

The Money Question

Becoming Like-minded

Money is a popular topic in today's media. Not a day goes by that our newspapers and news media do not report something about the state of the economy. World events are interpreted in terms of how they affect our profits and financial security. Many also follow the stock market. Their lives revolve around it because they have stored up treasures on earth for future retirement.

The Bible also has a lot to say about money. But its focus is on stewardship, and giving to meet the needs of others—just the opposite of this world's system, accumulating for self. As believers we are not exempt from the influences of this world's mentality. John reminds us that the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one (see 1 John 5:19). We do well to remind ourselves of these things when we come together to discuss missions and the work of God.

Money has a way of overtaking our motives. If we don't master it, it will master us (see Matthew 6:24). In fact, so strong is its pull that the New Testament has more verses on the subject of money than verses about heaven and hell. And more is said about money than about faith. Why is this so? The fact is this: the human heart is inextricably bound to wealth and material things. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21).

The Supreme Task

A church that wants to send out missionaries will sooner or later face the money question. Commonly asked questions are: "Do we have enough?" and "Can we afford this?" But before we consider how much we need, we should look at the *what*.

Missions is the central theme of God's revelation. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. And He has also made us ministers of reconciliation. The Bible is a mission's handbook. It calls us to take up the priority of world evangelization. The last words of Jesus on earth turned all eyes to the needs of the world (see Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8).

**"Every church
should spend
more on missions
than it spends on
itself."**

OJS

Oswald J. Smith in *The Challenge of Missions* says:

If world evangelization comes first, then we should concentrate on giving to missions and let others who do not have the vision contribute other things. There will always be plenty for the home work, for there are always those who put the home work first. If we put missions first, then we will give more to missions than to anything else. Otherwise something else takes its place. I find very few ministers who really believe that the evangelization of the world is their most important work.

Unity of purpose is very important when a church has to make tough financial decisions. A clear vision will help eliminate things of lesser importance even though they may be deemed to be worthy causes.

Methods of Raising Money

Churches and missions these days use many and varied methods to raise money to finance the work of God. It is crucial that a local body be of one mind regarding methods. To not be is to invite problems when a crisis comes. Unity of purpose and method helps keep us on track and hold us together when differences surface.

The church bazaar, benefit auctions, concerts, and promotional banquets are common methods that people use to raise money for missions. Each of these *can* raise money. In regards to these and similar methods, Oswald J. Smith says:

Not because I am against these methods, but because they will not work [for us]. What does a business man do when he runs across a method that does not work? He scraps it, does he not?... Do you blame me for scrapping a method that will not produce what I need? [the amount needed for missions] A lot of people have an idea

Consider these promises:

"For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." Psalm 50:10

"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Psalms 37:25

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:9

that when George Mueller died, George Mueller's God died. God is not dead. Elijah's God still lives today. He can work the necessary miracle. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou would believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God? All things are possible to him that believeth."

Some have built whole systems around the missionary's responsibility to "raise personal support," knocking on the doors of individuals and friends and whatever church that shows interest. The missionaries are not released to the field until all the support is pledged. These days it takes many missionary candidates from one to two years to raise support. Many do not reach their target, and so abandon their leading. Health insurance and retirement benefits have raised the bottom line significantly. Missions journals are now asking the question, "Have Western missionaries priced themselves right out of a job?"

By Faith or By Sight?

God's method is different from man's. Man's way is to go by what he sees. God's way is by faith. God's accounting is not based on human reasoning, but on His ability to provide and multiply the money. Jesus said, "...According to your faith be it unto you" (Mt 9:29). Man adds, but God multiplies. Remember the story of the five loaves and two fishes?

Bible Examples

God led the children of Israel out of bondage and into the desert. There was no food, no water, and no protection from the sun or the cold. But God provided everything they needed in the wilderness: manna, water, shade by day, warmth by night, and protection from

their enemies. Even their shoes did not wear out! But beware. The greatest enemy was the enemy within. Self and selfish preferences prevailed. This kills any faith initiative. How often God had to rebuke them for their hardness of heart, their unbelief!

But God was faithful. He oversaw their mission (really *His* mission) to prepare a people and a nation for the promised Messiah. They were the channels through which God desired to bless all nations. God saw to it that they had *everything* they needed for this task. Will he not do the same for us, especially in that He commanded us to go into all the world?

Men of History

Many are the men of God, both ancient and modern, who dared to believe God for what they could not see. William Carey, though the church discouraged him, cast himself on God and went to India. C.T. Studd gave away a fortune and went to Africa, living on a shoestring—but that shoestring was tied by faith! George Mueller of Bristol trusted God's provisions for hundreds of orphans to demonstrate God's faithfulness to the unbelieving church of his day. Hudson Taylor stepped out in faith when he went to China. It is well known that God provided for all that he needed. It was he who said, **"God's work done in God's way will not lack God's supply."** There are countless others who stepped out by faith and trusted unwaveringly in the promises of God.

What is God's Way?

We looked at the supreme task: world evangelization. We looked at how to find money: by faith. Now let's look at the dynamic of how this is fleshed out in our church fellowship. How will we know if we are doing God's work in God's way? In other words, are

Every Christian a Missionary

"Every person in my church is a member of the Missionary Society. This work is far too important to hand over to any one organization. It belongs to the whole church, and when everyone catches the vision and everyone does something, then our goal is reached and our budget met. Our motto is, 'Every Christian a missionary.' It is the work of the whole church." OJS

we (as individuals, a local church, and our missionaries) in the will of God?

The Apostle Paul says, *"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind"* (Philippians 2:2). Paul here admonishes us to be united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Are we united in one mind and purpose regarding our vision and strategy for missions? Can the blessing of God rest upon our work if we are not?

Let's look at what we have available: *"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,..."* (v.1). All these things we have in Christ. But we can cut off these blessings if our way is wrong. Paul (knowing our tendency) admonishes us in verse three, *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory..."* Strife and contention are the exact opposite of unity and fellowship. Vainglory speaks of the spirit of pride. When disagreements about the use of money come up in a church, we would do well to allow God to search our motives. Much confusion stems from the root of selfishness. Strife, contention, and vainglory are deeds of the flesh.

But humility is the way forward: *"...but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"* (vv. 3, 4). Christ Himself lived this way, dying to self

and self interests. He subjected Himself to another, His Father.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (v. 5). Christ is not only our example, but our empowerment. Through His grace (power) you can *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (v. 12, 13). But grace does not operate where there is strife and vainglory. There is no power.

“Do all things without murmurings and disputings” (v. 14). Paul repeats again that which displeases God and kills faith. Murmurings and disputings brought strong rebuke to the Israelites in the wilderness. But Paul looks at the potential impact, *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world”* (v. 15). Paul is exhorting us in that the way we carry this out will be seen in a mixed up world.

We *must* be united in purpose (mission goals and strategy) and walk together in fellowship and humility in order to see God’s blessing and provision to empower our local body for missions. In this our labor will not be in vain. *“For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me”* (v.18).

I hope we can see the key to trusting God for His supply for His work. It has everything to do with our attitudes. Negative and wrong attitudes kill faith and harden the heart. So, is

Systematic Giving

“Everyone is taught to give systematically, from the ushers to the choir members; and we do not have parents give for the children. Every boy and girl, from the time they are age seven, is taught to give systematically. Then when they grow up we have no trouble with them.” Oswald J. Smith

the issue *really* about money? Can we agree that it is a deeper one of the heart?

Local Church Responsibility

The local church is still the best context for personal responsibility and accountability. Many parachurch organizations have taken up the work of missions in the past hundred years because the local church abdicated its responsibility. But local churches are catching anew the excitement and burden of obeying and following God’s way. How beautiful when a body of believers bands together to support its own missionaries! The missionaries are not burdened down by financial concerns and are able to give themselves fully to their calling. God promises to bless and provide all that is needed when we commit to world evangelization.

Any church that commits to having missions as their top priority will surely be tested. Other pressing needs and even emergencies may arise. The enemy may come in as a marauding band, seeking whom he may devour. He is a murderer, a thief, a destroyer. But God’s promise rings out loud and clear, *“... call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me”* (Psalm 50:15). When money issues arise, remember, our battle is not against flesh and blood. The money question in missions is more about unity of purpose, faith and humility than dollars and cents. God is the owner of it all. He knows our needs even before we call on His name. May God grant us grace to be of one accord and of one mind in knowing His heart for the lost. The result will be an ever increasing and brighter light to a lost and dying world.

