

Church Money

Recently, I looked carefully into how the early church handled money, business affairs, and finance, and I have become convinced that the modern church world bares very little resemblance to that virginal church.

Now, I know that the following remarks will shock or upset many people, but check out your Bible and the ancient history books — see if these statements are not true.

From many writings, I learned that the first Christians served God by searching out poor, needy people and helping them. Also, they sought out those who were evil or sinners or criminals and showed them the way to be free from their sins, hangups, addictions, strongholds. Many poor ones were won to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and many sinners found freedom from their sins and evil lifestyles.

But the thing that will shock most church members is that there is no record in the New Testament of any minister ever asking for an offering for himself or for his own ministry. Yes, they did take up offerings for poor, needy people, but not for themselves. Are you surprised at this? Okay, let's check out what the Holy Bible says; let's start with is verse:

They laid them [the prices of the things that they sold] down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. Yes, the first part of this verse does say that they gave to their ministers [apostles], but the last part of the verse tells us that this money was used to help those who were in need. There is no hint that the apostles took a percentage, or a cut or an commission, or “an expense account” or a salary out of this money.

Now, the question is: How did the ministers or servants of God in the book-of-Acts church handle their own personal business affairs, and how were their financial needs met? The Bible does not tells us how these needs were met, but there is evidence that those men learned to live by faith, and living that lifestyle, their needs were met on a day-by-day basis; not on a pay-day to pay-day basis. The same is true concerning our Lord Jesus Christ and his 12

disciples. There is little indication in the four gospels as to the details of their financial affairs. However, it is very evident that none of the apostles waited until they had a guaranteed monthly salary before they went to preach the gospel.

The following story from the early church gives us an insight into how the servants of God lived:

Once there were two brothers who each were medical doctors. They each devoted their medical skills to God and vowed between themselves that they would never accept any payment for their services. And, this they did for many years; treating and/or healing the sick and refusing to take any payment—even when they were pressured to accept a gift.

However, one day, one of the brothers treated a certain woman who wanted to give something to this brother. She was poor and had very little money, but she begged him to accept her “widow's mite.” Of course he refused. She continued to beg him, and he continued to refuse to accept anything. Finally, seeing that he would not take any money, she decided to offer him food; however, she was so poor that the only thing she had was one egg. Again he refused to accept the egg. Again she pleaded with him to accept this egg. The end of this story is that she bothered him so much that he finally accepted the egg.

When he found his brother, he told him what he had done, and his brother immediately turned his back to him and never spoke to him again.

Now, the point of this story is to show how many or most of God's servants in the early years [and centuries] of the Christian church lived—and to show their devotion to serving needy people freely.

[I am not writing this story to say if what the first brother did (accepting the egg) was proper, or if what the second brother did (turning his back on his brother) was proper. I am only writing this to show the level of devotion that the ministers or servants in the early church had and how they lived.]

How many do we know today that walk in that level of

devotion to following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ? Perhaps I should ask: Do we know any who walk in that level of faith? The answer is, yes there are, but their number is extremely small. Here are just a few that I know about: Sundar Singh of India, George Muller of England, Saint Francis of Italy, Gladys Aylward, missionary from Scotland to China, and others too numerous to list.

How were the needs of these two brothers and most of God's servants met? We are not told, but from plenty of evidence in the Bible and in the histories, they learned to trust God, and in his own ways, God provided for them.

What are our Christian ministers doing today? Many have started having conferences and charging "registration fees" or "admission fees." I went to a few such meetings. First I paid \$7 to get into one meeting, and later \$35 at another meeting. But a few months later, another minister came to my hometown, set up a convention, and requested a \$60 registration fee. At that time, the heavenly Father put it into my heart that I was not to go to any more meetings at which ministers charged a registration fee. Can we imagine Jesus charging an admission fee or a registration fee for the multitude that gathered on a grassy slope to hear him? Rather he fed the sheep; whereas, many of our Christian ministers today are fleecing the sheep.

Following is a quotation from the first newsletter put out by the leaders of the Azusa Street revival:

We believe in the faith line for Christian workers, and no collections are taken. During the [past] four months, meetings have been running constantly, and yet with working day and night [without purse or script], the workers have all been kept well and provided with food and raiment. Workers who have received calls to foreign lands are going out, the Lord providing the means with no needs being presented [to the congregation]. The ones that give, do so as the Lord lays on their hearts to do; they do not want their names mentioned.

— end of quote from Azusa Street newsletter —

Let's look at a standard that was used by the apostles to judge false prophets and false apostles: The early apostles wrote:

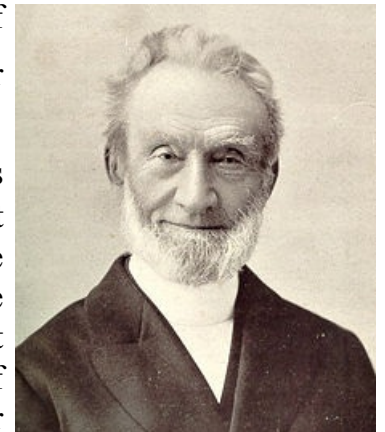
An apostle or prophet who asks for more than bread for the road—especially one who asks for money or one who asks to be put up for more than two days—is false.

By these standards (that is, asking for money), virtually every one of our ministers, priests, bishops, pastors, and evangelists are false apostles or false prophets.¹

Our Lord Jesus taught: "Freely you have received; freely give" [Matthew 10:8], and "It is better to give than to receive" [Acts 20:35]. I published a 40-page book about a man who served God freely and am hereby offering it to you **freely**. This book is about a man from India by the name of Sundar Singh who departed from this life about 1931. Please write me and ask me for this **free** book.

Following are some more examples of faithful men who trusted God rather than asking men for financial support:

A. George Müller (1805-1898) This man was led by the Lord Jesus to start an orphanage. He had no money, but he got on his knees and prayed for it. He did start an orphanage and ran that orphanage for 60 years. Tens of thousands of children were cared for during those 60 years, and Müller never



George Müller

¹The name of this apostolic document is *Didache*, which is a Greek word that means *The Teaching* or *The Doctrine*.

This document is available on the internet at:
<http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon/fathers/ante-nic/didache.htm>

The text as it appears on the above web site reads:
"...when he departeth, let the apostle receive nothing save bread, until he findeth shelter; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet." 11:8+9

once asked anyone for a penny. Rather, he daily got on his knees and asked his heavenly Father for their daily bread and other necessities. In 60 years, those orphans did not miss a meal. He said that there was one time, the meal was 30 minutes late coming in [once in 60 years!]. Now, if anyone had a right to ask for money, certainly this man, George Müller, did. He would have been asking for the orphans, not for himself, yet he did not. Frequently, he made trips to churches and took a choir from the orphanage to the churches. Everyone expected him to ask for money, but he never did.

B. In my city [Knoxville, Tennessee], there is a pastor who started offering-free cassette tapes of his messages on a radio broadcast. He never once asked for money on his radio broadcast. The ministry grew and grew so much that today, he is sending out 100,000 tapes every year—all over the world—including into hundreds of prisons. If a person has a true anointing, the people will gladly send in their financial help without having to be asked.

C. During the 1906 revival at Azusa Street, the leaders of that revival started a newsletter. Because the anointing was so great, the people gave freely, and they produced 5000 copies of the first newsletter. Again the demand was so great that for the second newsletter, they produced 10,000 copies. Again the demand was so great that 20,000 copies of the third newsletter were sent out. There was never any mention of money in the newsletter or in the meeting place. There were 13 newsletters in all produced by the Azusa Street Mission. Someone recently made those newsletters available on the internet [FREE]. I have already downloaded them. They came to about 300 pages. I hereby offer this book on a computer disk FREE to anyone who will ask. This revival at Azusa Street was led by a black man who was blind in one eye. They met in a building that used to be a stable. They were not a bunch of rich people there. As most probably know, in 1906 Black people had very little money. Yet, they never once asked for money.

D. The church where my daughter was a member does not take up offerings; they only have an offering box in the back of the church for those who wish to donate. I have never heard money mentioned in their meetings, yet the church is grew rapidly.

E. Above we read about the two brothers who were medical doctors. How many medical doctors do you know who do not charge for their services? Yes, there are some: Mostly missionaries in some of the poorest countries of the world. I recently read about five such doctors in eastern D.R. Congo.

F. Above I also mentioned that the early church gave virtually all of their money to helping poor, needy, hurting people. Should they have settled down to having Western-style church buildings, taking collections every week, and hiring a paid pastor?

G. Of course the premier example of giving is our Lord's example in feeding the crowds [multitudes]. He did not fleece the people, he fed them. We are not called to fleece the sheep, we are called to feed them. Our Lord himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." [Acts 20:35] Most Christians prefer the blessing of receiving.

H. I know of and have heard of a number of other ministries that refused to ask for money, and they prospered according to God's prosperity. Those who are asking for money are not walking in the fullness of the blessing that our heavenly Father has apportioned to us—and the same applies to all of the ministries that are begging for money.

Once again: the apostolic document called the Didache [διδάχη] was reputedly produced by the early apostles. Notice again what the early disciples wrote:

An apostle or prophet who asks for more than bread for the road—especially one who asks for money or one who asks to be put up for more than two days—is false.

Reminder: Paul said that “the love of money is the root of all evil.” [1st Timothy 6:10, King James Version] [Another translation reads: “A root of all evil is love of money.” My translation: “Love of money is a root that produces nothing but evil.”] The Greek Bible has this translation: “The root of all evil is miserliness”.

What a sneaky thing love of money is. The devil found millions of people who have been saved from their sins, but whom he [the devil] was able to draw away from the nature of the Lord with love of money. Very many preachers and ministers and priests have fallen into that trap, and, if you were a pastor, it would be very possible for you to fall into that same trap.

Please read this saying by the Apostle Paul carefully:

Those who want to get rich, fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and harmful desires, which cause them to sink into ruin and destruction.

—1st Timothy 6:9

All of the above seems to describe the early church as more of a welfare organization than what most of our modern churches are. Isn't this the heart of God: To demonstrate his love for the people in a practical way, and to thus win them to an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Today there are many Christian organizations that are doing outreaches to poor, elderly, children, street children, orphans, prisoners, homeless, and many other groups. Many people call them para-church organizations. I call them the true church, and those big churches that are constantly begging for more and more money, and bigger and bigger salaries, I call them the “para-church organizations.”

There are many passages in the Bible that speak of God's promises of blessings, prosperity, and success for his people, but there are also many passages that speak of gross hardships, trials, testings, pressures, distresses, persecutions, etc., that are the lot of God's people. Many people have stumbled on this seeming contradiction. Let's look at a few things that the Bible says, and see if we can get a better understanding as to what the heavenly Father is trying to tell us.

Any father would want blessings, prosperity, and success for his children, but a good father will also want his children to be disciplined. What would prosperity do for an undisciplined child? Wouldn't that child, like the prodigal son, waste his wealth, blessing, or prosperity? So it is, that the heavenly Father permits the trials, hardships, testings, and whatever he determines is necessary to bring his children to a place of discipline and obedience. Also, please notice that the discipline must come first. As the prophet Jeremiah wrote: “It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.” Lamentations 3:27 [NKJV] Here are two more passages that speak of God's correction:

Job 5:17

...happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest his correction; for whom the Lord loves, He corrects, just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

Now, the above is very simple, easy to understand, but many questions remain:

Why is it that some of God's people have gone through such extreme suffering? Are they so rebellious as to need so much discipline?

Shouldn't trials and testings end once we learn to obey?

Why are there so many who seem to be such pure saints who are suffering so many things?

Why do some live clean and regularly pay tithes but never prosper?

What methods does God use to discipline us?

It seems that some people are never disciplined. Why?

When tragedy strikes, is it God's hand of discipline, or is it an attack of the devil?

And, on and on the questions go.

Please notice Proverbs 30:8 “.....give me neither poverty nor riches...” This writer knew that riches draw most people's hearts

away from spiritual things to earthly things. Is this not true: most of us are sure that we can control riches; nevertheless, when riches come, in almost every case, those riches control us. I am repeating this: when riches come, almost every one of us are drawn away from the spiritual riches, and are drawn to the earthly riches, luxuries, and comforts. As King David wrote: “...if riches increase, do not set your heart upon them.” [Psalm 62:10] Yet, when riches increase, almost every one of us who call ourselves believers, Christians, etc., set our hearts on them. When riches increase, almost every one of us asks: “Where would be a safe place to store my riches? How can I protect my riches? Where would be the best place to invest them? There are still many things in this world that I do not have but I want; how can I further increase my riches so that I can have those things?” Some such individuals do give to poor, needy people, but for the most part, most people, when riches increase, tend to give less and less to the poor, and almost every one of them turn to hoarding.

Will riches control you, or will you control the riches? Please note that even Solomon was drawn away by his riches. This is the man to whom God appeared twice, yet even he was enticed/seduced by riches. Are we stronger than Solomon? He did not obey God or do with his riches what God wanted him to do. He too oppressed the people to obtain more riches. Truly it is a very rare individual whom God can trust with the riches of this world. Very many of the most anointed, the most godly, the most saintly, the purist souls, have, in times of prosperity, been drawn away from the lifestyle and devotion to their God, and sought after the things of this world.

Now, there are very many books in Christian book stores [and being sold by tel-evangelists] promoting the ‘prosperity’ doctrine. Those books point out very many scriptures that tell of God’s desire for his children to prosper. Almost every one of those books, writings, teachings, etc., ignore verses in the Bible such as Jesus’ word: “If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself [discipline himself], take up his cross, and follow me.” [Mark 8:34] Those who are following the prosperity doctrine simply can’t deal

with this verse and many others like it. Hardly anyone is teaching/writing about God’s purposes in allowing his children to go through many trials, temptations, hardships, and go through times of poverty and need. For this reason, I will bring out many of those passages in this article.

Here is one saying from the Bible: 2nd Corinthians 4:17 reads: “...our momentary light distress pre-prepares for us an eternal weight of glory, which transcends every measure...” [My own translation]. Will you allow the distressful situations in your life to prepare you for something far greater in the eternal realm? Or will you let those distressful situations get you down, steal your victory, rob you of your joy, destroy your faith? Yes, the heavenly Father allows many distressful situations to come into our lives to test us and to prove us. An example is God’s word to Abraham to offer his own son as a burnt sacrifice. Didn’t God test Abraham? Don’t most of us think that we will escape God’s testing? He uses those situations to bring us to a place where we learn to walk victoriously despite any difficult situations that we may be in. He promised us that he would not allow us to be tempted more than we are able to stand [endure]. [1st Corinthians 10:13] When you run into distressful situations, do you remind yourself of this promise that “you are not being tempted more than you can stand”? Or do you allow those distressful situations to “get you down”? The choice is yours: If you wish to be a servant of Jesus the Messiah, you cannot do it while you are indulging yourself in anything and everything you want. Each day, ask him what your cross is for that day. Following him will eventually lead you to his cross, as Paul the Apostle said, “I have been crucified together with Christ...” [Galatians 2:20] This is another verse that “prosperity” preachers never bring out.

Answer this question: Which would you rather have: the riches of this world, or would you rather have the spiritual riches that will bring you into an intimate relationship with Jesus? Many people will ask, “Why can’t I have both?” The answer to that question is: Riches have drawn very many believers away from the

purity and sincerity that is in Jesus Christ. If you want to follow Jesus, you should ask him just what he wants you to do with your riches, resources, possessions. Most likely, he will direct you to share with those who are poor, needy, and hurting. You should dedicate your riches to him, and he will direct your situation so that you will use those riches in a way that blesses those whom he wishes to bless; not to pamper your own self with every luxury item.

One spiritual leader put it this way: “One thing I am sure God will challenge is the idea of ‘seed money.’ God makes it very clear in His Word that His people are to be the seed that is planted, not the ‘almighty dollar’. He distinctly shows us that we are to be the seed that is planted, and we are to be fruitful in the earth.” –Paul Cain, <http://www.consumingfire.com/heaven.htm>

Another spiritual leader put it this way: “...we should not adopt the Old Testament way of paying the tithe, but we should follow what is taught in 2nd Corinthians 9:7, that each person is to give according to God’s order; he may give a half, a third, a tenth, or a twentieth.....Pray before giving, whether to the poor or to some other worthy cause....” — Watchman Nee²

2nd Corinthians 9:7 reads:

Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver.

I recently read another article by Watchman Nee about money. Upon reading his writings, I found that he and I were in complete agreement in the things we wrote. For further reading on this subject, I recommend this book by Watchman Nee: *The Normal Christian Church Life*, Chapter 8, pages 97-111. Note: Watchman Nee wrote another book called *The Normal Christian*

²*Watchman Nee’s Testimony*, compiler: K.H. Weigh, Church book room, 1974, Hong Kong Church Books Room, Hong Kong, 1974, page 26.

Life, not to be confused with *The Normal Christian Church Life*. I have this Chapter 8 in a 16-page pamphlet — FREE to anyone who requests it. It can also be downloaded at this web site: <http://www.voidspace.org.uk/esoteric/nee/nccl8.htm>
Here us what Mel Tari wrote about church money:

During the....revival the Lord told us that He would never allow us to tell anyone that we needed money. He said: “If you need money, you must tell Me, and only me.”
— from *Like A Might Wind*, page 102

When you take offerings openly, there are two dangers:
① Sometimes there are people who don’t want to give, but they put something in the offering [to avoid being shamed or embarrassed]....Neither that person nor the church will be blessed spiritually.
② There are others who will give a large sum of money just so others can see them give. God does not bless this kind of giving. It may shame someone close by who wants to give but has very little. — from *Like A Might Wind*, page 103

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