

**Thursday, July 30, 2020**

**SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE**

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**TITLE: Stewardship Pt. 4**

What's the greatest gift you've ever received? Was it a birthday present? A graduation gift? A Christmas present, whether from a parent, a grandparent, or Santa Claus? One of the most memorable gifts I ever received was a gift from Santa Claus in 1986.

As a 5-year-old child, the thing I wanted most that year was a Nintendo. The Nintendo entertainment system came out in late 1985. But just one year later, The Nintendo had only grown in popularity. It was a hot ticket item for the 1986 Christmas season. The problem is, you couldn't find one. I remember going to Toys R Us and KB Toy Store, and you couldn't find one. But I told my mom, I told my grandparents, and I told Santa Claus, what I really, really wanted was a Christmas miracle of a Nintendo.

Well, Christmas morning came, and I opened up the presents at my mom's house, but there was no Nintendo. I wasn't upset. I wasn't unhappy with what I received. And yet, I hoped there would be a Nintendo hiding somewhere. We went over to my grandparents, as we did every Christmas Day. I looked around the Christmas tree, but I did not see any boxes that looked like they were the right size. We ate breakfast. We opened presents. There was still no Nintendo.

It was OK. I didn't seem to be bothered too much by it. But about 30 minutes after opening presents, there was the ring of a doorbell. My grandma told me to go see who it was. I opened the door, and there was Santa Claus. Santa Claus had come in and was looking for me. What did he have inside his bag? A box; and that box looked like the right size. I went and sat down in their living room, tore open the paper, and there was my Nintendo Entertainment System.

Here's what I found out about that Christmas Day. Who was Santa Claus? It was my grandfather dressed up. How did he get that Nintendo? He paid an employee to drive through a snowstorm, to get down to Kansas City to purchase the last Nintendo in the area. My grandfather paid a high price for that gift. I couldn't find that gift. I couldn't pay for that gift. That gift was an unconditional gift of love. That's what made that gift so special. He didn't give to get. He simply gave away, for the benefit of another.

How are you doing today with your giving? How are you doing with giving away freely for the benefit of others? Do you give to get? What motivates your giving or your lack of giving? What difference does it make what we do with our resources? That's exactly what I want to talk about today.

Well, today, we are wrapping up our series called "Character Over Compromise." We've been looking at different qualities of a Christian. We're looking at ways to display the reality of our

faith. Each day we have the opportunity to make a wise choice or a poor choice. It's really the choice of character, and living out who we are in Christ, or compromise, defaulting to our old sinful patterns.

Over the past four days, we've been talking specifically about stewardship. And we've been looking at Second Corinthians Chapters eight and nine. So today, we're going to wrap up a section In Chapter 9, beginning in verse nine.

Paul has been talking about how the Macedonian churches in the area have been very generous with what God has given them. But the Corinthian church has struggled in this area. So in verses 6-8, Paul said, whatever it is you sow you will also reap. If you sow sparingly, your harvest will also be very sparse. And the reality is, what you sow is a reflection of your heart. God is not so concerned about a magical percentage, but rather on the condition Of your heart. He's more concerned about the reason for your giving. Our heart and our giving is a reflection of what we really believe about God, because, in verse 8, Paul reminds the Corinthian church, and us today, that God is the giver of all of our resources. And when we expound, or we invest in God's Kingdom, God will continue to replenish our reserves and meet our needs. And that's where we pick it up in verse 9 (ESV).

<sup>9</sup> As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” <sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

In verse 9, Paul quotes Psalm 112, verse nine. Paul is not preaching a welfare system or a socialist mentality. It's not a redistribution of wealth. What he is simply doing is reinforcing a posture that has been around for centuries. Listen to what Deuteronomy 15 says. Moses writes, “You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. <sup>11</sup> For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore, I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in your land.’”

Pastor John MacArthur says, “those who were generous to the needy received God's material blessings. But the purpose was not so that they could be like the rich fool in Jesus’ parable.” They were not giving to get. They were not giving to increase their reserves. The purpose is very clear in verse 11 here. There will always be needs around us. And because we have been given much grace, we are able to and should give out of that abundance.

Again, I need to stress this is not teaching socialism or a redistribution of wealth. This is not creating a welfare system or a government structure mandating a certain program or percentage. Rather, it is reinforcing what Paul stated earlier in this chapter, but also what's been taught for the centuries. Because we have been given much, we can give much. Because our supplier never runs out of supplies, we can pass on what we have been given.

And then, in verse 10 of Second Corinthians 9, Paul quotes Isaiah 55:10. I like what former Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe said. He said, “There is no such thing as secular and sacred in the Christian life. The giving of money is just as spiritual an act as the singing of a hymn or the

handing out of a gospel tract. Money is a seed. If we give it according to the principle of grace, it will multiply to the glory of God and meet many needs. If we use it in ways other than God desires, the harvest will be poor.”

Again, this all goes back to what we believe about God. Do we trust God, or do we not? Do we really believe that He is the secret to our success in life, or do we think we are the magic ingredient? Because if we trust God, we know that He will be the one to meet our needs. He is the one who pours out grace upon grace. When we believe this, we will demonstrate this. There is probably no greater example than what we do with our treasures.

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: Now, let’s bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney for “a reality check”. Cara, what’s the relationship between our giving and a person’s worldly wealth?

C: Well, if you're following Jesus, you'll just give, I think. If you're following religion, which is worldly, then you're probably, you might give a percentage, but there's going to be no love or feeling behind it. You're just going to do it because you think that's what you're supposed to do.

N: Yeah. It's a motivation of the heart. Again, we can give, but if the heart's detached, it lacks the meaning, both to the person receiving it, the ministry receiving it, and even the person who is giving it. I mean, think about giving a gift to someone that you feel compelled to, you know, someone, “Hey, I'm raising money”, and you're like, “Oh, all right, well, I'll give you money, because I know you – even though I don't necessarily believe in this.” They're not really receiving any real benefit or joy from it. And certainly you are not either, but when you are passionate about something, and you're giving like, “You know what? I love you and I love this cause”, that's a completely different experience. What do you think Arnie?

A: I still think it's not, even though you two keep gravitating to money, I think it has more to do with giving of your time, talent and treasure, and time and talent is part of your treasure. And that I don't think the world defines it as that, but I certainly do. And you know, it's about a relationship with Jesus Christ and that's your whole entire being. So just to say your money - and back in the day, it was more, you gave your money, and you were a good person, depending on how much you gave.

N: And I would agree a hundred percent with you, that our giving goes far beyond just our pocket books, more than money. This passage in particular is about money. And that's why we've been talking so much about it. But again, I think your point is well taken. And I agree, we do need to be giving joyfully of our time and our talents. And as we've been talking about, our treasure, and I think something that Cara has talked about, is also giving our first fruits, and the Bible does talk about that, how we're not supposed to give, you know, what's left over, but rather out of the first fruits. And that does apply of course, to our time and our talent and our treasure.

As you know, we're in the process of moving, and I received a message from the men's ministry of our church, and the gentleman who is arranging it. And he said, “You know what, I'm

working, but I'd be happy to not see some clients for a time, and I'll come over and help". Okay. He's giving really from the first fruits of his time, right there, rather than, "Hey, I've got 30 minutes, you know, from five-thirty to six o'clock." No, he's going, "I'll carve out; I will give sacrificially of my time for that". And so it's exactly what you guys have been talking about.

Okay, Arnie, I want to ask you a question about what we quoted from Warren Wiersbe, because Wiersbe talked about giving money being as a spiritual act as anything else you might do. You kind of just talked about that, but what are your additional thoughts on this?

A: Yeah, I think Warren nails it; it is a spiritual experience. That's for sure. It's just, as in any spiritual experience, you have to be careful, because it makes you feel good. Sometimes it makes you feel proud, and oftentimes it makes you feel better than everybody else. So it, Warren nailed it. I mean, it is a spiritual experience. It can be a very positive spiritual experience, if done correctly.

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2 Corinthians Chapter 9 beginning at verse 11: <sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. <sup>13</sup> By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, <sup>14</sup> while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.

Paul says you will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way. You see that debunks this whole prosperity gospel—this whole false teaching that we give, so we can become rich. It is very popular today by certain prominent TV preachers and authors, to say, give and give and give and give. But what they're really saying is, give to me, and give it to me, and give to me, so I can become rich. That's not what the Bible teaches. Paul says when you give, God will resupply, so you can keep giving. There is a great blessing and enrichment when you give.

The harvest of generosity is not only an eternal reward but also blessing in this life. Hosea says, *Sow with a view to righteousness, Reap in accordance with kindness*" (10:12).

You see, this giving and receiving produces thankfulness to God, because those who are giving are thanking God for His blessing to give. And those who are receiving are thanking God for His faithfulness to His people.

It reminds me of the incredible story of George Mueller. George Mueller was a pastor, but also would take care of orphan children. He did this by prayer and by faith. There is one incident where the housemother of the orphanage came to Mueller, and said the children are ready for dinner, but there is no food for them to eat. So what did Mueller do? He didn't call a friend. He didn't put out a message on Facebook or Twitter. Instead, he took the 300 children to the dining room with empty plates and empty bowls; he prayed and thanked God for the food. Minutes later, a baker showed up at the doorstep, and the baker said, "Last night I could not sleep.

Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and made three batches for you.” If that wasn't an answer enough, another knock came at the door, and it was the milkman. The milkman said his car had broken down, and the milk would spoil by the time he would get it fixed, so he gave Mueller and the children 10 large cans of milk. It was just the amount so all children could have a drink.

There was a need. There was faith. There was giving. And there was thanksgiving.

In verse 12, Paul describes the Corinthian ministry as “service”. We get the word *liturgy* from it. You see, their act of service was more than just a physical act; it was an act of worship. It was a spiritual ministry. This reminds us that everything we do is an act of worship. Again, there is no disconnect between the spiritual and the secular. What we do, to serve and give and do, is a reflection of our heart, which in turn can be an act of service.

In verse 13, Paul says, “By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ.”

Their act of giving would be evidence of the authenticity of their faith. Like many today, people are suspicious of conversion. Jewish believers at Paul's time were suspicious of Gentile converts. We know how bad the Corinthian city was. Yes, it was a hub of entertainment and society, but it was terribly sinful and sexually immoral. So no doubt those who came from a more pious background would have the posture of, “Let's wait and see if these guys are actually saved.” But the sacrificial giving demonstrates genuine faith. It's much like James would say in James 1: He would say that we are not called to be just hearers of the word and deceive ourselves, but instead be doers. Saving faith works. One evidence is our willingness to be obedient through our giving.

Paul closes in verse 15 by saying, “Thanks be to God for his *inexpressible* gift!” Paul concludes this section with the benediction. What is that *inexpressible* gift? Well, the Greek word could also be translated as *unspeakable* or *indescribable*.

I think you know exactly what – no, WHO - that gift is: His son, Jesus Christ. Paul wrote earlier in this letter, “For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” We who are dead in our sins - we who are enemies of God - we who are slaves to sin - God offered us a gift, an unspeakable or indescribable gift: Forgiveness of sins and peace with God. Because of that great gift, our souls are saved, and our lives are changed.

This is why we can give freely, because He freely gave to us. This is why we don't have to hold on to our resources with a tight grasp, because His grace overflows into our lives.

Many will wonder, what happened to the Corinthian church? Did they, in fact, become generous in their giving? Well, according to Romans 15, not only did they give – they gave, and they were pleased to do so.

It's my prayer that we will not choose compromise in our stewardship – that we will not choose to be stingy or selfish. But instead, we will choose character - That we will reflect the reality of Christ in us. That we will give, not so we can get, but so God gets the glory!

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N: Now, let's turn again to Arnie and Cara. Cara, I'd like to hear from you about your biggest takeaway from our studies this week.

C: If you are following Jesus, I think it's going to make you want to give, and give joyfully and in faith - be very generous, just like the church you were talking about. I don't think it's anything - God doesn't want money He has to pry from your hand, or time, or all of those things. And that's the other thing that, you know, when you talk about giving generously, it's not just money - it's every part of you.

N: I'm curious, have either of you experienced moments when God provided just the right thing in just the right time? I would love to hear about that.

C: I'm sure Arnie's had a million working in ministry, because I think many of us have stories like that, yeah.

A: To me, there's never been a time when God hasn't shown up at the right time, since I've been a Christ follower. So I can tell you, multiple times before I became a Christ follower, whether it was, you know, when I lived in my van, or drug addiction, or some of those crazy things, that God - I could tell you all the times God never showed up. But as a Christ follower now, there's never been a time He hasn't shown up.

N: I think a lot of times, you know, as you're saying, God's timing is perfect. And so often when it comes to our schedule, those things don't always match up. But again, this goes back to whether we trust Him or not. And humanly speaking, it does seem like sometimes God shows up at the 11th hour - part of that is creating dependence upon Him - But the point of it is God's delivery will come. God will meet our needs. He has promised that He will meet our needs, and we can trust Him to do it. And as Jesus talked about, hey, *give us our daily bread; daily* bread - It's not give us a week's worth, two weeks worth, a month's worth. So many times, especially in ministry, it is, *give us our daily bread* and He does, and His timing is perfect.

Arnie, obviously this ministry depends on God's provision, and it is dependent upon the generosity of other believers. What lessons have you learned about that over the years?

A: That it's up to God. That you have to do your part; you can't be lazy. You've got to put the need out there, but really it's up to God, and don't take the credit. Don't come off with this fake humility, how God showed up, and then you list all the things, how awesome you are. It really comes down to being willing to get out of God's way, to do God's work.

N: Cara, you're on the board of directors. So what do you have to add to this? What have you seen?

C: Well, you're always making decisions that would further the Gospel. That was the original intent of this ministry. And so you just always have that in the back of your mind, and you're trying things to get the Gospel out. And we are just kind of under the philosophy that, if we're in God's favor, He's going to allow us to keep chugging along. So a lot of prayer is involved in, you know, you hire the right people and then you stay out of the way.