

Your money or your blood!

Whilst giving blood recently, no big deal, I was struck by certain similarities with our giving as Christians. (Being a treasurer, the subject often springs to mind in unlikely situations). Firstly, there is some sacrifice involved in giving blood, perhaps an hour of your time and then one eighth of your blood. You start with 100% of your blood and you go home with just under 90%. In giving to God's work, we need to spend time reading what the Bible says, then give accordingly.

We all start with 100%, whether it's our pay, our pension or our pocket money. The Bible would seem to indicate that we give a tithe (10%) of our income to God, although the New Testament, and even the Old Testament in places, talks about more generous giving, perhaps one eighth or one fifth, or far more if we have it. Selwyn Hughes writes, 'If we give money away and it doesn't cut into the way we live and make a difference in our lifestyle, then it is possible we are not responding to Jesus in the way He ministers to us.' The wealthy, repentant Zacchaeus gave 50% away after meeting with Jesus and the poor widow gave everything she had, two very different examples of giving for God's work.

Secondly, blood donors do not give their blood grudgingly or unwillingly, or they wouldn't bother to go. Similarly, 2 Corinthians 9:7 tells us not to give money away with that attitude, but to give gladly and cheerfully, which God loves to see. I'm not sure how cheerful I am when I give blood but I'm glad to be offered the regulation cup of tea and biscuit. Of course, when giving blood you lie down and don't notice it has gone. As treasurer, I try to encourage people to give by a monthly bank standing order and tax efficiently. In this way the money will leave your account as you sleep and you don't feel a thing! You can still be cheerful about it.

Thirdly, and most amazingly, I'm writing this as far as I know without being short of blood. They told me I could cope with seven pints, which would soon become eight again, and I believed them! Some poor soul in hospital will probably get my old pint while I am blessed with a new one without even asking! In fact, they will contact me again in a few months to ask for another pint, so not quite a monthly standing order. However, as you seek to please God in your giving with open and generous hearts, He pours out His grace and blessing in generous measure; we don't know how but do we believe it? Please read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, also Malachi 3:8-10 and Proverbs 11:24-25.

I know that some Christians go through hard times financially and may sometimes need support from other Christians, but how much do we trust these promises of God? Have we ever tested God in this as He asks us to - Malachi 3:10? One young lad gave some fish and loaves and they needed twelve baskets to gather up the leftovers after more than five thousand were fed.

Jesus said, 'Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where they cannot decay or be stolen where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' This should be our incentive to give as much as we are able to God's work on earth. This must include giving to the church we attend; in fact some commentators would say that the church should receive the whole tithe, although this may be difficult if we wish to support individuals or other charities that our own church does not support. Certainly a good proportion should go to your own church, even though you may not think that paying for repairing the church boiler is storing up treasures in heaven.

The previous Bishop of Chelmsford said that we needed to stop tipping God and start tithing! We live in the grace of Christ and are not under the law (of the tithe) but this should release us all the more to give freely and gladly. When he said this in 1999, everyone in the Church of England appeared to be on Income Support. Have we given more freely and realistically since then? The greatest blessing in life is to be a child of the living God. May our giving reflect God's presence in our lives.

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