
THE CHURCH AND MONEY

An Orthodox Christian View



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Have you ever heard any of these statements when the subject of money is discussed in the Church?

Money, money, money, that's all you talk about. Isn't the Church supposed to be about spiritual things? What's so spiritual about money? I go to Church to get away from everybody trying to get MY money. I am a member in good standing. I pay my dues and go to confession once a year. What more do YOU want?

Sound familiar? Why is it when the Church and money are topics of discussion in the parish, we get emotional? To some, God and money are complete opposites. One is spiritual, the other is material. One is good, the other is bad.

What is the Church's Teaching on Money?

At first it may appear that the Church and money have very little to do with each other, except for paying the church's bills! And while it is true that God, not money, is called to be the true center and content of our life, it is also true that God teaches us about giving in general and money and possessions, in particular, in Holy Scriptures.

By taking flesh from the Virgin Mary, our Lord Jesus Christ accepted to freely enter into the fullness of the material world. In the Incarnation (the taking on of flesh), Jesus united heaven and earth. In Himself, He abolished, once and for all, the dichotomy (division) between the "spiritual" and the "material" worlds that began when Adam and Eve were cast out of the paradise of Eden.

The belief that there is still a division between the spiritual and material life is no more than a denial of the true implications of the Birth, Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Christ, heaven and earth are united. By entering the material world, our Savior sanctified and restored matter to its original purpose- *as a means to glorify God*. Therefore all matter, even money, is called to be used in ways that give glory to God and fulfill the Mission of Christ's Body, the Church.

The Offering of Oneself to God

Here are some very important questions we must answer correctly if we are to understand the Orthodox vision of giving and the giving of money to the Church.

1. **Who gives us life?**
2. **Who gives us a mind and body to earn a living?**
3. **Who gives us health so we may earn a living?**

The answer to each question is GOD!

Now if we truly believe this, then we can joyfully accept the fact that all things for our salvation ultimately come from God and return to God.

Consider the great trust and love God has in us and for us. When the Son of God became the Son of Man, Jesus freely embarked on a personal relationship with each of us. He invites us to have a personal relationship with Him in the community of His Body, the Church. Being given all things by God, He asks that we be faithful stewards (caretakers) of His Creation. Our actions, as the Lord's stewards, are a measure of our faith and a demonstration of our love. They mark how much we are freely willing to offer back to God and others in a *dynamic* relationship founded on trust and love.

Our “working” relationship with the Lord and others is grounded in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. One could even say that one leads and informs the other. Holy Scripture teaches that we are to return to God a first-portion, the “first-fruits” described in Proverbs 3:9-10. The action of returning to the Lord what He has allowed us to steward teaches us humility and discipline in a very tangible way. It is important to note that when the Lord is calling for our “first-fruits” He is not expecting our leftovers. How often do we return to the Lord only what remains *after* we have taken care of our needs, wishes, and desires. What we return to God must be the FIRST and BEST we can offer. Would we offer stale and moldy bread and sour wine for the Eucharist? Certainly not! When we offer the first and best portion of our life in prayer, fasting, almsgiving - *in all things* – it is not the most we can do, but rather it is the least we can do!

Who Comes First, God or Me?

Of course we would answer God. But do our actions answer, ME? As we stand before Christ the Judge on the Day of Judgment, when kings and beggars will be equal in the sight of God, what will judge us is not our words but our deeds. (Matthew 21:28-32; 25:ff) The Lord teaches that if we put Him first – in this life – that He has freely given us, He then will bless us with every thing necessary in this life for salvation. This is the reward for being *wise and faithful stewards!*

Since we can really never possess any material thing for eternity, it is important to guard against and resist the temptation to be selfish

towards God and others. God teaches and expects us to be generous. God promises that when we remember Him first, He will remember us. To be remembered by God is to live forever. To be forgotten by God is to truly die!

In this life we learn how to remember God, to trust God and love God – and – to trust and love others. Sometimes this is difficult. People break trust and stop loving, *but God never does!* In an imperfect world, it is God’s perfect plan to give us the time of our life to learn this eternal lesson. If we live thinking and acting “me first” we will cripple our ability to trust and love God and others and miss the most important lesson we can ever learn. (Luke 16:19-31)

All Our Life Unto Christ Our God

How much should I give to the Church so that the message of salvation in Jesus Christ can be shared with others? The answer is freely given to us no less than four times at every Divine Liturgy.

*Let us commend (commit) ourselves and each other and **all our life**, unto Christ, our God.*

The Christian is asked to live and give like Jesus Christ gave: First to God, then to others, and finally to ourselves.

When we live for God first and ourselves last, we begin to understand that what the world thinks important – status, power, influence, the accumulation of possessions and money, these things are not eternally important.

What is eternally important is that we measure our life by the standard of Jesus Christ and not

what the world thinks important. As Christians we are “new creatures” born of “water and the Spirit.” Our faith and life are called to be one in the same – no divorce between what I believe and how I act. This is not an option for a Christian because Christ overcame any and all division between the spiritual and the material. As St. Paul teaches, *Christ is all and in all.* (Colossians 3:11) For us, this means we freely offer back to God every part of our life – even the dark, hidden and broken parts of our life. No holding back when it comes to God. (Acts 5:1-11)

Committed or Just Involved?

Consider the ham and egg sandwich and what it took to make it! To make a ham and egg sandwich, the chicken is involved, but the pig is *fully committed!* As followers of Christ, are we called to be involved or fully committed? Was Christ just involved in our salvation, or was He fully committed?

The real question for each of us to answer, daily, is *am I as fully committed to Jesus Christ and the Church as I can be, or am I just involved?* When I offer back to the Lord, my time, talents, and money, do I give back a committed, faithful and loving first portion, or do I offer just enough to be involved?

The Lord loves us and trusts us to be His stewards. He teaches us in the Great Commandment to ... ***love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.***

Therefore, *Let us commend ourselves and each other and **all our life** unto Christ our God.*