

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Stewardship with Integrity, Part 4

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:1-5

Code: 47-63

Our time in the Word of God this morning will be spent in the eighth and ninth chapter of 2 Corinthians, as we continue going through this wonderful epistle. We are looking at chapter 8 verse 10 through chapter 9 verse 5, the inspired Word of God is teaching us stewardship with integrity. So turn in your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and beginning at verse 10 we're going to return to our look at this great portion of Scripture.

The noble missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, once said, "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply." That's axiomatic, that's a self-evident truth. God supports His own program. If God has chosen to do something, He will make sure it gets done. And whatever resources are necessary for the accomplishment of it will be provided.

That in terms of giving challenges us to line up with God's plans to find out what God is doing and how He is doing it and be a part of the supply for it. Certainly the work of God begins in the church and we then come alongside the purposes of God as they unfold by giving our money to the church, by providing the resources necessary to accomplish the purposes of God. That involves the ministry of the church in every aspect.

As we have been learning in this series on giving, Scripture tells us that we are to support the leaders in the church, those who preach and teach, work hard at it are worthy of double pay. The ox should not be muzzled while he treads, Paul reminded the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 9. And he said those who preach the gospel should be able to live by their preaching, that is to be supported by it.

In Galatians 6 Paul said that those who have been taught should share with those who teach in all good things. So we give to the church for the support of its leadership, for the support of its ministries. We also give to the church for the support of its people, those in the church who have need, such as we remember from Acts chapter 4 where the early church in Jerusalem was bringing money and putting it at the Apostles' feet and the Apostles were disseminating it to those poor saints who didn't have the basics of life.

Giving begins in the local church. We give to the unfolding purpose of God as Christ builds His church. Beyond that, of course, there are opportunities to give in an extended way. There are various ministries around the world that call upon us to have a share...missionary ministries, missionary enterprises, evangelistic outreaches, teaching opportunities, the care of those in need

who are far away from us, all kinds of ministries, many ministries. We begin, as we have learned, by supporting our local church, pouring our life and our time and our energy and our prayers and our service into the local assembly where God has placed us. But also we have the opportunity to consider other extended ministries of the church, we have to be prayerful and careful and wise and discerning as we seek to support those things that God is really doing.

We've done that here. We've sent money far, far away to meet the needs of saints who needed the basics of life. We've sent clothing to those far away who needed the very basic things of life, something to wear. We've built churches all over the world, supported missionaries near and far. Many of you have responded to ministries that aren't particularly associated with our church. Many of you have given to the college and the seminary which are organizationally independent of the church and not supported by the church budget at all. You've given to Grace To You, you've given to other ministries and other mission efforts. This goes on all the time.

At this particular point, however, we have come to this great text which helps us to recognize what we should support because the pleas are just ubiquitous. They're just everywhere all the time. We have to be able to make discerning decisions. Sometimes sadly in local churches there are unwise efforts to raise money. Terrible debt is incurred. Unnecessary buildings are built. Sometimes money is wasted on endeavors and enterprises that did never have the blessing of God.

On the other hand, perhaps more frequently in parachurch organizations, fund raising is done without proper discretion, integrity and credibility. In fact, for many, I'm sure, fund raising is a blight on the Christian faith and one reason why people criticize us, it is to many unbelievers offensive, and even a scandal to the Lord occasionally. It calls upon us to be discerning, not undiscerning. And sad to say, many Christians lack discernment and rather witlessly send their money to those things that God is not doing, and thus those who are unscrupulous or unaccountable, who operate bogus ministries seem to be successfully funded and very often by well-intentioned but unwise Christians.

So in our giving whether it is something that the local church is sponsoring, or whether it is something beyond the walls of our own local church, how do we decide? How do we discern? How do we know where to send our money wisely so that we literally are laying up treasure in heaven and not wasting it? So that we actually are purchasing friends for eternity who will greet us when we enter into heaven? The question is, what do we look for to discern those opportunities that really are the work of the Lord? How do you recognize it? Whether in your local church or beyond?

Well that question is crucial and that is precisely the question that Paul is answering in our text. Second Corinthians 8:10 through chapter 9 verse 5, that extended section shows us what to look for. As I've been telling you, it is a very unique section. It is a sort of implied standards for recognizing stewardship that has real integrity.

Now remember the Corinthian situation. They were somewhat prosperous. They had enough of the necessities of life and more, not only to take care of themselves but to share with others. Paul knew that. He also knew the Jerusalem church was extremely poor. By this time stripped of almost all of its original resources and persecuted more extensively than in the beginning, the people were in dire condition.

And so, Paul had begun to collect money from the Gentile churches on his missionary travels to take back to Jerusalem to relieve the tremendous poverty. This enterprise had been told to the Corinthians by Titus and they had begun to participate. But not long after they had begun to participate, some false teachers came to Corinth, they began an all-out assault and character assassination on Paul. In the process of this assassination they were able to win over many in the Corinthian church and full-scale mutiny occurred. And when the mutiny against the Apostle occurred, one of the accusations was he is a deceiver, he is a con man, he is after your money. Consequently the offerings which were being collected for the Jerusalem church ceased.

The relationship between Paul and the Corinthians was wounded deeply. It was in great trouble. Paul was depressed. He had fears within and without. He was greatly disturbed. In fact, his depression was as deep as at any time in his ministry that we can tell reading between the lines of his epistles. And he wanted to make things right, he wanted to win back the Corinthians. He wanted to protect them from the encroachment of the false teachers. And so he wrote this letter of 2 Corinthians to defend his own integrity. And one of the issues was his integrity with money. They knew he was collecting all of this money and, of course, it was a great place to make accusations. The false teachers, no doubt, had taken advantage of that and said he's collecting money all over everywhere to make himself rich, or to give to his friends in Jerusalem whom he likes much better than he does Gentiles. Whatever way they could assassinate Paul's character they wanted to do it.

So in the middle of this self-defense it is important for him to defend the way he handles money. And that's precisely what he's doing here. In chapters 8 and 9 he is urging the Corinthians to get back to their giving toward this project. Remember now, in the beginning they had pledged a certain amount. They started toward that goal and then stopped. It's time now because the relationship has been restored. They have responded to the severe letter which Titus took. Titus has come back and said all is well. They reaffirm their love and their trust in you. And Paul now knows that they're back connected as they should be so he writes 2 Corinthians and in this part he says it's now time to start the giving again. He had already told them to reach their goal they had to lay in store every week, the first day of the week, 1 Corinthians 16:2. And they had started to do that and apparently they had stopped. So he is now telling them to get on track with their giving, to restore this process of giving so that he comes for his third trip which will be yet in the future, no offerings will be necessary to make up the lack but the original commitment will be already completed. As we shall see, it was a very large amount.

So Paul is in the process of doing this collection of getting it from not only Corinth but other churches, carrying it back to Jerusalem and giving it to the saints there. And in the midst of that, accusations were flying all over the place about the fact that he was likely going to take a big cut for himself or steal the money or do something dishonorable or dishonest with it. So Paul protects himself and discusses here the characteristics of stewardship of integrity.

Now let me review what we've already learned. Stewardship with integrity calls for giving that is voluntary. Remember in verse 10 he says, "I give my opinion in this matter, this is to your advantage." There is no percentage, there is no amount, there is no coercion. There is no manufactured crisis. There is no manipulation at all. He simply says it's up to you, I'm just giving my opinion, verse 8, I'm not speaking this as a command. I'm just telling you if you give it's for your advantage. That's the spirit.

One writer wrote this, "Christian fund raising has reached the end of its tether after it has adequately informed us of the need." It's a very good statement. Christian fund raising has reached the end of its tether after it has adequately informed us of the need. That's as far as it can go.

He goes on to say, "Convincing is the terrain of the Holy Spirit and we dare not abrogate His work." In other words, we can tell you the need, the Holy Spirit has to do the convincing. And he further says, "To be quite honest, I will no longer read appeal letters that have the appropriate sentences underlined in red and promise to give me a special trinket if I give and enclose a handwritten though printed final note of appeal just in case I've decided to say no. It is with sadness that I refuse to read them because I'm certain they are often for very good causes, but their approach has moved from information to psychological manipulation," end quote.

I understand how he feels. I will not allow myself to be manipulated. Tell me the need and I'll allow the Spirit of God to lead me. Stewardship with integrity features giving that is voluntary.

Secondly, stewardship with integrity calls for faithfulness to complete the project. We talked about the fact that Paul says, "Look, you started this thing, you started...he says in verse 10...a year ago, or it could be last year...verse 11...now finish it." In other words, the plan is in place, you determined what you were going to give. Stewardship with integrity calls for faithfulness to see it to the end, complete what you've committed.

Thirdly, stewardship with integrity calls for amounts proportionate to what one has. It doesn't try to take lots of money from people who have little. It doesn't try to strip people of their money used for the necessities of life. In fact he says very clearly there in verse 12, "If the readiness is present it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he doesn't have." God's not trying to rob you. He's not trying to make you poor. He's not trying to take your last cent. If you have little,

you give little. If you have much, you give much. It is proportionate.

Fourthly, and we're just reviewing, stewardship with integrity calls for giving that balances resources in behalf of those in need. Now remember, the saints in Jerusalem were poor, they didn't have the necessities of life. The Corinthians had more than the necessities of life, and they were to some degree wealthy. And what he's calling for, both at the end of verse 13 and the end of verse 14, is bound up in the word equality, or better translated balance. The idea is that within the church there's a balancing of resources so that no one has unmet needs. We're not talking about elevating somebody's life style. We're talking about meeting needs. And so the Apostle reminds us of the joy of sharing and how we are to meet needs and that what we possess is really the Lord's and should be used for other believers who have needs that they themselves cannot meet. And he illustrates that in verse 15 by reference to the gathering of manna as we saw back in the wilderness.

Then number five in our principles learned from this text, is that stewardship with integrity calls for pastoral leadership, pastoral leadership. In verses 16 and 17 he talks about the fact that this is not only his enterprise but that Titus is fully involved in it from the heart. In other words, Titus agrees that this is a proper campaign. And they knew Titus. They knew him, they loved him, they trusted him. He had been there numerous times. He had taken the letters to them. He had introduced them to the original project. They had great affection for Titus and that caused Paul's heart to rejoice. So Paul is very wary of being accused of being a unilateral sort of dictator type who calls his own enterprises and operates them on his own and basically says right here, "Thanks be to God who put the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus." What is really good about this is that God has put this in the heart of both of us. There is confirmation in that. Where you have legitimate purposes that God is outlining, believe me they will come through godly leaders. Stewardship with integrity calls for the most godly pastors and leaders to be involved in that enterprise. It should be those who know God, those who have knowledge of God and His ways and His Word and those who have sound doctrine and faithful ministries and lives of unimpeachable virtue. Those are the kind that you want to give to.

And then number six, and this was the bulk of what we discussed last time...Stewardship with integrity calls for giving that is handled with accountability. It calls for giving that is handled with accountability. In 1987 forty percent of Americans surveyed felt that Christian fund raising was honest. That was 1987 and sixty percent felt that it was dishonest. I wonder what the number would be today. We can easily bring reproach upon the name of Christ and fuel the fires of our critics if we do not have accountability with how we handle money. And we've all been very aware of scandalous illustrations of that in recent years. Paul knew that this was a potential scandal.

It wasn't that he didn't trust himself, he did. And he told the Corinthians his conscience was absolutely clear. It wasn't that he didn't trust Titus, he did. He was a noble and exceptionally dedicated fellow servant. But Paul did not trust his enemies and he did not trust the enemies of the

cross. And he knew if there was any way they could discredit the gospel, they would do it and this would leave them an open door if they could find anything that could be questioned in the handling of this money. And so, starting in verse 18 all the way down to verse 23, he discusses the accountability that is in place with regard to the money.

First of all, Titus whom they knew and trusted. Secondly in verse 18, the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches. An unnamed famous gospel preacher with unimpeachable credentials, a godly man, well-known, famous through all the churches. No doubt used by God for the salvation of many, no doubt beloved in many churches. They don't find an accountant, I might add, not that that would in itself be wrong. They don't find a business man. They find somebody who is known as a gospel preacher, a godly pastor, elder, leader, that man who ranks highest in the humble leadership of the church, a famous man. He is not a man appointed, by the way, by the Apostle Paul, but verse 19, appointed by the churches. He is an apostle of the churches, an official delegate representing the churches, probably the Macedonian churches selected him so that there can be no collusion here. He is to travel with us, verse 19, in this gracious work which we are administering. And we're taking precaution, verse 20 says, so that no one should discredit us. That's the issue here. So that he cannot be discredited by his enemies.

Verse 22 indicates that not only was their Titus and the famous gospel preacher, but a third individual was sent with this letter to Corinth to help them with the offering and ultimately to take it to Jerusalem. He is called the brother whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things. Here is a proven man, a tested man.

So you've got three men who were given the responsibility and the trust to care for this. They are men appointed by the churches. The end of verse 23, it says "all of them." Titus and the other brethren are messengers of the churches, and then this commendation which has to be the most wonderful commendation anybody could ever receive, "A glory to Christ." They are a glory to Christ, they are an honor to Christ.

So all of that is all about accountability. Stewardship with integrity has that kind of accountability. It is the hands of godly well-known men appointed by the churches to care for the resources.

And then number seven, and this is where we ended last time, stewardship with integrity calls for giving that exhibits love...calls for giving that exhibits love. Now you can tell by what we've said already that some of these principles have to do with the people running the giving program and some have to do with the people giving to it. It covers both. And here in this verse we're talking again about those who were giving to this project, as opposed to those who are caring for it in the prior passage. Verse 24, "Therefore openly before the churches show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you." Prove your love...prove your love by your giving.

Our testimony is linked to our love. Our love is measured by our generosity. You can say you love but it is meaningless until you put it on display. In the face of all who are watching, show the churches how much you love the saints. Show them that the love of Christ has been shed abroad in your hearts. Show them that they never need to question your genuine salvation. Because, you remember John said, if you say the love of God abides in you but you close up your compassion to one in need, we have a right to question that. Nothing is more characteristic of being a believer than love and nothing is more characteristic of love than giving and giving generously. So show your love. Stewardship with integrity then is an expression of love from one believer to another.

So what have we learned? Giving is to be voluntary. It is to be faithful to complete the need. It is to be proportionate to what one has. It is to balance resources in favor of those who have need. It is to be under pastoral leadership, handled by godly men with accountability. And it is to exhibit genuine spiritual love. Now that brings us to the last two in the first five verses of chapter 9.

Number eight, stewardship with integrity features giving that sets an example...features giving that sets an example. Now this is a very, very simple straightforward section of Scripture but it does illustrate this wonderful, wonderful point that I've just mentioned. If someone were to say to me, "What do you want out of your church in terms of giving? As a pastor what is your real heart cry?" I might approach it perhaps in a series of steps. And I would say, well first of all, my desire would be that the people give to meet all our needs.

In other words, I would desire that there not be a short fall, that whatever it is that we need to do ministry wise, that whatever commitments we have made, whatever expenses we incur, whatever it is that we need that our people would give to meet that need. That would be my first desire. But I wouldn't want to stop there. I would really have a second desire. If that's good, here's what's better. I would desire that our people give more than we need, more than just meeting needs, I would like them to give so that we could expand ministry, so that we could add more missionaries, so that we could reach out with more materials, so that we could teach more, train more. I would like our people to give not just what we've budgeted, but more than that so that we have some money that we can prayerfully and carefully use to expand our ministry and thus to advance the kingdom. That would be better.

But even that wouldn't be enough. If you really want to know what I would like, what would be best, would be that they would give so magnanimously and so generously that they would become the standard by which all church giving was measured. I love you enough to wish that for you because should you give like that you wouldn't be able to contain the blessing that God would give to you and we would be having an impact on churches all across the world. We do anyway. Churches look at us, evaluate us, very often take us as a model and go back and try to reproduce that. If we were giving not just what we need, not just more than we need, but if we were giving at a level that set the

standard for generosity, if we were giving at a level that was magnanimous beyond anything that might have been expected, we would set a standard that others would endeavor to emulate and therefore giving would have an exponential result.

I think that's what was in Paul's heart. He wasn't settling just...Well, I hope you can meet the need...well I hope you can meet the need and do a little better. What he says in this text in a sense to the Corinthians is I want you to set the standard. I want you to set the pattern. You say you love Christ. You say you love the world. You say you have sound theology. You say you're committed to each other. Then set the standard that manifests that kind of love.

Let's look at it, the first four verses of chapter 9. And he's very gracious here. He's not at all browbeating them in the matter of giving. Look at what he says to start with. "It is superfluous...he says...for it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints." Now let me just say by way of footnote that is probably not a good place for a chapter division, it doesn't really make any sense here because this flows right out of the prior verse.

I want you just to prove your love. I know it's there. I want you to vindicate my boasting for you because I have every reason to boast about you because I know you have this love, it's almost superfluous for me to even ask you to do this because you already know to do it. He wanted that offering ready when he came. He wanted it all completely collected before he got there. He wanted it that way because it would show their love and it would vindicate their confidence in them. And he says I know your love is real, I know I have reason to have confidence, so it's almost superfluous for me to write this to you. You've already heard about the need, Titus told you about it. You already started to give. Now you're ready to give again. The connections that we've made are solid and now it's time to take the offerings and build up that amount.

Verse 2, "For I know you're readiness." That's why it's sort of superfluous. I know you're ready, or your eagerness, or your zeal, or your passion for this. I'm just calling you back to your original response, your original readiness. It was there in the beginning before you got confused by the false teachers, before you got sucked up in their lies about me being a charlatan and a fake and a deceiver and in it for the money. I just want you to go back to that original motivation, that original readiness.

And then he identifies it, "Or which I boast about you to the Macedonians." Now remember this, the first people to begin this collection were the Corinthians. And their readiness was so great, their eagerness was so great, their motivation so strong that Paul used them as an example to the Macedonians. And when he went from Achaia where Corinth is, the lower part of Greece. When he went from there to the northern part called Macedonia and met with the Macedonian churches, he used the Corinthians as an example. He said to the Macedonians, "I want you to give the way they gave." Look at that in verse 2. "Of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely that Achaia has been prepared since last year; or a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up most of them."

In other words, in the beginning it was your example that motivated the Macedonians. You were the example to them. And by the way, their giving, the Macedonians' giving, was incredible. Back in verse 2 of chapter 8 it says, "In a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality, for I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord." They were poor, they were persecuted. They were in deep poverty and yet they gave liberally and they gave like that, listen, because of the model that had been established by the Corinthians. You were an example in the very beginning. You were an example that motivated the Macedonians to give. "Your zeal, or your readiness, your zeal stirred up most of them."

Paul wanted the Corinthians to continue that kind of exemplary giving. Look at verse 3, "But I have sent the brethren that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, that as I was repeatedly saying, you may be prepared."

You had a great start, he says. You had a great start. You set an example for the Macedonians. The Macedonians responded with amazing generosity and liberality, and you were the ones that stirred up most of them. Now I have sent the brethren who would be carrying this letter...Titus, the preacher and the tested brother...that our boasting about you may not be vain or empty in this case, that as I have continually been saying to you, you may be prepared. I'm sending the brethren so that you can continue to fulfill my confidence and my expectation. Why? Verse 4, "Lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we...not to speak of you...should be put to shame by this confidence."

Paul says, "You know if when I come on my third visit and I bring some Macedonians with me...which according to Acts 20 verses 2 to 6 is exactly what he did...and I bring those Macedonians and you are not prepared with your offering, you will be ashamed and I will be ashamed for my boasting about you." We can bring shame on the church and shame on the Apostle if this thing isn't cared for appropriately. I want you to be an example right from the beginning to the end so that other churches, other individuals from other churches can come and see the model that you have established. I've said you have great love. I've said you were generous. I've said I believe in you, I have confidence in you. Don't make me eat my words. I want you to have a powerful witness to other churches. A stingy congregation, a congregation that doesn't give, a congregation that doesn't meet the needs of its own church life sets a bad example, a dishonorable example.

On the other hand, a faithful, generous, giving church can set a model for other churches to follow. Often, I mean often, when I speak outside of here which I do I tell other Christians in other churches about you and I do what Paul did, I boast about you because I have confidence in you. And I tell them what a marvelous church you are. I tell them how you love the Scriptures. I tell them how you love to worship. I tell them how you love sound doctrine. I tell them how you can recognize false

teachers and you can recognize error. I tell them how you are discerning. I tell them how you pray. I tell them how you faithfully serve. I tell them how whenever we talk about a need or mention a need you run to meet that need. I tell them how you give a million dollars plus every year to the missionary enterprise. I tell them how you care about the lost. I tell them how you lead people to Christ. I tell them how you support the ministry.

Now your credibility and mine then is always at stake, isn't it? And that's exactly what the Apostle Paul was doing. Paul was saying I've been telling everybody about your giving, folks, could you please keep it up? And I think that that's fair and that's legitimate. I want to use this church as an example to other churches, which it is. In a few weeks we'll have five hundred men here at a Shepherds' Conference and they'll be listening to what I say but beyond what I say they'll be watching what goes on. And when we tell you we like to have you bring these men into your homes and let them stay with you for the week, that's because we trust you. That's because we believe in you, because we have confidence in you that you're not going to show them a kind of Christianity that's the antithesis to everything that we believe. We have trust in you. And through the years we've learned to have that trust.

As I said earlier, I...if you ask me what my desire for the church would be, it would be that you set the example in everything...in speech, conduct, righteousness, virtue and everything. That you would set the example in giving as well. And that's what Paul is saying. He's not settling for stewardship that is marginal, he wasn't stewardship that is exemplary. He wants the Corinthians to set the standard. Paul says I have repeatedly said how willing you are, please fulfill my confidence so that when Macedonians come with me they don't find you unprepared. That would be very sad. And then you would be put to shame and so would I and so would the Lord.

And then finally, a last point and this is really where it ought to end, folks. This is where it ought to end. Stewardship with integrity involves giving that has overcome the sin of covetousness. It involves giving that has overcome the sin of covetousness.

If the enterprises of God, if it is God's work, if it is done in God's way, and if it deserves your gifts, and if you have them to give and you don't, sin is the issue. It has to get down to that. Verse 5, "So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren...that's Titus and the two other brothers...that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same gift might be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness."

So he says...To make sure there was no humiliation, to make sure you didn't fail to give, to make sure you were fulfilling your promise and your pledge, I have urged the brethren that they would go on ahead of me. I can't come right now...in fact it would be a while before Paul would go. But I have to know that things are moving and I have sent these brothers to get this thing to its completion, to arrange beforehand your...this is a key phrase...previously promised bountiful gift. Which indicates

that on first hearing about the need they no doubt had promised a huge amount...bountiful gift signifying a very, very large sum. And he's just pushing them toward the fulfillment of that commitment. They had targeted an amount for the final sum and he is saying you previously promised this bountiful gift, this large sum, and I want to make sure that the same is ready, that it's ready and not affected by covetousness.

And there Paul identifies the one great sin that affects giving, pleonexia in the Greek, it means covetousness, or it could be translated greed. It indicates grasping to hold more, grasping to get more at the expense of others. It's all built around selfishness and pride. But in the end, churches and stewardship programs succeed because God's people are not covetous. After all else is discussed and you know that it is a ministry of integrity and you know that they have done it according to the way God would want it done, the only issue remaining is whether you are going to respond in a righteous way or a sinful way. In the end, it is an issue of covetousness.

And frankly, few sins are as ugly as that one. In Mark 7 Jesus said covetousness is built into the fabric of depravity. He said it comes from within, it's there, it's in your unredeemed flesh. It's part of your fallenness. In 2 Peter 2:14 Peter speaks of a covetous heart as one trained in greed...trained in greed. In other words, you've been selfish so long you've become habitually greedy. Paul says that anybody who is covetous is an idolater. If there is a purpose of God that's unfolded and it is God's work and it is being done in God's way and you have an opportunity and the resources to support it and you don't, then instead of worshiping God you have another idol...whatever it is that your money buys you. Whatever it is that you want that makes you hold back from giving is what you worship, right? Clothes, possessions, a car, a house, a vacation, whatever...whatever it is that makes you covetous is what you worship.

Solomon said by way of warning that covetous people are never satisfied and never thankful, Ecclesiastes 5:10. They never have enough so they can't ever be thankful for what they have. In fact, it is such an ugly iniquity that Paul said in Ephesians 5:3, "Do not let covetousness or greed even be named among you." I don't even want to hear about it ever occurring in anyone's life. The Bible says that covetousness leads to the oppression of others, Micah 2:2. It leads to foolish and hurtful lusts, 1 Timothy 6:10. It leads to departure from the faith, 1 Timothy 6:10. It leads to lying, stealing, murder, misery and interestingly enough the Bible says covetousness leads to poverty. Worst of all Psalm 10 verse 3 says, "Covetousness causes a person to curse and spurn the Lord."

We expect it from reprobate minds who according to Romans 1:29 are filled with all greed. We certainly don't expect it from Christians. The covetous, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 10, the covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. In Ephesians 5:5 he says the covetous have no part in the kingdom of God and Christ. And in fact, if you know anybody who is covetous, stay away from them. First Corinthians 5:11, "Believers are not even to associate with any so-called Christian who is covetous...greedy." Greedy people have left an ugly mark on the world. They are the Balaams of the

world, preachers for hire. They are the Ahabs of the world, the Achans of the world, the Sauls of the world. They are the rich young rulers of the world. They are the Ananiases and Sapphiras of the world, and worst of all they are the Judases of the world. And who would want to be among such? No one would desire that kind of company and that kind of reputation. So I suggest to you what Paul said is wise, run from greed and run from covetous by being unselfish and generous.

It comes down to a little battle in your mind. If you ask yourself if you are covetous, and there's any hesitation. You probably are. And if there is an impulse in your heart to give, don't fight it...don't fight it. It's probably covetousness trying to hold on. In the end the campaigns that God honors are only hindered by sin and that sin is covetousness.

Giving that is voluntary, faithful to complete the need and the promise, proportionate to what you have, giving that has pastoral support, pastoral leadership, where the money is being handled by godly men who bring credibility, accountability, trust and silence to all critics, giving that expresses love toward God and others, giving that sets the example for all others to follow and giving that is completely free from selfish greedy covetousness, this is stewardship with integrity. Measure all your giving opportunities by those measurements.

Now by way of a helpful summary, as we close, a gentleman has put together a check list to evaluate any church fund raising, or any parachurch fund raising...before you entrust your money to it, here are the questions or issues you need to see.

Do they have a definite and personal commitment to Christ? Do they have an unclouded commitment to the authority of Scripture? Are they involved in that which is defined as a biblical mission? Is there prayerful dependence on God more than dependence on current strategies and techniques? Is there an obvious love and concern for those ministered to? Is there evidence of maturity, Christlikeness and integrity? Is there the spirit of servanthood and humility rather than presumption or arrogance? Is it a God-centered rather than a man-centered operation? And he puts in parenthesis (without constant pictures of particular men)? Are the furnishings and life styles in that ministry modest and unpretentious? Have they demonstrated responsible use of funds for purposes that are given? Are there non-manipulative fund-raising tactics? No continuous crisis or inducements to give that will result in you losing your eternal reward?

Is there a track record of spiritual fruit? Have you seen it? Is there responsibility to the leadership of a local church? Are there good personal relationships among the ministry staff? And is there a pronounced eternal perspective?

Some wisdom in there. And that's just a way to summarize what the Apostle Paul has been saying, and I've been saying as we've walked through this great passage. Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, we have been instructed and we acknowledge that, now we are responsible for that instruction which we have received. Lord, thank You for the opportunities which are so numerous for us to give. Thank You that we're so wealthy. We understand that at this particular time in which we live even today more Christians are being martyred every year than in all the history of the church combined. There are many of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have nothing, not even their lives and we have so much. Lord, help us not to hold lightly to it. On the one hand we feel somewhat cheated by having so much because our dependency upon you is not as great as others and so we don't see Your incredibly providential and powerful hand as clearly as others who have nothing see it. But on the other hand, we do thank You and we rejoice in the bounty of what You have given us. We don't take it lightly, we don't disregard it. Lord, we are thankful for it. But like those children of Israel who of old gathered more manna than they could possibly eat and knew it would perish before the dawn, we are eager to give away our surplus in the meeting of needs of those who have not enough.

We thank You that we can enjoy all things that You've given us. You haven't asked us to become poor. You've just told us to share. Lord, help us to give. Help us to have the discernment to recognize what to give for in order that we might use our resources in a stewardship that brings glory to Your name both for time and eternity. Thank You again, Father, for such clear instruction to us, in our Savior's name. Amen.

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