardship.

So only Christians can bring a true offering of praise and thanks to God. And when they do, it must be for the right reasons.

God doesn't need our money. We need God. And we need the opportunity to serve and worship Him with our time, talent and treasure.

We don't give just because there's a need. We give because we *need* to give. And only Christians are permitted to give.

"I respectfully note to our visitors that only members of the Christian church are permitted to contribute to our offering."

Taken from *In My Opinion*, "The Lutheran Witness," November 1992, written by Dr. Donald L. Deffner. The original article was titled: 'We Don't Want Your Money.'