

Heart of Worship: God, Tell Me How to Use My Money!

A sermon based on 2 Corinthians 9:6-12,15

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Little Billy was ecstatic. His mom has just returned from going to the mailbox, and on the top of the stack of bills and magazines was a card addressed to him. It was from Grandma and Grandpa! Sure, they were a few days late on his birthday, but little Billy didn't care. He tore open the envelope, opened the card, and his eyes opened wide as a crisp \$20 bill slipped out and onto the floor. As he reached down to grab the bill, thoughts of candy, Legos, and toys danced through his head.

Then he read the card. "Happiest of birthdays to you, Billy! Here's some money to either buy yourself some new clothes for school or to put into your college fund." A huge scowl formed on little Billy's face, and his mom, seeing the obvious look of disappointment, asked, "What's wrong, Honey?"

"Grandma and Grandpa gave me all this money for my birthday, but they won't let me spend it how I want to. I wish they wouldn't tell me how to spend MY money!"

Has that ever been you? Even today, do you like being told how to use your money? Friends, last week and today, we've been talking about the subject of stewardship. But, I'll admit, that's a bit of a broad, general topic. Last week, we were encouraged to be rich toward God, which, as it stands, is an abstract concept.

But today, as we continue our Heart of Worship sermon series, we've moved to the part of worship where we get the chance to practice this stewardship, with the offering...and that's not abstract.

You see, throughout his Word, God tells us how to use our money. God gives instructions (specific instructions) for how he wants you and me to use our money (which is really his money because everything is his, right?!). Paying taxes, providing for our families and their needs, even using money for our enjoyment...just a few of the God-pleasing ways we can be good stewards of the gift of money God has entrusted to our care.

But God tells us how he wants us to use our money here, too. Just look. What does he say? ***"Sow generously... Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give...[each of you should give], not reluctantly or under compulsion...God loves a cheerful giver."*** Or, in 1 Corinthians 16, Paul wrote, ***"Now about the collection for God's people...on the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with [your] income, saving it up..."***

Hearing those words, in your own words, how is God telling you to use your money? Generous giving. Decided/planned/intentional giving. Eager (not reluctant) giving. Cheerful giving. Regular giving. Quite a few different principles for us to keep in mind when it comes to this part of worship and of our lives as believers in Jesus.

Do you like what you're hearing?

During my vicar year (the year at Seminary when you go out and basically intern for another pastor to get practical training), Becky and I took part in Financial Peace University, a program created by financial guru Dave Ramsey. It's meant to teach you how to manage your finances better so you can work

towards and be able to live a debt-free life. It was great! I would highly recommend it to anyone who's looking for that kind of advice. And I have. But once, the response I got back was this: "I don't want someone else telling me how to use my money."

Sound like anything you've thought or said before? I mean, we got over that once we became adults, didn't we? I shouldn't need my parents hounding me about what I should do with my money, making sure I'm paying off the car and putting a little away each month for retirement. I don't need my friends questioning whether I'm spending too much on clothes (my kryptonite) and maybe leaving myself a little tight for this month's rent.

I hate how the government tells me I have to give this much out of my hard-earned paycheck to do my part in helping run this country. I hate when my spouse tells me we don't have the money to spend on this vacation...or restaurant...or house project that really needs to get done like yesterday. I hate when God tells me what to do with my money.

Does that sound like you? I know I've thought some of that before, well except the part about hating when God tells me what to do with my money. I wouldn't ever want to admit that. I'm sure you wouldn't, either.

But here, in his Word, he does tell us how...rather specifically. God says planned giving, but wait, let me grab my phone and check my account balance, so I know what I have, then I'll quick write a check before the offering plate comes around. God says give willingly and not reluctantly or under compulsion but I give because "I have to." God says cheerful giving, and I give with a forced smile on my face and scowl on my mind or worry in my heart because "I really needed that money for this" or "With that money, I could have been that much closer to getting that."

It's all about the attitude, isn't it? Not one of us would ever think to say, "God, don't tell me what to do with my money!" But if the giving is with a heart that's unwilling or reluctant, a heart that's not cheerful about it...if the giving isn't planned or regular, but, "Hey God, here's the leftovers," or, "God, I don't have anything for you," what does that giving say to God? Right, "God, don't tell me how to use my money!"

Now, you can say, "My giving, it's between me and God." And it is. So, look at it from God's perspective. Because he sees hearts. He sees that selfish, childish, immature, sinful nature living inside of you and me...that selfish, childish, immature, sinful nature that says, maybe not with words but with actions and attitudes, "God, don't tell me what to do with my money!" God sees that.

And God changes that. You see, God doesn't just give us these directives for giving because he wants to shame you and guilt you. He does it because he wants to transform you (and your thinking)...he wants to guide you.

And so his solution to your selfishness? Christ's selflessness.

That's how we could describe Christ's giving...that's how we could describe his attitude in giving....selfless. Listen to Paul's words to the Philippians, ***"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross."***

God didn't ask Jesus to give him a huge sum of money to pay off the debt of sin you and I have accrued. He required an even greater amount. He required Jesus' life.

You know, sometimes the encouragement people have when it comes to giving is to "give 'til it hurts." Well, God did. You can imagine how much it pained God to abandon his one and only Son (Jesus, who had done nothing wrong, who had been the only human to live the perfect, sinless life God demands)...you can imagine how much it pained God to abandon Jesus on the cross and allow him to suffer the entirety of God's wrath for every single sin committed by every single person throughout history.

But he did, and we know why. We know why he paid that massive price and gave his Son to die. Look at God's attitude. Verse 8 here says, **"God is able to make all grace abound to you."** His attitude is grace...abounding grace...generous grace. His attitude is love for you...full and free forgiveness to you because his Son paid the price and completely saved you through his life, death, and resurrection.

That's the attitude God's wants us to have when it comes to giving here, to him, and that's the attitude God works in us to have....abounding and generous.

You see, a couple times here in our verses, Paul uses that word "generous." But you notice he doesn't give a monetary amount. That's because generous giving in God's eyes doesn't have a specific amount attached. Generous giving, in God's eyes, instead stems from the attitude of our hearts...an attitude that puts God, not myself, first...an attitude that desires more than anything else to thank God for his indescribable gift, Jesus and our salvation...an attitude which gladly and eagerly says, "God, now tell me how to use my money!"

And he does. We've already discussed how God wants us to give...first-fruits/generous giving, planned giving, eager giving, cheerful giving, regular giving. And he lovingly provides the opportunity to give here...to use your money here, through your offering. After hearing the Word of God, having that news of God's grace and righteousness that are yours through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection...having that fresh in your ears and on your hearts, it's the best time to respond to God's love with your best gifts of thanks to him.

And when your attitude is right, it doesn't matter whether God would ask you to give all you have, like the widow whom Jesus and his disciples saw give two mites (probably less than a penny, but it was all she had)...that as her offering, or whether God would ask you to give a percentage of your money to him (like the tithe, or 10%, the Old Testament Israelites were required to give back to God). When your attitude is right, you're going to be generous and you're going to give your very best to God here.

And when you are, God is glorified and praised. Listen to what Paul says, **"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people, but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God."** Through your giving, through your offerings, God is praised. Those on the receiving end of your offerings, God's people here, people in our community, and people throughout the world, through your offerings they too worship and glorify God.

Now, if ever you are tempted to think, "I can't possibly do this. I can't possibly give as God tells me to," listen to what God promises, **"Whoever sows generously will also reap generously...God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work...Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also**

supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

God not only promises bountiful blessings to the cheerful, generous giver, but God supplies us with what we need so we are able to give. The same God who makes sure the farmer has seed for sowing ***"will also supply and increase your store of seed,"*** that is, the money and other material goods they need to be able to give.

My greatest desire should be to attain the great wealth of God's undeserved love and compassion in Jesus. I want to know the peace of his forgiveness. I want to enjoy the comfort of his never failing promises. I want to live with the unshakable hope of heaven.

Friends, that abundance of wealth, and so much more, is already ours through Christ. And now, God tells us how to use our money? And we're ok with that. And we're happy and eager to listen and obey and be generous and give to God our all and our best so we can joyfully say, ***"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"*** Amen.