

When Church Members Withhold Financial Gifts

The story is too common, but I hear such stories repeatedly. My most recent conversation was with a church leader where an affluent church member offered to make a large contribution to the renovation of the worship center. He had one stipulation: the worship center had to be named in memory of his late mother. The leader politely declined. The affluent member did not make the donation. To the contrary, he began withholding all of his gifts to the church.

Almost every pastor and church leader has some story about members **withholding their financial gifts as an act of protest** about the direction of the church and its leadership. I have never known such a situation that had any positive affect. Such is the reason I offer nine concerns about this practice.

1. **It assumes that we are the actual owners of our finances.** That is unbiblical thinking. God gives to us everything we have. We are the stewards of these gifts. Such is the reason we use the word "stewardship."
2. **No church is perfect.** If every member protested about an imperfection in a local congregation, no church would ever receive funds. This selfish act is not the way to resolve concerns.
3. **This practice is divisive.** One of the most precious resources of any congregation is unity. The withholding of financial gifts is an act of disunity and divisiveness.
4. **It is controlling.** The church member who withholds financial gifts seeks to get his or her way. Such is not the spirit of Paul's words in Philippians 2:3: "Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves."
5. **It is self-serving.** When Paul penned 1 Corinthians 12, he emphasized how we are to function in the body of Christ. Our motive for serving is for Christ and others before ourselves.
6. **It is demoralizing.** Paul wrote in Romans 14:19, "So we must pursue what promotes peace and builds up one another." This practice has the opposite effect.
7. **It backs church leaders into a corner.** Leaders have one of two options. They can yield to the church member and thus affirm a sinful practice. Or they can refuse to yield and continue the conflict that was started by the member. It is a lose-lose situation.
8. **If the church member truly has serious disagreements with the direction of the church, he or she should pursue other paths.** They can address their concerns with leaders in the church directly. If members still have serious concerns and no resolution seems possible, it may be best to go to another church. It is much healthier to give to another church than to withhold from your present church.
9. **This practice never has a positive outcome.** Even if the member gets his or her way, unity and trust are broken at many levels. The body of Christ is always wounded by this practice.

This topic is both sensitive and challenging.

> [Read more from Thom.](#)