

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Tom and Patti and Jim and Mary took a weekend camping trip together to a local lake. They decided to rent canoes for the afternoon. As their leisurely canoe ride ended, Jim and Mary rowed up to the dock and stepped out of their canoe. Tom and Patti rowed up beside, intending to step out of their canoe into Jim and Mary's canoe and then up onto the dock.

Patti got out fine. But when Tom put his first foot into the other canoe, the shifting of his weight caused his canoe to begin drifting away, leaving him in the hilariously untenable position of trying to stand in two canoes moving away from each other. Unable to control the drift, he found himself doing the splits with hands flailing just before plunging headfirst into the lake, his feet still hooked over the side of each canoe. Jim, Mary, and Patti laughed until they cried at the slap-stick scene before them.

As comical as this scene is, many of us, unbeknownst to us, are in the same position—trying to straddle two canoes that are moving in different directions. If you have ever been in a canoe, you know that trying to stand up in one canoe can be enough of a challenge. Trying to stand up in two canoes, as Tom discovered, is *double trouble*.

We live in two kingdoms—our spiritual kingdom and our material kingdom. Just as Tom found himself unsuccessfully straddling the two canoes, we too can find ourselves unsuccessfully attempting to straddle these two kingdoms, one foot planted in each even as they drift apart, leaving us facing our own *double trouble*. The Bible offers several metaphors to expose the untenable position of attempting to live a contradictory double life, and the trouble that comes from trying to straddle our two competing “canoes.”

James 1:8 (NASB) tells us that *a double-minded man [is] unstable in all his ways*. (Sounds like Tom in the two canoes, doesn't it?) David declares in Psalm 119:113 (ESV), *I hate the double-minded*. James adds in 4:8, *purify your hearts, you double-minded*. In Psalm 12:2 David provides a different metaphor, that of being “double-hearted.” In 1 Timothy 3:8, Paul describes those who are “double-tongued.” All these phrases describe the contradictory position of attempting to keep one foot in our spiritual canoe and the other foot in our material canoe. In doing so, we are facing “double trouble.”

Jesus said it this way, *No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money* (Matthew 6:24). Jesus is expressing the impossibility of trying to successfully keep a foot in both canoes.

Here is how straddling these two canoes often functionally plays out in our lives. Our material possessions (time, talents, treasures, toys, etc.) are in our material canoe. On occasion, we are asked, compelled, coerced or convicted to give some of our stuff from our material canoe to be used for spiritual purposes. When we

transfer some of our material assets over to the spiritual canoe, it is recorded, reported, and/or recognized in some way.

Contrast that picture with this alternative. We choose to wholly and solely live in only one canoe—our spiritual canoe. We recognize that at our conversion we willingly transferred everything we were and everything we possessed—and I mean everything—into our spiritual canoe, abandoning our material canoe altogether. We sing “All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give,” and really mean *all*. Everything we have and everything we are is His. We are *all in* the spiritual canoe. We acknowledge that our material stuff was never really ours in the first place, but that we had wrongly confiscated it and are now willingly returning it to the rightful Owner. (See Psalms 24:1; 50:10-12.)

It is no longer a question of what we will transfer from our material canoe to our spiritual canoe. Everything we possess and everything we ever will possess should already be in our spiritual canoe to be used for kingdom purposes whenever and however it is needed by our sovereign King. Let me ask you to think back. Did you indeed surrender and transfer all the possessions in your material canoe now and forever into your spiritual canoe when you surrendered to Christ? Did you ever really “surrender all?”

If the answer is yes, then your *giving* decisions are not really giving decisions. They could more accurately be described as *deployment* decisions. The term *giving* carries with it the implication that we are taking something from our material canoe and “giving” it to our spiritual canoe to be used for spiritual purposes. The term *deployment*, to the contrary, simply focuses on how these resources already in the spiritual canoe will be utilized to produce maximum impact and benefit for the King to whom these assets already belong.

If we attempt to live with one foot in our spiritual canoe and the other one in our material canoe, we will find ourselves double-minded, double-hearted, double-tongued, and with a severe case of double-vision. We will indeed find ourselves continually living with *double trouble*. Notice that right after Jesus tells us that we should lay up treasures for ourselves not in our material canoe, but in our spiritual canoe, and right before He tells us that we cannot simultaneously live in two different canoes (God and riches), He adds a powerful illustration in Matthew 6:22-23, *The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

It is impossible for our eyes to simultaneously focus on two different images. Have you ever intentionally crossed your eyes? If you have, you know that when you point your eyes in different directions, you can't see anything clearly with either eye. We cannot focus on both our spiritual and our material canoes at the same time, lest we find, like my friend Tom, that we are in a compromising position that can never be maintained.

Ask yourself, “Where am I standing right now? Am I trying to straddle these two different canoes, hoping to enjoy the best that both canoes have to offer?” If the answer is, “Yes,” then you are indeed in *double trouble*. Here is a superior option for you to consider. If you have not already done so, transfer everything you have into one canoe—your spiritual canoe. In doing so, something glorious will happen. You will find yourself becoming singled-minded, single-hearted, single-tongued, and single-visioned. You will now be single-focused on what God wants you to do with what you are carrying of His material things in His spiritual canoe to be used for His divine purposes and ultimate glory.

If we get into the right canoe, the spiritual canoe, heading in the right direction with an eternal perspective in mind, we will experience what Paul describes in I Timothy 6:19 as *life indeed*. Here are your options: *Double*

trouble or life indeed. Not really a very difficult choice, is it? Starting today, why not be *all in* your spiritual canoe?

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E. G. “Jay” Link has a unique combination of being an ordained minister with a Master Divinity degree in Biblical Theology and a professional Stewardship planning coach who for over 40 years has been working with very affluent Christian families to enable them to optimize their Kingdom impact with all that the Lord has entrusted to them to manage. After retiring from his personal practice, he then served for five years as Director of Taylor University’s Stewardship Planning Ministry, which he launched for them. Most recently, Jay founded the Stewardship Resource Group to serve Christian ministries, colleges, and churches to better minister to their highest capacity families. He has written six books, hundreds of articles and has provided extensive training curriculum for hundreds of professional financial and legal advisors in how to provide stewardship planning services for their clients.