

Stewards of God's Money

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

April 3, 2022

Please open your Bibles today to 2 Cor 9. In October of 2020, a former Post Office employee, Rico Alvarez was sentenced to one year in federal prison and ordered to pay over \$250,000 in restitution. What did he do? Well about a year earlier, Alvarez began stealing smartphones that had been mailed to customers. In just 3 months, he stole more than 400 phones by opening boxes as they passed his sorting station, took out the phones, and then sent the empty packages on for delivery. On the day he was arrested he had over a dozen stolen phones in his possession. When interviewed, Alvarez admitted to stealing high end smartphones, which he then sold for his own profit.

What was he thinking? Didn't he realize they didn't belong to him? Didn't he understand that as a Post Office employee, he was simply a steward, a deliverer of packages for someone else? Apparently not, or if he did, he forgot. We too forget sometimes. If you are able, please stand as we read from 2 Cor 9:6

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And 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. 9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 Now 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. 11 You 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. 12 This 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. 13 Because 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. 14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Over the last several weeks, we've been talking about stewardship; taking care of property that belongs to someone else. The first week we talked about stewardship of the earth, the second about stewardship of our bodies, and last week about stewardship of natural and spiritual gifts. If you missed any of those, I encourage you to go back and catch up on Youtube or our website.

Today then, we come to the last message in this series and it involves stewardship of our material resources. Primarily our money. Before you turn me off, let me assure you I'm not preaching about this because we need money. We're in decent shape and making good progress. But I'm preaching about this because Jesus did. Because Jesus said more about money and giving and finances than any other item including heaven and hell combined. 15% of Jesus' recorded teachings are on **this** subject and if I spoke about as often as He did, it would mean 8 Sundays per year. 11 of Jesus' 39 parables are about money and possessions. Over 25%. The same is true with the Bible overall. There are 50 verses in Bible on baptism, 200 on faith, 700 on love, and over 2000 on money and finance.

I'm preaching about this because we need to be good stewards of what God has given us. Just as is true with every other type of stewardship we've discussed, our money and our financial assets really don't belong to us. They belong to God and He's entrusted us, like the US Postal Service to handle and deliver His material goods appropriately.

Look back at vs 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food (who is that? God Himself) (He...) will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be (filthy rich...oh, no, so we can be) generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God." Why does God make us rich? Why does He increase our store of seed? So that we can be generous on every occasion so that it will eventually result in thanksgiving, praise, glory to God. Not so we can steal phones to line our own pockets. But so that the people in Sierra Leone can thank God for the clean water you have provided them, and the orphans in Haiti for the food you bought them, and the refugees from Ukraine for what you're doing for them, etc.

Now Post Office employees get paid and God also provides for our needs as well. But He doesn't intend for us to live a luxurious life while others around us starve. He entrusts us to deliver His mail to them. There's a serious problem whenever we mistakenly think we own His packages. He often lets us put the address labels on them and decide where they should go, but ultimately they're not ours! Haggai 2:8 says, 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty." It's not so much giving it all up, but recognizing who really owns it. It's not us. We're God's stewards.

I know what some of you are thinking. "I worked long and hard for everything I got. No one gave me anything." Let me remind you of what Deut 8:18 says, "But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth..." We would have nothing if God did not give it to us. (James 1:17) Every good and perfect gift comes down to us from the Heavenly Father including our health and our wealth and everything we use them both for.

So how does God say we should use them? What does the Owner of the wealth we steward have to say about how we are to use His money? Ten minutes after we die, we'll know exactly what we should have done. But God has given us His Word now so we don't have to wait and find out afterward. In Matt 6:19-21 Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 **But** store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (And where there's no inflation or taxation.) 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Where is your treasure? Where is your heart? Few topics are any closer to our hearts than our money.

In his book, *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn asks us to consider what we would do if we had millions in Confederate money just before the Civil War ended. If we knew it was going to be devalued and replaced, what would you do with it? Exchange it for Yankee dollars! Or lose it all. Alcorn says, "Here's the ultimate trading tip. When Jesus returns or you die, whichever comes first, earth's currency will become worthless." All our cash, bank accounts, securities, stocks, bonds, bitcoins, real estate, etc will be worth nothing. Why keep stockpiling stuff that very soon will be worthless? Why not exchange it for something that will last forever? Like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, spreading the Gospel?

Each day we have opportunities to buy up more shares in heaven. Eternal returns vs uncertain earthly ones. Imagine you're in Canada on business. You're earning money and will return to US but you can't bring anything back with you. You can, however, mail checks back to be waiting for you. Would you spend money on fancy furniture for your apartment or a big expensive car just to leave it all behind? Or would you send your money back? Lay not up treasures on earth, Jesus said, cuz you're only gonna be here a little while and you can't take it with you when you go. But you can send it on ahead. Martin Luther once said, "I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

So how much of God's money should we give for God's work? Before we answer that, let's remember it **all** belongs to Him! 100%. Our homes and families are also God's enterprises so they belong to Him as well. But how much should we give? The Old Testament Law required 10% of all income to be given. One lamb from every ten that were born. One bushel of wheat of every ten produced. Etc. That would mean \$10 of every 100, \$100 for every \$1000.

By the Malachi's time about 1,000 years later, people were not tithing and this is what God said to them. (3:8-10), ""Will a man rob God? Yet **you** rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse — the whole nation of you — because you are **robbing me.**" I know that was for the Jewish people in the Old Testament, but Alcorn asks, "Does God demand less of us who live in the wealthiest society in human history than He demanded of the poorest Israelite?" Jesus

always raised the bar of the law, He never lowered it. He affirmed the tithe when He told the Pharisees not to neglect it with their gardening but to also pay attention to matters of mercy and justice. Ten percent of our income isn't the ceiling for our giving, it's the floor. People often ask if that's 10% before or after taxes? I don't care. Just tithe on one of them. And if you start, you'll find out that God keeps His word and then you can give more and more as you discover that you can't out-give God. Before we complain, remember that God gives us \$100 and only asked for \$10 back. I'll play that game all day, no complaints! You give me \$100. I'll give you \$10 back.

But sadly, only 5% of American Christians tithe today. Instead of a 10% tithe, 80% of Christians in this country give only 2% of their income and several give none. It's not because we don't have it. Mormons give 5.2% and Muslims and Buddhists give 2.8. During the Great Depression when we didn't have it, Christians gave 3.3% of their income. We're giving less now than then. And then we wonder why we're not blessed. In Luke 16:10-13 Jesus said, "'Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with **true** riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? 13 "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.'" But oh how we try.

God keeps records of our giving. Jesus noticed when the poor widow put in two pennies as well as when the rich folks put in their offerings. He sees what we put in as well. In Matt 10:42, He said, "... if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." God is keeping notes of the big and the small and has promised to reward us accordingly. I'm not a health and wealth preacher, but I do want you to know what God has promised when we give.

In Malachi, God promised this to the people who were robbing Him, "10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "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. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the Lord Almighty." What does that mean to most of us that aren't farmers today? "I can prevent your car from breaking down and your child from breaking her arm." Martin Luther said, "What people of faith do with their money is indicative of what they believe about God." Or don't believe. Will God keep His promises or won't He? I not only believe He does, I've found that He does! I've tested Him and He passed. You can't out give God.

Jesus promised this in Luke 6:38. "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." And in Prov 3:9-10 God promises this: "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." It illustrates the principle of what we read in our Scripture from 2 Corinthians, as we give to others, God replenishes our seed, He makes us rich so we can continue to give.

Mr. RG LaTourneau invented all types of earthmoving equipment that has been used all over the globe. As his income increased, he gave away 90 percent of it for the God's work and became known as "God's Businessman." But the money still came in faster than he could give it away and he said, "I shovel it out and God shovels it back but God has a bigger shovel!" You can't outgive God!

You ask, why didn't he leave it to his 5 children? I imagine he did leave some of it to them. What a blessing to leave something to our children and grand-children. And we should. But, after we're gone, we will have no say in our money is spent. Do your giving while you're living, then you're knowing where you're going. I want to challenge us to consider including our church and/or other ministries that we care about in our wills. They are after all, our last testament.

Some say, "I don't give 10% of my money but I give 10% of my time." Thanks for that, but ask God what you should do about this. Study His Word to see what it says. But it does involve more than money itself. Our 3rd Baptismal vow that many of you have taken and renewed many times asks if we will support the Church with our prayers, presence, substance and service. Our substance includes money, but it also involves other things like those who donate towels for the kitchen or lumber for the cross up here. Before Bezalel and Oholiab could build the Tabernacle, the people had to bring their gold, silver, linen and goat hair. In fact they brought so much, Moses had to stop them! I'll tell you when you bring too much. ☺ You might remember how a woman anointed Jesus' feet with perfume before His death. She couldn't buy Him a tomb but Jesus said, "She did what she could." Joseph of Arimathea on the other hand could and did provide a tomb for Jesus. He did what he could. Someone provided the Upper Room, someone else a donkey. What can you provide? Let's be careful, however, not to give God our leftovers. As Bro Kent says, "People will give you their used teabags because they don't want to throw them away." If it's no good, throw it away. But if the church has a need and you have the item, thank you.

In 1 Chronicles 29:(14-17), at the dedication of the Temple, Solomon prays and says this, "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand... and all of it belongs to you." It all belongs to God. What we

give **and** what we keep. When we give in the offering, we're giving part of what already belongs to God. We have a song in our hymnbook that recognizes this. It goes like this:
We give thee but thine own, Whate'er the gift may be:
All that we have is (yours) alone, A trust, O Lord, from thee.
May we thy bounties thus, As stewards true receive,
And gladly, as thou blessest us, To thee our firstfruits give.

As we wrap up today and think about giving to God, let's remember the greatest gift He ever gave us. He didn't mail it through the PO but brought it personally. Paul mentions it verse 15 of 2 Cor 9. "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" God gave us His very best, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Such a generous indescribable gift deserves the best and all that we can give in return. Let's thank Him for Jesus and commit all that we have to Him.