

GOD AND MONEY

Handling Money in a Fallen World...

PART 2

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15



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THEOLOGY OF MONEY:

In part one of this two part examination of what the Bible says about money, we looked at 1 Chronicles 29:10-18, which gave us a theology of ownership and of stewardship. **First**, we saw that God owns everything—“everything in heaven and earth is yours...” **Second**, everything we possess came from Him—“Wealth and honor come from you...” **Third**, God retains ownership of all He has entrusted to us—“You are the ruler of all things...” These three taken together mean that we are then stewards of all God has entrusted to us.

This means stewardship is not merely a matter of **handling** money, it is also a matter of **integrity**. The honest steward regards his possessions as God’s, entrusted to his care. David said, “God, you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly, and with an honest intent.” The honest steward longs to use what has been entrusted into his care in ways that bring joy to the Master.

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

⁶Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

⁹As it is written: “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

¹²This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

WHY START WITH GIVING?

I absolutely love being outdoors on a cold night—the kind where I can see my breath—under a moonlit sky deep in the country where no city lights detract from the brilliance of the heavens above me. I feel a sort of closeness to God, as though

there is a special favor simply in just being alive and under His gaze. I feel like with my life and breath there is waiting to come out of me a doxology of praise—like at the end of this text, which is not about the beauty of creation, but is about giving.

Paul offers a doxology of praise to God in response to the blessings that come with giving away what has been entrusted to us. Why does he offer this exclamation of praise? Because, along with the rest of creation, the financial part of life cries out for redemption that is certain to come because of the work of Christ. Money, in this world marred by sin, has an enslaving power that is a very real danger to every single one of us. Money has the power to convince us that our lifestyle **actually is** our identity, and that to change it is to change ourselves, and consequently no longer be ourselves.

We get headaches, lose sleep, bite our nails, yell at the people we’re supposed to love, and regard the Christian virtue of bearing one another’s burdens as an opportunity for someone to take advantage of us—all in the name of money. But this passage tells us that there is redemption from all this—and that God has not left money and our use of it to be doomed by the fall. For this, Paul offers his doxology of praise.

The time we have in this study is very limited, so I want to focus on giving because I can think of no other use of God’s resources that combats the enslaving power of money than giving it away.

HOW WE SHOULD GIVE- VS. 6-11:

Before we ask what we should give, and why, let’s first ask the question, “How should we give?” The first verses of this text give us the following answers: We should give generously, intentionally, cheerfully and dependently.

GIVING GENEROUSLY—Vs. 6 lauds generous giving, while vs. 11 tells us that we ought to desire to give generously, because generous giving leads to thanksgiving to God.

GIVING INTENTIONALLY—Vs. 7 says that the giver should know what he is giving, and should be doing it decidedly, freely, willingly and not motivated by anything other than his heart’s conviction. Our giving should be in response to careful consideration of how we wish to invest what the Lord has entrusted to us. We should **decide** what we are going to give before we give it.

GIVING CHEERFULLY—Vs. 7 tells us that God loves a cheerful giver. The whole truth of this passage is that God loves joyful handling of His resources. The whole tenor of this passage is that the Christian ought to be excited to partner with God for the strengthening of His Kingdom. Giving to God’s work on earth is the only lasting, and therefore mainly wise investment. Money invested in the lives of others and the proclamation of the Gospel ought to bring great joy to the believer’s heart.

GIVING DEPENDENTLY—Vs. 8 tells us that it is God who makes all grace abound to you so that you will have all you need to do and be everything He has called you to. What this means for us is that we must give with the knowledge that we are utterly dependent upon the Lord for **everything**. This perspective is all that will keep our hearts from making an idol out of money.

A BRIEF WORD ON IDOLATRY—The two primary idols of independence we seek in money are the idols of **status** and **security**. These both attempt to wrest God's sovereign control over our lives away from Him. Worshipping the idol of status is the act of trying to buy your identity or image. It is the spirit which says, "I wouldn't be caught dead wearing... driving... living... talking to..." It is, in a word, materialism. Worshipping the idol of security is a bit more complex than that because it is not shown by what it owns, but by what it stashes away for security and certainty. The security idol says that if you can stash enough away in savings, investments and such, you'll never be in need, you will be able to provide for yourself. And giving becomes especially hard, because you are giving what you count on to preserve your life. God has not called us to be independent, but to rely on Him for our provision.

WHAT WE SHOULD GIVE:

The next practical question is "What should we give?" The Bible talks about giving in three categories—giving the tithe, the excess and the sacrifice. We are going to focus on the tithe because it is the most basic form of giving.

WHAT IS THE TITHE?—Larry Burkett defines the tithe as "the external, material testimony of God's ownership of the material and spiritual things in our lives." The word, which appears 28 times in the Old Testament and twice in the New Testament, means in both the Hebrew (*maaser*) and the Greek (*dekate*) "tenth."

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE TITHE—The tithe is mentioned in the Law of God in Leviticus 27:30-32: "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. If a man redeems any of his tithe, he must add a fifth of the value to it. The entire tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod—will be holy to the LORD." Later in Malachi 3, we read, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse..." What is peculiar about the tithe is that it is one of the rare commands in the Old Testament that does not carry with it a punishment for those who do **not** tithe. Even more peculiar than that, is that this is also one of the rare commands which does carry a particular reward for those who do keep it—Malachi 3:10, "Bring in the whole tithe... test me now in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

JESUS AND THE TITHE—Jesus Himself upholds it as a biblical principle of giving. But how He does it gives us what we really need to develop a right perspective on it, and maybe even an insight as to why the Old Testament treats it as it does.

Jesus' upholding of the tithe comes, of all places, in a rebuke of the Pharisees who were abusing it. Look at Luke 11:37-42. Jesus said, "You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness... Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone."

1. **JESUS REBUKES A LEGALISTIC "USE" OF THE TITHE**—What is "legalism?" We talk about it a lot, and warn against it just as often. Legalism is trying to fulfill the Law without our hearts being in it in order to earn God's favor. This certainly applies to the tithe. If you are giving a tithe, but only because you are trying to fulfill a law you resent, your 10% is not enough. In other words, Jesus is cursing the Pharisees

for "only tithing." We are to use the resources entrusted to us in ways that bring joy to the master, because our longing is to share in the Master's joy.

2. **JESUS UPHOLDS THE BIBLICAL GUIDELINE OF THE TITHE**—He says, "You should have practiced [mercy, faithfulness, etc] **WITHOUT** leaving the former—the tithe—undone." They were meticulous so there could be no fault found in them. And Jesus leveled this woe against them not because they were meticulous, but because their hearts were far from God in their meticulous observation of the Law. The tithe is a testimony, as Burkett said, of God's ownership of the material and spiritual things in our lives. It is not a payment to God. It is a testimony to Him, yourself, and the world about His gracious provision in your life.

WHY WE SHOULD GIVE- VS. 12-15:

Paul concludes this passage by talking about this testimony. To testify is to confess truth. Paul tells the Corinthians that when they give, it "is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God" (vs. 12)! Their giving has led others to praise God. A bond has begun to form between those who have given and those who have received—one that has not only addressed the needs of the people, but has also led people to worship. And this gets at the heart of the final question we pose here: "Why should we give?"

MODELING GRACE TO THE WORLD—When we give, we testify to the generosity of God. Money, as Tim Keller says, becomes a "currency of grace." What he means, and what we see Paul saying here in this text is that money, when it is given away generously, models the grace of God. How does it model God's grace? It helps others see that we, as Christians, believe that God has been truly generous with us. This is what Paul is saying when he talks about "the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ." Our confession is that God, who is rich in mercy and abounding in grace, has lavished our lives with that mercy and grace, and has made us partakers of His wealth. When we give our money away, we model what Christ has done for us.

REMINDING OUR OWN HEARTS OF THAT GRACE—A lot has been written about why we should give. But at the end of the day, the only proper motivation for our giving should be our response to the grace and provision of God. In other words, we should give because we **really want to** out of a heart-felt response to God's gift to us—Jesus Christ. We want to see the Gospel proclaimed not just through words, but through physical, tangible proclamations of God's love and care for His people. When this is our passion, we are not afraid to give our money away because it has not enslaved us. It has not enslaved us because it does not provide for us our identity. Rather, we see money as yet another resource God has provided for the care of the broken and hurting and sin-sick—of which we all were before we received God's indescribable gift.

Giving is a means to remind our own hearts of the grace and generosity we have been shown by our God, the owner of all things. Without that generosity, not only would we be poor, we'd be lost. Can you begin to see now where Paul's doxology comes from? Jesus has authored by His life and death true generosity. He has set us free from the tyranny of money and the idols of status and security by giving us our identity as sons and daughters of God and by securing for us our place in His world as heirs with Christ. And for this, I conclude, along with Paul, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!!!"