

God and Money

Preached at 8.15, C@10 and C@6 on 16th October 2016

Introduction

Welcome to this series of four talks that I pray will help us to grow in godliness concerning a sometimes sensitive issue: money and how we relate to it as Christians.

Christians have a bit of a strange relationship with money.

We like what money can do for us, yet we struggle to know how to use it well and in a way consistent with the our faith in Jesus.

A former Principal of More Theological College, David Broughton Knox, said:

“money figures largely in our thoughts. We occupy ourselves in thinking a lot about it, how much we have got, how much we need, how much we can earn, how much we can spend.”

As Christians we struggle against the pull of materialism and greed... we battle with being godly with our money and at the same time wonder how it can slip through our fingers so easily!

Christians through the centuries have held a range of views about money.

At one end of the scale money has been seen as a sign of God's blessing — so the more money you have, the more God must be pleased with you.

(The flip side is that if you're not materially rich then you must be doing something wrong or not trusting God enough.)

But at the other end of the scale money has been thought of as something that contaminates our relationship with God.

Therefore godly people are the ones who get rid of as much money as possible.

That attitude can be seen in religious orders like the Franciscans who take a vow of poverty.

But what is a truly godly attitude to money?

Someone once remarked to me that the hip pocket is the last part of a Christian to be converted — meaning that money is the last issue we let God's word speak to us about.

Yet it's one of the most important because the way we respond to God's word about money is often an indicator of how we're responding to his word with the rest of our lives.

So it's important that we're seeking to obey God's word in regard to money as much as in any other area of our lives.

The sermon series and these studies will focus on:

An overview and God's attitude to money

How God's attitude to money played out in Israel's life

The difference that Jesus makes

Christians and money

I hope the series will encourage, challenge and help us to live as faithful followers of Jesus with all he has entrusted to us.

It All Belongs to God

So we'll start with what God has to say about money.

Firstly, money in itself is a good thing.

It can be used to do good — like providing for our family, putting food on the table, etc...

or it can be used for evil — like the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas Iscariot for betraying Jesus!

But money is a created thing, and Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 4:4-5:

“For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.” (1 Timothy 4:4–5 NIV11)

Money is a created good that we should receive from God with thankfulness.

What that tells us is that the money we have, we only have because we have received it from God.

And as he is the giver, **he is the owner.**

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;” (Psalms 24:1 NIV11)

Like everything else he’s created, God entrusts money to people to use for his purposes.

The first thing about God’s attitude to money is that it all belongs to him.

So if you get out your wallet or your purse and look at the notes and coins in there... or if you scan over your bank statement or look at the balance of your account on your phone app — what you’re looking at is God’s money!

It’s money that he has entrusted to you to use.

Whether you’ve earned that money through work or business, or inherited it, or received a benefit from the government, you ultimately only have it because you’ve received it from God.

That’s not the way most people think about money, is it?

Our natural way of thinking is that we’re entitled to the money we have.

And we’re not usually thankful for what we believe we’re entitled to.

Ask yourself when was the last time you thanked God for the money you have.

Friends, it’s not just a matter of remembering our manners.

There's a good reason why it's important to be thankful to God for the money or wealth he entrusts to us.

"You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today." (Deuteronomy 8:17–18 NIV11)

Without thankfulness we'll inevitably head down the track of thinking that we are self-sufficient — that we can live with or without God's help... which is the thinking of an unbeliever.

Lets just pause for a moment there to let that thought settle in our minds, and perhaps pray and thank God now...

It's to share

The third thing about God's attitude to money is that he made it to be shared with equity.

One of the first words many children learn is a four-letter word... "mine!"

Most of us grow up so that we stop hitting our siblings over the head to get the toys off them... but we don't naturally grow out of that attitude when it comes to money.

My money is mine, and I don't have to share it.

That attitude is apparent when we look at some data...

This is some data about charitable giving for the 12 months to February this year, just for the top 20 suburbs in NSW.

The first is in dollars, and you can see one of our wealthiest suburbs , Mosman, tops the list with an average per person of \$295.

The conspicuous odd man out on that list of the wealthier suburbs in Sydney like Darling Point, Kirribilli and Pymble is Blaxland in the lower Blue Mountains with an average of \$198 per person.

It doesn't look too bad until you look at that giving as a percentage of the average income of people in those suburbs and see that Blaxland tops the list at 0.35% — and Darling Point, Kirribilli and Pymble don't even make the list!

The point is that even the most generous givers in NSW give just over a third of one percent of their income to charity.

Now, charitable giving is only one measure of how we share our money, but it's a significant and reliable one, and it shows an attitude of 'mine' when it comes to sharing our money with others.

God's attitude is that the money he gives us is to be shared — not least with people in need.

"If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them." (Deuteronomy 15:7 NIV11)

"Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart" (Deuteronomy 15:10 NIV11)

...without a grudging heart!

See there is the problem... our grudging sinful heart.

Instead of freely and generously giving money that we are thankful God has given us to be able to share, we hang onto as much as we can...

...and we only part with what's left over after we've got everything we want.

In fact many people will part with their money just for the chance of getting what they want — more money.

I don't have as up-to-date data as for the charitable giving, but in NSW in 2014-15 the amount spent on gambling was \$278 per person.

That's more than the amount per person given to charity by all but the two highest giving suburbs in the state.

Friends the point of this all is just to show how our sinfulness creates in us an attitude towards money that is out of kilter with God's.

He says it's all his and it's to be used in a way that pleases and honours him, and is shared for the good of all people.

We say it's mine, and I'll use it to do what pleases me, and I might give away some of what's left over - if any.

The Solution

In a couple of weeks we'll look more closely at the difference that Jesus makes to our attitude about money.

But at this point it's important that we remember a couple of things that I'll finish up with for today..

Firstly, Jesus has died to pay the debt that we owed to God and had no hope of repaying — the cost of the our forgiveness.

So as we believe in him, we are forgiven for all our sins — including the way we have thought about money, our lack of thankfulness, the way we've trusted in money instead of in God, and the way we've used and misused the money he's given us.

And when Jesus was raised, God set him in the place of all authority over everything and everyone — over everything in our lives... including our money.

Jesus has saved us and called us into a new way of living.

Everything we are and everything we have is for us to use to glorify him.

As I said at the beginning, someone once said to me our hip pockets — wallets, purses, bank accounts — are often the last part of who we are and what we have that comes into line with following Jesus.

I know it was with me.

My wallet was converted not by being guilted into parting with money, but as I grew in my understanding of who Jesus is and what he's done.

And even that isn't about trying to repay him in some way — I can never do that.

It's about understanding that I belong to God's Son, the creator who never fails to provide for me... who has entrusted so much to me that I might use it and share it to do good to others — not least by giving it away so that others will hear about him.

But friends we mustn't deceive ourselves — even as Christ's saved people our sinfulness will always tempt us back in the direction of worldly attitudes to money.

It's not that we can't use some of the money God has given us to enjoy life.

But if Jesus is Lord of our life, even the way we do that should honour him.

I was talking to the singer Nathan Tasker once and he said that whenever he bought a CD for himself he gave the equal amount away to an overseas relief fund, just to remind himself that his money wasn't just for his enjoyment.

Perhaps you can think of something like that to help remind yourself to share, or to remind yourself to be thankful. Maybe talk about that in your Growth Groups this week.

But when it comes to your attitude to money, as for everything else in your life, let that attitude be driven by the cross... where God has paid for our salvation at enormous cost to himself, so that we can live a whole new life to glorify Jesus with all we are and all we have.