

What We Give Away

Upon This Rock, Part 10

Selected Scripture

This past week saw a record number of people attending Christmas Sweet . . . right at 4,000 people either attending or involved in the production. The gospel was so clearly sung and explained . . . it was absolutely terrific.

If you sang or played or acted or served in the kitchen or on sets or sewing costumes . . . if you were involved in any way, would you stand?

For the past several months, we've been addressing the subject of the church and when I began I mentioned that this was a highly personalized series. Even though we have people watching or listening in some 20 countries, on an average Sunday morning, as well as folks around the country – still, we really weren't going to be talking to them, but to us.

These are significant days for our church as we clarify and propose a rewritten constitution and bylaws.

And because we are a Bible believing church, that kind of process can't happen without ransacking the scriptures to see what they say in this regard.

And I trust we've all been struck by the significance of the church – the primacy of the church in the program of God's redemptive purpose – the power of the church bearing the truth of the gospel – the foundation of the church which is the word of God.

I had a gentleman come up to me last Lord's day and deliver the highest compliment any church member could deliver to any shepherd – he said, I want you and the other elders to know that I've read every word of the new constitution and every word of the new bylaws, and I've even looked up every single reference of scripture, and I've read every

verse – and I was so grateful to see that what we believe and where we stand is so clearly biblical.

Amen to that.

In the last few weeks, we've covered what churches throughout the centuries have called Church Covenants.

A Church Covenant traditionally involves a covenant of conduct and commitment that church members effectively commit to pursue.

In our new constitution and bylaws, we've attempted to make things clearer – less formal sounding and more obvious in our vocabulary. There's no need to be unclear.

So what we did was effectively rewrite the covenant and break it down into what we're now simply calling promises – because that's really what they are.

None of us will keep all of them perfectly – in fact, none of us can . . . however, we can promise to pursue them.

We aren't interested in perfection, but we are interested in progressing. And a holy pattern for living that comes from God's word.

The Apostle Peter exhorted the believer to keep effectively moving, spiritually. He wrote for us to ***apply all diligence and in your faith supply (or add to it) moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, add to it knowledge; and in your knowledge (add), self-control, and in your self-control (add), perseverance, and in your perseverance (add) godliness, and in your godliness (add) brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness (add) love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful (2 Peter 1:5-8).***

Promises we're making one another are another way of saying that we are applying diligence to progress in the right direction.

I've said before that these promises reveal the direction our toes are pointing.

And if there was ever a time when the church needed to know which way its toes are pointing, it's today.

They reveal our doctrine and our direction, and they also reflect our desire to bring Jesus Christ greater glory and His gospel a greater audience.

The last thing we want to be is useless and unfruitful.

Let me tell you something encouraging; as we've gone through these promises, it's been interesting to me that we've had some people say they want to join this church. In other words, clarifying what we believe hasn't sent them away, but creating a desire to come on board; and they've asked about the process of joining.

In light of the fact that some folks have said that's exactly what they want to do, I'm willing to offer another GreenHouse class this Spring.

You don't have to join if you take the class, but it is required if you want to join.

If your work schedule changes – or kids get sick, we now offer the class via live video streaming and then we archive the class so you can join with us that way.

This past fall we had quite a number of people who accessed the live streaming and the archives and took the class that way.

If you're interested, we need to know fairly soon, because the class starts in January; you can call the church office or go online and register at the page entitled JOIN. That way we'll know you're coming and have your notebook ready.

Now, so far in our Sunday morning study on this subject, we've looked at some key issues related to our personal conduct and our relationship to the church.

So far, we've addressed what the New Testament has to say about:

- Who we are as a church
- Why we belong to a local church
- Why the church actually exists
- And how we as church members behave
- We've addressed, Who has the final word – if you're wondering, the final word around here is the word of God.

- We also answered, what is it that makes us different from the world?
- We also addressed, Why we matter to each other; How we get along with each other and then, last Lord's day, how and why we discipline the unrepentant from us.

Now there is one more promise as it relates to our commitment to the local church.

This is the 10th and final promise regarding the promises we make to each other regarding the church: here it is: we promise to financially support the church through faithful, cheerful and sacrificial stewardship.

We've attached several passages to this promise – and there are, of course, many more.

And from our understanding of New Testament principles, this promise has been carefully worded to reflect the scriptures.

Let me break it down into three principles.

1. First, there is the principle of faithfulness.

We promise to financially support the church through stewardship that is **faithful**.

Which immediately indicates that although you give gifts to the church, you're ultimately giving to Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul writes of the eager giving of the Macedonians to the needs of the believers living in Jerusalem; and he describes for the Corinthian believers that these Macedonian believers *literally begged us for the privilege of participating in this special offering (2 Corinthians 8:3)*.

Can you imagine people begging to give what little they had to help other believers? And then Paul makes this telling statement of them – he writes, but they first gave themselves to the Lord.

They gave themselves to the Lord.

Giving that is God-honoring is giving that ultimately proceeds from the overflowing of a life entirely devoted to God.

And Paul uses the testimony of the Macedonians to encourage the Corinthians to faithfully steward their resources toward the support of the church – not only in Corinth but beyond.

He writes further in *chapter 8. I am not speaking this as a command – this reference to their financial giving – but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also . . . verse 11. But now finish doing it also, that just*

as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.

In other words, be ready . . . be faithful to give what you can!

I'll never forget sitting in church one Sunday morning along with my brothers . . . we were young boys at the time; the offering plates were being passed . . . my younger brother Tim, who was probably five years old at the time, – was normally in children's church – that Sunday he was sitting with us, and he held the offering plate when it came to him, took off his little skinny clip-on necktie – you remember those? and he put it in the plate and passed it to me . . . it finally reached our mother and the plate just stopped . . . she recognized the necktie and leaned over and whispered down the row something like, "What are you doing?" it might have been something a little more dramatic. And Timmy whispered back, "*The pastor said we were supposed to give our ties and offerings.*" I promise you that really happened.

How's that for responsive . . . surrendered . . . giving.

Giving that honors God carries an element of submissive eagerness that translates into faithfulness.

2. This promise also includes the principle of cheerfulness

We promise to financially support the church through faithful, cheerful . . . are you serious? stewardship

Are we really that happy about it?

I'll never forget being in a church in East Africa – a poor third world context – block building with a tin roof – several hundred people packed inside; and when it came time for the offering, the people stood and clapped as the ushers came down the center aisle.

Clapping, because they had the opportunity to give to the Lord.

Paul wrote that classic text to the Corinthians, "*Let each one do just as he purposed in his heart; not grudgingly – I hate to, or under compulsion – I guess I have to – for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7)*

Which means that to God, the attitude we have when we give matters more than the amount we give.

Listen, don't give if you **hate to** . . . and don't give if you **have to** – give because you **can't wait to**.

God is most interested in those who love to give because they understand they are engaging in eternal things.

A. W. Tozer wrote, as earthy as money is, it can be converted into something else; for whatever is given to Christ is touched with immortality.

The church tends to create givers out of obligation . . . duty . . . pressure.

I've had two different couples in GreenHouse class over the past couple of years tell me the same rumor. They came to different GreenHouse classes, and they both joined the class rather skeptically . . . the entire semester, they were waiting for me to talk about money and principles of giving to the Lord.

After our session on New Testament grace giving, they came up to me – independently of each other – but both couples said, "Stephen, we were skeptical when we came to Colonial." I said, "Why was that?" And they said, "Because we had been told by people – people we trusted who had also attended here at one point in time – they told us not to join Colonial because if you did, the pastor – and they were dead serious – the pastor will require that you give him a copy of your most recent 1040 tax return so that you can prove to him you are giving to the church.

What a rumor!

I can assure you that not only do I not know what any of you give – and don't want to know – I can assure you that the only tax forms that I've ever inspected to determine the level of charitable giving were my own.

Listen, giving to the Lord is truly a joyful and cheerful delight when you truly understand that you are giving to the Lord.

And not to man!

These are the principles of faithfulness and cheerfulness.

One more – the promise reads, to financially support the church through faithful, cheerful and sacrificial stewardship.

3. This includes then the principle of sacrifice.

Again, Paul wrote of the Macedonians who so eagerly gave to meet the needs of the church, and you might be tempted to think that they simply had

money laying around. They must have been among the more wealthy in the church!

Actually, Paul describes them in their responsiveness to the grace of God – *that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality (2 Corinthians 8:2).*

They were undergoing a great ordeal of affliction and deep poverty and in the midst of that context of poverty, they overflowed with generosity.

Some time ago I read a lengthy 1200 page biography of George Whitefield, the man used by God to fan the flames of the Great Awakening during the mid-1700's.

I found numerous examples of Whitefield's personal sacrifice with joy – and also illustrations of God's provision at just the right time. Here's one of them.

Whitefield had learned of a widow with a large family, whose landlord had recently taken all her furniture away because she couldn't make rent. Whitefield immediately went and gave her five guineas. I don't know what a guinea is – it sounds like a furry animal. But he gave her five guineas that took care of rent and got all her furniture back. The friend who was traveling with him hinted that the sum was more than he could reasonably afford; to which he replied, "When God brings a case of need before us, it is that we may relieve it."

The two travelers proceeded on their journey and before long, a robber confronted them, demanding their money, which they gave. After he had left, Whitefield said to his friend, "Isn't it better that I didn't have any money, having given all mine to the widow, but all your money went to the thief?"

They continued down the road in silence and all of a sudden the robber came galloping back toward them. And he demanded Whitefield's coat. However, before the robber left them, Whitefield asked if he could have the robber's tattered old coat in exchange since it was very cold. The robber agreed and after trading coats, the robber rode away. Whitefield's friend chided him and said – now neither one of us have any money, but at least I've got my coat.

A few minutes later they saw the robber galloping towards them as fast as he could and now, fearing that their lives were threatened, they also spurred on their horses and, fortunately, made it to some cottages before the robber reached them. The thief was stopped and, no doubt, mortified; for when

Whitefield took off the man's tattered coat, he found in one of the pockets, his five guineas, and nearly 100 more!ⁱ

Is that a great sacrificial giving story or what?

And we'd all be willing to give sacrificially if we had some sort of promise that God would pay us back 100 times more than we give – within a few weeks or months at the most, right?

That's the false promise of prosperity theology – give and God will give you back even more. No, God has promised to meet our needs, not our greeds.

Sacrificial giving makes no demands on God – it merely responds to the grace of God, understanding that He sacrificed so much for us – and guess what – we can never pay Him back.

But this is the demonstration of love and loyalty – this is the gospel.

The key word in this promise that really governs the entire promise is the last word – the word **stewardship**.

We promise to financially support the church through faithful, cheerful and sacrificial stewardship.

Simply understanding that word, stewardship, clears so much of this up for us.

We are not owners, but stewards, managers, of all that we have.

You may follow a percentage in giving to God, but just don't make the mistake that He owns 4% or 10% of what you make, and you own the other 96% or 90%.

God owns it all.

The older I get, the more I am convinced that the issue of giving revolves around understanding the difference between ownership and stewardship.

Many of you have read the book by Chip Ingram on stewardship – we made it available a couple of years ago. He gives an illustration from a time when he pastored a church . . . it must have been a blast to live it out. He said that a wealthy gentlemen from his congregation said to him, "Listen, I don't want anybody to know I'm the source; I don't want thank you notes or calls, but I want to open a checking account and give you the check book . . . there won't be any name or address on the checks.

And whenever you see someone in need – or someone who could use some help – or someone that would simply be encouraged by a monetary gift – you use that checkbook and write them a check. So Chip began this amazing period of ministry, literally blessing hundreds of people with unexpected gifts.

And every so often, this older gentleman would call him up and say, “Let’s have lunch . . . I want to hear what’s been happening with my money.” They’d meet, and he would just be thrilled to hear the stories of lives impacted. And then, he’d always say, “Okay, let me put some more money into your account . . . you continue managing it for me . . . and keep me posted.”

The truth is, everyone of us are in that position. We are managing God’s checkbook . . . we are administrating God’s portfolio . . . His property.

We are literally, the Apostle Peter writes, *stewarding all that belongs to God – we are stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10).*

And one day we’re going to stand before Him and give an account with what we did with His property.

With that in mind – as we make this promise:

Let me make three personal challenges for you to consider:

1. First, make a realistic assessment of your spirit in giving

Do you give what you give because you have to . . . you might even hate to . . . don’t give until you want to?

2. Secondly, make a realistic assessment of your record of giving

Don’t fudge your way through it . . . pull out the check register or the type in the computer command and get a record of your contribution so far, this year.

Nearly every study indicates that Christians living in America give on average between 2-3% of their take-home pay to the Lord.

Let’s do a little math this morning and let you find out where you really are.

I’ve started this chart out for those who give 4% and then 7% and then 10%.

MONTHLY INCOME	4%	7%	10%
\$3,000	\$120	\$210	\$300
\$6,000	\$240	\$420	\$600
\$10,000	\$400	\$700	\$1000

And I started this chart out at 4%, just because I believe we’re all a cut above the national average of less than 3% giving.

From all your personal tax returns you’ve given me over the years for me to look at – you’re way ahead of the rest.

I want you to think through what you gave to the church or to some other ministry last month. Total it all up in your mind – then look up here at this graph and find out the closest spot where you land in terms of monthly income . . . and then do the math.

If you need more data, go home and sometime over the next week or two, figure out where you stand.

Find out what it indicates about your battle with the gravitational pull of the earth.

We need to take a realistic look at where we are.

We need to accept the teaching of scripture that there is a direct relationship between our faith and our finances.

3. Here’s the third challenge; Make a realistic assessment of changes you need to make.

If you discover you’re among the average statistic for giving in America – at around 2-3% a year to Christ, ask the Lord first to begin developing your faith and priority and sense of stewardship.

Spending 98% of everything I make on my life and my world and my family and my assets and my future speaks volumes about my true perspective and passion in life.

Make some decisions . . . have some conversations . . . spend time in prayer and the word.

We’re not just talking about money – we’re talking about attitude and submission and participation and sacrifice and submission and joy and anticipation and the building of the church for the advancement of the gospel and the glory of God.

With our earthly gifts, we are touching – we are
promoting – we are joining that which is immortal.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/6/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from George Whitefield, Volume 2 by Arnold A. Dallimore (Cornerstone Books, 1980), p. 94