

TALKING POINT #17
LIVING IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY #10: GIVING AT CHURCH

“CHURCHES ARE ALWAYS AFTER MY MONEY!”

A common complaint I hear is, “Churches lull you in talking about service and love and all that, then when they’ve got you, they start pumping you for money.” To be sure, there have been many cases in Church history where this accusation fits the crime. At the other extreme, though, many Churches have become so afraid of offending anyone that they simply do not mention money.

Rather, we are called to have a Biblical attitude to money, as with all the gifts God gives us and to be sacrificial with our finances, as with all our lives (Romans 12:1).

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Sometimes we make the link between our giving and the Old Testament sacrificial system. Clearly, God called the Ancient Israelites to bring their sacrifices to atone for sin in accordance with the Law (Leviticus 7:37-38; Numbers 28:1-2). However, to link those sacrifices for sin to our giving is problematic because the New Testament declares that sacrificial system was fulfilled and completed in Christ (Hebrews 10:10).

However, Paul does say to “offer our bodies as living sacrifices” in “view of God’s great mercy.” In other words, our gifts are not *to gain* forgiveness but *in response* to God’s forgiveness. Hence, our giving comes not from a place of obligation but thankfulness. That’s why Paul can say, “God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7). We give as people who are saying “Thanks Lord for all You’ve done!” A cheerful giver is one who sees the incalculable gift God has given us and says, “I’ve received so much, this is so wonderful, I need to pass it on! This is such an awesome gift that I’ve received that I want to show my gratitude by giving something back!” When we give to God, we are not repaying Him! We are simply saying, “Thanks Father!”

That, then, also answers a commonly asked question about tithing. In the Old Testament, the Israelites are commanded to give 10% of everything to God (Deuteronomy 12:17). If we have been released of the regulations of the Old Testament, then we have also been released of the obligation to give 10% of our income. But, far from saying we shouldn’t give, the call is really for us to give more sacrificially than simply calculating a strict 10%. If we are giving from a place of thankfulness, we won’t be legalistically calculating how much 10% is; we’ll be giving whatever we can. However, history shows that the 10% tithe still acts as a good rule of thumb for many people and, it appears, that it was the guide the early Church used. The tithe is not a rule to be followed but a healthy principle to guide us.

Paul writes to the Corinthians about giving to help the starving Church in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 9). He calls on the wealthy Christians of Corinth to help their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. He also thanks and encourages the Philippians in their financial support of his ministry (Philippians 4:15). The purpose, then, of Christian giving is to extend the ministry of the Gospel – to help people in their need and to facilitate the Gospel. We are thankful for what we’ve received from God and now we want others to hear about the amazing hope available in Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:8).

TALKING POINT #17
LIVING IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY #10: GIVING AT CHURCH

One final Biblical principle to consider is that of reward (yes, reward!). Reward has become a dirty word in Christian circles because we think God shouldn't discriminate between Christians. And, to be sure, God loves all of us equally. But there is an important principle in Scripture that if we are generous with what God gives us (whether small or large), He rewards that generosity. Take some time to read the story of the widow with her two pennies (Luke 21:1-4). The widow actually gave less than the others in straight accounting terms but because she gave from a place of sacrifice, Jesus regards her as giving more. More passages about this point are:

- Proverbs 22:9 says, "Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor."
- God says to Israel in Malachi 3:10, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."
- Jesus said, "give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).
- Paul says to the Corinthians, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ... Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." (2 Corinthians 9:6, 10-11).

There is a clear principle here: God rewards generosity. The more faithful we are to give generously, the more God will reward us to give more. This is not "prosperity doctrine" because sometimes God's reward comes in the form of greater responsibility in other areas, but the principle here is clear, the more we give to God, the more he responds with blessing (Mathew 25:21).

NOW FOR US AT FOREST LAKE

We believe God is doing something special in and through Forest Lake Baptist Church. We believe He is calling us to partner with Him in changing lives for eternity. While He calls us to respond sacrificially in every area of our lives, we must also acknowledge the need to respond financially.

Paul says that God will provide all we need for His work (Philippians 4:19) but He will principally provide that through the generosity of His people. The cost of ministry continues to rise as we expand our field of influence and so He calls us to bless the work of God by giving what God has already given us. In gratitude for the grace and hope that He has poured into us, we give so that others may know this grace and hope.

CONCLUSION

Will you join in giving to God's work at this Church? We want to see people transformed by the power of Christ. We are privileged to share in this work with God. We are honoured that our Heavenly Father wants to use us in this work and so we respond by giving our time, our efforts, our expertise, our gifts and, yes, our money to see His Kingdom extended.

Next month, we'll continue our series on "Living in the Church Community" as we look at the "Artistic Church."