

PREACHING ABOUT MONEY

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Preaching about money is not something I like to do. In part, this is because I know that I have to practise what I preach! And in part too because I know that there are always some people in the congregation who take exception the moment they hear a preacher mention money. And yet, I feel I would be doing less than my duty if I omitted to teach on one of the basics of the Christian life. So normally once a year in the Spring I preach about money.

In the first place, I believe that there is need for clear teaching about the principles of giving. In particular, I believe that we need to teach our young people that it is never too early to give. When for instance I became a church member in my early teens, I was given a set of offering envelopes in which I religiously put my 6d. It didn't make much difference to the total offering, but it did instil into me the discipline of giving. As the American Baptist, John Rockefeller, once said: "If I hadn't learnt to tithe my first dollar, I would never have tithed my first million". Yes, however high or low our income may be, all of us have a duty to give.

I also believe that there are times when we need to challenge the people of God to give more. Certainly, having just gone through a £2 million re-development scheme, we have found it necessary on a number of occasions to present a financial challenge. Some 'super-spiritual' members objected and said that we should simply trust God to supply our needs. They piously cited George Muller who made it a principle never to mention the financial needs of his orphanages – instead he simply 'prayed the money in'. I don't buy that argument. The fact is that God normally supplies our needs through people, and in order for God to do that, people need to know what the needs are. I find it significant that the Apostle Paul never prayed money in – rather he believed in appealing for money. In 2 Corinthians, for example, he devoted two whole chapters to the subject. In other letters, he comes back to the subject of money time and again. Jesus too was never embarrassed (see, for instance, Matt 6.19-21; Matt 6.24). I am told that one out of every six verses in the Gospels has to do with the right and wrong use of material possessions; and that sixteen out of thirty-eight parables have to do with the right and wrong use of material possessions.

I find it interesting that on one occasion Jesus sat in front of the temple collection box and watched people putting in their offering (Mark 12.41) – as far as Jesus was concerned, giving was not a private matter! Nor indeed does the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11) encourage secrecy in giving. Why is it then that for some church people money has become the great unmentionable? I wonder, does their unease reflect short-comings in their personal discipleship.

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