

Series: Five: Timeless Values for Today's Church

Title: Faithful Stewardship

Text: Matthew 6:19-24

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It's often been said that there are two topics you shouldn't talk about in public — religion and politics. Indeed, those two subjects are capable of generating a lot of controversy. However, it's perhaps possible to add a third subject to the aforementioned list — money! Since money is a personal subject, conversations concerning the matter often hit close to home.

There is certainly room for caution when it comes to talking about money matters. Some talk about money way too much. Our materialistic society beckons many to join the rat race, to hustle in pursuit of more possessions and wealth. Many have been seduced into living an out-of-control life. They live at a break-neck speed in a mad dash for more material attainments. We certainly don't want to approach money from the materialistic perspective of our society.

In addition to the get-rich-quick crazes of secular society, there is also unhealthiness concerning this subject in the religious world. Popular religious teachers and gurus are guilty of erring in two regards. First, some have applied a get-rich-quick mentality to the Christian faith. This is seen through the now infamous "prosperity gospel." There is a branch of modern Christianity that, like the false teachers in Paul's day, "...imagine that godliness is a way to material gain" (1 Timothy 6:5).

Religious error can also be found in a more subtle version of the prosperity gospel. This variation from truth uses the teachings of Christianity for personal success. For adherents to this type of religion, the Bible is seen as a source for principles that will help one become healthy, wealthy, and wise. Little mention is made of sin, redemption, the substitutionary work of Christ, and the abiding ministry of the Holy Spirit. This secondary error has become so commonplace in mainstream evangelicalism that many have a hard time detecting its presence. In fact, self-help Christianity may be the most prevalent form of Christianity in America.

The two aforementioned errors make many slow to talk about money in the church. However, such error actually makes biblical teaching on these matters more important. In addition, Jesus' plain teaching on these topics requires the church to speak up. In His most famous sermon, our Lord talked about money on more than one occasion. He once said:

Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

Immediately after those words, Jesus said:

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness! No one can serve two masters,

since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:22-24).

Because of the Bible's teaching on money, Tabernacle Baptist Church has made "Faithful Stewardship" one of our key core values. Because the Bible speaks on this subject so robustly, we cannot be silent. We have articulated this core value with the following words — "We desire to be generous with our time, talents, and treasure to advance the Kingdom of God." Passages that instill this conviction within us include 2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Romans 12:1-2 & 6-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Matthew 6:21; Genesis 1:28-30; 2 Samuel 24:24; and Malachi 3:10.

In a world in which many use all of their money for self, we want to leverage our resources for Christ. This involves stewarding our time, talents, and treasures for Him. We are grieved by the way in which our fast-paced busy culture blinds many to the priorities of the church. We want to covenant together to put Jesus first in our lives. All that we have is from Him, and all that we have should be used for His fame and renown. We understand that God owns everything, and we realize He needs nothing from us, but we are aware that He gets great satisfaction when we offer our lives in an act of worship as sacrifices to Him.

As we begin our examination of this subject, I think it is worth considering a quote from Kent Hughes, a pastor and author. In a book entitled "The Disciplines of a Godly Man," he challenged Christian men to be good stewards by saying, "The abiding spiritual fact is, there is no way to grow into spiritual maturity without committing one's giving to the Lord. God can have our money and not have our hearts, but He cannot have our hearts without having all our money."¹ Yes, it is imperative that we learn to be "faithful stewards." Let's consider the subject at hand by examining three ideas — the character of God, God's design for humanity, and the Biblical precedent of generosity.

The Character of God

In singing of the blessings of the Lord, David said, "I will sing to the Lord because he has treated me generously" (Psalm 13:6). The Hebrew translated "generously" by modern translations is one that strictly meant "to give." It conveyed the idea of doing good to another.² David used the term to speak of the way God had lavishly poured out blessings on His life. Later in the Psalms, David would similarly proclaim God's goodness, saying, "I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous abandoned or his children begging for bread. He is always generous, always lending, and his children are a blessing" (Psalm 37:25-26).

The generous nature of the Lord flows from two of His most fundamental attributes — love and goodness. Love involves the Lord's compassionate regard for His creation. Though He has a special love for His covenant people, He is full of affectionate kindness towards all humanity. The Bible flatly says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

¹ Hughes, R. Kent. *Disciplines Of A Godly Man*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 18.

² Gesenius, Wilhelm and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003), [CD-Rom].

In addition to love, the Lord is marked by goodness. Such a virtue is based on the reality that there is no sin or badness in God. The goodness of God refers to the Lord's moral excellence. One has said that the virtue reveals that "...all that God is and does is worthy of approval."³ In Mark 10:18, Jesus said, "No one is good except God alone."

Because God is loving and good, it follows that He is generous to humankind. He has a giving nature. This is exhibited in two ways. First, He has a general generosity toward all people. Each has air to breathe, food to eat, family to love, work to do, and nature to enjoy. Second, God has shown a special generosity toward the church. His children have the gift of salvation, the Word of God, the privilege of prayer, and innumerable other spiritual blessings. If God is so giving, shouldn't His people be giving as well?

I remember preaching my first sermon on giving as a young pastor at my first church. Afterwards, an older man from the congregation approached and said, "Preacher, you shouldn't preach about giving. Just stick to preaching the Bible and our church budget will take care of itself." I later considered his words. As I did, it struck me — if I didn't talk about giving in my preaching, I wouldn't be able to talk about one of the most important verses in all of Scripture. John 3:16 says, "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." Know this — any talk about giving starts with God. Because our God is generous, we should be too!

God's Design for Humanity

The Bible contains unique doctrine when it comes to the nature of humanity. It places a high value on human life by teaching that each person is made in "the image of God." From the earliest pages of Scripture the special dignity of human life is affirmed. In Genesis 1:26-27, we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.' So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female."

Throughout the years, theologians and Bible teachers have debated what it means for man to be made in God's image. Clues concerning the matter are found in the creation account of Genesis. Typically, three main theories are offered to explain the image of God concept. First, some highlight the relational aspect of humanity. It is believed that the use of first-person plural pronouns ("us" and "our") in Genesis 1:26-27 are references to the Trinity. By alluding to the relationship amongst the Godhead in his account of the creation of the first man and woman, the author of Genesis meant to highlight the way mankind is made to be a relational being. Jesus seemed to affirm this reality in some of His teaching (John 17:21).

In explaining the image of God in humankind, others point to what is known as the "structural nature" of humanity. This refers to man and woman's ability to think and reason. It also includes emotional and volitional capacities. The Genesis narrative pointed to the Lord's structural nature when it depicted God reasoning amongst Himself — "Then God said..." (Genesis 1:26). Like the Lord, humans have the ability to

³ Grudem, 1243.

think, reason, express themselves, make decisions of the will, and experience emotions.

Last, some place weight on the functional nature of humanity. This refers to humanity's ability to make and manage things. The Genesis account clearly portrayed God as a creator and maker. It told of His functional capacities in Genesis 1:25-28. Immediately after it gave account of God's creation of humanity, it told of the way the Lord commissioned the first man and woman to engage in functional work (Genesis 1:28-30). Like the Lord, men and woman have been made to "take dominion" — to make and manage things upon the Earth.

What does all of this have to do with faithful stewardship? Simply put, since God is generous, His people should be generous. If mankind is made in the image of God, it stands to reason that mankind should reflect His giving nature. The relational, structural, and functional nature of humankind mandates the wise management of money and material things. One has said, "If we understand that God is our Creator, we will approach our responsibilities from the perspective of stewardship. A steward is someone who understands that he is not the owner but the caretaker."⁴

The Biblical Precedent of Generosity

A surface reading of Scripture reveals that generosity should be a hallmark of godly living. The first story from life outside the Garden of Eden emphasizes the importance of liberality in giving. Didn't Cain kill Abel because of jealousy concerning Abel's more excellent offering (Genesis 4:1-5)? Didn't the Lord have greater regard for Abel's virtuous sacrifice?

Reading on in Genesis, we find that Abraham practiced a giving of a tenth to the Lord (Genesis 14:20). Even apart from the giving of the Mosaic Law, the patriarch knew that it was right for God's people to give for purposes related to worship. The New Testament affirmed Abraham's tithe as a commendable act of faith (Hebrews 7:4). In the Bible, the giving of ten percent is not limited to God's covenant with Israel.

David followed in the footsteps of his ancestors of faith. When he was once required to offer an offering to the Lord, he knew that personal sacrifice was important. Though one offered to pay for land related to the offering, he refused. He said, "No, I insist on buying it from you for a price, for I will not offer to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24).

When God's people returned from captivity in Malachi's day, the prophet extolled the importance of giving. He famously said, "'Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way,' says the Lord of Armies. 'See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure'" (Malachi 3:10). Yes, Israel had special obligations concerning taxes and relief for the poor that aren't binding on New Testament believers. However, principles related to giving can be found in Malachi's words for all generations. In each era, God's people are to give to the work and worship of the Lord.

Jesus continued the Bible's teaching on money and material things. In fact, many have noted that such things were the most popular topics in His preaching. He

⁴ Raymond, Erik. *A Framework for Humble Leadership. Tabletalk.* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2022), 12.

said things like, “If you want to be perfect...go, sell your belongings and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21). Our Lord boldly preached on financial matters because He knew that one’s approach to finances can have deadly spiritual consequences. During the growth of the early church, the apostles encouraged faithful stewardship among the church by quoting Jesus as saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Like Jesus, Paul upheld the importance of generosity in the Christian life and in the church. He said, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:10). He instructed churches to take offerings for ministries and missionaries, saying, “Now about the collection for the saints: Do the same as I instructed the Galatian churches. On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and save in keeping with how he is prospering, so that no collections will need to be made when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

As you see, the Bible is replete with teaching concerning the place and priority of faithful stewardship in the Christian life. To close, allow me to share three necessary activities one must take in order to be a faithful steward. First, one must know what he or she makes. This requires a clear-headed awareness of one’s income. The book of Proverbs provides counsel on this matter, saying, “Know well the condition of your flock, and pay attention to your herds” (Proverbs 27:23). Second, one must budget and manage his or her income wisely. In the context of speaking about finances, the author of Proverbs said, “The plans of the diligent certainly lead to profit, but anyone who is reckless certainly becomes poor” (Proverbs 21:5). Last, it is important to give a portion of one’s income. Apart from the Levitical Law, the Bible encourages us, “Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest” (Proverbs 3:9).

The Bible’s teaching on stewardship is clear. God has made His people to be faithful stewards of earthly resources. It is because of God’s truth on this matter that Tabernacle Baptist lists faithful stewardship as one of its key core values. Generosity and giving to God’s work is needed in every generation, but it is especially needed in our day and age. Though we live in a nation that is like an island of plenty in a world of need, many are tempted to be stingy and greedy. May we live by the conviction John Calvin articulated when he said, “God’s gifts to us are ultimately sanctified to us after our hands have offered them back to their very author, any use of those gifts that is not perfumed by such an offering will be a corrupt abuse of them.”⁵

⁵ Calvin, John. *A Little Book on the Christian Life*. (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2017), 38-39.