



Explain the contradictory attitudes towards money and wealth in Christianity (20)

Christian attitudes towards wealth are varied and in some cases contradictory. There are clearly different approaches to wealth in Christianity, both the teachings and the scripture.

A turn to the Bible gives Christians different messages on how to approach money and wealth. Firstly, the New Testament tends to preach about the dangers of money, which may encourage Christians to fear becoming wealthy. In Mark 6, Jesus preaches that it is not this material world which should worry Christians, but the eternal life in heaven. In Mark 10, Jesus quoted that it is easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Not only do the Gospels preach a negative message about money, the letter of 1 Timothy suggests that money is the root of all evil. All of these Bible passages suggest that money should be seen as a danger by Christians.

These Bible passages have probably gone on to encourage asceticism within Christianity, a movement which rejects the temporal world, including money. Asceticism, meaning to train or exercise, was a popular practise particularly amongst early Christians and is a movement whereby Christians reject all kinds of material possessions. Common ascetics were the Early Desert Fathers and Syrian Simeon of Stylites who, in the 5th Century, lived on top of a tower for 36 years. These practices, influenced also by Jesus' 40 days in the desert, not only reject money but can encourage rejection of the flesh. Although less popular in contemporary Christianity, Asceticism is still practised amongst Monks and Nuns of the Catholic faith, such as the Poor Clares who wear ill-fitting blocks of wood as shoes.

The idea of rejecting wealth is contradicted by other Christian ideas of Stewardship. Stewardship, meaning to manage, takes its inspiration largely from the Old Testament where in Genesis 1 God commanded that man must have dominion over the temporal earth. Moreover, The 10 commandments in Exodus 20 state 'thou shalt not covet your neighbour's goods' which suggests that God approves of material ownership. Both of these passages, alongside Luke 7 where it is reported that Jesus enjoyed wine and food more than John, offer an alternative guide for Christians and wealth to asceticism. They instead promote the idea that Christians can have money and wealth, as long as it is managed well. An example of a Christian steward with wealth would be Bill Gates who remains one of the richest men in the world, yet will give 99% of his income away before he dies. This clearly contradicts asceticism where Christians reject all of their wealth.

A final, and increasingly popular, approach to wealth in Christianity is that of the prosperity Gospel. Popular amongst Pentecostal Christians and the world faith movement, the Prosperity Gospel is rooted in the miracles that Jesus performed such as the healing of Blind Bartimaeus in Mark 10. The prosperity Gospel contradicts asceticism, and in many ways Stewardship, in that rather than rejecting wealth, it actively encourages Christians to seek wealth and health. Pastors in the prosperity Gospel movement preach that a declaration of a desire for wealth in front of God is all that a Christian needs to become rich.