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MONEY AND POSSESSIONS

A SCRIPTURAL LOOK AT MONEY AND POSSESSIONS



Money and Possessions:

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Table of Contents

MONEY AND POSSESSIONS?	1
New Testament believer's attitude.....	1
First fruits, or 1st born or the tithe	2
Faith & tithing	2
Law & tithing.....	3

MONEY AND POSSESSIONS?

New Testament believer's attitude

A New Testament believer's attitude towards his money and possessions

Well, to begin with, we see from the Bible that there have been some topics discussed more than others, with money and possessions being one of these. For instance, the subject of prayer is discussed in five hundred different contexts in Scripture faith is also discussed around five hundred times in the Bible but it's interesting to see that money, prosperity and possessions are discussed over two thousand times (four times more than weighty subjects like prayer and faith).

Clearly from Scripture we see that money and possessions are an important issue to God and therefore we, as Believers and Disciples of Christ, need to know how best to handle it in a godly and responsible way.

Often Scripture refers to money or possessions as 'seed' and therefore needs to be seen as something given to us as a means and not an end in itself. I say this because we know that a wise farmer never eats his seed, and instead knows the importance of planting it in a time of famine, not knowing when the rains will come. It's this self same principle we see Paul teaching the church in Corinth:

*"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness"
2 Corinthians 9:10*

This is why we need to understand the purpose of provision as being both for seed and food. This is so because God not only gives it for blessing and provision, but it's also given by God as a means to test us with. Yes, money is also a test.

Scripture shows us clearly on a number of occasions how God can use money or possessions as a faith test in our lives, to see if we recognize that everything we possess in life actually comes from God Himself. This is why Moses warned the Israelites of the need to always see God as their source and to never stop honoring Him with His tithe:

"Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God." Deuteronomy 8:1'-20.

First fruits, or 1st born or the tithe

So, to understand how money interacts with our faith and our relationship with God our Father, we need to understand what the Bible says about First Fruits, or 1st Born or the Tithe.

In Exodus 13:2 we are introduced to the concept of the '1st Born' and how it's to be offered as a sacrifice so that it can redeem what is imperfect and unclean.

In the same way the First Fruits offering was to show one's dependence on God as their Source, and was offered up by the person in an act of faith.

Even God functioned in this area of faith (Himself being the Author and Perfector of our faith), when He offered His First Born (Jesus) to purify and make acceptable to God every other person who was to follow (Colossians 1:18). Psalm 51 says we are all born in sin (unclean).

It's interesting to see in John 1:29, that John the Baptist points to Jesus and calls Him Gods 'first born lamb' whom God was going to offer to redeem mankind (i.e. to use to take away the sin of the world) . God first offered His First Born (Jesus) before He got His 'faithed' return (that was going to include every other believer). In other words, He didn't wait until He first had nine sons and then gave His Son Jesus as number ten.

Faith & tithing

No, with God everything He does is done through faith - so it is with us who are called 'Children of Abraham, i.e. children of faith' - We too bless our God with our first fruit, believing Him to multiply what we see is still to come through eyes of faith.

The Bible tells us in Romans 5:8 that " God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ His First Born, died for us" This is why this Divine principle remains up until today, and it's this very principle which Malachi the prophet reminds us of in Malachi 3:8-12.

When we give back to God a portion (i.e. one tenth as seed) of what we receive or earn in this life (because our currency today is money and not sheep or goats), it is and will always remain a faith test on the part of every Believer until Christ returns. As with every first lamb, when sacrificed by the Jewish father in the family, he did so, not knowing how many more the ewe would bear - He did it in faith seeing God as his provider.

- So it is with us today, every act of faith, showing our dependence on Gods provision for every part of our lives, is highly pleasing to God.
- This is why God never says 'After the 9th lamb give me the 10th'- No, God says give me the 1st one (Exodus 23:19 & Proverbs 3:9,10) so that you can show me that you trust Me.
- This is why our monthly income should first have 'Gods Tithe' taken from it and sown into the local church where I fellowship and am spiritually cared for.
- This is what the Bible calls the principle of tithe, but sadly, not every Believer accepts it.

Law & tithing

Some contemporary Bible teachers have said that the tithe principle was part of the Old Testament law, and now that we are no longer under the law, but under grace, we no longer need to give God His first fruit or faith tithe. I believe they are sincere, but sincerely wrong.

I say this because the principle of tithing (giving to God a tenth of your income) was introduced by Abraham 800 years before the law was given to Moses. But, because the cross is our filter in the Christian faith, every religious practice that Israel held to must go through the cross from the Old to the New.

If when going from the Old Testament into the New Testament, we see that Scripture does away with it in the apostles teachings then we drop it, but if it comes through from the Old Testament into the New, and remains unchanged in the apostles teachings, we keep it as a part of our faith - This was in the case of the tithe. It was never 'changed' because it was not introduced with the Mosaic Law; it was instituted in the time of Abraham, 800 years before Moses was given the Law. Actually, in the New Testament letter to the Hebrew believers in chapter 7:8 we see the principle of tithing endorsed rather than removed. The writer to the Hebrew believers tells them:

"In this life mortal men (i.e. men in the local church) receive the tithe, but at the same time He receives them in heaven from your hand, of whom it is witnessed that He lives!"

What a magnificent, New Testament truth this is, i.e. my giving into my local church not only shows my dependence on God for all things temporal, but at the very time I give God His tithe (His tenth) as a believer, I make a faith declaration that Jesus my Lord has risen from the dead and is personally receiving my offering in heaven as well!

Money has in the past, and will continue into the future, have the power to make us independent from each other and from God. Money has the power to seduce and to steal our hearts and affection. This is why God keeps the tithe (one tenth) as both a source of provision and test in our lives. Isn't it interesting that the number 10 has always been the Biblical measure used to test man?

- Israel had 10 tests in the desert
- Laban changed Jacobs wages 10 times
- Daniel prayed 10 days for help
- In Matthew 25 we have the 10 virgins
- In Malachi 3 we have a tenth of our income required - it's always a test!

As we become faithful in every area of our lives and stewardship towards God, may we know the blessing and favour of our God in this area of our faith as we remain faithful in bringing a tenth of what we receive through salary or gift, into our local church. As sons and daughters of our God, let us give joyfully and willingly knowing that we are family of the King and thrilled to participate with Him in extending His Kingdom on earth through our giving! Sowing in faith and never doubting that our God will meet our needs according to His riches in glory! Let us never forget that we are destined for eternity and our permanent home - We are only 'camping' in this life and will soon leave everything behind!