

Greed In Disguise

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It is that time of year again when children will be running up and down the streets of your neighborhood dressed up in costumes that make them look like everything from Spiderman to Disney princesses to creatures that I don't have the words to describe. Unfortunately, children are not the only ones who wear disguises. At times, Christians are prone to putting on disguises to try and make themselves appear to the world as holy beings when in reality they are attempting to cover up some major spiritual shortcomings. This is nothing new. Jesus addressed this problem in Matthew 23:27-28 when He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." The Pharisees wanted everyone to think that they were spiritual. They knew how to portray a righteous image to the world around them so that other men would think them to be spiritual, but the reality was they were not spiritual at all. One of the disguises that Christians unfortunately wear to cover up sin is the disguise of stewardship because it fits perfectly over the sin of greed. Greedy people are savers, planners, and have a desire to make sure their financial future is secure. All of those things are marks of good stewards if pursued in light of God's provision. Without God they are nothing more than the foundation for greed that destroys the soul of man.

Some of the strongest statements of stewardship I have ever heard other Christians make were in reality nothing more than greed in disguise. Someone might say, "I don't approve of the way the elders are spending the money." Sometimes what they

really mean is that “I not getting my way.” Someone might say, “I would give more if there was more transparency.” When they are handing a detailed copy of every financial transaction from the foyer it makes no difference. The hard part is telling from our fleshly vantage points which statements come from stewardship and which come from greed.

This very real danger of personal deception is one that the child of God is warned about over and over through numerous Biblical examples. One of those examples of greed disguised as stewardship comes from Judas Iscariot in John 12. Jesus was in the city of Bethany having dinner with Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and his disciples. We read in verse 3 that, “Mary therefore took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair.” This act of sacrificial worship was not missed by any in the room, especially Judas. In verse 5 he reacted to her sacrifice with a question, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor people?” On the surface, this would appear to be a powerful statement of stewardship. This perfume cost almost as much as a year’s wages. Think of what good works for the Lord could be done with a year’s salary. Those wonderful works would seem much greater than pouring out perfume on someone’s feet. Now that costly perfume is gone and you have absolutely nothing to show for it. Who would like to respond to Judas’ criticism? Someone would be hard pressed to respond without appearing to be uncaring and greedy themselves. But the Bible gives us a glimpse into the true heart of Judas and what the motivation was behind his powerful statement of stewardship. “Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into

it.” (vs. 6) His expression of stewardship was nothing more than greed in disguise. This disguise was the same worn by the rich fool (Luke 12), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and Felix (Acts 24:26). As Christians, we have to ask ourselves if we are wearing this disguise. When people speak about the need to be more generous givers, do we ask questions to make us look like conscientious stewards when in fact we are just looking for a reason to not have to give more?

Are we wearing Christian disguises or are we truly converted children of God? All Christians are to be good stewards of the treasures God has blessed us with, but we must never allow that stewardship to be a cover for our greed. The solution to any mask of deception we might be tempted to put on is to purify our heart. In Matthew 23:26 Jesus instructed those whitewashed tombs, “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may be come clean also.” When we purify our heart we will not have to be concerned with masks and spiritual disguises. What we look like on the outside will take care of itself.