

Money and The Christian

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

Intro

The title of this final talk could really apply to everything we've been learning from the Bible about money over the past month.

The intention throughout has been to help us come to see money in a new way as Christians...

...maybe this way of seeing money is very new to you... maybe you've just never heard the Bible's teaching about money before, or didn't realise what God has to say about money.

But I hope that what we've been learning doesn't just end up in the category of "that was interesting".

A number of people have spoken to me to let me know that they're re-thinking their attitude to money and to how they manage it.

Whenever we hear God's word about anything, it should always lead us to re-think that aspect of our lives and at least re-assess what we're doing.

And in nearly every case, when God shows us the way he's made us and saved us to live, and we take action to sit down and think about what we do now, we'll see that we need to make changes.

It's like James says in James 1:23, that if we listen to the word but don't do what it says, we're like someone who looks at their face in the mirror and walks away forgetting what they look like.

So I want to encourage all of us not to walk away from this series without sitting down with pen and paper or a spreadsheet or whatever to evaluate what your actions with money show you about your attitude to money so you can see objectively if your attitude lines up with God's.

... that it's his, to be used for his purposes, not for storing up treasures in this life, but to be used by people who are thankful and trusting God to provide for our needs as we seek first his kingdom by sharing all that we are and have to glorify Jesus our king.

Our final talk today gets down to what a godly attitude to money should look like in practice.

Priorities and Responsibilities

To begin with, 1 Timothy 5:8 says:

“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8 NIV)

We have a priority responsibility to provide for our own families.

In that part of 1 Timothy Paul’s addressing the issue of people abandoning their responsibility to provide for elderly parents.

But the principle applies to everyone in our families who are entitled to depend on us, including children.

They’re strong words for good reason.

Firstly, if we neglect our family by spending what we have or earn on ourselves, we’re denying the principle of love that gospel teaches us.

So a parent who spends their pay on themselves and then doesn’t have enough money left to buy food and clothes for the family is acting contrary to the gospel.

But so is someone who thinks they’re doing the right thing by giving away more than they can afford to and leaving their family without enough.

What we saw last week in Matthew 6 when Jesus said “don’t worry” is not a command to give away all your money without regard to your responsibilities, especially to family members who depend on you.

If we do that, all we do is make them unfairly dependent on someone else — probably the taxpayers who fund the welfare system.

Secondly, supporting the ministry of the church we belong to must have priority in what we do with our money.

“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” (1 Timothy 5:17 NIV11)

“Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.” (Galatians 6:6 NIV11)

“In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:14 NIV11)

The principle is similar to Israel's law about the Levites who didn't have land, crops and stock to produce a living because they served full-time in the temple.

They were dependent on the generosity of the community...

People who serve full-time in leading and teaching the local church are dependent on the generosity of their congregations to live.

Our church doesn't receive any money from any organisation or head office or anywhere else to pay John and myself. It all comes from what you give.

I find that a very humbling thing.

Effectively it means that you provide for me so that I don't have to work, so that I can devote myself full-time to the ministry of the gospel that God has called me to.

It's based on that principle of sharing all good things (Gal 6:6) so that God is glorified as his money is used to glorify Jesus through the preaching and teaching of the gospel.

God commands us all (1 Cor 9:14) to support the local ministry of our church.

That includes me — Sue and I give as generously as we can to the ministry of this church just like everyone else out of the money you give to provide for us... we're not exempt because we're receiving your support.

Only we as the local community of Christians can keep the ministry of this church alive financially.

I mentioned last week that we presently depend on the income we get from the Acts 11 church who use our Kingsgrove building and the rent from the rectory at Kingsgrove to get our budget over the line each year.

If the building at Kingsgrove became unusable or Acts 11 moved out, we'd be instantly \$24,000 further short of our budget which would mean we could no longer afford both John and myself full time.

And when we need to put on another staff member, we have to provide housing for them. So to increase our team we'd need to raise the \$30,000 plus rent on the house that we'd lose before we start raising the cost of paying them.

Friends, it's essential for us as a church to move to supporting all our ministry from our giving so that our buildings can be used for ministry, and so that our ability to employ staff doesn't depend on having tenants in them.

God commands us to use the money he entrusts us with to support the ministry of our church.

Thirdly, supporting the mission of the gospel must have priority in what we do with our money.

“Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.” (Philippians 4:15–16 NIV11)

Here Paul's holding up the Christians in the church at Philippi as examples of a church who shared in his mission to preach the gospel elsewhere.

Earlier in Philippians he talks about them being in partnership with him in gospel mission as they prayed for him and provided for his needs so that he could be free to preach and share the gospel without having to work or to ask the people who weren't yet believers to support him.

Friends, only Christians will support gospel mission.

People in general will support all kinds of charities and humanitarian work.

But only Christians will support other Christians going out to share the good news of Jesus... because we're the only ones convinced of the great need for everyone in the world to come to know him.

We have the Charles family and Steph as CMS missionaries linked to our church for support. We have Janine Baird at BHGHS.

CMS have the line “Pray, care, give, go” to describe how mission works.

Christians in churches pray for missionaries, care for them, and give so that they can go.

Without our partnership they simply couldn't be all over the world sharing the news of the treasure of eternal life.

Fourthly, caring for people in need must have priority in what we do with our money.

In my first year as a Christian I was struck by something I saw at music practice one night where one person sensed that someone else there was struggling financially and opened their purse and gave them what they had.

I'd never seen anything like that happen before.

It taught me a huge lesson about this being how we live as Christians, and God has blessed us with opportunities to do the same to other people several times since.

"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:17–18 NIV11)

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Galatians 6:10 NIV11)

As we make a priority of doing good to others by sharing what God has given us we show that we're understanding that everything is his, to be shared so that no one is in need because we love them like he loved us and gave everything for our good.

What a witness we are to the world as we make it our priority to love each other like this.

As people who've been given the treasure of eternal life in Christ, we've been set free to live in a new way with God's attitude to everything, including our money.

It's his good gift to be received with thankfulness along with everything else, but it all belongs to him.

So we'll use it along with everything we are and have, for his purposes to seek first his kingdom and bring glory to Jesus.

And with that new attitude, we'll do what his word says about our priorities for our money.

We'll take the responsibility for providing financially for our own families.

We'll make it our priority to generously support the ministry of our church.

We'll make it our priority to generously support the people we partner with who are out in the world leading others to Jesus.

And we'll care for each other in more than just words but in sharing our money so that no one is without enough money for their basic needs.

Principles

Friends, thankfully God hasn't just given us the priorities without some principles to put them into practice.

We don't have time to do justice to them well today — in hindsight it would have been better for this to have been a separate talk.

So please spend time on them in your Growth Groups this week.

But please forgive me for speaking a little longer than usual today and stay with me as I do my best here.

In 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul is talking about a collection that he's been organising among the churches he has planted to help provide for the Christians in Jerusalem who'd been abandoned by their families and culture because of their faith in Christ.

From his teaching to these churches we are looking at principles from God's word for giving.

Firstly we need to have the desire to give.

"Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so." (2 Corinthians 8:10 NIV11)

Action follows the desire.

Our giving must be in response to a desire to give that springs out of our understanding of God's purposes.

If we give for any other reason — because we think it will earn us brownie points with God or make us feel good about ourselves, or even because we think we're expected to even if we don't want to — then we're not giving for the right reasons.

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7 NIV11)

Giving is a heart decision.

Our hearts matter to God more than our money.

If we give to church or mission reluctantly, we need to go back to the gospel and seek to develop our desire to give, as we see the example of Jesus.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV11)

Secondly, the acceptability of our giving as far as God is concerned isn't measured in absolute terms.

“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.” (2 Corinthians 8:12 NIV11)

The tithing principle set 10% or perhaps 20% as the required giving for Israel. But for some people giving 10% of their income away is impossible, while for others 10% isn't generous at all.

God commands us to be generous with what we have — not as if we had more than we do.

If you have very little, be as generous as you can in all the priorities God gives us.

If you have plenty, be as generous as you can in all the priorities God gives us.

For anyone with an unbelieving spouse, you need to be wise in how you decide how you'll give generously, talking with your spouse about your desire but not expecting them to go against their conscience and commit the money in shared bank accounts to ministry or mission... or worse, giving from that money without their knowledge.

A third principle is being intentional and regular.

“Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” (1 Corinthians 16:1–2 NIV11)

The traditional way of giving at church is cash in the plate.

The envelope system has been a great help for people to be intentional and regular.

I was taught that if you get paid monthly the first thing you do is put the amount you've decided to give each week into four or five envelopes and put them aside ready to take to church.

That way the money's already set aside and you're not tempted to use it for anything else.

These days many of us give electronically by a direct payment from our bank account to the church, which is the best way to apply this principle.

Sue and I have got our weekly giving to church and missionaries set up to happen automatically. We don't need to do anything about it until it's time to review if we need to change it.

Electronic giving also has the advantage of continuing our giving even when we're on holidays or away for any other reason.

Just being regular with our giving could actually make a big difference in helping us to meet our budget.

And over them all is the principle of generosity.

“Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.” (2 Corinthians 9:13 NIV11)

Generous giving is the action of a heart that has been shaped by the gospel to desire to be generous.

We'll want to be generous with however little or however much we have.

We'll be prepared and intentional and regular in our giving because it's what we want to do — not something we feel we have to do.

And we'll be generous so that others will praise God when they literally see us putting our money where our mouth is... in the same way that we count everything else in our lives to be God's for his purposes, his praise and his glory.