

STEWARDSHIP OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

Those who would declare all the counsel of God cannot be silent concerning the Christian and money. Jesus gave very little thought to the subject of money for its own sake, and even though he was not very interested in material things as such, still he attached a great importance to the subject of money. His parables and his other teachings are filled with instructions concerning the proper place of the material and the use to be made of money. He had so much to say about the futility of seeking after riches, of laying up treasure on earth, and of the difficulty of the rich man entering the kingdom of heaven.

Many people regard a sermon on money as an attempt to extract something from somebody. Jesus did not talk about money because he was in need of it or because he was trying to force it from the hands of its owners, but because he was trying to develop the proper attitude toward life. He knew it was not possible to have the wrong attitude toward money and the right attitude toward life. He knew that if men coveted money it would become their god and would displace Jehovah in their thinking and in their affections. He knew that trust in riches was a false sense of security and would end in bitter disappointment. He knew that the love of money was a root of all kinds of evil and would lead to many other grievous sins.

What attitude does God want us to have toward money? He wants us to regard it as a stewardship. He wants us to look upon material possessions, not as an end, but as an instrument. He wants us to consider money as a means to other important ends. He knows that money is power and that it can accomplish much, either good or bad, depending upon the attitude of the one who handles it. Money can extend the borders of God's kingdom and it can relieve the suffering of unfortunate humanity, but it will not accomplish these ends unless the proper attitude is developed in the one who has the money. However, God is not only interested in our having the proper attitude because of what money will do if used rightly, but he is also interested because he is interested in us. He wants our love for himself and he knows he does not have that love unless our money is dedicated to him. So, he teaches us the meaning of stewardship. He commits a certain amount of material goods into our hands, more to some than to others, and expects us to stand before him in the judgment day to give an account for the way we handled his goods.

Some seem to have the idea that we shall stand in the judgment and give an account for the way we handled a certain percent of our income, but in

reality we shall give an account for the way we used all of it. What kind of an answer shall we be able to give?

It is right that our families be supported. The home is the oldest divine institution. The man who will not work to support his family is not worth anything to his family, to the nation, to the church, or to anything else. "But if any provide not for his own, and specially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Tim 5:8) It is God's will that we support our families. Just how much a man should spend on his family is not set forth in the scriptures. We should pray for wisdom and attempt to use good common sense.

"The powers that be are ordained of God." (Romans 13:1) Under government we enjoy the protection of society and are guaranteed certain rights and privileges. We are to help support the government. "For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." (Romans 13:6-7). We are thus taught to pay our taxes. The person sins who falsifies to the state in the paying of taxes.

Then we are taught to give to the church. A certain amount of the income of each and every Christian should go into the treasury of the church. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (I Corinthians 16:2). "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give." (2 Corinthians 9:7). Too, the parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us to be neighbors to those who are in need. One of the tests in the day of judgment will be whether or not we visited those who were sick, helped those in need, fed those who were hungry, etc. Jesus insisted that in helping needy humanity we are ministering to him. By helping others we help our Lord. (Matthew 25:31-45). How important, then, is the matter of giving?

The New Testament does not legislate as to the exact amount we are to give. It seeks to create a right attitude toward money that would cause us to use it properly rather than legislating as to definite amount. The law of Moses told the Israelites how much to give but in the gospel system there is no such law. Paul teaches us to give as God has prospered us. Our giving should reflect our income. Many people say by their living standard that they are in a much higher income bracket than they say by their giving. So many live beyond their prosperity that they are not able to give according

to their prosperity. Paul also tells us to give cheerfully and liberally and assures us that the Lord loves "a cheerful giver". What is liberal Giving? Again he has left us on our own honor.

Merely telling a person that he should be liberal will not likely produce liberality. There must be sufficient motive. What is the basis of liberality? Let us notice some examples of liberal giving in other matters. We see liberality in the home.....fathers and mothers willingly deprive themselves in order that their children might obtain an education. Parents would be willing to wear rags and eat crumbs in order that their children might have the things they need. Why? The answer is THEIR UNDYING LOVE.

The greatest manifestation of liberality in the history of the world was the gift of God's Son to humanity. God gave his son to die for man! What prompted such a great gift? "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). God So loved that he gave. However, the death of Christ was voluntary. God did not force Christ to leave heaven and come to earth. Why was Christ so willing to give his life for us? "Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it." (Ephesians 5:25). Divine love manifested itself in giving.

It is possible to give without love but it is not possible to love without giving. Loving and giving are linked together. When the apostle Paul was urging the Christians at Corinth to proceed with the gift they had previously promised, he said: "I speak not by way of commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, to prove the sincerity of your love." (2 Corinthians 8:8). So, let us every remember that even though God does not arbitrarily demand a specified percent of our money, still he is concerned about our giving because it indicates the measure of our love. If we love we shall give liberally and a failure to give indicates a lack of love for God.

In seeking to establish in our hearts the proper attitude toward material things and to produce within us a desire to be liberal in our giving, the Bible calls our attention to several great facts. It reminds us, as we have already emphasized, that giving is a test of love.....it proves the sincerity of our love. It reminds us of the great sacrifice of Jesus. "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9). Paul reminds the Corinthians of the liberality of the Macedonians in an effort to encourage them to carry out their plans for giving. And, speaking to the same group, Paul reminds them that we shall

reap as we sow. "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." (2 Corinthians 9:6). These appeals should stir the hearts of all Christians. Remembering all that God and Christ has given to us, remembering that our giving indicates to our Father the sincerity of our love, remembering what others have done and are doing, remembering all of this should stir our hearts to a greater realization of the importance of stewardship.

Without doubt, God is more interested in us than in our gifts. He is interested in our giving because of what it indicates. He knows that he cannot dwell in a covetous heart. Too, God wants us to be happy and he knows that giving is the way to happiness. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The selfish one cannot possibly be happy. Real joy comes from doing good to others. The person who has opened his heart to give has a heart that is open to receive. And, while it is more blessed to give than to receive, still it is true that if we give as God teaches us to give, we shall receive. Let us notice the wonderful promises of God found in his word.

"The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered himself," "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work."

Let us remember that ours is not ours.....it is God's. And let us remember that we, being stewards of that which is God's, shall one day stand before him to give account of the way we have used that which is his. Let us be good stewards so that our Lord may say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Matthew 25:23.