

Right ways and Wrong ways of Using Money

In 2005 a man from Khartoum wrote this in a letter to me :

*“As a Sudanese Christian I have **listened to people say they are poor**, unable, unfit, un...anything to give to God. All they feel able to do is to receive. I am ashamed that many of my fellow Sudanese Christians are like that. Time and again we see from experience—and from the Bible—that when the people of God come together we can face up to our desperate challenges. Then God helps us to overcome them”.*

“Our Lord expects us to give back to Him from what we have. We are never accountable for what we do not have! By not giving to God we are for sure denying ourselves His blessings. We are closed to God. We say we do not want God’s blessings. Instead, we seek donations from so and so”.

“When individuals and families belong to a local church, and tithe, and give offerings to God through it, we can free ourselves from being dependant on outside help all the time”.

Bible reading: 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9, which talk about the nature, significance and patterns of Christian giving.

God’s grace was seen by the way they used their money!

“this act of grace on your part”, (N.I.V.) 8:6

“see that you also excel in this grace of giving”, 8:7

“you know the grace of our Lord **Jesus** Christ”, 8:9,

who made himself poor, for the benefit of others.

We meet the Macedonian church in Acts 16:9-17:15. It included people from Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. They were new Christians in very young churches. They faced

persecution in daily life, Acts 17:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 2:14. Yet they were very keen to give to a collection for relieving the suffering saints in Jerusalem, 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.

“they were extremely generous in their giving even though they are very poor”, (Good News Bible) verse 2.

“they gave as much as they could, and even more than they could”, verse 3.

“First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then by God’s will they gave themselves to us as well”, verse 4.

Some people from Macedonia joined Paul’s travelling team, Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4. They willingly gave themselves and their time and their talents—as well as their money. A person’s money is his or her own energy and effort converted into Sudanese pounds! When you give your cash, you give part of yourself. If you have no money—you can still give things like your skills, your strength and your hospitality.

The principle in 2 Corinthians 8:15 comes from Exodus 16:4-5, 21-22. God miraculously provided for thousands of His people who were in the desert. Their key was passing God’s test for obedience: *“Gather.. eat... and save what is appropriate for each day”*. God supplied. Obedience brought blessing.

Question: God promises to meet our daily needs, Philippians 4:19.

Why do so many of us have to struggle with this week by week?

Think about these things. They help us towards an answer.

1. It is partly the general result of humankind’s sin, Genesis 3:17-19.
“through painful toil ... by the sweat of your brow ...you will eat”.
2. God intends all of mankind to work hard for a living, Exodus 20:9.
“six days you shall labour and do all your work”.

3. Making the best use of what God provides through this work—or through other gifts received—brings a spirit of contentment, even in times of hunger, Philippians 4:11-13.
I learn to make do with what I have earned or received.
4. Jesus said: “Be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things”, Matthew 6:33 (Good News Bible).

Teaching our own families to live with Jesus’ priorities is sometimes difficult, but it is a part of our Christian responsibility.
5. Where necessary some believers were warned by others of the results of their own laziness, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13.
6. Paul describes a “matter of **giving** and receiving”, Philippians 4:15. There are many similarities between Philippians 4:10-20 and 2 Corinthians 8& 9. We all have more control over what we can give than we have over what we receive. When we give in the right way, we have done something towards meeting our own needs.

There is no room for legalism in giving to the Lord. Twice Paul advises and encourages, but he does not command, 2 Corinthians 8:8, 10.

2 Corinthians 9:7 says: “*Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*”, (italics mine).

We learn three facts from this text:

1. **The amount of the gift is not important**, 8:3; 8:12. Tithing—giving 10%— in the Old Testament came before the Law was given. See Genesis 14:17-20, where Abram tithed to Melchizedek. We must never allow tithing to become a mere legalism.

Jesus is the New Testament Melchizedek, well worthy of *at least* a tithe from us, Hebrews 6:19-20.

In the New Testament tithing becomes **regular, proportional giving**, 2 Corinthians 9:7 (see above); and “every week ... a sum of money in keeping with his (or her) income”, 1 Corinthians 16:2.

Tithing *and offerings above a tithe* are both ways for us to give to the Lord. **They do not have to be in money:**

- They may be giving a percentage of our time, our skills and our strength in maintenance of church buildings and equipment—making no charge for it.
- They may be bringing to the church a percentage of the eggs our hens lay; the honey our bees produce; the crops we grow in our fields.
- They may be separating some of the sugar, lighting or cooking oil we buy from the market, and giving it for our church to sell or to use.
- They may be selling the first shirt we make every week, and putting the cash aside for the weekly offering.
- They may be putting a sum of money aside from what we have earned, and giving it to the offering at church, or for other Christian work.

These first fruits—and similar things—belong to God! They are not ours. We steal from God if we keep them for ourselves. We waste His resources if we wrongly use them.

What does God want you to do as your tithe and offerings?

2. The attitude in which the giver gives is very important.

Good attitudes:

- 8:4 counting it a “privilege” to share
- 8:8 “sincerely” expressing your love”
- 8:11 a “continual willingness”

- 9:5-6 "generosity"
- 9:7 happily doing the right thing.

Bad attitudes:

- 8:5 giving money, but not from a heart given to God
- 8:11 starting well, but forgetting to continue
- 8:13 jealousy of what others have
- 9:5 giving only "because you have to" G.N.B., and not because you want to
- 9:6 giving "sparingly" N.I.V., as little as you can!
- 9:7 giving sadly, out of duty rather than love.

Jesus taught His first disciples the importance of attitude when He compared the poor widow's offering with those of the rich people, Luke 21:1-4.

"she *out of her poverty put in* all she had to live on", (italics mine).

Wrong attitudes towards giving and receiving had nearly wrecked the Christian church early in its life.

Acts 5:1-11, some tried to deceive God and other people, (compare to Acts 4:32-37).

Acts 6:1-7, some grumbled over the distribution of aid.

Check your own attitudes over giving and receiving.

3. Given well, God anoints both the gift and the giver.

The best methods for giving to God can be almost anything! They simply need to be from a sincerely moved heart!

We can only give beyond our ability, 8:2-3, as God works in and through us.

Jesus' parable of the talents teaches us to invest what we have wisely. God will give the return, Matthew 25:14-30.

As God's servants we are to do good and to be faithful, verses 21 & 23.

God promises a reward to those who give secretly—without public show—to help the needy, Matthew 6:1-4.

Jesus said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive”, Acts 20:35. (A saying of Jesus not recorded in the Gospels, but remembered by Paul and Luke from oral tradition).

Is God pleased with the way you use your money? Are you prepared to change your ways so that He can bless you?

Five DANGERS with money, for us to be careful about:

1. **Giving 10% to the church is not buying a blessing** from God! It does not bribe God to bless you! In the 16th century something like that was called “an indulgence”. Martin Luther started the Reformation by standing against it. Jesus Christ has done all that is needed for salvation. No-one can buy it—or any other blessing—from God, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”, 2 Corinthians 9:15.

Giving to God shows your love for Him, your obedience to Him and your worship of Him.

2. **“A gift might be offered with altogether improper motives, so that the word comes to mean much the same as bribe”.**¹

We must never try to bribe God, or anyone else.

Proverbs 18:16 (verses 10-11 urge trust in God, not wealth).

Exodus 23:8

Deuteronomy 16:18-20.

1. Do not “pervert justice”

2. Do not “show partiality”

¹ Illustrated Bible Dictionary, (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press) 1998 reprint, Volume 1 p.560.

3. Do not “accept a bribe”.

To bribe means “to promise, offer, or give something, usually money, to a person to procure services or gain influence, especially illegally”.²

Bribery is corruption. It is like a cancer—taking the nation’s life away. There is no honesty or trust where there is bribery.

1. It oppresses the poor, who cannot afford any money.
2. It steals from employers, who already pay for the job to be done.
3. It dishonours the name of Jesus in witness, because it shows that He cannot provide without us breaking the law to help Him out!

(see Articles 8, 16 and 35, Constitution of the Republic of Sudan, July 1998).

3. **We do not give because God needs anything!** God is not poor! We do not need to help Him out. It is for our benefit that God wants us to give. By giving to God we show that we love God more than we love money, Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 6:33; 1 Timothy 6:6-11.

4. **Money is a temptation. We can all handle it wrongly.**

1. Acts 6:1-7, delegation to a trusted, group of spiritual men
2. Acts 11:29-30, responsibility given to a respected team who would be held personally accountable
3. 2 Corinthians 8:18-21, clear and specific arrangements made with honest and transparent accountability. Everyone could see it was right!

5. **Materialism** is an increasing danger as Sudan develops economically. Peoples’ lives will become *more* dominated by money and things, and *less* controlled by spiritual values. I have

² English Dictionary (Glasgow: Harper Collins) 1995.

found that the “love of money”, 1 Timothy 6:10, is often strongest among the poor. Our attitude reveals our eternal values, Matthew 6:19-21.

As another friend wrote to me from Sudan recently, *“It is easy to spend millions today and then to become a burden on others tomorrow”*.

How can we give to God and depend upon nobody else?

In the Old Testament Law 10% of everything was God's portion, Leviticus 27:30-34.

In the New Testament Jesus fulfilled the Law. He said: “Whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 5:17-20.

Read again from 2 Corinthians 8:1-9.

God wants us to give to Him and to His work.

God wants us to give:

liberally—verse 2, “in rich generosity”

conscientiously—verse 3, “as much as able”

sacrificially—verse 3, “beyond ability”

deliberately—verse 4, “pleaded for the privilege”

worshipfully—verse 5, “themselves first to the Lord”

excellently—verse 7, “excel in this grace of giving”

lovingly—verses 8-9, “test the sincerity of your love”.

Every Christian's offering is an act of worship, and an act of witness, and an act of willingness:

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income”, 1 Corinthians 16:2.

Discussion guide

Using this chapter and Scriptures quoted:

1. Share examples you know of a Christian Sudanese “culture of dependency” on outside help.

Do you believe this honours God? Why? Why not?

2. “Giving our tithes and offerings to God through our local church can free ourselves”.

True or false? Why?

3. “When we give in the right way, we have done something towards meeting our own needs”.

Why is this true?

Who is in control of what we give to the Lord? Think of the principle, not the amount.

4. In the “good and bad attitudes” from point 2 (above), which of them do you find easy and which do you find more difficult regarding your own giving? If you can, explain why.

5. From Acts chapters 4,5 and 6 list as many good and bad examples of giving to the Lord as you can find.

What is the main lesson you and your church can learn from them?

6. What are some of the dangers facing Christians as materialism and development come to Sudan?

Explain how Matthew 6:19-21 can help Christians who want to combat this.