

Money and Finance

The issue of money and the way it is spent can become a stumbling block in marriages and the basis for arguments. This paper takes a look at what can be a tricky issue for married couples.

1 Money – Acquiring it.

Many of the world's problems stem from the business of money and finance. For some it's not enough money and for others it's unwise or careless use of what they have. It's the same on a smaller scale with people. In Bible times there were money problems. Judas used to steal from the money bag and when feeding the five thousand the question was asked "where's the money coming from?" A common question - and that's what we'll look at now.

Where do we get money? A child gets pocket money from parents to buy small things and the pensioner gets money from Government. Most of us fall in between but, whatever our age, it's not possible in this country to meet commitments without a supply of money.

a) Working For It

2 Thess 3:10

10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: **"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."**

2 Thess 3:12-13

12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and **earn** the bread they eat.

Some can't work e.g. carers such as those looking after parents, individuals with certain disabilities and those suffering long term illness. Unemployment is frustrating for those who want to work but can't find it. For Christians who are responsible for providing for their household there is no room for the attitude "I can work but I won't work, I don't want to work and I won't look for work"

b) Inheriting It.

The windfall – a sum of money received unexpectedly. That doesn't often happen.

The inheritance – someone dies and leaves you an old armchair stuffed full of money! That may not happen often either.

Where we have the opportunity of working for our bread, we should take it and not wait around in the hope that money might fall unexpectedly into our lap.

Those who are about to be married will do well do discuss beforehand how they propose to bring an income into the home. For example, will each of the marriage partners go out to work or will it be just one of them that does so? It's necessary to talk frankly about such things rather than just move into marriage hoping that it will "All turn out right on the night" as far as finance is concerned. It is too big an issue to overlook beforehand.

On speaking to married couples, we have found that issues surrounding money can cause problems, arguments and stand offs between husbands and wives - even in Christian households. It shouldn't be like that and we want to look below at ways in which money matters can be handled, particularly in a marriage between two Christians.

2 Money - The Marriage Covenant.

When two people plan to marry, each will normally have accumulated some money which they would call their own. In some cases, though, one or both of them may come to the marriage with debt which is their own too. We'll look at that later on.

In a Christian marriage ceremony, the couple will make vows and other statements to each other and, when individuals make such vows before the Lord, they are not to be taken lightly. In his book “Right Relationships” Tom Marshall emphasizes the point that marriage is a covenant making it a bond of personal loyalty between two parties which is everlasting in its nature. The vows are permanent and not merely words said in the marriage ceremony which can subsequently be kept or broken depending on circumstances or feelings. It’s the permanence which brings security to the married couple, each knowing that, come rain or shine, the other will keep the vows made before the Lord on their wedding day.

In a traditional C of E wedding service, the giving of a ring (or usually the exchanging of rings these days) is accompanied by the giver saying “With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen” In a more modern service, wording like this is typically used: “I give you this ring as a sign of our marriage. With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit”

In the traditional form of words, it is clear that one gives to the other everything which he or she owns. Therefore from that time onwards all goods formerly owned by them individually now become owned by them jointly as a couple – the one flesh unit. Even in the more modern form, all that one owned beforehand is now shared with the other. In other words, everything formerly owned by them individually is now shared jointly between them as a couple and neither can say that anything is his or her own any more, it belongs to both of them.

Therefore, taking a simple view of things, neither the husband nor the wife is entitled to dispose of any possession without the consent of the other because the possession is the property of both of them. That applies to money too. Put simply, the husband is not entitled to spend money without the prior consent of his wife because it is not his to spend and *vice versa*. The money belongs to both of them and each should be accountable to the other over the way it is to be spent. So how might that work in practice?

As stated above, couples who are contemplating marriage should discuss with each other what they plan to do when it comes to dealing with finance in the marriage. After over forty-five years of marriage, we have found that being totally open about money and having money in joint accounts has worked well for us. So, for example, where the husband and wife are working, we recommend that all the money they earn is paid into a joint account in their names (e.g Mr A and Mrs B Smith) so the money is effectively “pooled”. When either the husband or wife wishes to spend money on something, it should first be discussed between them and, provided that both agree, then the money is spent accordingly. In that way, there is accountability and neither spends the jointly owned money without the consent of the other. We realize that there may be some wisdom in having an amount of money in an account in the name of one or the other of the marriage partners when one of them is in business but we are looking at an exception there and not the norm.

“Well” you might say, “what about when one wants to buy a present for the other? How does your system work then?” What we have done in our marriage is simply agreed that when it comes to buying presents, each trusts the other to buy wisely at a cost which will not create financial difficulty for us and it has never been a problem. Also, a couple might agree that each can have a certain amount of personal spending money each month to spend how they wish. It really comes down to what is acceptable to both of them.

Now, we are not saying that our system is the only one that works. We just know it has worked for us. To our way of thinking, if the husband and wife hold individual bank accounts there is a temptation to think of the money in them as “my money” and “your money” to be spent as either one wants without reference to the other thereby moving away from the oneness and accountability that should be evident in the marriage. Of course, if both partners are completely open with each other about how much is in their respective accounts that can be helpful. However, we know from discussions with those who work such a system that total openness doesn’t always occur and one sometimes suspects that the other is spending money without the one knowing. In extreme cases, one partner has believed that the other has money in his or her account for paying household bills, only to find that the other has spent it and there is none or very little left. When that happens, trust can begin to break down. Love

between a husband and wife can be very strong indeed. Even scripture tells us that many waters cannot quench love (Song of Solomon 8:7) and that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). However trust is more fragile and, once broken, takes time to rebuild. When trust is broken over the matter of money, it can take a long time.

3 Money - Spending it

If the husband and wife pool their money in one or more joint accounts and always decide that they won't spend money on something unless they have first agreed to do so, it avoids this scenario which can arise where one has spend a substantial amount on something from "my money" which causes concern for the other:-

"I'm surprised at you buying that!" "Well, it's my money. I can buy what I like."

Where the couple adopts the "agreement" system we have described, it also avoids arguments arising when whatever was bought by one marriage partner without the consent of the other turns out to be a mistake. Besides being disappointed in what was bought, the one who bought it also has to cope with the annoyance of the other who may insist that he or she would never have agreed to buy it in the first place.

The couple also needs to bear this in mind too:

Ps 24:1 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

As Christians we need to realise that nothing is really ours, even when money is in joint accounts, but all is God's, we are entrusted with it and should handle it with care.

Part of our responsibility as husbands and wives includes paying bills, paying the mortgage, buying food and clothes, bringing up children and so on. Even non-Christians do that but Christians have an additional responsibility of spending money in a way which is honouring to God. In that respect, the husband has particular responsibility because he is seen by God as the head of the home and is accountable to Him for decisions made in all aspects of the marriage – including the spending of money. That is another reason why potential purchases should be discussed by husbands and wives before money is spent on them as it is likely that the wisdom of both husband and wife together will be greater than the wisdom of one of them alone.

There's something else too. That is, the husband and wife should put aside a portion of their income to support the work of God.

Money – Tithing on it.

That's not attractive to some Christians. Tithing is where we retain 90% of our income with the principle of pressed down, shaken together and running over as a return on 10% of the income that goes into His kingdom. That is 1p in every 10p and 10p in every £1.00. Only married couples who are serious about their faith will put a significant amount of their money into the Kingdom of God.

A tithe, one tenth of income, is a scriptural guide to an amount to invest into God's kingdom. It was law under Moses but tithes were given before the Law. (Abraham Gen 14:18-20 and Jacob Gen 28:20-22).

However, in God's economy, the giving comes before the receiving.

Luke 6:38 **Give, and it will be given** to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

“I can’t afford to tithe” is sometimes heard. However, as God always gives in return, can we afford not to? God is never in debt to anyone and will always honour those who give. There may be cases like a Christian wife who has an unbelieving husband who keeps her short of money and she barely has enough to get by. Not many are in that position but if she chooses to tithe, the Lord will honour her for that.

3 Money - Acquiring More of it

Most Christians wouldn’t make the quest for more money their main aim in life.

Matt 6:24 No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Note, however, that the verse doesn’t say “You cannot **have** both God and Money”

Most people would like more money. Just a little more would often help. How you get more of it is usually the problem. Wages may be fixed in bands dependent on qualifications/experience. It might be possible to negotiate a higher wage in some firms or work overtime or change jobs. Some incomes are fixed like pensions. Usually it’s not easy to get more income.

Strangely, more income isn’t always the answer to having more money. A leaky plug allows water to drain from a sink. The answer in that case isn’t more water but a bigger plug! Being unable to make ends meet in the household isn’t always down to insufficient income. Sometimes it’s because of haphazard budgeting of what there is. Whether Christians or not, where extra money is given to a disorganized married couple with a poor budgeting method, there is every likelihood that they still won’t make ends meet because they’ll simply expand their poor budgeting system to swallow up the extra in the same old way.

Here are some examples of how money can “leak” away:

Small but regular expense accumulates. An average morning newspaper at fifty or so pence a day could cost towards £200 in a year.

Going overdrawn on a bank account results in bank charges. Staying overdrawn results in charged interest. Both waste money. Mr Micawber principle David Copperfield “Annual income £20.00 expenditure £19.99, happiness. Annual income £20.00 expenditure 20.01, misery.”

Impulse buying. “I want it, I must have it and I’m going to buy it now!” It’s easy to buy on impulse when the money is in your hand but all that glitters isn’t gold. After a day or two the thought sometimes comes “I wish I hadn’t bought it now”. So, think before buying. As discussed above, we feel that Christian couples should agree on things before buying them. Amongst other things, it avoids one blaming the other if it turns out to be a mistake.

Credit card debt. Use a credit card for credit and pay bill in full each month. Then it’s your servant. Pay the minimum amount – interest stacks up and then it’s your master. Credit card debt is a hard taskmaster. Also, never let it out of your sight and never do a phone-for-a-loan arrangement to pay credit card debt. It’s said that there are three things people will say to you in life that you can’t believe: 1. “The cheque is in the post”. 2. “I’ll do it for you first thing in the morning”. 3. “We’re a loan company and we’re here to help you”. Oh, and on the matter of debt, any couple contemplating marriage must be totally open with the other if he or she has debts. For a couple to marry and then for one of them to be told for the first time that the other has substantial debts with little hope of paying them except with money which the first one brings into the marriage is dreadful and will create the feeling that he or she is being used. That is so dishonouring and certainly not a good beginning to married life. You must be totally open with respect to debt.

4 Money – Controlling Spending of it

- a) Have a weekly budget and stick fairly rigidly to it.
- b) Record all expenditure in a book or on computer to monitor all you spend. Tedious but helpful.

- c) Shop wisely and get sensible offers where possible. However, don't buy something you don't need just because it's reduced in price.
- d) Bank online if possible to keep a frequent check on balances rather than wait for a monthly statement.
- e) If you have an agreed overdraft never go over the agreed amount. Significant charges can result if you do which are a waste of money. Also, returned cheques will generate charges you don't want.
- f) When using a savings account make sure to choose one giving the best possible interest.
- g) When not paying income tax, make sure that you receive interest gross.

Conclusions

Married couples need money on which to live and according to the marriage covenant, all the money which they have is owned jointly. It is no longer "My money" or "Your money". Unless the couple agrees otherwise, one partner should not spend any of it without the consent of the other. In that way there is accountability to each other. Pool all money in joint accounts and before buying anything discuss it together before you do so. That will avoid one blaming the other if the buying of it turns out to be a mistake. Tithe your income and don't let your income leak away because of haphazard budgeting of what there is. Where it's possible to make savings then do so.

And Finally

In the parable of the unjust steward (dealing with the dishonest use of money) the Lord Jesus said

".....the people of this world are much more shrewd in handling their affairs than the people who belong to the light" Luke 16:8 TEV

Put another way, we might say that when it comes to dealing with finance or business affairs, the average unbeliever is better at it than the average believer. It shouldn't be like that because, as believers, we are handling God's money. However, with God's help, Christians should be wiser than the world when it comes to handling money and we hope that the discussion notes above will go some way in assisting couples to achieve that.