

GIVING - PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

Today we are going to look at a few of the things God's word tell us about how we handle our money. I try to preach about money at least every other year. There are many new faces and all of us need to know at least the basics of this important topic because it is addressed often in scripture.

Many churches do not talk about money because there has been so much manipulation and abuse that some are afraid to even broach the subject. There are other churches that always talk about money and it turns people off. When churches place too much emphasis on money it leaves us with the same feeling as when we allow that guy selling vacuum cleaners offers to clean our carpets for free only to pressure and shame us in to buying their machine.

With that said 6 years ago when I came here I promised to preach the word of God honestly and objectively. That is what I plan on doing today. I'd like to begin by observing ways in which money is sometimes misused in churches. Then we will examine a bible passage central to understanding the calling each of us share in giving to the Lord's work.

So here are some false practices and ways in which we should never handle our money in God's church. I hesitate to bring them up except I have seen these practices in more than half of the churches with which I am familiar.

FALSE PRACTICES

False Practice 1: USING MONEY AS BLACKMAIL FOR AN AGENDA

The first bad practice that I would like to confront involves the words blackmail and agenda. Many of my fellow pastors have been threatened by people more often than you would believe. The threat involves money and it goes like this:

FINANCIAL BLACKMAIL QUOTES

“if you don’t focus your preaching on God’s love every single week there are a lot of people that will stop giving.”

“If you stopped using the drums in church I would give more.”

“If you try to change anything we will not give.”

And here is one I heard about 15 years ago when considering whether I should candidate at a church in Northern Minnesota.

“Pastor Mike If you don’t stop this contemporary worship our choir from the traditional service will stop giving and all our friends will stop giving also. We have most of the money.”

The bible tells us to honor our leaders. Not to blackmail and threaten them when they do not swallow our personal preferences.

The reason we contribute to the church is because God wants us to. No strings. No agendas. Our giving is a response to God’s word and the amount is determined by The Holy Spirit.

Our money is not to be used to “send a message” rather it is to be used to please our Lord and Savior. When we give it is a personal transaction between us and the Lord. Here is how we should determine how much we give to the Lord’s work on a regular basis no matter what personal preferences go unmet.

2 Corinthians 9:7-8

7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

If we want to please God in our giving we will have no agenda other than to discern what God wants us to give. Our goal is to please God and to show off the generosity of Jesus.

If anyone wants to face Jesus and explain how he or she used money to force a personal agenda or personal conviction on the church then I will pray for that person. Because they are in spiritual danger.

False Practice 2: I GIVE IN SPUR OF THE MOMENT CAUSES SO I DON'T GIVE TO THE GENERAL FUND

Baloney. God calls you to do both.

False Practice 3: I AM POOR SO I DON'T GIVE

If you are poor you also should be setting aside a percentage of your income each week. God will determine that amount and He will share it with you as you pray. Begin somewhere. Even if it is 2 percent. Be intentional. We invest our money in the things that mean most to us. We will read about the poor widow's offering later in this message.

Now let's turn our attention to specific false teaching about giving. Then we will end with a bible passage that tells us what God truly expects of us. So here are a couple false teachings most of us have heard.

FALSE TEACHINGS

False Teaching 1: RECIPROCITY

According to prosperity gospel preachers; if believers have enough faith they will be wealthy and healthy have no sickness and little or no suffering in his or her life. It is usually stated within this movement that a sign of God's blessing is that you have lots of money. Having anything less than all the money you desire is a product of weak faith. It is taught that if you give generously then God owes you money back and He must make you wealthy.

The people who teach this heresy are recognized by their bad hair, their chauffeur driven Bentleys, and \$5000 white suits. They claim God wants every Christian in perfect health, with lots of money.

But what does God's word say?

Regarding God's desire for Everyone To Be Wealthy

Matthew 6:19-21 ESV

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Hebrews 13:5 ESV

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Matthew 6:24 ESV

"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."

God's word specifically tells us not to focus on riches. It looks like this false teaching is actually worse than unbiblical. It is designed to make people focus on money and to desire that which God Himself tells us not to focus on.

False Teaching 2: THE OLD TESTAMENT AMOUNT FOR GIVING IS 10 PERCENT

Many people claim that because the Old Testament requires God's people to give a 10 percent tithe we also should give ten percent of our income. Allow me to say that if you want to give 10 percent of your income please do that. It would be very honoring to God and I believe that is a good goal to begin with. 10 percent is symbolic. It is generous. And I hope everyone does his or her best to set aside 10 percent of their income for the Lord's work.

On top of the 10 percent when there are special needs that come up we can be generous as The Spirit leads. Now I set that forth as an ideal. With that said you need to know that The Old Testament never demanded 10 percent. I hope you give it. But give 10 percent because you love Jesus and want to be generous with His work and support the ministry and staff.

Let's look quickly at what the Old Testament required.

Leviticus 27:30-33, tells us that

10% of all grain, cattle, fruit, etc. was to be set aside as a tithe to the Lord.

Deuteronomy 14:22-27, gives instruction for a second tithe (or 10% of the remaining 90%, hence 9%) was to be taken once a year to Jerusalem. This was to be used for a huge nationwide fellowship meal. Kind of like a national pot luck for fellowship and worship rededicating the nation to The Lord.

We now have Israelites paying **19%** of their income in tithes. But there is more to come.

According to **Deut. 14:28-29**, an additional tithe of 10% was to be paid every third year. This tithe was to be given to the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless, and the widows. In other words, every third year the Israelite was to take an additional 10% from the remaining 81%. **This means that every year the Israelite was required to pay approximately 21.7% of his income in tithes to the Lord!**

So, with that said, do not give 10 percent to the church because it is a law carried over from the Old Testament. If you want to do the law then please start giving 21.7 percent.

But, give a percentage of your income to the Lord's work because you love the Lord, you love His church, and you want to support the ministry of the gospel and honor your pastors and staff and all the ministries God has given us.

WHAT IF WE GAVE A PERCENTAGE CONSISTENTLY?

Doing The Math

Let's do the math and see what would happen if each of us gave a percentage of our income consistently.

If everyone made 40 grand per year and gave 10 percent that would be 83. per week.

If 80 people in the church tithed we would have a 3000. surplus each week. We could actually keep our current staff and add 2 church planters on full salary and pay for the Unterschuetz family to move to Liberia. If 80 of us gave just 5 percent we would make budget.

The bad news is we have made our budget only once in the past 7 years. We have been supplementing our income from a large memorial gift that came in 7 or 8 years ago. Thank God for that large gift. It has allowed us to have a couple pastors on staff and purchase much needed upgrades. That fund is almost gone and we are going to have to meet very soon to talk about some big cuts in our budget. If you want to hear details, come to this Wednesday night's 6pm meeting in the youth room.

Let's end our message by going through an important New Testament bible passage related to giving. There are several texts that we will not have the time to cover.

BIBLICAL TEACHING AND PRACTICES OF GIVING

2 Corinthians 8:1-7

¹And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ²Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. ⁶So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. ⁷But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us --see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Here are a few observations:

THEY BEGGED TO GIVE (even though they were poor)

THEY GAVE THEMSELVES FIRST TO THE LORD (this is the way true Spirit led generosity begins)

THEY ALSO EXCELLED IN THIS GRACE OF GIVING (that means they could not wait to see God bless others and meet their need)

2 Corinthians 9:6,7,12

Sowing Generously

⁶Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver....

¹²This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of

God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.

GIVE WHAT IS IN YOUR HEART

How do we work that out in our everyday lives? How do you give what is in your heart? The way you give what is in your heart and not out of compulsion is that you spend time praying and offering all of your money to God. (You give yourself and all you are and all you have to the Lord!)

And then you stay in His presence and in discerning prayer long enough and earnestly enough to hear from God the amount that He wants you to give every week whether you can make the Sunday morning service or not. And He will bring to mind the needs of individuals and give you His heart toward them so you cannot help but to give generously.

Few people take giving this seriously and in this Spirit led manner. And one of the signs that you are no longer a baby Christian is that you are able to put all areas of your life including your giving under the control of The Holy Spirit.

REVIVAL AND EVANGELISM ARE CONNECTED TO GENEROSITY

I also want to state that many of our God sightings are connected to God leading people to give money or special gifts to those who were in desperate need.

-When we gave a new van to a single mom as part of our worship service that was a direct demonstration of the love of God.

-When unexpected gifts came the moment another person was praying for a desperate need that was God acting through us.

-When a few families had their house burned down Brian and several others brought groceries over as a demonstration of the love of God. The tears of joy that result are so precious.

This is one of the ways God has brought waves of revival in this church and in so many places. But it does not happen if we love our money and possessions more than we love Jesus and other people.

So let's gather our thoughts. We have covered a lot of ground.

SUMMARY / APPLICATIONS

Is it permissible to tithe? (Sam Storms says); "Not only is it permissible, I would strongly recommend and urge you to do so. In choosing to give 10% of our income to the Lord, we are honoring God."

This does not mean you are sinning if you don't. To give only 8% or to give 12% is equally permissible. To not give at all, or to give disproportionately to your income (which is the case with many Christians today), or to give grudgingly, is indeed sin. Let us be joyful and generous in our giving. After all, everything we own belongs to God anyway!"

And we should hold personal possessions loosely. Read **Acts 2:42-47** when you get home. That is not just the ideal 1st century church. That is a picture of how we can bear one another's burdens and show off in a tangible manner the love and reality of Jesus Christ.

TAKING IT HOME

1. When is the last time you went before God and told Him that you would give whatever He told you to give on a regular basis to His church?
2. If you can't think of a time you surrendered your finances to God will you plan a time to have that conversation?
3. What is The Holy Spirit saying to your heart today?