

5: STEWARDSHIP

Handling God's Goodness

As the church grew from the day of Pentecost they distributed amongst themselves 'as any had need' (Acts 2: 45-46). This stands in stark contrast to the present world of ever increasing global inequality. In this unit we shall look at Biblical principles for handling wealth in God's Kingdom, as Godly stewards.

ACTIVITY

Read Luke 16:10-15

What link does Jesus make between worldly wealth and spiritual riches?

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KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE

To understand Kingdom principles we need to gain God's perspective. Let's look at 4 important principles.

- 1. 'All Things' Belong to the Lord** – The Word of God tells us that the world and everything in it belongs to God (Ps 24:1). This must be our starting point, when considering what we need and what we consider 'ours' in life.
- 2. 'All of Me' Belongs to the Lord** – Given the world belongs to God, even more so we belong to Him, as Paul said 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal 2:19). All that we have and that we are belongs to Him - we are purely 'stewards' of what He gives us.
- 3. Attitude of the Heart** – Jesus talked often about what we do with our wealth, because He considered it a barometer of the heart (Mt 6:19-24). Jesus was not saying

money is evil, nor that we are not to have it, but that it must not have us! Therefore, we are to keep our lives free from the love or pursuit of money (Heb 13:5). We are 'to seek first His Kingdom' and He will give us all we need (Mt 6:33).

4. **Eternal Principles** – There are two eternal principles for stewardship:

- **Treasure in heaven** - earthly riches will not go with us into the next age. Our true treasure is spiritual riches laid up for us in heaven (Lk 12:34).
- **Sowing and reaping** – embedded in creation is this principle, that everything in life we sow, from that we shall reap (2 Cor 9:6-13).

Now we will turn to these timeless truths outworked in practice.

TITHES

How are we to therefore practically honour God with the wealth He has entrusted us with? The Bible shows us that there are **two** different ways of doing this, the first of which is the 'tithe'.

A tithe is literally a tenth of something. Throughout the Word we see God's people bringing a tithe to the Lord to honour Him.

- **Abel** – The principle of honouring God with 'firstfruits' we see in the life of Abel, who brought to God the fat portions (best bits!) of his flocks to God (Gen 4:2-5). God's people were instructed to similarly offer firstfruits to God which would result in overwhelming blessing (Proverbs 3:9-10).

The principle here is clear – honouring God leads to a release of blessing! Firstfruits and tithes are interwoven in the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 31:5).

- **Abraham** - In Genesis 14 we read of Abram going out to battle to defeat the King of Elam and rescue Lot. On his return from battle he gave a tenth to Melchizedek the priest (Gen 14:18-20). Tithing was a response to, and a trigger for, blessing. It

was not an act of law - this was over 400 years before the law came (Gal 3:17).

- **Jacob** – God reminded Jacob of His covenant with Abraham. In this place of revelation Jacob’s conviction is to honour God with a tithe (Gen 28:22).
- **Israel** – The nation honoured God with a tithe, which later became part of the law, through which God reserved the tithe as belonging to Him (Lev 27:30-32). God told them it was to teach them the fear of the Lord (Deut 14:23), such that the neglect of which would lead to withholding of God’s blessing. They had to bring the ‘whole tithe’ into God’s storehouse (Mal 3:10-12).
- **Jesus** – Jesus chastised the Pharisees for ignoring the heart of God’s law, whilst at the same time, instructing them to continue in the tithe - a practical expression of it (Mt 23:23 and Lk 11:42).
- **The Church** - In the OT the tithe was used to support the Levites, who were the priests serving the people (Nu 18:21). In the NT this principle continues as Paul confirms that the ministers of the gospel should similarly be supported from the tithe. In addition to ministry support the tithe is used to support the needy (i.e., ‘aliens, widows and orphans’ - Dt 14:28-29) amongst God’s people (i.e., ‘any had need’ Acts 2:45).

OFFERINGS

Given the tithe is a prescribed amount and reserved by the Lord, God also gave His people an opportunity to give over and above this, as an expression of worship; an amount we decide (2 Co 9:7). Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul provides some practical guidelines.

- It is an **act of worship** (2 Co 8:5)
- Seen as a **privilege** (2 Co 8:3-4) since God
- Done **willingly** (2 Co 8:11)
- Done **cheerfully** (2 Co 9:7) and not reluctantly or under compulsion.
- In accordance with our **means** (1 Co 16:2, Mark 12:41-44).
- Regular **systematic** giving (1 Co 16:2) is a mark of faithfulness and diligence.

The principle of sowing and reaping means that when we sow generously in faith we shall also reap generously, in a variety of ways (2 Co 9: 6,11-12).

Whereas tithes are used to support people, offerings are to be used for a wider range of projects and expenses: buildings, maintenance, printing, outreach events, etc.

INTEGRITY & ACCOUNTABILITY

Essential for each of us and for the church as a whole is **integrity**, which can be evidenced to the world. This can be achieved through **accountability** and **transparency** in the way we handle our finances. At Living Rock Church this is an area in which we have always aimed for excellence, to show that we are **faithful with worldly wealth**, which Jesus promised would lead to being entrusted with Spiritual wealth (Luke 16:11-12).

Read: Lk 12:32-34, 16:10-15, 19:11-27, 1Ti 6:6-10.

What principles of stewardship are found here? Which do you find most encouraging? And most challenging?



STEWARDSHIP – KEY POINTS

- Good stewardship is at the heart of Kingdom-living.
- Everything belongs to and comes from the LORD!
- We must have the right attitude about money.
- Stewardship is to do with eternal principles.
- The tithe belongs to the LORD, and is for *people*.
- Offerings are over and above, and fund *church life*.
- God wants us to steward well our time, talents and treasures.