

101 Their money and our money!

The vexed question of bankers' pay and bonuses has been in the British news once again. The notion that a small number of clever banking spivs, gambling with vast sums of other peoples' money, should be paid millions of pounds as their reward, arouses predictable emotions - notably a sense of anger and injustice, along with a plain and simple feeling that this is WRONG!

Fuel is added to this fire when many people in the country feel hard done by themselves, due to the years of "austerity" we have been passing through. Why, people ask, should there be such a great gulf between the lifestyles and incomes of the very rich and everyone else? It's a fair question, and the politicians across the political spectrum tell us they are trying to fix the problem; but they never remember God's Word!

For the Lord in His Word has much to tell us about such matters. The Jubilee principle in what is now for us the Old Testament (Leviticus 25.8-24) was given by the Lord to re-set the whole economy of Israel every fifty years: debts were cancelled, those who had been forced into slavery were freed; ancestral lands were returned to their original tribal owners. In this way any tendency for the gulf between rich and poor to grow ever-wider was scotched, and the whole cycle could start again.

The Lord's covenant people were also given clear instructions about their own money and possessions. Always, come what may, the tithe came first - their grateful giving to the Lord. This kept alive in the people's minds their dependence on the Lord, and their recognition that everything they gained or possessed were blessings from the Lord Himself (as in the words of King David, "All things come of thee and of thine own have we given thee" I Chronicles 29.14 AV), Their tithes supported the priests of the tribe of Levi, who were freed from economic labour to concentrate on their God-given ministries.

In the New Testament too the Lord gives us further instruction over money and wealth, jobs and possessions - a brief reminder must suffice here. First, we are to keep correct priorities - "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthews 6.33): money has its place, but it is always a secondary, junior place, for "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6.21).

Second, the tithing principle can still hold good for Christians, albeit now as a thank-offering rather than as an obligation under the Law. It reminds us to put the Lord first in all things, giving Him the glory that is His due.

Then a few further Scriptures - "...so labouring, support the weak....(remember) the words of the Lord Jesus, It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20.35); "not slothful in business distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality..." (from Romans 12); "(no more stealing), but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have, to give to him that needeth" (Ephesians 4.28); "....study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands that ye may have lack of nothing" (I Thessalonians 4.11-12); "....that if any would not work, neither should he eat we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread (II Thessalonians 3.10b, 12b; all the above from AV).

These few samples, chosen from many more besides, give us the overall message. Whether we are highly paid or lowly paid is not the point, though we are right to be very wary indeed of great riches (eg Matthew 19.24). The Christian norm is to be one of steady, honest, worthwhile work; that we may then give first to the Lord, and then to provide for ourselves, for our dependants, for our fellow Christians, and for the needy in general, including those who for genuine reasons cannot work for themselves.

For our money is a God-entrusted resource, to be used in fulfilling the Lord's various wishes. When it comes to money, neither the self-centred billionaire at the top of the stack, nor the idle scrounger at the bottom, nor any one of the rest of us in between, has permission to sit with arms comfortably folded in the Kingdom of God!

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