

Biblical Stewardship

What does it mean to practice Biblical stewardship? I would suggest it begins with a commitment to living a simpler lifestyle.

The Bible says, *“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share”* (1 Tim. 6:17-18).

“Command those who are rich in this present world...” The question is, who are the rich? When we hear the term “rich,” we seldom include ourselves in this category. However, we must. 1.3 billion people in the world live on less than \$1 per day while 2.7 billion people survive on less than \$2 per day. All things considered, **we are the rich**. So an obvious question emerges, how should we, as “rich” Christians, live in a world of poverty?

That does the Bible say about this important question? First, the Bible does not condemn material wealth and possessions. Rather, it commends wealth and possessions as gifts from God. However, the Scriptures also carry a warning. Material wealth can become spiritually dangerous if we use the gift and ignore the Giver. *“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”* (1 Tim. 6:9-10). Few things tempt to grip our hearts more than money. Christ put it this way, *“No one can serve two masters . . . You cannot serve both God and money”* (Matthew 6:24).

And yet, the same passage that warns us of the dangers of wealth and possessions also commends it. *“...God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment”* (1 Tim. 6:17). Material wealth and possessions are inherently good as are all things which come from God the Creator. *“Every good and perfect gift is from above...”* (James 1:17). *“For everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving”* (1 Tim. 4:4).

As “rich” believers, we can take advantage of our God-given wealth in three ways. We can spend it, save it for ourselves, or give it all away. Or, we can learn to enjoy it by investing it in God’s work. This is the commitment of our text, *“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share”* (1 Tim. 6:18).

The question that Christians often ask is how much of our money should we share? I think the more appropriate question is how much should we keep for ourselves? *“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that”* (1 Tim. 6:6-8). One of the reasons many of us do not have more contentment is that we drive so hard to acquire. *“Because of our worship of material things, we buy stuff we do not really need, with money we do not often have, to impress people we do not really know, with things which do not eternally last.”* (Richard Foster)

John Newton, the famous Anglican pastor and author of the hymn, “Amazing Grace,” was asked by a young man how much he should give to God’s work. Newton responded by offering this criterion for giving. Determine before the Lord your necessities, conveniences, and extravagances. For every cent you spend on conveniences and extravagances, spend a cent on Christ’s kingdom. Newton then applied Proverbs 19:17, *“He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward him for what he has done”* and said, “I will stake my friendship on the promise. If you act on this truth, in a spirit of prayer and faith, with a single eye to His glory, you will not be disappointed.”

I suggest, for our own soul and for the kingdom of Christ, to consider coming down a notch or two in our lifestyle in order to increase our commitment to give to Christ and His kingdom. Materialism runs rampant in many churches, but it is not a sin that is addressed in many of our evangelical circles. While no Christian pastor, author, or church should tell us what kind of car to drive, house to buy, or vacations to take, these decisions should be made prayerfully and considerately as a follower of Jesus Christ and a participant in His kingdom.

Here are a few suggestions for living a simpler, missional life:

- **Budget Frugally** – “There are two ways to get enough. One is to accumulate more. The other is to desire less.” – C. K. Chesterton
- **Discernment on Advertising** – “The purpose of media bombardment is to increase desire so that in our hearts we go from, ‘That’s extravagant’ to ‘That would be nice’ to ‘I may need that’ to ‘I’ve got to have that.’” – Richard Foster
- **Examine the things of our lives** – Do we enjoy them? Do we have an attachment to them? Or, are these things really idols?
- **If we are vulnerable to materialism**, is there someone to hold us accountable?
- **Focus on *quality of life*, not quantity of stuff; on *relationships*, not luxuries.**
- **Purchase for *usefulness*, not status.**
- **Cultivate a life of giving.** *“Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil”* (Eph. 5:15-16).
- **The more money we make, the more we commit to maintaining the same lifestyle.**

As we follow the commands of Christ, we should be seeking to live a more simple life. We seek to serve, to share, and to simplify as we grow in our faith and commitment to Jesus.

Great Peace in the Lord,

Eddie