

THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (17)

A Giving Community

A. Introduction

1. The local church is a community of God's people.

2. What kind of community should we be?

When people look at this local church what should they see?

3. A key mark of every local church should be that they are a giving community.

How we use our money and possessions is of utmost importance – there are hundreds of verses about money and possessions, and how God's people should use them.

Jesus judged the reality of Zacchaeus' conversion by it.

"But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham." (Luke 19:8-9)

Jesus knows and cares about what people do with their money.

"As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:1-4)

Giving is one of the key ways that we become more like Jesus.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9)

B. Ownership and Stewardship

1. Everything in the world belongs to God.

"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." (Psalm 24:1-2)

"I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it." (Psalm 50:9-12)

"To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it." (Deuteronomy 10:14)

"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all." (1 Chronicles 29:11-12)

God gives specific property and possessions for people to look after and enjoy (see Matthew 25:14-30).

God grants moneymaking skills and determines how much wealth He entrusts to us.

"But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today." (Deuteronomy 8:18)

"The LORD sends poverty and wealth." (1 Samuel 2:7)

The Lord expects us to work hard, to earn a fair wage, and to use our money responsibly.

"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." (Ephesians 4:28)

2. We are all called to be stewards.

A steward is someone the owner entrusts with the management of his assets.

Good stewards always act in the owner's best interests.

We are to use whatever God gives us in ways that please Him.

3. Therefore, money and possessions are good things to be used for God's glory and the good of others.

"For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." (1 Timothy 4:4-5)

The problem is the love of money.

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." (1 Timothy 6:10)

C. Do I have to give?

1. Yes!

It is a way of acknowledging that all good things come from God and that everything belongs to God.

It is a way of thanking Him for His goodness to us – especially shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The example of Israel.

God asked for the firstfruits of their work.

"Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God." (Exodus 34:26)

God also asked for a tithe (10%) – in fact, there were three tithes the people of Israel were to give.

"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD." (Leviticus 27:30)

"I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting." (Numbers 18:21)

"At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

3. The example of the early church.

"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." (Acts 2:44-45)

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No-one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had... There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need." (Acts 4:32, 34-35)

D. Where am I to give?

1. We have a responsibility to provide for our families and also to pay what is due to the state.

"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5:8)

"Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then he said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away." (Matthew 22:17-22)

2. Our giving should be directed first to the local church that feeds and cares for us.

For the work of proclaiming the gospel.

For the work of teaching the believers.

To provide support for the pastor(s).

"Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor." (Galatians 6:6)

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

To provide relief for suffering believers – the local church has leaders who should be aware of these needs.

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Galatians 6:10)

3. After the local church, our priority is to other believers before unbelievers.

E. How am I to give?

1. Give willingly.

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

2. Give cheerfully.

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

3. Give generously.

"If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously." (Romans 12:8)

4. Give discreetly.

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matthew 6:2-4)

5. Give sacrificially.

"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything— all she had to live on.'" (Mark 12:41-44)

Giving is meant to be felt.

If you haven't had to put plans on hold because of your giving, can you say you have given sacrificially?

6. Give purposefully.

"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made." (1 Corinthians 16:2)

We should plan to give a certain amount rather than give what's left in our wallets at the end of the week or month.

7. Give regularly.

"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money." (1 Corinthians 16:2)

F. How much should I give?

1. Our giving should be in keeping with our income.

"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made." (1 Corinthians 16:2)

Those with more money are expected to give more than those who have less money.

An increase in income should be reflected in an increase in our giving.

2. As a guide, 10% is a helpful starting point for most people.

We are free to give more than 10%.

The example of John Wesley.

G. Conclusion

"There are three conversions necessary in the Christian life: the conversion of the heart, the mind and the purse." (Martin Luther)