

Church Life Notes

Study 6 – Giving

These notes are to accompany our series, Church Life, on Sunday mornings. Their purpose is to give you a summary of the message, bible passages referred to, and some questions for further study.

They will also be available on the church website (www.bethel-laleston.co.uk).

This is a challenging subject because our money and how we use it is something that is usually considered a private matter and so we don't like to discuss it (especially in a way that challenges us!).

Giving financially is just one example of giving that should form part of our Christian life. If we are commanded to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength (Deut 6:4-5), it surely follows that we must be giving people (not just with money). But this study is particularly focussed on giving financially. Your attitude to giving of money may well be a barometer for how you are obeying God in other areas of giving.

How does God want you to view money?

Foundational to how you feel about giving will be your view of money. So first we will do a quick fly over the bible to answer our first question. We need to start at the beginning. If God made this universe and all it contains, then it follows that EVERYTHING belongs to him. That is foundational, and yet God has given us a place in his creation and has graciously allowed us to own things, to possess them for a time. From the earliest time, God's people have owned things and nowhere are we commanded or expected to automatically give up or get rid of all that we have.

On the other hand, there are plenty of warnings about the dangers of money. Heb 13:5-6 – These verses capture what other verses of the bible highlight in their own way. What is big problem with money? It is the love of it, the reliance on it, the trust we inevitably place in it as the solution of our problems. That verse gives as the reason for rejecting the false trust of money the truth that God has promised to be with his people ALWAYS. It is HIM we are to trust and love, not money.

1 Tim 6:6-10 – These are strong words but borne out by many in their experience. There are dangers with money, but it is worth noting that bible is not against rich people. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, King David, Daniel were all wealthy men and yet commended as men of faith.

Money is transitory and temporary. Jesus' parable of the rich fool in Luke 12 graphically makes that point.

Proverbs 11:28 and Proverbs 23:4-5 both reinforce this. How does God want you to view money? As given to you, entrusted for a time, useful but not to be relied on,

trusted in, loved or lusted after. The dangers are real and devastating. Treasures in heaven are infinitely more valuable than treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-21).

How does God want you to give?

Loving God means making all our resources subject to our King. It should be obvious then that God DOES want you to give. But how? Three accounts in the bible will help us to answer that question.

Exodus 25:1-2, 35:4 and following. The character of the giving for the materials of the tabernacle was emphatically voluntary. It is those whose heart prompts them and those who are willing. 2 Cor 9:7-8 tell us that our giving must be voluntary.

Luke 21:1-4 – this powerful account of the widow with her two pennies being commended above the rich and their bags of money shows us that our giving is not only to be cheerful and voluntary but also sacrificial.

"The subject before us is peculiarly heart-searching. On no point perhaps do professing Christians come short so much as in the matter of giving money to God's cause. Thousands, it may be feared, know nothing whatever of "giving" as a Christian duty." (JC Ryle).

2 Cor 8-9. 9:3ff – in these verses Paul urges the Corinthian church not to embarrass him when he comes but to be ready with a prepared gift. Giving is not only voluntary and sacrificial but also planned, deliberate, orderly. In these verses, Paul uses the example above all others (the giving of Christ for their salvation, 2 Cor 8:9) as a strong incentive to Christian giving.

How does God want us to use the money given?

OT tithe was used in a number of ways – to support the ministry to God (worship), the ministry to God's people (nurturing) and ministry to world (gospel and social care). We don't limit ourselves to a mere tenth (we want to give ALL to our Lord and King) but principle of tithe use is helpful.

Money should be used by church to support the worship of God, to maintain the ministry of the word, to take the gospel to the world and for caring for others. The church needs to continually check that the money is being used to support the aim of the church – to glorify God. Those three areas are helpful to keep in mind – ministry to God, to church and to world. Are there imbalances in our giving as a church? Are we using the money God has given us to do the work God has given us?

How will you obey God in your giving?

Final question is a challenge to us all to provoke us to think through this issue, to test our hearts, to hear God's word and to act on it. God doesn't need your money, that much is clear. But giving is a Christian grace that we are to excel in. You are to give willingly, joyfully, sacrificially, diligently and then the church is to use that money to glorify God. Read these verses as a final word of challenge: Malachi 3:6-12 and pray that God might have the glory as we honour him with our giving.