

I Believe in God...But What's Mine Is Mine

Welcome/Prayer

Foreword

As followers of Christ, we are often tempted to live like Christian atheists—we believe in God, but we give Him very little thought in our everyday lives. Furthermore, we act as if He doesn't exist or as though we don't need Him. One of the most common areas where we demonstrate this attitude is in our financial affairs. For many of us, what we receive as the fruit of our labors is what we claim as our own; however, such a mindset directly opposes Jesus' teachings. In particular, Christians are no better than our unbelieving counterparts if we say, "Yes, I believe in God, but... what's mine is *mine!*"

Introduction

At the earliest of ages, human beings begin to express the mantra, "what's mine is mine." While we might associate toddler behavior with this selfish mindset, we really don't have to look much past the end of our own noses to see that we are just as possessive of our own "stuff" as a two year old is of his. It may be our natural tendency to claim ownership of our possessions, but the Bible makes it very clear that God is the owner of it all. We are only "stewards," or managers, of God's stuff. Everything we have belongs to Him; He simply entrusts it into our care for a little while.

1. What are some ways in which the "what's mine is mine" mentality is evidenced in children's lives? In adults' lives?
2. What difference does it make when we consider ourselves as "managers" of God's stuff?

Preparation

Read aloud the key scriptures related to today's message.

Luke 18:18-23, 28-30 (NLT)

¹⁸ Once a religious leader asked Jesus this question: "Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "Only God is truly good. ²⁰ But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.'" ²¹ The man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." ²² When Jesus heard his answer, he said, "There is still one thing you haven't done. Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²³ But when the man heard this he became very sad, for he was very rich.

²⁸ Peter said, "We've left our homes to follow you." ²⁹ "Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, ³⁰ will be repaid many times over in this life, and will have eternal life in the world to come."

Break it Down

There is a stark contrast in the two above referenced texts. Verses 18-23 aptly describe a Christian atheist, whereas verses 28-30 define the characteristics of a true follower of Jesus—a Christian. Peter understood that there is a price of discipleship; it costs something to be a Christian-sans-atheist. Accordingly, when we choose to follow Jesus, we give up our **treasure**, our **time**, and our **trust**.

Treasure. The biblical standard we are asked to give up is 10%. If we wisely manage 10% through tithing, the Lord will help us wisely manage the 90% through good spending practices. The 90% that is left over will go much farther because God rewards His people's obedience.

Time. Time is a valuable commodity and precious resource (ref. Ben Franklin, "time is money"). However, to follow Christ means we must be willing to invest some of our time in service to others; we must become like Him and adopt His servant attitude.

Trust. Both tithing and serving are matters of faith; so, if we trust the Lord with our eternal destiny, surely we can trust Him with our earthly goods. We have to choose to give Him control and trust Him to fill in the gaps and provide for our needs.

1. What are some things you've had to "give up" in order to follow Jesus?
2. How do you feel about the biblical principle of tithing? Why is it so hard to practice?
3. Share about an experience where giving up your time for service/ministry brought you a blessing.
4. Have you ever trusted God to "fill in the gap" and provide for your financial needs? Describe what happened.

As we heard in the message (and read in the first paragraph of this segment), it costs something to be a Christian. Consequently, if we choose to act like "what's mine is mine,"—like a Christian atheist—there are still some things we're giving up (i.e., missing out, losing) in our lives.

If we choose to live as Christian atheists, we give up God's...

1) Power

When we tithe, we give God permission to get involved in our financial matters. Failure to obey God in the area of finances keeps Him out of them. The same principle applies to our time management. God's power always accompanies our faith and obedience. When we choose not to serve or give, we are restricting the flow of God's power into our lives. Recall what Paul told the Ephesians, "[God's] power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20b CEV).

1. When has God seemed to multiply your money or time through an act of obedience on your part?
2. Describe a time when God's power at work did far more than you imagined possible.

2) Peace

Jesus suggests obedience is a precondition for receiving His peace: "All who love me will do what I say [i.e., obey my commands]...I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart." (John 14:23a, 27a NLT). Since serving and tithing are explicitly mandated in the Bible, choosing not to obey in these areas means that we forfeit peace of mind and heart.

1. How would you define "peace of mind and heart?"
2. Have you ever felt guilty about disobeying one of God's commands? Share what happened and what you did as a result?
3. How and when has obedience brought you a sense of peace?

3) Pleasure

We experience the pleasure of our Lord through faith and obedience. Recall from the message, the example from the Book of Malachi. The people of Israel were disobedient, and God showed His displeasure. Yet, despite His displeasure, the Lord told the Israelites that He would "flood [them]

with blessing after blessing" if they followed His command (Malachi 3:10b CEV). When we choose to disregard God's laws about serving and tithing, we forfeit His blessings and pleasure.

1. Share about an experience of God's pleasure with you? What did it mean to you?
2. What are some of the blessings God provides to those who are faithful and obedient?

4) Partnership

Paul uses a great phrase to describe the ministry of believers: "We are God's fellow workers..." (1 Corinthians 3:9 GWT) So, serving and tithing aren't duties or obligations that we have to fulfill; they are opportunities to participate in God's work here on earth. When we choose not to serve and give, we give up the unique privilege of partnering with God.

1. Describe a time when you felt the joy of being one of "God's fellow workers."
2. What are some of the "dividends" that are the result of the faith and obedience of the Lynn Haven Church's partnering in programs/ministries?

Conclusion

Investing our time and money in the ministries and programs of the Lynn Haven Church allows us to share also in reaping the dividends. Each of us should prayerfully consider what God is leading us to give up in terms of our time and treasures...and where we need to trust Him more in our financial matters and lifestyles. Let us not be the Christian atheist who boasts, "what's mine is mine." Instead, let's be the followers of Christ who say, "I believe in God, and...since what's mine is actually His, I'm willing to give it all up for the sake of His Kingdom's work."

1. What, if anything, is preventing you from being obedient and "giving up" a tithe (10%) of your income in order to support the church's mission and ministries?
2. If you're not already there, what step will you take toward the tithe this year?
3. To what ministry is God calling you to give your time?
4. What is one thing you can do this week to show that you recognize God is the owner of everything and live by the principle, "what's mine is actually His?"

Close in Prayer