

Biblical Principles for Handling Money, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-72

Last Sunday night we began a discussion of what Scripture teaches with regard to Christian economics, if we can call it that, or a proper perspective on money and how we as believers are to deal with it.

Tonight as we begin what is the second and I think the last part of that discussion, I want you to open your Bible to Matthew chapter 6 and just to read you just a few verses, familiar ones, Matthew 6 verse 19 through 21 and then we'll skip down to verse 24. Matthew chapter 6 verse 19, Jesus here is speaking, as you know, in the Sermon on the Mount and He says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in or steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Then verse 24, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and riches," which is what the word "mammon" means. "You cannot serve God and riches."

Simply stated, heaven is the rival of earth and money is the rival of God, riches, material things are God's rival. And yet we live in a culture which, of course, has elevated earth's treasure to a place of idolatry. The American value system known as the "pursuit of the almighty dollar" is a kind of religion, kind of religion that exalts possessions as having the ultimate value, the ultimate worth and the ultimate meaning. And like all idolatry it finds its ultimate expression in a preoccupation, follow this, with the creation rather than the Creator. That's why I say that money or material things is the rival of God. You either worship the Creator or you worship the creation.

If you read Romans 1 you will see that played out. When men refused to worship God they then began to worship elements within the creation or themselves as created being...beings and the things that they concoct and conceive in their own minds. All idolatry finds its expression then in a worship of some form of the creation rather than the Creator.

Now we are living, of course, in a time when it's very obvious that people are preoccupied with the creation rather than the Creator. It hasn't always been that way and it isn't always that way in every culture but it is in ours. We have people who believe that money is the most important thing, they will do anything to get it. They will perform anything to obtain it. They will act in whatever way they need to to acquire it. They will covet it. They will envy it. And they will even cheat, lie, steal, rob and extort

to get a hold of it if they can get away with it. At best they will work hard to attain it believing that it is the ultimate point of satisfaction.

Materialism then just in that simple definition is absolutely antithetical to Christianity. As believers we are called to be faithful to the Creator. We're called to be preoccupied with the Creator, the creation is frankly the absolutely incidental. It doesn't really matter or shouldn't really matter to the believer what he has or doesn't have, what she has or doesn't have. We are to be faithful to heaven, not earth and faithful to the Creator, not His creation as our preoccupation. It's so easy to become victimized by the Spirit of our time.

Through the years I have spoken to this issue occasionally, not as often as people have asked me to speak to it because it's just the nature of teaching through various books of the Bible that we don't always address it. But I'm always compelled to address it when I get an opportunity because I know it is such a problem. And I know that Christians seem always to struggle over this whole matter of materialism. We get ourselves in a certain life style pattern which we then somehow sanctify and think it's God ordained and it must be sustained at that level or bettered or we haven't lived up to some kind of commitment that we assume God has made to us.

Well nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the Word of God tells us we're to be content with having our needs met on a minimal level and anything beyond that is purely a gracious work of God in which He has benefited us beyond what we have any right to claim. We are to be involved in worshiping the true God. We are to be involved in holding lightly to earthly treasure, being preoccupied with heavenly issues.

And all of this, as I noted for you before, relates to the fact that we are becoming very, very preoccupied with this whole matter of how much money we have. When I read, as I said last Sunday night, in the paper or in a magazine, I guess it was a national magazine, I think Newsweek, that Americans are more concerned about money in this election than anything else, you there have the indication of the disease of the human heart that is rampant in our culture. On the other hand, when I read to you as I did this morning a little card from a lady who can't feed her four children and has one son who has been sick and locked in his room for six years and in her poverty she expresses her love to us in card that probably cost them a day's food, you understand that people can live at another level and be content to some degree and grateful to God for what He has provided, and maybe live at a level of spiritual life that people who have as much as we have don't even comprehend.

Now in understanding how we are to respond to money, let me just remind you of what I said. The first thing I said is that we have a right to possess money...we have a right to possess material things. God has given them to us. God made the world the way He did. He could have made it all brown and He could have made everything ugly and He could have made all food tasteless, just nutritionally valuable so it didn't matter what it taste like. He could have made no color so that it didn't matter

what you wore. He could have reduced life simply to living in some kind of a mud hut so your house didn't matter. He could have done anything but He gave us a world so full of variety that while it has the capacity to bless us with wonderful variety, it also has the capacity if wrongly treated to curse us with a preoccupation with things which can be to us destructive. But God has given us all these things. It is God who gives you the power to get well. God has given us richly all things to enjoy and we can take what He has given and if we use it wisely and for His glory, then we can receive it from His good hand. He has chosen some to be rich and some to be poor and those who are rich are to be rich in order that they might share it with those who are poor so that their poverty can to some degree be alleviated.

We also saw that not only do you have a right to have money but God has even designed ways for you to get it. You have a right to gain more than you have. And the ways that God has designed are through work, saving and careful planning. And we talked about that and will not belabor the point.

Now I want to take you to a third point tonight and this is how you are to think about money, how you are to regard it, what your perspective toward it is to be. This is very, very important. And how you deal with money is not a matter of your account, it's not a matter of your bank account, it's a matter of your attitude. It's not a matter of what you have, it's a matter of what you think. And we addressed that last time.

Let me read Ecclesiastes 5:10 and 11, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money. When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So what's the advantage to their owners except to look on." That's an amazing insight. He who loves money will not be satisfied with money. That's true, it's insatiable that lust for more. And when good things increase, those who consume them increase. If you get more than you need then you have to pay somebody to take care of it. If you get so much money that you can buy a big place then you've got to hire people to take care of it. It's the way life is. And so you compound your problems and Solomon says so what's the advantage except to just look on and watch it slip through your fingers, going in every direction.

How are we to regard this money, this...this temptation in and of itself, it seems? How are we to look at it and view it? Well, first of all, let's talk about what we're not to do. Okay? Here's a few things to keep in mind. Here's the wrong way to regard money and this is what the Scripture says, don't love it - don't love it. It is wrong to love it. In fact, 1 Timothy 6:10 said it as simply and clearly as it could be said, "The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil." And as I noted last time it isn't money that is the root of evil, it's the love of it. And you can love it and not have any of it. Again it's a question of attitude. You're not to love it.

You might want to look at 1 Timothy for just a moment. We touched on it last week but I need to point out just a couple of things. In 1 Timothy chapter 6 you really need to go back to verse 6 to kind of get the running start here where Paul says, "Godliness...godliness actually is a means of great gain when

accompanied by contentment." Interesting. Godliness and contentment go together.

Paul certainly had that in his heart when he said, "I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound." I know what he's saying is to have little and I know how to have much and it really doesn't matter to me either way. It's like Hebrews 13:5 says, "Be content with such things as you have." Well that's what Paul is telling Timothy, godliness goes along with contentment. Verse 7 says, "We have brought nothing into the world and we can't take anything out of it." I mean, this is all very temporary. "And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content." I mean, that's enough. "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction."

When a person loves money and loves what money can buy, he first of all becomes useless to God and then brings to himself a snare and foolish and harmful desires plunge him into ruin and destruction. For money, Achan brought defeat on Israel's army and death to himself and his entire family. For money Balaam sinned against light and tried to curse God. For money Delilah betrayed Samson and ultimately slaughtered thousands. For money Ananias and Sapphira became the first hypocrites in the church and God executed them as a testimony to the kind of attitude they had toward money. And worst of all, for money Judas sold Jesus.

That's not very good company. But that's the company of money lovers.

What does the love of money lead people to do? Well here's a few things it will lead people to do. One, is to forget God. Proverbs 30 verses 8 and 9 says this, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food that is my portion lest I be full and deny Thee and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be in want and steal and profane the name of my God." Agur is writing there and he says in that particular proverb, "Give me exactly what I need, not too much lest I question whether I even need You; not too little lest I steal and profane Your name."

Love of money can cause you to forget God. Secondly, it can cause you to stop trusting God. There's something wonderful about being in a situation where you don't have any money because it puts you in the position of trust. Job 31, "If I have put my trust in money, if my happiness depends on wealth it would mean that I denied the God of heaven." That's flatly it. I don't need You, God, I'm covered...I'm covered.

I heard a preacher on television the other day say, "I don't need anything." And he said it about four times, "I don't need anything." He was a prosperity preacher and on one finger he had a massive diamond...you say, "Well what's that on your finger?" That's a gold ring. "Where did you get that?" Well I hate to tell you, a friend of mine is a dentist made it. I hope there are still some people around whose bite is right. And he gave it to me as a gift. But this was a huge massive diamond ring and I

know this particular preacher has a brand new Rolls Royce and that all goes with the prosperity. Four times at least, maybe five he said, "I don't need anything." What a terrible position to be in because if you don't need anything, you don't need God. You're sufficient, you've got it all. Just give me what I need so I don't have too much and I deny You and say, Who is the Lord? And I don't trust You anymore.

Look at 1 Timothy 6 down to verse 17, he says, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches but on God." You don't ever want to put your trust in your bank account, put it in the Lord.

There's a third thing that happens if you love money and that is you can be deceived...you can be deceived. In Mark 4:19 there is a phrase that ought to be remembered, talking about the seed sown among the weeds or the thorns. These are the ones who heard the Word and the worries of the world, and listen to this, "The deceitfulness of riches." Money and possessions lie, they really lie. They tell you about satisfaction but they don't deliver it. They tell you this will fulfill all your desires if you can just get this but it doesn't deliver. Money lies, materialism lies, the love of riches lies, it's a deception.

That's not where you find your satisfaction in life. No, the love of money will make you forget God, stop trusting God, be deceived and another thought, the love of money will cause you to sell out...the love of money will cause you to sell out.

It is amazing to me how many people are willing to compromise for money, doing something illegal, something that is wrong in their work, falsifying some kind of expense report, falsifying an Income Tax return. It's been said that every man has his price. Certainly that should never be so for the Christian. Someone else said, "When money speaks, the truth is usually silent." Sometimes you won't confront someone in sin because you'd rather flatter them to gain something of their riches.

Many people sell out for position, for prestige, for power, for popularity, for...even for intellectualism. They'll sell out the Christian faith if they can get a degree. They'll sell out for what they think is some physical attainment, the body beautiful, or whatever it might be. They'll sell out for all kinds of things...a house, a car. That's the way it is in life. There is...there's a price which compromising people will sell out and money is very often the player in that. And if Satan, and he does, if he knows because he can see by the pattern of your life that you have a price, he'll find that price. That's why Jesus said in no uncertain terms, "Seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and let the other stuff take care of itself." Loving money can cause us to forget God, stop trusting God, be deceived, even sell out.

Let me give you another thought. Loving money can cause you to build your life on an unstable foundation. There are a lot of people right now who are crumbling, as you well know. They were

living through the euphoria of the Reagan administration, I guess you could say, that period of time, maybe ten to twelve years there. A lot of people were building their empire. They were putting their life on an unstable foundation, leveraged to the limit, doing everything they can to gain riches and now it's all crumbled. Proverbs 23:4 and 5 says, "Do not weary yourself to gain riches. Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it's gone for wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens." Don't build your hope on that. Don't extend yourself to the very limit in terms of credit and leverage so that you have an unstable foundation for your life. The love of money will drive somebody to do that because they never have enough and they'll gamble and risk it all for the next big hit.`

There's another interesting thought, too, about the love of money, it tends to make people ungrateful...it tends to make people ungrateful. Have you noticed...and this is true in your children...have you noticed that the more they have the less they appreciate? Is that not just basically a pretty generic truth? The more you give your children the less they appreciate any of it.

In Deuteronomy there's a text that I think relates this issue, Deuteronomy chapter 8 verse 12, "Lest when you have eaten and are satisfied and have built good houses and lived in them and when your herds and your flocks multiply and your silver and gold multiply and all that you have multiplies then you become proud and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Back in verse 11 he says, "Beware," beware because when I pour out my blessing on you it's going to make you ungrateful, it's going to make you proud. It's going to make you self-confident, it's going to make you think you attained something on your own. He reminds them in verse 15, "He led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water. He brought water for you out of the rock of flint, in the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers didn't know that He might humble you and that He might test you to do good for you in the end. Otherwise you may say in your heart, If you forget all that My power and the strength of My hand made me this wealth." You're not going to be grateful, you're not going to know the source of it...that is that it was God who gave you the power, as we noted earlier, to do it.

In fact, in Proverbs 28:11 it simply says, "Rich men are conceited." What does it mean to be conceited? It means to give yourself the credit for everything, that's the same as an unthankful heart. Love of money will make you unthankful. And the more you have the less you will appreciate what God gives.

There's another thought. Love of money tends to cause people to rob God...love of money tends to cause people to rob God. A very familiar text that all of you know in Malachi and these are just reminders for you, in Malachi chapter 3 verse 8, "Will a man rob God? But you're robbing Me. How have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings you rob Me. You love so much your own money and the material things that it can purchase that you're stealing it from Me. It is rightfully Mine. You owe it

to Me, it should be given to Me."

There's another robbery involved in this love of money, not only do you rob God, you rob others. Remember 1 John 3, "Whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother has need and closes up his compassion, how dwells the love of God in him?" The point there is you're going to rob others. If you love money, you'll keep it to yourself, you won't give it to others.

And you know, there are people who love money but you don't see it because they hoard it in a private place but they don't give it to people who need it. If you love God you're going to give to others. If you love material things, you're not going to give, you're going to hoard them.

So all of that to just to sort of kind of wrap around the thought that God and money cannot both be served. And if you serve money, if you love money, all kinds of bad things are going to happen. In fact, I don't know that we can even stop there. Let me suggest just some, I'll just rattle them off to you. The love of money will lead to wrong relationships with people around you because you stop focusing on people and you start consuming yourself with objects, that ought to be obvious. It will inevitably impair the relationships around you. It will impair obviously your relationship to God and consequently it will hinder your spiritual effectiveness. Jesus said in Luke 16 if you can't handle money, do you think I'm going to give you true spiritual riches. You think I'm going to commit ministry into your hand if you can't handle money?

All those are wrong attitudes toward money and it talks about what effect that has. Let's turn the table a little bit. What is the right attitude? What should be our attitude? Simple and you are aware of these, I just remind you. They really reverse the things we've said, in a sense.

First of all, we're to live trusting completely in God's provision. According to Matthew 6:33 we seek the Kingdom and let God give us what He will...let Him give us what He will, whatever He chooses to give us as we seek to honor Him. If I'm on the job I do the very best job I can do with the very greatest amount of skill I have with the most amount of effort as timely and appropriately and dutifully and effectively as I can do it and whatever is the reward for the excellence of what I do I accept from God. I'm not seeking the money, I'm seeking to honor God with the effort. And I'm trusting Him for the provision.

The second attitude..aspect of attitude is to be content with whatever He provides. First I trust for His provision and second, I'm content with whatever it is. Godliness, again I remind you, and contentment go together. So whatever it is that God provides I am content. Now this means, dear people, that you can't always extend your life style at a certain level and expect that God is always going to provide for that level of life style if it's beyond what is reasonable.

And then there's another attitude that we must have and that is gratitude for God's provision. Trust in God's provision, He never allows His own to go without...contentment with God's provision...and gratitude for God's provision. This is..this is the sister, really, of humility. I talk about humility often and it needs so much talking because we lose sight of it so readily. Humility basically says "I don't deserve anything so whatever I get is a bonus." I don't deserve anything but judgment.

There's another aspect of this. Not only to trust God's provision, be content with it, be grateful for it and maintain our humility realizing we don't deserve anything, but also to establish priority use for God's provision...to establish priority use for God's provision. And what I mean by that is to take account, first of all, that we give back to Him. That's the first and primary consideration. So that demonstrates that we're not robbing God but we're giving what is rightfully His as the Spirit of God prompts our hearts.

Another obvious thing is to be generous with God's provision toward others. This is a great joy. I was recently with a man who is a very, very wealthy man, a multi-millionaire. And in conversing with one of his friends I said, "He's done very well in life, he's succeeded eminently in his career," he's a Christian man, he loves Christ. I said, "Now he's sold this very large and successful business to a conglomerate and he's made all this money over the last few years, what has he found now with all of his wealth is the greatest point of satisfaction?"

To which this person replied without a hesitation, "Oh that's easy." He says, "His greatest joy is to give it away." To give it away, that's his greatest joy. That tells me something about the man. That tells me that he's not loving money but he holds it lightly.

Those are the right attitudes in dealing with money. One other thing that I would just add to it is to see all of our money, to see all of our money as a means to expressing a holy purpose. All right? See all of our money as a means to expressing a holy purpose.

You say, "Now what do you mean by that?" I mean that there is something...there is something divinely virtuous in everything we do with our money, not just the money we give at church. There's a certain constraint in my life...there are certain things I need. I need to eat, I don't need to eat maybe as much as I eat but I need to eat. I mean, I could starve myself a bit more, God in His goodness makes ample provision. But I need to eat. I need to eat in order that I might be strong and well and serve the Lord and so when I purchase food which is reasonable to consume with a certain degree of modesty I therefore am accomplishing some kind of spiritual end.

I need to drive a car and put gas in it and keep it up because I need to get where I'm going because wherever I'm going I have to speak. I don't go places to listen, unfortunately, I go places to speak and it's important for me to be there and so people are always concerned that I have good transportation and they want to make sure that I get where I'm going, and that's very important to me,

and I get there safely and quickly without problems. And I have to keep that car filled and so even what I do there is very, very important.

I have to work, I have to go there because I need to earn a living to provide for my family. And so my money is expended that way. I want to provide a home for my children and a place where people in God's Kingdom can come and be refreshed and I want to provide a place which somehow manifests the love of Christ and somehow radiates what God intends a family to be. And so I want to have a home that will afford me the opportunity to do that. And I see...I try to see everything in my life as having some ultimate spiritual or holy purpose with regard to how I use my money. I mean, that just simply gives me focus. And it tends to sort of jerk the chain when I get to the point where I feel some impulse to get something which has no purpose that I can perceive.

Cultivating that kind of attitude with my money insulates against the sin of materialism. Just summarizing, trust in God's provision, be content with God's provision, be grateful for God's provision, find the priority usage of God's provision which starts with not robbing Him. Be generous with God's provision toward others and make sure that you are able to see a holy purpose in the use of all that God gives to you. You sit down some day, as Patricia and I have done, and you make out a will or a trust, in our case we have a trust, and you decide what you want to do with whatever might be left. I have this plan that when I die, hopefully if it all works out, and I'm sure I'm not going to know the moment I die or do I know the moment the Lord comes, but if I don't go in the Rapture and if I die, I have this plan that just the day before I go it will all be gone. And nobody will have any meetings and discussions because it will be dispersed to the responsibilities that God has given me in ministry to the places in the Kingdom where it will be wisely used and to care for those who are a part of my family that God has given me to care for. I want it all to be used for purposes that will honor Christ.

There's a fourth concept here. We've talked about the fact that God has given us possessions, that we have the right even to gain more by working, saving and planning. We've talked about the way to regard money and that is not to love it from a negative standpoint...from a positive standpoint, to see it for what it is, a means by which we can purposefully glorify God.

Now I want to talk about the way to use money with some more specific insight. If you understand, first of all, that God gives money and possessions in different amounts to His children sovereignly, you're on your way to getting a grip on this whole subject. God doesn't expect everybody to be equally wealthy or poor. Now Jesus said the poor you have with you always. That is true. God in His sovereignty has designed it so. You must realize that God makes choices and God chooses to deliver His money in differing amounts. Lest you think the rich are mostly blessed, I think the opposite is true. So we understand that God gives it in differing amounts to His children sovereignly.

Secondly, that it all belongs to Him...it all belongs to Him. And you are to hold it lightly and you are to use it only in ways that gain eternal benefit...only in ways that gain eternal benefit. Not directly, it

doesn't mean you take it all and pack it up and send it off to missionaries or whatever, but that you can see in what you're doing with it some effect that has eternal consequence. If you can get a grip on that, you're on your way to the proper use of money.

Now, here are some specific things that you can just pull together as a little list that the Scripture indicates for us. Here's what you're to do with your money. Meet your needs...meet your needs, that's where it starts. God has given you whatever He has given you so that you can buy your food and shelter and clothes, meet your needs. Secondly, support your family. Scripture is clear on this. The person who doesn't support his family is worth than an unbeliever, the Christian person. Thirdly, pay your taxes...pay your taxes. You don't like to hear that but that's what it says in Romans 13:8 to 10 and following that we are to do whatever God has called us to do in our society to demonstrate the love that we have toward God and part of that is paying your taxes. It says in that text, actually verse 7, "Render to all what is due them...tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom is due, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor." Then verse 8, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." The discharge of love is to do what is right even in paying your taxes.

Now I know we have a large controversy in America about taxation. And we can vote and we can write letters and we can do whatever you choose to do about that and you can feel the way you feel about whether the government is taxing us too much or too little. The bottom line is when it comes time to pay it, you've got to pay it. And that's an act of really honoring the Lord because God has designed that we do that. That's what the Old Testament tithe really was, it was paying money to the government of Israel.

So, meet your needs, support your family, pay your taxes. And then give to those in need...give to those in need. And that's really it with one other factor and that is to give to God...to give to God. I think we all know that God has provided what He has given us for our needs and the needs of our family, and that could be an extended family, in order for us to meet the needs of others and to pay taxes because we live in a country and what happens with those taxes is we receive the services that they bring and we also help to share our wealth with those who have need. But beyond that and with this we'll close our discussion tonight, we are to give to God...we are to give to God.

How are we to do that? And I don't have time to go into this in detail so I'm going to hit you real quick with it. First of all, it's to be joyful...it's to be joyful. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, 2 Corinthians 8:12, 2 Corinthians 9:7 talks about giving with joy. Secondly, your giving is to be secret...it's to be secret. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them." When you give don't blow a trumpet. Can you imagine that? Those Pharisees would come into a temple and they'd have a trumpeter...Ta-da-ta-da...everybody watch while I put my money in the little box. It's to be secret.

Here's another thought. It's to be...you've got to catch this one carefully, it's to be prompted by spontaneous movement of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing or vice versa, I can't remember which. In other words, there's a certain spontaneity that comes to the heart, prompted by the Holy Spirit that subjected to the process of human thinking may be eliminated. You've experienced that. You've been somewhere and someone has shared a need and there's something in your heart that just says...do it. And there's something inside of you or beside of you pulling on your arm saying...whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. There should be a certain amount of spontaneity as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

I also believe that giving should be sacrificial. It is to be sacrificial. David said, "I won't give the Lord what cost me nothing." Jesus could not have been more explicit when He identified the singular virtue of giving as not belonging to all the crowds putting money in the treasury and the rich people putting in large sums but the poor widow who put in two small copper coins which would be today a tenth of a penny. And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury, for they all put in out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty put in all she owned, all she had to live on." I mean, this was her food money, when she put it in there was no food, no money for food. That's sacrificial. That's like the Macedonians who out of their deep poverty gave liberally, 2 Corinthians 8.

Another thing in your giving, it is to be relative to what you have...it is to be relative to what you have. You always hear people say, "Well, I don't give because I don't have enough, if I had more I'd give more." I doubt it. I doubt it. First Corinthians 16:1 and 2 says, "Give as God has prospered you." To whatever degree God has prospered you, relative to that degree of prosperity is your degree of giving. I'm sure you've done what we did with our children from the time they were very small and had little or nothing, we taught them that a portion of whatever little bit they had always belonged to the Lord and that that was to be prompted from the heart. Giving is to be relative to what you have. God is well pleased with a tenth of a cent if it's sacrificial. In fact, more pleased than with a hundred thousand dollars if it's not.

Another principle to keep in mind in your giving is that it is to be personally determined...it is to be personally determined. It's whatever is in your heart. Jesus just said in Luke 6..."Give and it shall be given unto you." In the Old Testament the givers were told to give of the firstfruits. They weren't necessarily told how much of the firstfruits, what degree or what amount, but just to give it right off the top. It wasn't a prescribed amount, the prescriptions, as I noted earlier, the ten percent tithes, were related to the taxation system in Israel, not to free-will giving. Whatever is in your heart.

I suppose as clearly as anywhere in the Scripture you see an illustration of that kind of giving from the heart in the story of the little tax collector by the name of Zacchaeus in Luke 19. When he was converted it immediately affected his wallet. I mean, instantaneously. He said, "I'm going to give half of all my possessions for the poor and if I've defrauded anybody of anything, I'm going to give them

back four times as much." And Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house." It's evident, there is a changed life. Jesus didn't say, "Oh, whoa, whoa, you're overboard, buddy, keep some of that. There's no need to be giving 50 percent and no need to be giving 400 percent interest, it's ridiculous." No, He said this is a transformed man. And He let him give whatever he wanted to give.

We don't know how much the Macedonians gave, it isn't really important to know the amount or the percent. But it says in chapter 8 verse 3 of 2 Corinthians, "They gave of their own will beyond their ability." Whatever they wanted to give they gave, it was sacrificial, it was more than anybody could have assumed they might have been able to give.

Another thing, it is to be...your giving is to be systematic. "Let each of you lay by in store the first day of the week," that's Sunday you're to give, 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 2. You're to give regularly. Paul said, "I'm coming to town, I don't want you taking some special offering when I arrive there, I just want you people to learn to give every week, every week, every week, every week, every week so there's that stewardship of giving all the time that provides money in a fund so that when I come and have need the money is there already." In other words, you don't just give because somebody has a need, you give systematically week in, week out, it says it, it couldn't say it more clearly than it says it...on the first day of every week let each one of you put aside that no collection needs to be made when I come.

That verse means, and we've discussed that in our study on 1 Corinthians, weekly giving. Now you say, "Wait a minute, I only get paid every two weeks." Well, I think the Apostle would understand that. His intention is to teach you regular stewardship, regular stewardship. But I believe that the first day of the week is the day to do that because it's the day of worship. And I find that every Lord's day that comes along I feel the prompting of the Spirit in my heart to give something, although as I'm paid only once every two weeks I may give more on that interval on the other Lord's days.

Another thought, you're to give in order to meet needs. You are to give in order to meet needs. In the early church in Acts 2 and Acts 4 people were selling land and giving the money to the church to meet the needs of people whose needs weren't met. You're to give to meet needs. Now you have people you know of in your life that have needs, sometimes people in your Sunday School class that you know, on a communion service as we did last Sunday, we have a retiring offering which goes directly to meet basic needs. We're to give for that.

And then, our giving is to be generous...it is to be generous. And that, I think, is so wonderfully indicated to us in that great text I've mentioned, 2 Corinthians chapter 9. And I just want to briefly comment on it cause you know it well. "Now this I say," verse 6, "he who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully." I'm just telling you, folks, that's a promise. You give much, God will give you much back. That's right. He'll give you much back. And that's why you're to purpose in your heart to do it and not be grudging or under compulsion but do it

cheerfully and God will make all grace abound to you, the God who will give you all sufficiency for everything. He will make sure you have an abundance for every good deed. He will supply, verse 10, seed to the sower and bread for food. He will supply and multiply your seed for sowing, increase the harvest of your righteousness and you will be enriched in everything.

Let me tell you something, you give and God will give. Give and it will be given unto you, pressed down, shaken together and running over, Luke 6. You give bountifully, God will give back bountifully. I've watched it happen all my life that promise has come to pass.

I don't know what the world thinks it's going to get from all this materialism, other than a terrible empty feeling in their hearts. I think they believe there's going to be some satisfaction ultimately down the line if they can amass enough stuff and it isn't so. What a deceptive illusion. Don't let us as Christians get caught in that. But let us have this biblical perspective on money and things so that whatever happens on the political scene really doesn't matter to us. If God so desires and so orders in this society, that's fine, we accept it. We live with contentment and all that we have is purposed for His Kingdom.

Father, thank You again today for blessing us through this day. We've just been talking some practical things tonight as we have for the last few Sundays and we look at our country and it's so tragic, so tragic...abortion, homosexuality rampant...all this economic chaos and people thinking that the ultimate disaster is to have to give up more money, a failure to recognize sin. Try to talk about values but not about sin, how hopeless. We see this country on a path toward disaster. And, Lord, we can only thank You that You're still in control and we can only pray that in the midst of this chaos and dissatisfaction, in the midst of this wretched sinfulness that resists a proper definition and thus resists redemption, that in the midst of all of this somehow your Spirit would move in a great way and that there would be somehow a call back to truth and righteousness, virtue and godliness before this whole country and the world with it plunges into eternity, before Jesus comes to judge. Make us ambassadors. Remind us that we've been given the ministry of reconciliation to call men to faith in Christ. And, Lord, we would ask with a certain amount admittedly of hopelessness in our hearts that somehow You would turn this country around, somehow You would lift up righteous people, somehow You would give us men who know You and who can speak to this people, give preachers and those who say they represent You and Your church the boldness, the conviction and the courage to speak truth, to call this nation to repentance from its murders and its vice and its materialism and its pride. Crush it in the...in the knowledge of its own sinfulness and then hold up Jesus Christ as the only answer. May we realize that the balance of America's future doesn't depend on Clinton or Bush or any other man but our future like that of every person in the world, every nation depends on Christ. And may we preach Christ, live Christ, exalt Christ and lift Him up. And in being lifted up may He draw men and women to Himself. We pray in His wonderful name. Amen.

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