

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER XLIII

STEWARDSHIP

Money which is earned by toil is human life in concrete form and since money, however gained, is so vital a factor in both spiritual and material progress, the child of God because of his right or wrong use of it will be tried by fire, as he will concerning all his service (1 Cor. 3:12-15). The element of self is especially evident in matters of Christian finance; for too often money is acquired, held, or dispensed by the child of God without due recognition of that fundamental relationship which he sustains to God. The Christian's responsibility in stewardship may be considered under three phases:

I. THE ACQUIRING OF MONEY

Though the motives which actuate people in their efforts to get money are many, there is but one which is worthy of the Christian's relation to God, which motive is expressed in the words, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). This injunction, it may be seen, is far-reaching in its scope.

It is divinely arranged that all shall engage in toil (Gen. 3:19; 2 Thess. 3:10), and the Christian is not excepted. However, to the spiritual, instructed believer, labor is more than merely earning a living: it is doing the will of God; for every employment, be it ever so menial, should be accepted by the child of God as a specific appointment from God, and to be done for Him, else not done at all. The incidental fact that God is pleased to give His child food and raiment through daily labor should not obscure the greater truth that God in infinite love is committed to the care of His children, and this without reference to their earning power (Phil. 4:19; Heb. 13:5). The saying, "God provides for those only who cannot provide for themselves," is untrue. He cares for His own at all times, since all that they have is from Him (1 Sam. 2:7). In the relationships among men there are agreements and salaries to be recognized, for "the labourer is worthy of his hire"; but in relation to his Father, the Christian's highest ideal concerning his toil is that whatever he does, he does at the appointment of his Father, for His sake, and as an expression of devotion to Him. Likewise, whatever is received is not earned, but is rather the expression of the Father's loving care. Such an attitude is not sentimental or impractical; it is the only basis upon which the believer can sanctify all his toil by doing it for the glory of God, or be able to "rejoice evermore" (1 Thess. 5:16) in the midst of the burdens of life.

II. THE POSSESSING OF MONEY

In view of the appalling need on every hand and the unmeasured good that money may accomplish, every spiritual Christian is facing the practical question relative to retaining property in his own possession. It is doubtless often the will of God that property shall be kept in store; but the yielded Christian will not assume this. His property will be held only as God directs and it will be subject to His control. The motives which actuate men both rich and poor -- the desire to be rich (1 Tim. 6:8, 9, 17, 18; Jas. 1:11; Heb. 13:5; Phil. 4:11), the desire to provide against a day of need (Matt. 6:25-34), and the desire to provide for others -- are commendable only as they fulfill the specifically revealed will of God in each individual's life.

III. THE DISPENSING OF MONEY

Self and money are alike the roots of much evil, and in the dispensing of money, as in its acquisition and possession, the Christian is expected to stand upon a grace relationship to God. This relationship pre-supposes that he has first given himself to God in unqualified dedication (2 Cor. 8:5), and a true dedication of self to God includes all that one is and has (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19) -- his life, his time, his strength, his ability, his ideals, and his property.

In matters pertaining to the giving of money, the grace principle involves the believer's recognition of God's sovereign authority over all that the Christian is and has, and is in contrast to the Old Testament legal system of tithing which system was in force as a part of the law until the law was done away (John 1:16, 17; Rom. 6:14; 7:1-6; 2 Cor. 3:1-18; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14; Gal. 3:19-25; 5:18). Though certain principles of the law were carried forward and restated under grace, tithing, like sabbath observance, is never imposed on the believer in this dispensation. Since the Lord's day superseded the legal sabbath and is adapted to the principles of grace as the sabbath could not be, so tithing has been superseded by a new system of giving which is adapted to the teachings of grace as tithing could not be.

Christian giving under grace as illustrated in the experience of the saints at Corinth, is summarized in 2 Corinthians 8:1 to 9:15. In this passage we discover:

1. Christ was their pattern.

The Lord's giving of Himself (2 Cor. 8:9) is the pattern of all giving under grace. He did not give a tenth; He gave all.

2. Their giving was even out of great poverty.

A striking combination of phrases is employed to describe what the Corinthians experienced in their giving (2 Cor. 8:2): "In a great trial of affliction," "the abundance of their joy," "their deep poverty abounded," "the riches of their liberality." Likewise, concerning liberality in spite of great poverty, it should be remembered that "the widow's mite" (Luke 21:1-4), which drew out the commendation of the Lord Jesus, was not a part, but "all that she had."

3. Their giving was not by commandment, nor of necessity.

Under the law, a tenth was commanded and its payment was a necessity; under grace, God is not seeking the gift, but an expression of devotion from the giver. Under grace no law is imposed, and no proportion to be given is stipulated; and, while it is true that God works in the yielded heart both to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:14), He finds pleasure only in that gift which is given cheerfully, or more literally, hilariously (2 Cor. 9:7). If a law existed stipulating the amount to be given, there are those, doubtless, who would seek to fulfill it, even against their own wishes and thus their gift would be made "grudgingly," and "of necessity." If it be said that to support the work of the Gospel we must have money whether given hilariously or not, it may also be said that it is not the amount which is given, but rather the divine blessing upon the gift that accomplishes the desired end. Christ fed five thousand from five loaves and two fishes, and there is abundant evidence to prove that wherever the children of God have fulfilled their privilege in giving under grace, their liberality has resulted in "all sufficiency in all things" which has made them "abound unto every good work," for God is able to make even the grace of giving to "abound" to every believer (2 Cor. 9:8).

4. They gave themselves.

Acceptable giving is preceded by a complete giving of one's own self (2 Cor. 8:5). This suggests the important truth that giving under grace, like giving under the law, is limited to a certain class of people. Tithing was never imposed by God on any other than the nation Israel. So, Christian giving is limited to believers, and is most acceptable when given by believers who have yielded their lives to God.

5. They gave systematically.

Like tithing, there is suggested systematic regularity in giving under grace. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (1 Cor. 16:2). This injunction is addressed to "every man" (every Christian man), and thus excuses none; and giving is to be from that which is already "in store," rather than a promise or pledge concerning funds

which they have not yet received. It may be observed that very much giving at the present time is a direct violation of this principle. Believers are everywhere urged to make their "pledge" based on what they hope to receive.

6. God Sustains the Giver.

God will sustain grace-giving with limitless temporal resources (2 Cor. 9:8-10; Luke 6:38). In this connection it may be seen that those who give as much as a tenth are usually prospered in temporal things; but, since the believer can have no relation to the law (Gal. 5:1), it is evident that this prosperity is the fulfillment of the promise under grace, rather than the fulfillment of promises under the law. No blessings are thus dependent on the exact tithing. The blessings are bestowed because a heart has expressed itself through a gift. It is manifest that no gift will be made to God from the heart which He will not graciously acknowledge. There is no opportunity here for designing people to become rich. The giving must be from the heart, and God's response will be according to His perfect will for His child. He may respond by bestowing spiritual riches, or in temporal blessings as He shall choose.

7. True Riches are from God.

The Corinthian Christians were made rich with heavenly riches. There is such a thing as being rich in this world's goods and yet not rich toward God (Luke 12:21). All such are invited to buy of Him that gold which is tried in the fire (Rev. 3:18). Through the absolute poverty of Christ in His death, all may be made rich (2 Cor. 8:9). It is possible to be rich in faith (Jas. 2:5), and rich in good works (1 Tim. 6:18); but in Christ Jesus the believer receives "the riches of grace" (Eph. 1:7), and "the riches of glory" (Eph. 3-16).

QUESTIONS

1. Name three general phases of stewardship.
2. What, according to the Scriptures, should be the Christian's supreme motive in acquiring money?
3. What attitude should a yielded Christian assume toward his daily toil?
4. What attitude should he assume toward the money he receives?
5. How may all work be done to the glory of God and with increasing joy?
6. On what ground should a spiritual Christian hold property?
7. What fact underlies all giving under grace?
8. Is tithing imposed on the children of God in this dispensation?
9. a. What proportion of a Christian's property is now under the authority of God?

- b. What portion did Christ give?
- 10. Is poverty a legitimate excuse for not giving?
- 11. a. What is meant by the phrases "giving grudgingly" and "giving of necessity"?
- b. What in giving is more important than the money?
- 12. a. Of whom did God expect a tenth?
- b. Of whom does He expect gifts under grace?
- 13. a. What principle of giving is violated by pledges?
- b. Explain the fact that divine blessings follow the giving of a tenth.
- 14. Indicate some of the true riches and State the way they may be received.