

Pillar VI

Give cheerfully and sacrificially from our God-given resources for the building up of the church

The story line of the world as we know it from God's Word is 1) Creation, 2) Corruption, 3) Redemption, and 4) Final Restoration. Everything in the world falls into this grand narrative. For instance, when we consider the world we know several things:

- It is part of God's good creation, however,
- It is corrupted by sin.
- It can be redeemed to serve God's good purposes as it awaits final restoration from all the effects of sin.

This is the basis of a Christian worldview.

To miss any part of this biblical meta-narrative is to have a distorted view of reality. Consider anger for instance. We know from the Bible that God gets angry and therefore we know that anger is not inherently evil. Indeed, in its proper place anger is a positive good. In God we see that anger is a holy assertiveness that is exercised to protect that which is good. Tragically, sin has distorted anger in mankind so that it is usually an expression of sin and can be the source of great evil. But the Gospel of grace is able to redeem anger so that it can be an energy source to do good.

We must fit the God-given resources of our money, time, and gifts into this same biblical framework.

Our Resources and God

God is the creator and owner of all there is. His ownership extends to all of our money, our time, and gifts/talents. First Chronicles 29:1-18 describes a time that David gathered the people together and by his own example called them to give generously to build a temple for God's glory. In his prayer he says, "Everything in heaven and earth is yours...Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things...Everything comes from you, and we have only given you what comes from your hand."

The resources we have are good gifts from God. And while God has been very generous to us and given us far more than we deserve He nevertheless has not given up ultimate ownership over all we have. We can conclude from this that a lack of generosity with what we have (money, time, talents) is not just stinginess but robbery. God makes this clear through the prophet Malachi. When the people refused to share what God had given them He accused them of robbing from Him: "You are robbing me...in tithes and offerings" (Mal 3:8). Christians are merely stewards of all they have. We are to use our resources for God's glory and purposes.

A word about tithing: Since we are only stewards of what we have then what about our money? How much are we supposed to give? Tithing – giving 10% of annual income – was an obligation for the people of God under the Old Covenant (the time prior to the

atonement work of Christ on the cross). However, Christians are not under the civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant. So should Christians tithe? This I believe is the wrong question. A better question is, "Does it make any sense for God's New Covenant people who know the saving grace of Jesus to be *less* generous than God's Old Covenant people who could only look forward to the promised Messiah?"

While the tithe is not a rigid rule for Christians it certainly ought to be the ground floor of our generosity. Randy Alcorn calls tithing the "training wheels of giving." It's where our giving ought to begin. We should have eyes to give as much as possible. It is God's money after all. When we realize this we will certainly want to give more than just 10% to God's good purposes.

For this reason we encourage all members and regular attendees of Metro East to begin their giving by tithing from their annual income if they are not already doing so. Once that has become a glad exercise of faithful devotion we encourage everyone to consider going beyond the tithe through increasing their annual percentage as well as giving special offerings.

Our Resources and Sin

One of the results of man's fall into sinful rebellion is that our personal resources now have an enslaving power. This is brought to life vividly in the account of the rich young man described in Mark 10:17-31. He rejected Jesus' call to sell everything he had, give it to the poor, and follow Him. In response, Jesus makes an astonishing statement: "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (v. 23).

The Bible addresses the topic of money either directly or by way of analogy some 20 to 30 times more than sex. Why is this so? Because in our fallen condition money has very great deceptive powers. When people commit adultery, they know they are doing it. On the other hand, very few people who love money will admit or even realize it. Yet the Bible regularly warns against materialism. The Old Testament laws regarding giving went so far as to guard against too much wealth being concentrated in the hands of a very few (Sabbath & Jubilee years).

Luke's Gospel in particular warns about the power of money and greed. Jesus calls the Pharisees "lovers of money" (16:14). John the Baptist warns people against discontent with their income (3:13). Jesus warns people to watch out against greed (12:15), against worry about money (12:22), against frantic over-work (12:30), and against pride in economic achievement (12:15b). In addition a number of the parables deal with money and greed.

Armed with the knowledge of money's deceptive power and man's sinful nature the people of God must take practical action to fight the sins of coveting and materialism. We need to examine our current giving and seriously consider giving away more of our money. Can we live more simple lives? Simpler homes? Simpler cars? Simpler vacations? Can we spend less money on clothes? Eating out? Entertainment? This is

not a call to establish legalistic standards or to endorse asceticism. It is rather a call to realistically reckon with our own sin and the power that money so often wields over us.

In addition to money our other personal resources like time and talents can exercise an enslaving power over us. The Bible is full of commands and encouragements to serve one another precisely because as sinners we have a natural trajectory away from sacrificial service. We want to use our time and talents to serve ourselves. But Jesus gives us a radical alternative. When Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist and began to wash his disciple's feet he was embodying his own words that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." After washing the feet of His followers Jesus commanded them to serve each other in like manner. We must seriously consider how we use our time and gifts. Have we built into our lives enough margin so that serving our brothers and sisters in Christ is realistic?

In I Corinthians and Ephesians Paul describes the church as the body of Christ with each part playing a vital role in the health of the body. We are not to keep our time and talents/gifts to ourselves but are to use them for the building up of the body.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.
- Eph 2:19-22

Our Resources and Grace

The good news is that because God's grace is a working reality in our fallen world our money and other resources can become means of grace in the lives of others. In II Corinthians 9 Paul writes very powerful words about the end results of our cheerful and sacrificial giving:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work...He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for all your generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but it is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God." By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!" (vv. 9-15)

The words "riches," "grace," "righteousness," "giving," and "gift" are interchangeable in this text. This is a profound point. Paul wants the Corinthian believers to know that the money they are giving to the church at Jerusalem goes beyond simple dollars and cents.

The money they give away will actually be a means of God's grace in other people's lives. When Christians give generously of their money, time, and gifts, lives are changed by God's grace. Few acts demonstrate the reality and power of the Gospel more than cheerful and sacrificial generosity.