

Cash Register Receipts

“When he came to Nazareth, where he’d been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day as was his custom. Standing to read, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled it and found the place where it was written...” Luke 4: 16, 17

Some cash register receipts nowadays remind me of this ancient scroll unrolled by Jesus. They are much narrower, but often approach 32 feet, which was the maximum length of curled-up, glued-together papyrus sheets one could unroll with one hand and roll up again with the other.

And many of these receipts read like an ancient manuscript. In addition to the barcode and the liberal use of *****, there is a sprinkling of the store’s own higher glyphics, such as, Appr#03204C, Ref#105200413, Trans ID – 0832917542428382, Val – 6637, Pymt Serv – E, Term #281200986. Do we really need a written record of all this? It’s Greek to me.

Printing so much information drains a print cartridge every fifteen minutes, which is why the printing is often so faint. (And we know who pays for the ink.) Listed are not only the items I purchased, but recorded in bold print (even more ink) how much I saved with every item because I used the supermarket’s rewards card. Then comes the total of how much I saved both that visit and year-to-date. How much I saved on that visit is printed in numbers three times as large as what I owe for my purchases. As though I won’t notice.

In addition to selling me foods that give me gas, my supermarket also lists on its receipt how I’m doing toward my next gasoline purchase at their station – ten cents off a gallon for every hundred dollars purchased. I like this. I used to shop at the Beeno Supermarket. “Take our receipt, and there’ll be no gas.”

My pharmacy receipt gives me my bonus points in numbers many times as large as my purchases but doesn’t tell me how to redeem them. And the bonus points seem to ebb and flow as if by magic. “Trust us,” the clerk says. “We’ve been serving America on this corner for four years!” And I do. I trust that worrying about my bonus points can make me sick, enabling the pharmacy to sell me even more meds. When they ask for my name at the pharmacy, I say, “Alfred E. Neuman. What? Me Worry?”

Oftentimes there is a segment on the receipt with a website address and the urging that I take the company’s survey. For example, the USPO wants me to “Tell us about your recent postal experience.” Then it says, “Go postal.com” The word “to” is so faint I can hardly see it.

After the receipt is printed, coupons start linking out the printer like sausages out of a sausage maker. Most offer me savings on products my wife or I have purchased within recent months. It is creepy what stores do with electronic purchase profiling.

The other day I stopped at perhaps the last mom-and-pop filling station in the state. The receipt was hardly two-inches long, not nearly long enough to unroll. All it said was “Cash received \$5.” As I topped off the tank, I was also filled with nostalgia.

What really gripes me about these new receipts is how hard it is to find the date when preparing your tax return. It’s like they try to hide it. – DJ