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## Stewardship Part X

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### Learning What It Means to Give “Cheerfully.”

The mature Christian may realize his or her responsibility in stewardship and then struggle in prayer and with family about what to give. He/she will seek God’s Word for how he/she can serve Him and the church. A mature Christian should never rationalize that it is good not to follow his/her call, use his/her gifts, refrain from sharing his/her faith, or not to give. As persons saved by grace, we should be overwhelmed with gratitude for what Christ has done for us so we naturally desire to serve Him with all of our heart and means. Yes, you are not forced to do anything, because as His elect, you are saved by your faith alone in what Christ has done alone—period! But, as James tells us, what good is it? What good would you be (James 1:22-25; 2:14-19)?

Once we form a more mature faith, and develop a strong sense of gratitude for the grace flowing in us, what should we do about our stewardship? How can we best respond with the goods given to our care? How much do we keep for ourselves, how much do we give away; how much is for us to play with, and how much goes to the work of the church? There are no concrete answers here; it is a call and a response of our heart and faith. We are given the general parameters from Scripture; it is up to us to figure out how to apply them. Yet, this is hard for most, even me, and the source for most debates. The message board debates are nothing new. This subject is now, and has been very controversial. It has been a bitter debate since the formation of the early church, perhaps because most people like to do things their own way and do not like relinquishing control, especially with their pocketbook. So, we can see all kinds of crazy teachings from every conceivable perspective. But what we do at *Into Thy Word* is see what God’s Word says, and go from there.

The current attitude that is hitting the pew is the idea that since God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7) then you only need to tithe whatever amount you can “cheerfully” part with, whether it be two percent, five percent, ten percent, or none. Some people interpret these thoughts and behaviors to mean if they don’t resent the amount they are tithing, and as long as they can feel happy, content, and generous about whatever amount they tithe, then, they can say they are “cheerful” givers. I do not believe that is what God intended at all. Since all that we have comes from Him, we should be cheerful and grateful that He allows us to keep the gross majority of what we are given. We should focus on being cheerful for what He has done for us! So many countries, governments, and agencies require a lot more from us than God does. The fact that He allows us to enjoy such a large part of His blessings should be a great source of happiness to everyone. Yet, so many begrudge Him even the little they are willing to return.

This concept of giving out of our conveniences is directly in opposition to what Scripture says (although nicely convenient!). Our giving “cheerfully” is the response of our gratitude for what He did for us, not a convenience to our wallets! We may not be mandated to give an exact amount or percentage, since we are under grace and not law as the Puritans argued, but they gave way more than a mere ten percent! So, look at

this verse in its context (2 Cor. 9:6-15), especially verse six, and you will see that this popular thinking is wrong! This passage is an illustration from farming (Job. 4:8; Prov. 11:18; 22:8; Hos. 8:7; 10:12). Thus, when you give, your gift will be used as a seed that grows into a crop. The more you give, the more bounty there will be in the Kingdom. Both the seed of the gift and the maturity of the person who gives will grow. This is what Paul calls *sufficiency*, which means to be content in all circumstances. The opposite would be to be *self-sufficient*, and the book of Jeremiah tells us how much God hates that! Thus, we need to strive to see the beauty of giving and be cheerfully motivated. And, by the way, this passage has nothing to do with tithing; it was about giving to the poor!

*“Isn't the cheerfulness we feel supposed to come from the opportunity to return this small, required percentage of our blessing to Him rather than from a satisfaction with giving God some fraction of the minimum that he asked us to give?”* And the answer everyone to this is...? YEA! (Quotes from a missionary in Asia with whom we work.)

- Being a cheerful giver is about responding to God, not to our conveniences.
- Our giving is a pale comparison to the tremendous gift of grace we have been given (John 3:16)!
- We will end up robbing God when we refuse to give, or give too little. The most important investment we could ever make is in the Kingdom of God (Mal. 3: 8)!
- Remember, it is not just our money; it is our time, treasure, and talent. So, we give our time, gifts, and abilities of commitment and service to our Lord, and to His Church.
- We must be aware that our fallen human depravity will get in the way and rationalize the behaviors that we want to do over the call of the Lord!

## Questions

1. What does it mean to you that God loves a cheerful giver? How can giving away our possessions, resources, money and time be fun and cheerful?
2. Have you ever considered that when we just chase wealth, possessions, or power, all we end up doing is robbing ourselves of the greater riches that God has to give us? How and why are these worthless and meaningless?
3. Most Christians give out of our conveniences. How have you seen or done this? How is this in direct opposition to what Scripture says?
4. How can being a cheerful giver come about more if we are responding to God, not to our conveniences? How so? How can this happen?

5. Do you realize that your giving no matter how grand is no comparison to the marvelous gift of grace you have been given? How can that motivate you?
6. Once we form a more mature faith, and develop a strong sense of gratitude for the grace flowing in us, what should you do about our stewardship?
7. What can you do to be on guard against the sins and enticements of money? If you are not, how do you suppose the sins of your heart would break you down and take you over? What can you do about it?
8. What does it mean to wholeheartedly look to Christ? How can you better implement this in your life? What would your financial life look like with this mindset at full blast?
9. What does it mean to exemplify the attitude and conduct of Christ? What would that look like in your life?
10. Consider that if you cannot handle what God has trust you with now, how can you manage more of what He may give in the future?
11. Have you realized yet that how you deal with stewardship will show your true character, maturity, and spiritual growth?
12. Have you realized that how you deal with financial problems can make your situation positive and meaningful? How so? If not, what is in the way?