**Elements of Good Stewardship**

Luke 16:10-14 NKJV

*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own? “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”*

A common phrase often spoken when people are failing to live up to the teaching of Christ in their outward behaviors is “God knows my heart.” The reason they say this is because they are trying to cover up a failure with the idea that they really are right with God and that He knows the real person they are inside. Jesus spoke this to show that people who value material things above spiritual things justify their behaviors before men, but they are not fooling God. The Scripture teaches us plainly how to be right with God materially and financially. Jesus says how we deal with money and material things is a test being used to see if we should be trusted with the true riches. Let’s examine what the Scripture teaches us about using money and things.

First, see Jacob the grandson of Abraham. In Genesis 28:10-27 is the story of Jacob’s journey back to the family homeland. On the way, he falls asleep and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder that reached to heaven. In his dream, God promises to take care of him, give him the land he was currently in, and bless all the people of the earth through his seed. (Jesus is the fulfilment of that last promise.) When he awakes, he makes an amazing promise to God: *“Of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth (tithe) to You”* (vs 22). Notice that God does not command this of Jacob. Jacob simply makes this promise because he thought it was the right thing to do.

In the Old Covenant, God gave instructions on how to use resources in our hands via tithes and offerings. Numbers 18:21 tells us that priests received tithes for the work they did at the place of sacrifice. Verses 25-32 tell us that the priests were to tithe on what was given to them and that it was disrespectful to refuse to do so. Deuteronomy 26:12-14 teaches that tithes were to be used to help strangers, widows, and orphans. Nehemiah 10:38,49 shows that tithes were used to take care of the temple. Offerings were used to cover the costs of sin and trespass sacrifices as well as helping the poor. Proverbs 14:21 says, *But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.* In the book of Amos, we learn that God became disgusted with the tithes and offerings of the people because they gave their “castoffs” to God. Proverbs 11:25 says, *“the generous soul will be made rich and he who waters will be watered himself.”*

In the New Covenant, we find these teachings. In 1 Corinthians 9:1-18, we are told that those who help in spiritual things have a right to partake of the material things of those they help. Also, just like in the Old Covenant, God has ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. How did this happen in the Old Covenant? By the tithe of the believers. In a previous lesson, we learned that our tithe is our testimony that Jesus is our living high priest (Hebrews 5-7). In 2 Corinthians 8:6-15, Paul prays that Christians will abound in the grace of being a giver. In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul discusses the collection of a special gifts for Christians in another part of the world. He teaches that for such an offering each should give as he purposes in his heart. The basic premise is the more we are willing to give, God will increase what we have so that we can share more. *He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully* (vs 6). Our giving is obedience of our confession to the gospel of Christ. For such offerings we are given these principles:

* We give based on what we have. Don’t borrow to give. – 2 Corinthians 8:12
* If we promise to give, we must do it. – 2 Corinthians 9:5
* Give cheerfully, not begrudgingly. – 2 Corinthians 9:7

In summary Paul says: *God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work* (2 Corinthians 9:8,9). Hebrews 13:16 teaches us to be *“rich in good works, ready to give, and willing share.”*

There is more… 1 Timothy 6:17-20: *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.* Galatians 6:7-10: *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Those who do not tithe will sometimes say, “you have not shown me a single verse in the New Covenant that commands me to tithe.” Correct. But if you are looking for one, then you have just admitted you are still drinking milk and not eating meat (Hebrews 5:12,13). The New Covenant is distinct from the Old Covenant in a very crucial way. Here is a description from Hebrews 8:7-13: *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people* (vs 10). If we argue about giving a tenth of our money even though Jesus says we must give up everything in order to be His disciple, it is certainly true: “God knows your heart.”

Malachi 3:10 tells us how God gave Israel a way to test Him: *“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the widows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”* Can you hear the excuses: “I am poor.” “I don’t have enough money.” “I don’t make any money.” “I only get retirement.” “I have bills to pay.” Every one of these says, “Yep! God know my heart!” We surely shouldn’t need to test God. His promises are secure. How often have we read Psalm 23:1 –*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want?* Philippians 4:19 – *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus*. Matthew 6:33 – *Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you.* Proverbs 3:9,10 – *Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase. So your barns will be filled with plenty…* Trust Him!