

The Lord's Money: By Faith & In Faithfulness by Joshua Stucki

There is a common phrase that is regularly heard in church, especially with regards to the Lord's money: "We just need to trust the Lord to provide." This is absolutely true; the Lord has in fact told us that He would provide for our needs, and His church will stand against the gates of hell (Phil. 4:19; Matt. 6:18, 31-32). Of this, we can be certain.

However, this phrase is usually contrasted (instead of harmonized) with the various instructions we have on money in God's Word. There are various instructions on how to be a good steward of God's property (Proverbs 21:20; Luke 12:42-44; 14:28, etc.). What conclusions should we draw from the study of these verses? Do we pick one or more verses over the others, or do we seek a way to harmonize these Scriptures? Though I believe virtually everyone has good intent in honoring all of Scripture on any topic, many are unaware of the full context of certain Biblical topics. That is what this author hopes to address succinctly:

There are two basic concepts to understand: 1) needs versus wants, and 2) faith (trust) versus acting faithfully.

Needs are different than wants and everyone recognizes this. So what are the "needs" of a church? The most fundamental need is the ability to worship and serve God according to the instructions He has given us (Acts 2:42, 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:25-26; Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 16:1-2, etc.). These are our "needs". The rest, by definition, are wants.

When God promises us to fulfill our needs as a church, He is promising that a faithful church will always have what it needs to fulfill these functions. The extras, whatever they may be, must be funded in accordance within the principles of Biblical stewardship. Take the following verse for example: "Suppose one of you wants to build a

tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?" (Luke 14:28)

Building a tower is obviously not an essential part of Christian worship. So there is no promise that God will provide the tower, regardless of how much "faith" the person building the tower has. Instead, the tower builder is instructed to estimate the cost and have the funds available to make sure he can complete it. This is stewardship.

We can interpret the "extras" we have in church as well under the teachings of stewardship. Special events, extra staff, and even buildings all fall under "wants": the principles of stewardship apply here, not the essentials God has promised to make sure the church can perform the required elements of worship faithfully.

Second, the issue of faith (trust) versus acting faithfully needs understood in context of Scripture. The Scripture certainly tells us to "trust God" (Prov. 3:5, Matt. 6:5, etc.) and we should. God will provide our basic needs, both personally and for His church, to be sure both can sustain. However, we are also told to trust by acting faithfully. We have commands in Scripture regarding how money is to be handled (Prov. 21:20, Luke 12:42-44, etc.), and who is to make those decisions (Heb. 13:7+17); this is acting faithfully (in obedience with all of Scripture).

In conclusion, we want to harmonize Scripture WITH Scripture to come to a contextual understanding of any topic. Spending money is never "just" a matter of faith, just like spending money is never "just" a matter of being a good steward. Both have their place. The needs of the Christian and the Lord's church are promised for those who trust God, and the wants of the church are provided by faithful stewardship (via His appointed leadership) as given by those Scriptural principles.