



Money, Possessions, and Giving

Introduction

Once we are converted, we begin to live our lives with a new purpose. All of life is now to be lived for God's glory. As believers we are not our own; we are His. Everything we have and all that we are belongs to Him. The reality is, we don't own anything, we are just stewards of the things that God has entrusted to us. In other words, we are called to manage and use his resources in a way that will honor him and benefit others, this is called good stewardship.

"Christian stewardship is the management of life and all its resources for the glory of God."

Murray J. Harris

1. The Nature of Stewardship

a. God owns everything.

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Psalm 24:1 (NIV)

"For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. 'If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.'" Psalm 50:10-12

b. The significance of stewardship- "God vs. god"

Though we know that God owns everything and that he faithfully provides for us, we face the temptation to trust our possessions rather than trusting God. Scripture addresses materialism, greed, hoarding, and anxiety over finances as symptoms of idolatry (trusting in something or someone in place of God). Faithful stewardship, on the other hand, expressed in generosity reveals trust in God.

"No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money. Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Matthew 6:24-26

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust

destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

Our attitude toward handling money and possessions serves as an indicator of our spiritual health, for it reveals what we worship, serve, and trust. Our attitude toward “money and stuff” exposes our treasure, and where we find our treasure, we will find our heart. And where we find our heart we will find our god- either Jesus or a “functional” God (an idol) that we have substituted for the true, living God. Thus, the topic of stewardship gets at the very heart of our relationship with God.

2. Stewardship and the Local Church

Stewardship touches all of life, but given the scope of this series, our focus will be biblical stewardship as it relates to our life together in the local church. God has always called His people to use their resources for His work. Through giving, God’s people have always worshiped Him and served others. The following summary will describe God’s plan for His people’s giving in both the Old and New Testaments.

- a. Under the Old Covenant, God called Israel to a detailed system of worshipful giving. They were obligated to offer their firstborn animals (firstlings) to God (Lev. 27:26). Similarly, they were required to give God their first fruits which was a portion of the initial harvest of their crops (Deut. 18:1-4; Deut. 26:9-10).

“God doesn't look at just what we give. He also looks at what we keep.”

Randy Alcorn

Additionally, the people of Israel gave tithes (one tenth) to the Lord. The tithe was not a requirement to give 10% of all general income but specifically a tenth of all agricultural products- animals and crops (Lev. 27:30-34). The tithe was specifically agricultural because it was tied to the Promised Land. Tithing served as a reminder to the people that God had promised their fathers a land and had indeed redeemed Israel from Egypt and provided the land that they inhabited as the people of God. Their flocks, herds, and crops were a provision from God from the land provided by God. Their tithing was an act of worship declaring God’s ownership of the land (Deut. 26:12-15) and an act of faith trusting Him to continue to provide.

Tithes were used for several purposes in Israel. First, the people’s gifts of animals and produce were used to support the Levites who served in ministry to God and His people (Num. 18:20-24). Secondly, tithes were used to help the needy- sojourners, fatherless, widows (Deut. 14:28-29). Every third year a tithe was stored within the town to provide for those who couldn’t provide for themselves. Also, tithes were used in Israel’s corporate celebration. A tithe was to be consumed

at a great communal feast each year in Jerusalem honoring God for his provision (Deut. 14:22-27).

Given the different uses of tithes in the Old Testament, it is challenging to piece together exactly how the system worked. This has led scholars to differing opinions as to the number of tithes Israel was obligated to pay annually. There was minimally an annual tithe and maybe two, and likely another tithe given every third year. God made specific requirements for Israel's giving and summoned them to make freewill offerings on top of this.

b. In the New Testament, giving is described somewhat differently. Because our giving in the New Testament is not tied to the provision of a land, the required giving of first fruits, firstlings, and agricultural tithes are not mentioned. However, we do find that Christian giving is distinct, but not unrelated to giving in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, under the new covenant, God uses money not to support land, but to further His kingdom through the church, for the purposes of. . .

i. Supporting the needs of people.

"There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need." Acts 4:34-35

➤ The biblical expectation is that Christians will give to support those in need.

ii. Supporting the elders of the church so they in turn can devote themselves to serving God's people.

"Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." 1 Corinthians 9:13-14

"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'" 1 Timothy 5:17-18

➤ The biblical expectation is that Christians will give to support the church where they receive teaching, training, and care.

iii. Supporting the extension of our gospel mission.

"And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except

you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.” Philippians 4:15-16

- The New Testament clearly teaches that believers are to give worshipfully to God through their church (1 Cor. 16:2).

3. The Practice of Stewardship- Grace Giving

The New Testament radicalizes giving. God doesn't prescribe the percentage (tithe) or the type (firstborn animal) of gift He requires of a Christian. Rather, it all belongs to Him, and He dictates that we give of his resources in our local church in a manner that reflects our salvation in Jesus Christ.

a. Giving is to be motivated by grace.

When we give, we give considering Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, for His life provides for us a motive and a model. For example, when Paul addressed the Corinthians regarding participating in an offering he was collecting for *“the relief of the saints”* (2 Cor. 8:4) in Jerusalem, he points them to Christ.

“But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—
see that you excel in this act of grace

also... For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” 2 Corinthians 8:7-9

He points to the sacrifice of Christ who left His heavenly glory (“he was rich”), and became a man and died for us (“he became poor”) so that we might experience salvation (“might become rich”). Our giving is to be tied to the gospel.

b. Giving is to be generous, even sacrificial. Giving is a privileged response to God grace to us.

*“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. **For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—**”* 2 Corinthians 8:1-4

“Perhaps the saddest observation of all is that the spending habits of people in the church differ little from those of the world. The lifestyles of most professing Christians are not substantially different from anyone else’s. Too many in the church have adopted the world’s indulgent attitude toward money. Almost every form of materialistic extravagance and excess has found its way into the fellowship of believers. It is as if the church has forgotten Jesus’ mandate to invest in eternity.”

John MacArthur

c. Giving is to be deliberate.

*“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **Each one must give as he has made up his mind**, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” 2 Corinthians 9:6-7*

d. Giving is to be free and liberated

*“Whoever **sows sparingly** will also reap sparingly, and whoever **sows bountifully** will also reap bountifully. **Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion**, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:6-7*

“There are three kinds of giving: *grudge giving*, *duty giving*, and *thanksgiving*. Grudge giving says, “I have to”; duty giving says, “I ought to”; thanksgiving says, “I want to.”

Robert Rodenmeyer

e. Giving is to be joyful.

*“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver**” 2 Corinthians 9:6-7*

f. Giving is to be regular.

*“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. **On the first day of every week**, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.” 1 Corinthians 16:1-2*

g. Giving is to be an act of faith.

We give confident that God is our supply and that giving is a means of serving others and glorifying God.

*“**He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.**” 2 Corinthians 9:10-12*

Final Thoughts on New Testament Giving

Pondering Thoughts on the Privilege of Participation

All that we have and all that we are belong to God. This is great news. He provides for us, and we manage His provision for His glory. Because of the gospel, we are called to be servants and stewards motivated by grace. As a community of servants and stewards, we are called to participate in the local church by using our resources to build the church and reach the lost. This finds many different expressions: hospitality, helping provide for those in need, giving regularly to support the church, giving for special occasions, providing for those elders who labor hard at preaching and teaching, and funding the gospel mission beyond our local church. We have been bought with a price and now enjoy the profound privilege of glorifying God with our resources.

Questions for Application

(Please write your answers in the blank spaces below each question)

1. For some, the subject of stewardship is difficult to consider and especially to discuss. Is this true for you? If so, why do you think this is the case?

2. How does the truth that God owns everything affect how you view your money and possessions? In what ways is it difficult for you to keep in mind daily that you are managing the resources of another?

3. Re-read Matthew 6:24-26. In what ways do Christ's words in this passage strengthen you? Encourage you? Convict you? What is one tangible way you can apply this passage in your life now?

4. Re-read 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. How would you evaluate your giving lifestyle in light of these verses? How has God matured you in giving over the years? That is, how have you grown? Where is their room for further growth in your giving?

5. Consider one provision from God that you currently possess that can be more effectively used to build his church, reach the lost, or extend his gospel mission elsewhere.