

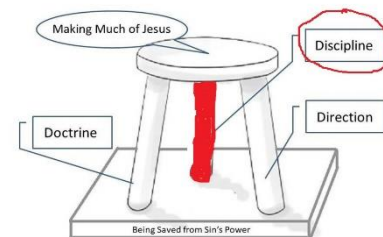
## NOW WHAT? Back to the Basics

### DISCIPLINE – Part 4 The Exercise of Giving

#### Introduction

Again, we recall the aim of these messages: What would we teach a new Christian? Now that a person has professed Christ, what is next? We have said that they need to be taught spiritual warfare – the war between the flesh and the Spirit; and how to kill sin in their lives. We have said that there are categories of truth that they should know and embrace. We have said that there are exercises to strengthen their Christian life, exercises like prayer, Bible nourishment, meeting with other Christians, etc. The fourth exercise that we need to know as new believers is the exercise of giving.

#### Now What?



#### The Biblical Principle

Jesus spoke specifically about this in a parable, near the end of his earthly ministry. Let's read it in Matthew 25:14–30 (ESV):

<sup>14</sup> "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup> He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. <sup>17</sup> So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup> But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup> Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>22</sup> And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>24</sup> He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup> But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? <sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. <sup>30</sup> And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Our English word *talent* refers to a person's innate ability or special gifts from God. In Greek, the word *talanton*, which is certainly the basis of our word talent, meant a measuring unit of weight, often

of money, such as a talent of gold or silver. But in Jesus's parable, he was clearly using this monetary word *talent* metaphorically to imply any God-given ability, gift, resource, etc. So let us see what Jesus wants to see:

- a) A master is leaving and gives his 3 servants talents (money) to invest.
- b) To one he gives five talents, to one he gives two talents, and to one he gives one talent. All we are told is that the master apportioned the amounts "to each according to his ability".
- c) Two of the servants wisely invested it. That pleased the master on his return.
- d) The third servant buried his talent. The master called him evil and lazy.

Jesus is obviously the Master who went away and returned, in the story. In this parable, Jesus clearly wants us to ponder the unfaithful servant. He doesn't give us many specifics, but let's consider one possible reason why the one-talent servant didn't invest his talent. Notice the words of this servant:

*"He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.'" (Matthew 25:24–25, ESV)*

This man misjudged the Master. Thinking that he was without mercy and severe he acted out of fear and his fear paralyzed him. He may have been thinking, "Nothing I can do will please such a omnipotent, holy God." Or, he may have been thinking, "This Master is so powerful and sovereign, he can get a return without my meager effort." I've often thought, humorously, that this servant was a hyper-Calvinist. He thought, "God can create things where there's no material, so he doesn't need me. You've heard it, haven't you:

- a. If God is sovereign why should I pray?
- b. If God is sovereign why should I go?
- c. If God is sovereign why should I give?
- d. If God is sovereign he can use someone else.
- e. If God is sovereign he can do it without me.

How does Jesus respond to this hyper-Calvinism? *"So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 25:28–30, ESV)

The point is that God had given to all of us time and opportunities. God has given to us both natural and supernatural abilities, by His Spirit. God has given to us possessions, wealth and earthly treasures. Everything is to be invested for the glory of God, to the pleasure of God, in the will of God. Let me apply this in 3 common areas of our lives.

## **APPLICATION**

### **1. Stewards of our Time.**

Hear God's Word: *"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil"* (Ephesians 5:15–16, ESV). The KJV translates the verb *exagorazō*, "redeeming" the time. It means to buy up or ransom. Time is seen by God in financial terms. The point is that we need to *rescue from loss* the time that remains in our life. We need to see this: if we don't manage time, time will naturally move into the waste bin. We need to intentionally rescue it and there is a sense of urgency. That is why Paul writes, "The days are evil." Time is short.

As Christians we look at the week ahead of us. There are 168 hours in a week. The question before us is this, "How many of those hours can we re-capture and use for the glory of God?" In secular work and business, they often have seminars on time management. The fact is that we cannot manage time, we can only manage ourselves. To the redeemed, God by His Spirit produces in us the fruit of self-control. So, the question today includes the question, "How will YOU use the time before you?" Obviously, we need to ask pointed questions:

1. How many of those hours will go un-redeemed in front of a TV or X-Box? ☐
2. How many of those hours will go un-redeemed in reading 3<sup>rd</sup> rate literature and listening to 3<sup>rd</sup> rate media? ☐
3. How many of those hours will go un-redeemed in amusements – mindless activities that gain no profit? ☐
4. How many of those hours will go un-redeemed in things that have no eternal value? ☐

The prayer of Moses in Psalm 90 is, *"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom"* (Psalm 90:12, ESV). Since the days are few, Moses calls upon us to pray that the Lord would enable us to be wise use of our time. Perhaps Jonathan Edwards had this in mind when he made this resolution, as a young man: "7. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life." The goal is that all our time should be used in a way that is pleasing to Christ. God has given us 168 hours this week. How much of it will be redeemed to serve His purposes and His delight? When you go home this afternoon, will God come to you before bed and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant?"

### **2. Stewards of our Personalities, Gifts and Abilities.**

The stewardship of our personalities, gifts and talents is based upon the principle that the Christian is established to do good works. Good works must accompany salvation: *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10, ESV);

The Bible is clear that when we are genuinely saved, everything changes. "Doing good" becomes a lifestyle. Good works do not justify us, but good works justify our profession of faith. James wrote, *"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him"* (James 2:14, ESV)?

In Paul's prayer to the Colossian believers he prayed: ". . . *we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: **bearing fruit in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God;*" (Colossians 1:9–10, ESV) [Emphasis mine].

One could rightly say that all that we are and all that we have is owned by God and we are called to use it for his glory. Even the very breath that I use to preach this message is a gift of God. My mouth is to be a vessel of his praise. My whole body is to be an instrument of righteousness. I agree with C.S. Lewis when he writes in 'Mere Christianity',

*"Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God. If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service, you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already."*

Are we taking the personality, gifts, talents, experiences, insights, etc. and using them as an investment in the kingdom of God.

### **3. Stewards of our Money**

OK, so here is where the Preacher starts talking about money! Well I'm in good company. The Bible finds no reluctance to talk about money. Jesus spoke on it often. Sixteen of his 38 parables relate to money. The New Testament makes it clear that having and gaining wealth is not a sin. Poverty is not valued in the Bible. However, I am confident that the character of a man or woman will be known by his or her use of their wealth. The Biblical principle on the management of our funds is found in Proverbs 3:9 (ESV): *Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce.*

Many of us have heard of the concept of tithing. It is a practice that is tried and tested and found to be of great value. To hold to a legalistic view of tithing from the Old Testament, in the strictest sense, one should give 25% of their income. However the New Testament teaches grace giving, not tithing. We see Proverbs 3 replayed in a couple of the most definitive chapters on giving, 2 Corinthians 8-9. There we read:

*"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."* (2 Corinthians 9:7, ESV)

My wife and I (and many in this church) would highly recommend that a good place to start in honoring the Lord with the "firstfruits of your produce" is to decide to give 10% of your increase to the Lord. You will never regret that decision. There is a direct promise of God for those who make such an honorable decision. He says, *"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 Corinthians 9:8, ESV).

**CONCLUSION**

The Gospel is way more than a ticket to heaven; more than fire insurance. We learned from our study in Titus that the Gospel, by its very nature transforms the way we live. The Gospel turns lovers of self, into lovers of God. One of the great evidences of conversion and exercises of converted people, is our godly attitude to our time, talents and treasures. The New Birth enables us to take the very same things that everyone has and use them for the glory of God -- use them to meet the needs of others. All of us need to pause and evaluate our lives if we are indeed united with Christ. Are we "redeeming the time"? Are we investing our lives in eternal things? Are we honoring the Lord with our money?

May God help us to do that.