

God's Last Word on the Proper Use of Our *Lives* and *Material Resources*

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Life Perspectives from Fellowship Bible Church

Stewards of God

God has called His people within the Jewish community and the Church throughout the ages to be faithful stewards (managers, overseers of their master's household) of the lives, time, assets and money He has given them. The scriptures are filled with biblical principles as well as stories of faithful men and women to guide us in our stewardship. (1 Peter 4:10)

The Biblical Foundation

All of us were born "in Adam," separated from God, and held in the bondage of sin by the world, the flesh and Satan. Then God in His grace and mercy gave us a choice to establish a spiritual relationship with Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. In His love He sent His Son to die for our sins (*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!* 2 Cor. 9:15). Once we made that choice to ask Him to forgive our sins against Him and His Son, He rescued us from the dominion of darkness, (God reminded Israel that He redeemed them from the slavery of Egypt) and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin. In response to God's love, Moses instructed his generation, Jesus his generation, and Paul his generation that:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself (Deut 6: 4-5, Luke 10:27). *In response to the love of God towards us, Paul wrote: "I urge you...by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is..."* (Rom. 11:33-12:1-2)

In light of God's love for us we can now see that our new life, time, assets and money all belong to Him 100%. Now the task before us, out of a heart of love for Him, is to begin to develop a godly wisdom in order to form a lifestyle of godly stewardship towards the Lord, our family, His church, and our society.

A. Before the Law

Abraham, with some 318 men, had to go to war with five kings who had attacked Sodom and took his nephew Lot as a captive. He defeated them and took the spoils of war. At that time he met Melchizedek who was the king of Salem and a priest of Jehovah. When they met, Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of war to him as a representative of Jehovah, symbolizing the victory and the spoils of war all belonging to Him (See Gen. 14:20, Heb. 7:4). The ancient world had established a practice where a landowner could collect 10% (a tithe) from those who used his land to make a living. Thus Abraham and then Israel through the "tithe" acknowledged that God was really the owner of the Land of Promise and the spoils of war for He would defeat their enemies in Canaan.

B. During the Law

After God defeated the army of Egypt and delivered Israel from their 400 years of slavery, He began to prepare them to enter the land of promise. He gave His Law to Moses and He began to teach them about the "tithe" as a symbol of the ownership fee. According to the Law the Jews would give:

- a "tithe" from the first produce of the land each year. (Deut 14:22, 26:1-10)
- a free-will offering and gifts which in time would be used to build and maintain the temple. (Ex. 35:21)
- additional gifts to support the prophets. God used the "tithe" to support the Levitical priests because they did not receive any land in Canaan like the rest of the tribes, but they were required to "tithe" as well. (Deut. 10:8-9; Num. 18:21-26)



Then every third year the “tithes” was divided into three parts:

- a third to the Levite priest,
- a third to the strangers in town, (hospitality = God is a lover of strangers), and
- a third to the widows and orphans. (Duet. 26:12)

(My thanks to Paul Winslow for his research on the subject of “tithing” in his introduction to “The Christian And His Possessions” booklet produced by Discovery Publishing.)

C. After the Law

On the Day of Pentecost our risen Lord Jesus established His Church (Matt 16:13-20) which is a spiritual kingdom and is no longer subject to the Jewish laws of tithing. But Christians, rather than be required to give a “tithe,” are to realize, as we have already mentioned, that *our lives are not our own they are brought with a price.* (1 Cor. 6:19-20). So everything – our body, soul, spirit, time, assets, and money – belongs to the Lord Jesus, 100%.

Godly Stewards

The Word of God gives each of us spiritual wisdom on how to grow as godly stewards of our lives, time, assets and money. Below are some key passages that will help us focus on the issue:

A. In Relationship to Jesus and His Apostles

Our Lord is our model: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.* (1 Cor. 8:9)

Treasures in Heaven

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consumed and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Mark 6:19-24; Jesus: “Sermon on the Mount”)

Kingdom of Heaven

Jesus warned his disciples against the pagan philosophy of running after food, shelter and clothing and then encouraged His disciples to *...seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow...*(Matt 5:25-34). Jesus also warned his disciples that, *No servant 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 mammon. (Luke 16:1-13.) Either we love God or we love money, we can’t love both at the same time.

Giving out of Poverty

One day Jesus was in the temple area with His disciples and, *He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, ‘Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.’* (Luke 21:14.)

Be Rich in Good Works

The apostle Paul in the following generation said (warning); *For the love of money is the root of all evil; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs...* (instruction) *As for the rich in this world, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed* (1 Tim. 6). He also told the Philippian believers (encouragement), *My God shall supply all your needs (not wants) according to His riches in glory in Jesus Christ.* (1 Tim. 4:19.) Most of our needs will be supplied by the work of our hands (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 1 Thess. 3:7-9).

The Apostle **John** would **warn** his generation and the ones to follow: *“Do not love the world or anything in the world; If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”* (1 John 2:15-17)

B. In Relationship to our Family

Within a biblical family setting, husbands are called on to manage their own household well (1 Tim 3:4). We are also called upon as a husband or wife, as well as a single adult, to *Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who Loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.* (Deut. 13:8). When it comes to the extended family,



the son or daughter and the grandchildren are to care for their widowed mother and grandmother and not place the emotional and financial burden on the church family (1 Tim. 5:1-16). In the context of caring for the widows, Paul admonished all Christians by saying that *...if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.* (1 Tim. 5:8). In the early church setting young widows were to marry again so that a husband could care for her and her children. Single mothers who were alone because of death or divorce usually were able to go back to their extended family unit until they remarried again. Today this is not always possible, so as a spiritual family of believers we should ask God for open hearts and eyes to see the needs of the single parents around us and make them and their children part of our families and homes.

C. In Relationship to the Church

Christian families as well as single people were called upon by our risen Lord to be generous and freely give to others within the spiritual body of Christ as well as Christians in other parts of the world when a genuine need arose.

The Church of Jerusalem

Shortly after the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit moved in the hearts of the new Christian community. *And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone had needs.* (Acts 2:43-45). As the new group of believers in Jesus began suffering persecution they still got together and *there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of lands or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles feet; and they would be distributed to each as any had need* (Acts 4:34-35).

The Church of Corinth

The Apostle Paul, writing to the church of Corinth some 20 years after the Day of Pentecost, in the context of loving one another (2 Cor. 8:24) wrote; *He who sows sparingly* (their love) *shall also reap sparingly;* and *he who sows bountifully* (their love) *shall also reap bountifully.* (2 Cor. 9:6). *Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.* Then Paul went on to explain the character of God and His desire and ability to supply all their needs so they were not to be afraid to give of what they had when a godly need was presented within their church or another church (2 Cor. 9). Paul also encouraged the believers to meet the needs of

the spiritual teachers among them. *And let the one who is taught the word share all good thing with him who teaches.* (Gal. 6:6)

A Church in Trouble

In the context of a famine in Jerusalem, Paul wrote to the elders of the Church in Corinth. *On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper...And when I arrive, whomever you approve. I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem.* (1 Cor. 16:1-3). Paul then wrote a second letter to the Corinthians reminding them that they were the first ones who wanted to begin giving to the *Jerusalem Relief Fund* and he was admonishing them to finish the task. At the same time he used the churches of northern Greece as another model for giving. They gave out of an abundant joy, and a freedom of the Spirit in the midst of their own personal afflictions and deep poverty. *For I testify that according to ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this not as we had expected. but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*

Issue: Equality of all, so that no one had any needs (2 Cor. 8:12-15).

D. Our Relationship to the World

Our best example for caring for the needs of the society around us can be seen in our Lord's story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37. (This story is speaking about His love for the World.) In the context, a lawyer asked Jesus, "who is my neighbor". Our Lord answered his question by telling the story of a Jewish man who was going down from Jerusalem on the Jericho road when he was confronted by some robbers who stripped him, beat him, left him half dead and took all his money. A priest and the Levite saw him on the side of the road but kept going. Then a half-breed Samaritan came by who was hated by the Jews and not only stopped (time) but felt compassion for him, bandaged up his wounds, poured oil and wine on them, (assets) put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. Then the next day he paid his hotel bill and gave the innkeeper enough money to care for him until he was well and a promised that all bills, if any, would be paid when he returned (money). Then Jesus asked the lawyer, *Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers hands? And He said 'The one who showed mercy towards him.'* And Jesus said to him, *'God and do the same.'*

Who is my neighbor? The next person who is in trouble (Christian or non-Christian). What should be our attitude? Compassion, mercy, and a freedom from fear to spend the necessary time, assets and money to help him get well.



Summary

1. God so loved us by sending His Son Jesus to die for our sins and deliver us from the kingdom of darkness. Our spiritual response should be to; *Love Him with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, knowing that our life is no longer our own for we have been brought with a price.*

2. We are not under the Law of Moses so we are not required to “tithe.” ...*for you are not under the law but under grace.* Romans 6:14

3. In light of God’s love for us we now see that our new lives, time, assets and money belong to Him 100% . We are now called to become good stewards (managers, overseers) of all that belongs to Him. The wisdom needed to use our lives, time, assets, and money in relationship to Jesus, family, His church and our society must come from Him and not the world system.

- In relationship to Jesus and His apostles: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.* (2 Cor. 8: 8-9). We have never truly given until it costs us. Giving finds its full meaning when others are made rich by it. As good stewards invest in treasures in heaven people, and the things concerning the Kingdom of God. ...*be rich in good works, liberal and generous...* Trusting God to supply all our needs (not wants) through the work of our hands.
- In relationship to our family: Stay out of debt, owing no man anything but love. Provide and care for our own family, and our extended family, especially our widowed.
- In relationship to the Church: Make sure no one among us has any genuine unmet needs. Become cheerful givers to the Lord and his spiritual family. Remember the widows, orphans, and



strangers. Share all good things with those who teach us spiritual truth so that we will grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, be willing to give of our lives, time, assets, and money to other churches around the world that have needs, according to our ability—and at times beyond our abilities.

- In relationship to our society: Ask the Lord Jesus to give us a heart like the Good Samaritan so that we will be willing to give of our lives, time, assets, and money to the next person we find in trouble even if he or she is our enemy.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Jim Elliott – *martyred missionary*