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Let us Not Grow Weary of Doing Good Galatians 6:6-10

I would like for you all to take a close look at this list of moral responsibilities that the Bible very clearly and repeatedly calls on Christians to observe:

- Be a truth teller (Eph. 4:25; or, do not lie to one another)
- Speak only what will build up and encourage one another (Eph. 4:29)
- Avoid filthiness, foolish talk, and crude joking (Eph. 5:4)
- Be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32)
- Forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you (Eph. 4:32)
- Walk in love (Eph. 5:2)
- Avoid all sexual immorality (Eph. 5:3)
- Do not covet (Eph. 5:3)
- Show honor to one another (Rom. 12:10)
- Be constant in prayer (Rom. 12:12)
- Be hospitable (Rom. 12:13)
- Bless those who persecute you (Rom. 12:14)
- Do not be haughty or arrogant (Rom. 12:16)
- Be subject to the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1).
- Pay your taxes (Rom. 13:7)
- Do not judge one another on secondary matters (Rom. 14:13)
- Walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16)
- Wives, submit to your husbands (Col. 3:18)
- Husbands, love your wives (Col. 3:19)
- Children, obey your parents (Col. 3:20)

That is a mere handful of what would probably amount to several hundred commandments in Scripture about the way we are to live our lives as the people of God. I suspect that if I told you I planned on ignoring several of these moral responsibilities and simply hope that you would obey them without being told that this is essential to godly living, you would be upset with me. In fact, you should probably find grounds for firing me as your pastor.

In other words, I assume you believe two things. **First**, you believe that you, as a child of God, are morally and spiritually responsible to God to obey what he has commanded in Scripture. I can't imagine any of you stopping me in the middle of listing these moral and spiritual responsibilities and saying: "Wait a minute, Sam. I'm ok with most of these, but I don't think I should have to forgive others as Christ has forgiven me. And I'm not sure about that one regarding paying my taxes. But you are free to preach on the rest of them." May I assume that you think it absolutely essential for me that to address all these matters? Thank you.

Second, I assume you think it would not only be wise of me to emphasize these moral commands but that I would be irresponsible and careless as your pastor if I were to ignore them. For example, if we were to discover that a person at Bridgeway, perhaps even a pastor or elder, was engaged in sexual immorality of some sort, or adultery, or embezzlement, I assume you think it would be my responsibility to call that person to repent and to exhort them properly.

Now, I have a question for you. Although I listed only a handful of the dozens and dozens of moral responsibilities that we as Christians are called on by God to obey, I assume you believe that we are truly accountable to God for all of them; all those that I listed together with numerous others. And I assume you believe that a person who claims to be a Christian but consistently refuses to obey any of these commands should be called to account, should be alerted to their failure to obey, and should perhaps be very attentive to listen to any sermon or teaching that might focus on the particular commandment that they are disobeying.

O.K. With all that in place, there is one more moral commandment, one more ethical responsibility that I need to address. Before I do that, I need to apologize to all of you and ask your forgiveness for being negligent in my responsibility as the shepherd of your souls. I have let you down. I have let many of you continue on in your Christian life with the belief in your mind that ignoring this particular moral responsibility is no big deal. I have let you live with the false belief that this responsibility doesn't really matter all that much and that by neglecting it you can still flourish as a Christian and be pleasing to God. For that I apologize. I've had my reasons for not saying much about this. I thought these reasons justified my silence on the subject. But I was wrong. And I repent.

So what am I talking about? Well, here are four ways of putting it, using biblical texts as the basis:

Keep your life free from the love of money (Heb. 13:5)

Excel in being financially generous (2 Cor. 8:7; 1 Tim. 6:18)

Be a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:6-7)

When it comes to financial stewardship, i.e., the use of your money, sow bountifully in order that you might reap bountifully (Gal. 6:6-10; 2 Cor. 9:6).

Let me put this in the form of a question. If it is not permissible to ignore the biblical exhortations to love one another and to speak the truth to one another and to serve one another and so on, why would anyone think it is permissible to ignore the biblical exhortation to be a generous and consistent and joyful giver to the work of the local church and the kingdom of God?

In other words, why do we put the issue of financial generosity in a separate, special category of unmentionable subjects? What makes it unique? Why is it largely off-limits? Why is it treated as an untouchable topic?

Let me put it in yet another way. Try to imagine if I were to stand before you on a Sunday morning or even in a private conversation and say: "You can become a spiritually mature Christian and pleasing to God without remaining sexually faithful to your husband/wife." Or again: "You can flourish as a believer and become all that God wants you to be even if you choose never to attend church or become involved in some form of Christian community." I trust that you would loudly protest and tell me that it's not possible to grow and flourish spiritually if we neglect or ignore or disobey such basic Christian responsibilities as sexual fidelity in marriage and community one with another.

That being true, why should I not also say: "You simply cannot flourish spiritually or live a life that is pleasing to God and honoring of his name if you consistently refuse to be generous in your use of money for the support of the local church and its ministries." Why does financial stewardship and sacrificial giving get a free pass, as it were? ***Why is it that some of you would insist that I'm sticking my nose into private and very personal matters when I talk about your habits of giving but not if I should talk about your habits of lying and whether or not you serve or how often you pray and read your Bible?***

My poor reasoning for not saying much about giving at Bridgeway was based, at least in part, on my fear that if I were to address the topic some might think I'm doing it in order to get a salary increase or to finance a new car or a new home or a nicer vacation. I have also been reluctant to say much because of the horrible reputation that many Christians and churches and ministries have for trying to squeeze as much money out of people as they possibly can.

We actually took steps at Bridgeway several years ago to address this matter and hopefully put to rest any fears or concerns that visitors might have about our intentions. We stopped passing the offering plate, or the offering basket in our case. And we simply placed offering boxes at the entrances to the auditorium.

Lest some of you who are new to Bridgeway think that I preach often on the subject of money and giving, I went back into my sermon archives and counted up the number of times I've addressed the topic. I preached one sermon in the series on Hebrews, one in the series on Proverbs, and one in the series on Philippians. Giving was the focus of these three sermons because that was the focus of a particular passage in each of those books.

Aside from that, I've only preached three additional times on giving, all from 2 Corinthians 8-9. So, if my math is up to speed, in the more than 9 years I've been here I've preached a total of ***six sermons on money and giving***. Unless I'm mistaken, that is substantially less than once a year.

My decision to address this topic today was also, in some measure, the result of prompting and prodding by both the Elders and Pastors at Bridgeway. A couple of months ago I brought to their attention some shocking results from our church-wide survey that we conducted last year. Together with an examination of giving records here at Bridgeway, we discovered that *one-third of our covenant members give nothing to the church. Nothing. I highly suspect that the percentage of non-givers among those of you who are not covenant members is even higher.*

The Teaching of Galatians 6

I would like to make a few, brief observations about what the apostle Paul says concerning giving here in Galatians 6.

First, Paul is explicitly clear and lacking in nuance when he says that it is the responsibility of all Christians to “share all good things” with those who teach the Word of God. No, this is *not* an appeal for you to give me anything directly or personally. It is Paul’s way of reaffirming the importance of Christian men and women supporting financially the work of the local church.

Most scholars believe Galatians was Paul’s very first letter, written somewhere around 47-48 a.d. At that time, in the first half of the first century, local churches were quite small. Few, if any, had financial requirements beyond that of supporting those who were full-time teachers and preachers. In today’s world the local church has grown immensely and its financial commitments have likewise kept pace. In January of 2018 the Elders will present to you the budget for the coming year. It will be approximately \$2.1 million dollars. It could easily have been substantially larger, as there are numerous ministry initiatives and missions opportunities that we would like to have supported, but the money isn’t there to do so.

Let me say one more thing about Galatians 6:6. Some of you have mistakenly believed that if you are not a covenant member of Bridgeway that none of these biblical texts applies to you. You have believed the lie that by remaining only one who attends Bridgeway you are under no obligation to support its ministries. This passage is a clear refutation of that notion. Paul is saying that if you are regularly fed and nourished spiritually at Bridgeway, you are responsible to give for the support of its ministries.

Second, in v. 9 Paul says, “let us not grow weary of doing good.” In context, the “doing” of “good” refers primarily to our financial generosity. In other words, giving is a good thing that over time becomes something of which we are prone to grow weary. Paul says, “Don’t let that happen! Don’t grow weary! Don’t be slack in your giving. Make financial generosity a regular part of your life, indeed a weekly or at least monthly commitment.”

Third, this notion of sowing and reaping is “a principle of order and consistency which is written into all life, material and moral” (Stott, 165). It is a principle that God has embedded in reality. If the farmer wants a harvest of wheat he must sow wheat. You can’t sow corn and expect to harvest lima beans. A good seed will produce a good crop and a bad seed a bad one. It is just as true in our spiritual lives. If you sow little you will reap little. If you sow into your “self” you will only reap for your “self”. The principle simply means that our actions have consequences. It is the principle of cause and consequence.

In this context the sowing and reaping refers to generosity in giving. This is how Paul used the same imagery in 2 Corinthians 9. When applied to the realm of how we use our money he has in mind the person who selfishly applies and makes use of his/her wealth for largely personal gain and pleasure:

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his own heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. . . 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. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way . . .” (2 Cor. 9:6-8, 10-11a).

This passage clearly points out that the reaping Paul has in mind, both here and in Galatians 6, is not for the purpose of building personal wealth for personal use. God will grant a bountiful harvest to the one who sows bountifully so

that you and I “may abound in every good work,” namely, the good work of being even more generous “in every way”!

Advocates of the prosperity gospel who argue that if you give a lot you’ll get a lot and be able finally to afford a significant upgrade in your standard of living cannot appeal to this passage or the one in Galatians 6. God provides abundantly to us so that we in turn can continue to provide abundantly to the work of the ministry of the local church. *The prosperity gospel says that you should give in order to get, and stops there. The biblical gospel says that you should give in order to get so that you might then be able to give even more.*

Paul’s language is designed to counteract the fear people experience when it comes to giving. They are terrified that if they give they will end up not having enough to meet their own needs. But God promises to supply abundantly those who give generously. *Paul wants the Corinthians to be free from the fear that generous giving will leave them impoverished.* His language is effusive and unmistakable: “God is able to make all grace abound to you” . . . God “will supply and multiply your seed” . . . and “you will be enriched in every way”.

So, does that mean the prosperity people were right after all? Well, not exactly. We must ask the question, *to what end or for what purpose or with what goal in mind does God cause the generous Christian steward to abound?* Simply put, why does God promise financial abundance to those who sow abundantly, that is, to those who cheerfully and freely give to others? Let’s allow Paul to speak for himself:

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, **you may abound in every good work**” (2 Cor. 9:8).

“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” (2 Cor. 9:10).

“You will be enriched in every way **to be generous in every way**, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God” (2 Cor. 9:11).

The point is that God will never stir your heart to give and then fail to supply you with resources to do so. But the idea that we should give so that God will enrich us personally with a view to increasing our comfort and convenience and purchasing power is foreign to Paul’s teaching. Personal wealth is here viewed, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a yet higher goal: continued generosity to those in need.

The principle at work in this divine scenario is that if you give generously now you will discover that God not only sustains your desire to give but will greatly increase your resources for yet more joyful and even more glorious giving in the future.

Fourth, look again at Galatians 6:7. Paul urges us to sow financially into the work of the ministry and reinforces his exhortation with these words: “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” What does this mean?

The Greek verb translated “mocked” is interesting. It literally means to “turn up the nose” at someone, hence to sneer at them and treat them with contempt. You and I may fool one another, but no one fools God. *The deception that people embrace is that they can do whatever they want for whatever motive they please and there will be no ultimate accounting for it.*

It may be that people in Galatia had been deceived into thinking that since they are now free in Christ they no longer have to be diligent to obey biblical commands. So, in the name of freedom they were using their wealth to sow into personal and fleshly endeavors while disobeying God’s exhortation and ignoring the kingdom of Christ. To say that “God is not mocked” is Paul’s way of saying that if you respond to God’s Word with scorn and disobedience you will eventually come to regret it. Here is how John Piper put it:

“You may be able to deceive yourself for a while that the sowing of selfishness is really going to yield more joy than sowing sacrifice for the sake of God’s Word. But you are dead wrong: ‘God is not mocked!’ Your disregard for his Word and your use of his trust fund for personal indulgences will come back upon you

head like an avalanche. . . And so Paul is saying in verses 6 and 7: We honor God and his Word when we take money, which might have bought us some comfort or security or prestige, and give it to support the ministry of the Word (domestically and on the frontiers). But if we are deceived and think that more happiness comes from spending that money on our private pleasures, then we mock God, and our greed will come crashing back upon us. We will reap what we sow” (John Piper).

Several Oft-asked Questions about Financial Stewardship in the Local Church

(1) Does the Bible require me to tithe? That is to say, does the Bible require Christians who live under the New Covenant to give at least and no more than 10% of their income? No. Giving under the New Covenant is to be *proportionate* giving, not percentage giving.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:12, that “if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have” (cf. also v. 11b where giving is “out of what you have”). He wrote much the same thing in 1 Corinthians 16:2, telling them that each “is to put something aside and store it up, *as he may prosper*.”

Now, is giving 10% a good thing? Absolutely. It’s a great place to start. For some of you, 10% is the bare minimum and God may have prospered you in such a way that 20% or 30% is more suitable. For others of you, at present, 5% may be all that you can give. The great tragedy in the American church is that surveys have revealed that the average American evangelical gives approximately 2.8% of his/her income to the work of the church. All I can say to that is, what a disgrace!

So, my point is that we should not be governed by percentages or held hostage to any particular amount. Paul said it clearly in 2 Corinthians 9:7, that “each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” A strict percentage is not the issue: giving abundantly out of the overflow of a heart that has been redeemed by the lavish giving of God in Christ is the issue.

(2) Am I free to give to other ministries and missionaries outside of my particular local church? Yes. Ann and I support two missionary endeavors beyond what we give to Bridgeway. But there is a priority that must be given to the local church. I say that because it is obvious from the NT that the local church has a unique and extraordinary place in God’s plan and therefore a unique and extraordinary claim on the giving of its people.

Don’t try to answer this question by appealing to rules and percentages. Answer it from your heart. Answer it by asking the question: *Is the local church the central and controlling expression of God’s kingdom and the primary way that the gospel is spread throughout the earth? The answer is Yes.*

Parachurch ministries and missionaries in foreign lands are wonderful and I believe essential to the work to which God has called us. But if the local church should fail, if it should fall short of what God has called it to be, then all other ministries will ultimately fail and become ineffective. As someone has rightly said, “The local church is the seedbed and the ultimate source for all other ministries.” If it fails, so do they.

My suggestion to you is this. Hear me well, it is a suggestion, not a divine and biblical rule. Start your giving with the local church. Then, as God has prospered you, give over and above that amount to other ministries.

(3) Should I give to God from my first-fruits or out of the leftovers of what I earn? Again, this is my suggestion, not a divine rule. But listen to what I have to say and then ask God if it resonates in your heart. I believe that God should always receive the first-fruits of our labor, not the left-overs. Ann and I have made a commitment to this in that the first thing we do is set aside our giving to the local church and then pay our bills or purchase something we want. If after giving to the church we lack money for additional luxuries, we dial down our standard of living. I fear most professing Christians spend and use their money for any number of purposes and then, if there is anything left over, they give to God. If that seems right to you, ok. But I would encourage you to take the matter to prayer and listen to the Spirit’s voice.

Conclusion

“Sam, why are you speaking to us today like this? What is your motivation?” I’ll answer that with as much honesty and integrity as I can muster. I’m speaking to you like this because ***I care about the welfare of your soul now and for eternity.*** I speak like this because ***what you do with your money is a reflection of what you do with Christ and the gospel. A person simply cannot say that he/she is a Christian and continue to sow into the flesh and into this world.***

Just as the NT knows nothing of an unbaptized Christian or a church-less Christian, so also the NT knows nothing of a Christian who does not give faithfully and generously to the work of God. ***Faithful, generous stewardship of one’s financial resources in the support of the life and ministry of the local church is as much a mark of a true Christian as is love for one’s neighbor and sharing the gospel with an unbeliever.***

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. And if you are wondering if there is any connection between Christmas and our glorious privilege of sowing financially into the expansion of God’s kingdom, the answer is yes. One need only consider how Paul sought to motivate and encourage the Christians in Corinth to be generous givers. Here is what he said:

“But as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you – see that you excel in this act of grace [i.e., this act of generous giving] also. . . For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:7, 9).

His point is simple: we give only because God has so generously and graciously given all good things to us in the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ.