

Faithful Stewardship – Part 2

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC

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Text: 2 Corinthians 9:1-8

Purpose: We are invited to participate in the ministry of God by bringing our tithes into the storehouse. Before we do, we should have a prior consecration, proper motive, and recognize our personal responsibility towards giving.

Appearance, numbers, and size are what determine success in today's world. But when it comes to giving, it's not the numbers that matter most to God. He is more concerned with what's in the heart than what is in the hand.

A few years ago, a company by the name of Enron was splashed all over the newspapers. That company became the seventh largest energy company in our nation. Enron had developed a business model where they did not own any power companies, power lines, gas lines or mineral rights. Their business bought and sold excess energy supplies. To make the company appear successful, they manipulated the assets and liabilities of the company.



By doing this, their workers retirement funds were tied to the success of the company. In a moment's time, many people's life savings were wiped out. One woman had invested her whole life's savings in the Enron stock.

At one point the stock was worth \$83 per share, but now it is worthless. This woman lost over \$700,000 because of several people's greed. She had put her heart into her work, put her treasure in her employer and now she has nothing left.

Last week we looked at the topic of becoming a faithful steward of what God has entrusted us with. Today, I want to continue with this theme of stewardship. Giving God our time, talents, and treasures.



Dr. David Jeremiah in his book, *Giving to God*, identifies three principles of giving that I think we should consider today.

First, I want us to explore the idea that before we can give, we need to have a **Prior Consecration**. We need to come to God with a proper attitude of the heart, already prepared to give and willingly surrendering who and what we are, unto God. We need to be prepared to worship and enter into His presence before we can give properly.

Secondly, we need to look at the **Principle of Proper Motivation**. When we give, we need to give for the proper reasons. When we give wrong, we will also receive wrong.

Thirdly, we need to realize that giving is part of our **Personal Responsibility**.

Giving our resources to God is simply a reflection of the fact that we have already given ourselves to Him. We have dedicated our life to the Lord, consecrating ourselves to His purposes, so it is only a natural thing that we would also offer Him our financial resources.

In II Corinthians 8:5, Paul said of the Macedonians, “*They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.*” In other words, Paul knew that the believers in Macedonia had not only given an offering of money, but had given themselves to God. The highest, most noble calling for any Christian is their commitment to Christ. When we do that, consecrating ourselves wholly to Him, financial stewardship is a natural outgrowth. Sacrificial giving is a reflex response to the One who loves us, for He gave His own Son on our behalf.

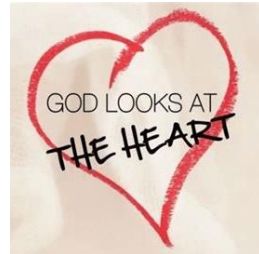
Sometimes, we are tempted to cut corners in our tasks. Yet God does not desire our money so much as he desires our obedience and our trust in Him.



An interesting story is told of a rich man who wanted to help a poor man. The rich man hired the poor man to build a house on the hillside and went away on a long journey. The carpenter said to himself, “My boss is away and I can use cheap materials for the parts of the house that will not show. The house will be weak and undesirable but nobody will know except me.”

When the rich man returned, he told the carpenter, “The house is not for me, it is for you!” The carpenter accepted the key in astonishment. Instead of a first-class home, he now had a shabby house in which to live.

Likewise, God is asking that we mold ourselves from the inside. God desires that our inward parts be made of good material. We can make ourselves look good on the exterior, but God desires that our heart be right. Enron made the outside look successful, but the details of the finances were shoddy. The carpenter that built that house made it look good on the outside, but the integrity of the structure was weak. We need to attend to the inside first, and then the outside will reflect what we really are.



God gives us a job, a life to build. We have to live in the house we build. If we do a shoddy job, we cheat one person -- ourselves!¹

The principal of **prior consecration** recognizes the ownership by God of everything. He sovereignly controls all things. Every person in the world belongs to Him. Paul says in Romans 14:8, “*We are the Lord’s.*”



The prophet Ezekiel quotes God as saying, “*All souls are mine.*” In I Corinthians it says that we are not our own, we have been “*bought with a price.*” The Lord owns us. He created us and paid for our souls with His own body. The

principle of prior consecration simply recognizes that everything we have is God’s. When we give an offering, it reflects the fact that we’ve already given ourselves to Him.

To offer God a gift without offering Him ourselves, is shallow spirituality. In fact, we are reminded in the New Testament that if we are in church, ready to give a gift, and we realize there is something wrong in our hearts, we are to go and make it right before offering the gift. God is not anxious to collect our money. He is anxious to make us holy. Let me say that again, God desires that we live holy and obedient lives instead of lives filled with self-righteousness and self-satisfaction.

Sometime when I see some manipulative request for money on television by ministers, it makes me cringe. The classic line is “if you will give unto God’s work here, then God will multiply it ten-fold.” The purpose in our giving should be a reflection of whose we are instead of what we are going to get by “investing” in God. Giving to God should be an act of worship, not a bargain with God.

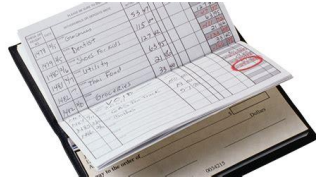


God is far more interested in the giver than the gift. He wants us to be faithful in stewardship, not because He needs the money, but because it reveals our heart. What we do with our money is a barometer of our spirituality – a tangible way to reveal what we really believe.

¹ Who Is Robbed in Unfaithfulness? A Treasury of Bible Illustrations # 811

Secondly, we need to consider the motivation behind our gifts.

Someone once said, “I don’t know what I believe!” They were told to go read their checkbook! That would tell them what they believed in. When you sit down with your checkbook this year to prepare your taxes, sort out your checks and see where you spent your money. That will show you where your priorities are. Is it spent in pleasure? Entertainment? The acquisition of things like clothes, shoes, or purses. Not that these are wrong, but when we place some of these above what we have given back to God, it really points to where our priorities are.



One day a pastor was putting up in the supply closet, five brooms that were recently purchased. A man that always prided himself as a “church man” was complaining about the waste of church money on brooms when there were hungry people in their town. His outburst surprised the pastor, but he did not say anything. He related the story to the church treasurer one day. The treasurer replied, “You would be upset too if what you gave to the church for the whole year was spent on brooms.”

Even Judas was the same way. He wanted the perfume, that was poured on Jesus’ body prior to his death, sold and the money used for the poor. Judas’ motive was not on the poor; his motive was in securing more in the purse that he carried.



Scripture says that Judas helped himself to the purse. His motivation was for himself.

Neal, a kind and loveable character about town, was considered by many to be quite simple-minded. Time after time people in our small village would come up to him and offer him his choice of a dime or a nickel. Always, he would take the larger coin.



Finally, a bystander could bear this mockery no longer. He went up to Neal and said, "Don't let these people fool you any longer. The nickel may be larger, but the dime is worth twice as much money."

"I know that," Neal whispered to him, "but if I start taking the dimes, they'll stop offering me money!"²

In II Corinthians 9:7 we read, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

God doesn’t want us to come to the offering loaded down with guilt. He doesn’t want us to come reluctantly, grudgingly, or out of a sense of obligation. He wants our giving to be the spontaneous response of a loving heart toward God – giving cheerfully and willingly out of gratitude and love for Him.



² [Parsons Technology -- Jean Crist, Niagara Falls, NY. Christian Reader, "Lite Fare." Topic: Money -- Subtopic: Index: 2396 -- Date: 6/1998]

The Amplified Bible, which offers several synonyms for every important Greek and Hebrew word, translates II Corinthians 9:7 this way:

“Let each one give as he has made up his own mind and purposed in his heart, not reluctantly or sorrowfully or under compulsion, for God loves (that is to say, He takes pleasure in, He prizes above other things and is unwilling to abandon or do without) a cheerful (joyous, prompt-to-do-it) giver – whose heart is in his giving.”

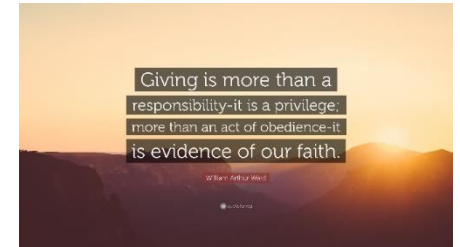
So when we come to the offering, we ought to be excited, for we are given the opportunity to take part in God’s great plan. As an expression of our love for Him, we give our gifts. After all He has done on our behalf, we can do no less.

A Christian doesn’t give to the church, or to the budget, or even to the needs of the congregation. A Christian gives to the Lord, and it ought to excite him. If Jesus were to walk into a church service, most believers would give generously to Him. Maybe we would give him our watches and rings. Maybe we would even give him our car keys. By doing this, we would be saying, “We love you Lord, and we want to offer you a tangible way of expressing our love.

What I want you to realize is that Jesus is with us in every service. When the offering is taken, we can give with the same motivation and have that attitude of love and thanksgiving.

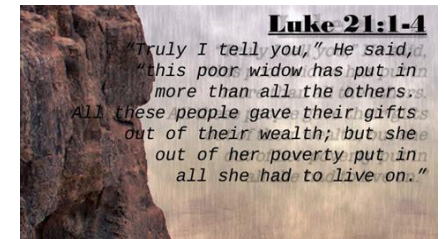
Lastly, the scripture teaches us that giving is our personal responsibility.

In I Corinthians 15, Paul writes about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our work of proclaiming the Gospel. In chapter 16, the Apostle shifts his attention from the resurrection to the collection for the saints.



Paul understood the spiritual importance of giving, linking it to the believer’s response to the triumph of Jesus Christ over the grave. In chapter 16, verse 2, Paul states, “*On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*” This verse indicates that the responsibility is solely upon the individual.

Often the average person in a church feels that the more well-to-do in the congregation will fund the church’s budget and that their smaller gifts are not needed. In most churches, the church is not dependent upon the gifts of the wealthy. It is the middle class that are struggling to pay their bills and cover their expenses from month to month that support the church the most.



David Jeremiah noted in a study of philanthropy in America, the people in the lowest income brackets actually give the greatest percentage of their income to the things of God. For every step up the income tax bracket, you’ll find

a smaller percentage of income being given away. The amount may be greater, but the percentage is actually smaller. God has not called us to equal giving, but equal sacrifice.

C. S. Lewis once said, “I do not know how much you ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.”

When we eat out, most of us expect to tip the waiter or waitress 15 percent. When we suggest 10 percent as a minimum church offering, some folks are aghast.³

Many people decide that they will give more to God when they can better afford to give. Maybe after the children are out of diapers. After I get the car paid for. After I get my children out of high school. After they finished paying for their children’s braces. When the medical bills are lower. If we wait for the right time to give to God, we will never have the right time.

Jack Taylor shares the following poem concerning waiting until you can afford to do what you desire.

“The bride bent with age, leaned
upon her cane.
Her steps uncertain need guiding.
While down the church aisle with
a wan toothless smile
The groom in a wheelchair gliding.



And who is this elderly couple thus wed?
You’ll find when you’ve closely explored it,
That this is that rare, most conservative pair
Who waited ‘till they could afford it.”

Dr. David Jeremiah shares the following story from his series on “*God’s Harvest Law.*”

R. G. LeTourneau, a manufacturer of earth moving equipment loved the Lord Jesus Christ. He started his business in the great



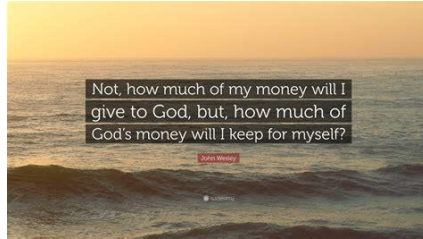
depression and made \$35,000 his first year. Puffed up with pride, LeTourneau decided that he would withhold his annual commitment to his church in order to reinvest it back into his company. He believed that if he could make a big return on his investment, the Lord’s work would have an even greater amount the next year. But God is not mocked. By withholding the tithe from the storehouse, LeTourneau was playing games with God.

Rather than making money, the next year he lost \$100,000! Chastened, R. G. got down on his knees and repented before God. He committed himself to faithfully returning what he had taken regardless of the company deficit. His fortune changed that very moment, and from that time on his entire life was different. Within four years, he had created the LeTourneau Foundation, comprised of 90% of the stocks of his company, which has financed evangelical works all over the globe ever since.

³ Felix A. Lorenz, Jr., in Holy Humor. Christianity Today, Vol. 40, no. 12.

Shortly before he died, LeTourneau wrote of having learned the “great harvest law” of the New Testament. That law is simple: **we reap what we sow**. If a man reaps little, he will sow little. If he reaps much, he will sow much.

LeTourneau enjoyed explaining this principal to others. “It is not how much money I give to God that is important. It is how much of God’s money I keep for myself that’s important.”



Maybe you are here and saying to yourself, “There is no way I can afford to tithe on my income!” I want to challenge you to take a step of faith. Take God at his word. He says that we should trust Him on this and then see if He will not open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing upon you.

Next January, I would love to hear how God has blessed you because you have decided to be obedient in the area of tithing.

When we come to the end of life, the question will be, "How much have you given?" not "How much have you gotten?"⁴

LET US PRAY

⁴ George Sweeting, former president, Moody Bible Institute. Men of Integrity, Vol. 1, no. 2