

The Church, part 17

(2 Corinthians 8-9 and assorted Scriptures)

(preached Pine Grove 10/22/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

The Sunday School teacher was finishing up her lesson to 4th grade boys on how important it is to give to the Lord...

She had talked about giving to God cheerfully from the heart and how important it is to share what we have with others....

As a way to end her lesson on giving, she wanted to end with a question that simply make the kids think deeply about giving to the Lord...

So she asked the class right before it was time to go...

“Do you know where little boys go if they dont put their money in the collection plate?”

Surprisingly, a little boy’s hand shot up.

“Yes ma’am. I know where little boys go who don’t give their money to God.”

“Where Johnny?”

They get to keep their money and go to the movies...

There was a 1 dollar bill and a 50 dollar bill riding down the conveyor belt at the US Mint.

They were both over 20 years old and were tattered and torn and headed to the incinerator to be taken out of circulation..

The 50 dollar bill looked at the 1 dollar bill and said, "hey little buddy, I have had a great life. I started out in Philadelphia and then I spent about 5 years seeing all of New York City, then I headed to Los Angeles for a few years before going to Las Vegas and I finally finished out my life in beautiful Miami."

The 1 dollar dollar spoke up and said, "well that is nice friend. I have not had quite the experience that you have had. I started out in Philadelphia and then headed to the Methodist church, followed by the Presbyterian church, the Lutheran church, the Church of God and then I spent the last few years in a Baptist Church."

The 50 dollar bill looked at him as the heat of the furnace got closer...

"Excuse me 1 dollar bill, but what is a church?"

Last week, we began a look at a Christian and money...

And this is a part of a series that we have been looking on the church...

Specifically, we have been looking at 9 characteristics of an effective church..

And we have looked at these traits in hopes of learning about the church but also in hopes of evaluating our church and seeing where we are doing good and where we can do better...

The 1st characteristic we looked at was Biblical preaching, and we talked about how effective churches preach the Word of God so that the church can obey and live by the word of God...

The 2nd characteristic we discussed was the need for qualified leadership in the church...

In short, God won't bless churches that are led by biblically unqualified men...

The new talked about how effective churches are serious about making disciples...

Effective churches are not just focused on people saying prayers and walking aisles but on seeing people grow in Christlikeness...

Then we discovered how effective churches are engaged in evangelism...

Since the mission of the church is to go into the world and preach the gospel, we have to get that right if we hope to do anything else for the Lord...

The 5th characteristic we discussed is the reality that effective churches have an active membership where the work of the church is shared by all the members and not just a select few...

The 6th characteristic of effective churches have genuine fellowship within their membership...

Since God created us social creatures, we must socialize and celebrate the goodness of God very frequently...

And then the last characteristic we looked at was the idea of courageous faith..

Effective churches trust God beyond what they can see...

They act in obedience to God but they also act in faith, trusting God to provide for their needs...

And then last week, we began our look at characteristic #8 of an effective church...

And that is the idea that effective churches are known for their generosity both to God and to others....

No when we think of generous giving, we must back up and first understand money and its relationship to the believer..

Therefore, we began what is going to be a series of messages on the Christian and his money...

So we began with 4 questions that really help us understand our relationship to money...

How are we to view money?

How are we to acquire money?

How are we to spend our money?

How are we give our money?

And we go through questions 1 and 2 last week...

So, let's just do a short review of these questions before we head to question 3...

So first of all, how are we to view money...

Well, we looked at this from the negative side....

We aren't to love money, since the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil..

Second, we aren't to put our trust in money.

God is where we place our trust, not our bank account...

Third, we aren't to anxiously seek money...

Instead we are to seek God's kingdom and HE will add everything to us...

So if we aren't to anxiously seek money or put our trust in money or love money, how should we view money?

WE should view it as part of God's created order..

We should see it as a way to accomplish the plans of God in the world...

By feeding our families, supporting our churches, spreading the gospel and using it to bless others in need...

Money is simply a part of the created order and having it or not having it is no indication of how we stand with God...

But the heart attitude behind how we use it is...

The second question we answered last week was how are we to get money...

And we talked about not getting it through sinful means...

We are not to acquire money through theft or bribery or extortion or through high interest charges...

We are not to acquire money through get rich quick schemes that take advantage of others...

Instead, we can acquire money through inheritance or wise investments or by simply working, which is God's ordained way of getting money for most people..

And that is a quick review of questions 1 & 2 in relation to how a Christian is to view money...

Now, we come to questions 3 and 4...

The third question assumes that we have acquired money through a God-approved method, so now the question becomes "how do we spend our money?"

Well the Bible has much to say about this as well..

1 Timothy 5:8..

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

A primary way to spend our money is to provide for our family...

And you see how serious it is not to spend your money to provide for your family..

The Bible would say that if you spend your money on other things while your family suffers, you reveal that you are not saved...

Verse 8 even says that a person like this is worse than an unbeliever...

So how is that possible?

Well, the idea is this...

Even unbelievers make spending their money to care for their families a priority...

Now, this verse is very much ignored in our current culture...

People today, and I am not just talking about unbelievers, I am talking about folks who call themselves Christians...

But so many people today, make their family last on their list of where their money is spent...

Christians are called to care for their families first...

Now, the verse is clear...

You household, which means the people under your roof are a priority for your money but this also applies to extended family as well....

Mothers, brothers, aunts, cousins, etc. are all part of your extended family...

And your money should be spent to care for them if necessary...

Look, the family is the first line of defense when you have a financial need...

This is what the Scriptures teach...

So many people see the church as the first line of defense, but it is not..

The church can and should help but only after people have turned to their family first...

So, your money should be spent to care for your household and your extended family if they have a need...

Along these same lines, your money should be spent to care for other Christians as well..

1 John 3:17

17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his [g]heart [h]against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

There is clearly a call to spend our money to meet the needs of other Christians around us..

John asked a serious question by challenging a Christian who has the financial ability to help his brother but refuses to do it..

He asked, "how can you say you love God if you can help out a fellow brother or sister in need?"

Since we are all made in God's image and in the case of the church, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to spend our money to help other believers..

And when we do spend our money in that way, we prove that the love of God is in us....

So, we should spend our money to help our households, our extended family, our brothers and sisters in Christ, and then finally on that list would be others in need that aren't in our family or in the church...

That is one way to spend our money....

A second way we spend our money is to pay our debts...

Romans 13:6-8...

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves [e]his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

Clearly, we are to spend our money by paying people what is due to them...

This would apply to paying our taxes but also to paying our light bill or paying our mortgage or rent...

Though going in debt is not a sin, it is also not an opportunity to not pay people what is due to them...

Spend your money to pay people you owe..

I watch a lot of Judge Judy and it is amazing how many people will let their debts go...

And Judge Judy always uses the same example..

If you go into a restaurant and you order a steak, and you eat the steak, you pay for the steak...

You don't eat it and then after it is all gone complain about how bad it was in hopes of not paying the bill...

If it bad, tell them after the first bite and leave the steak on the plate...

And she often uses it for people who refuse to pay rent...

She will say, you stayed there and uses the power and the roof and the shelter, but now you think you don't owe rent because it was a bad experience...

And she will say, you ate the steak so you owe the debt of rent...

And the Bible would agree..

Spend your money to pay your bills and debts...

A third way to spend your money is to save your money...

A wise man told me to pay the Lord and pay myself with each paycheck..

And there is wisdom in that..

We spend our money to save money...

The Bible commends saving and planning...

The ant is wise because he works hard in the summer to save for winter..

Proverbs 6:6-8

6

***Go to the ant, O sluggard,
Observe her ways and be wise,***

7

***Which, having no chief,
Officer or ruler,***

8

***Prepares her food in the summer
And gathers her provision in the harvest.***

The clear principle is to imitate the ant and prepare and gather your food in summer and harvest time because winter will come and you will need food...

And again, this is not hoarding but saving modestly...

The ant doesn't save enough in the summer to even last through a year but only through winter...

The idea isn't to save to make your family now or to take away from meeting other's needs or to dip into what you can give...

But to save regularly and modestly to make it through the few months of winter...

You can save in a regard savings account, a retirement account, through other long term safe investments...

Regardless of how you save, make it a habit to save...

Now let me make a note here..

Some folks especially younger couples find it harder to save..

There are added expenses with children and school and all sorts of things..

Therefore I tell dads to buy life insurance policies which I think are a form of saving...

Though you may not want to bet on you dying early, which is what you do when you purchase a life insurance policy....

You also dont want to leave a wife and kids with no dad to earn income to pay the bills...

One of the most important bills we pay each year is my life insurance premium...

We always scrape enough money together to pay that bill since it becomes our savings in case the Lord takes me home early...

So, we spend our money to care for our families needs, to pay our debts, and to save for the future..

Up to this point, we have answered 3 questions regarding the believer and his money...

We should now have a biblical answer of how to view money..

We should now know the biblical way to acquire money..

We should now understand how to spend our money in a God-honoring way...

Now, we need to take some time trying to understand how to give our money...

I want to take some time to build a biblical case of how we are to give our money...

Because this is one area in the church where there is very little understanding of how to properly give our money...

And the reason for that is that this is often a very uncomfortable subject for preachers to teach and people to obey..

Though I spoke about this a little last week, I want to make a disclaimer before I even start looking at giving in the Bible..

When I teach about giving, it isn't because I need your money...

I have no desire to pat you on your back or lay a guilt trip on you over how much and how often you give..

It is clearly a matter between you and the Lord...

Giving is a very personal thing and any conviction you get or comfort you feel is truly a work of the Spirit in your life...

I have no idea what people give to this church..

I see the financial report like you do every so often and that is it..

I trust the Lord to lead his people to provide for his church...

I am not obsessed with the bottom line of our checking account..

Yes, I know what is in it every so often...

Yes, I know what our current spending levels are...

But I don't stay awake at night over it..

My view is fairly simple...

If we can't afford to meet our budget needs, that is the Lord's will and we will adjust accordingly or close the doors..

Now, that being said, I also think it is wise to teach about giving and it is wise to set budgets and monitor budgets and be good stewards...

So though I am not a pastor to stay awake at night or to beg people to give, I also want to help the people of God

understand their biblical responsibility to give in a way that honors the Lord and blesses them...

With that said, let's kind of think about how we are to give our money...

Now, for most of us, we grew up in churches and under pastors where 10% was what we heard from the time we were in Sunday school...

I even had a man at church who would give me a dollar and a dime every Sunday...

He would tell me to keep the dollar and give the dime to God because that is 10% of what he gave me...

Well, he was only trying to help but he actually gave me a dollar and ten cents so a true 10% would be 11 cents and not 10...

Anyway, we have had that number ingrained in our minds in terms of our regular giving since we were in church..

And we have been told that anything above that 10%, which is commonly called a tithe, was an offering to God...

Now where does this idea of 10% tithe come from?

Well, it comes from the OT which uses the word tithe in a number of places to describe a portion of what people in the OT gave to the Lord..

Now, what may surprise you is that the word tithe is never used in the NT in reference to what people in the church should give to God.

In all the passages on giving in the NT, the word tithe and the idea of 10% giving never appears..

Not once, ever...

So the question comes, why has the OT tithe become the standard for NT giving...

And the reason is quite simple...

Churches and pastors have felt that if you didn't put a number of what a person should give that there wouldn't be enough money given to keep churches open and pastors paid...

So, they went to the OT and grab some passages on 10% and brought them forward to the NT church and made them the standard for the church..

Now, I am not opposed to a number..

Quite frankly, I have used 10% as a standard for my own personal giving for years, but I want us all to understand the biblical model for giving is not centered on 10% of your income...

The NT never uses that number when talking about giving and guess what is also true?

Israel was required to give much more than 10% in the OT as well...

So while it may be a helpful number, don't think that if you give 10% of your income that you are pleasing the Lord...

The Lord may be pleased if you give only 1% and he may not be pleased even if you give 25%..

You see, the motivation for giving is not meeting an obligation to the Lord..

The Lord doesn't want your outward obedience if your heart is not in it...

And often times, we give to meet a number rather than giving to please the Lord...

The NT is crystal clear...

Don't give out of obligation or under compulsion but give with a cheerful heart in gratitude for what the Lord has given you this week..

So, let us think about giving in terms of what the Bible says about it...

And we will need to begin this week and finish next week, but let's go to the OT to see how we are to go about giving to the Lord..

Now, we need to start this biblical look at giving in the very beginning...

The first example of giving is seen in the account of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4...

And this is going to give us one element of giving and that is the idea of voluntary or freewill giving...

In Genesis 4, we simply read this.

Genesis 4:3-4...

3 So it came about [d]in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.

Now, notice a couple things about this first example of giving to God...

First, there was no command to give...

From what we know, God had not told Cain and Abel to do this...

It seems best to see this this as a voluntary or freewill offering...

It is possible that Adam and Eve had encouraged their sons to give to God, but we simply can't prove that because the Bible doesn't say that..

It seems best to understand that giving to God comes from the fact that we are made in his image...

And that he has set it in our hearts to show our love to him and worship of him by giving to him...

Yet even in the beginning, God never told his people how much to give...

Now some people would tell you that Cain offering was rejected because he didn't give 10% while Abel did...

But that is twisting the Bible to suit your needs..

We have no indication that God put a percentage on what Cain and Able should give, he simply put it in their hearts to give to him without any minimum requirements or percentages...

They simply gave out of the overflow of their heart, which is clearly a foundational truth of giving that glorifies God...

Also in the OT, we find the example of Noah and Abraham...

Noah went out after the flood in Genesis 8, and here is what we read in verse 20...

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

Again, we see another example of giving to God in the very beginning of the Bible..

God has sent a worldwide flood upon the earth but had spared Noah and his family, so what does Noah do?

He builds an altar and gives an offering to the Lord..

Once again, please note that God didn't tell Noah to give...

He didn't tell him to offer 10% of the animals..

Noah purposed what he would give to God in his heart and he offered in to God...

And all it says is that God was pleased with Noah's offering...

Here is another foundational truth about giving...

It comes out of a heart of gratitude to God..

God had spared Noah's live and the lives of his family, so Noah gave to God not out of obligation or because of a command...

He gave out of gratitude to God and he gave out of his own freewill and voluntarily...

And notice he gave of every clean animal and every clean bird, which was probably way more than 10%...

The final example of we will look at tonight is Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel...

In Genesis 12 and in Genesis 13, we find two examples of Abraham building altars to God...

The first one was in verse 7 of Gen 12 in response to God calling him out of his homeland to follow Him...

So Abraham left and on his way, he built an altar to God.

And since altars were places of sacrifice, we assume that Abraham sacrificed something on that altar to God...

It most likely was an animal...

And then in chapter 13, Abraham does it again in verse 18 once he had arrived in the Promised Land of Canaan...

Again, the thing to note in all these examples of giving to God in the very beginning of time are this....

All of this giving was voluntary..

God had not commanded Cain or Abel or Noah or Abraham to offer anything to him..

All of these offerings were voluntary and not under coercion...

Second, there is no percentage tied to any of these offerings to God...

10% isn't even mentioned in any of these first examples of giving to God...

The offerings could have been less or more than 10%.

We simply dont know and that may be the point...

Giving to God is not based on a number but on the heart of the person who is giving...

Now, next week, we will be introduced to the idea of a tithe and the concept of 10%...

But you will see that even then, 10% is only a fraction of what Israel was required to give to God...

Let us pray tonight...