

Keep on loving each other as brothers. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³ Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

⁴ Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. ⁵ Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” ⁶ So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (NIV 84)

Theme: Stewardship: Often it is a Matter of the Heart

Everyone is interested in money. If you watch any T.V. show aimed at mature adults it seems as if half of the commercials have to do with money of some sort. You see all sorts of commercials from investment companies, banks, and credit cards. Book after book and website after website are dedicated to giving advice on finances or helping you invest your money. You constantly want to know how much something costs; or how much someone gets paid for doing their particular line of work.

We are always interested in money. We always welcome the advice and knowledge of the experts. We may not always listen to them; because that is the way we are—but we are still concerned about what we have and what we could have. But what about what God has to say about the use of the money that he so graciously and generously provides for us? Then there are many people who aren't too interested in listening to him. “That's my money. I worked hard for it; and I can do with it what I want. All the church is concerned about is money. I don't think it's appropriate for the Pastor to be talking about it at all.” But it's not money the Church or God is after—it's the heart. A saying that some attribute to Luther, but it is more likely that someone else said it, is: “the last part of a person to be converted is his pocketbook.” It is hard for many people to give up their money—they hold on to it more than anything else. They believe in Christ as Lord

and Savior, they know the truths of God's Holy Word, and will defend them against attack; but when it comes time for the offering, they give themselves excuse after excuse and give just enough to ease their conscience a bit. Today we see that financial stewardship isn't so much a matter of finances as it is a matter of the heart.

I will admit—the economy still isn't the best. It's been a long and slow recovery up here—if you can call it a recovery at all. You may not have the job that you want—or you have to drive a long-ways to work. Maybe you don't get paid as much as you would like, or after the government its share through taxes, you don't really have all that much left. Maybe you've had some medical bills to pay for, have accumulated a lot of debt, or are still paying for past financial mistakes. The little extra money you do have you like to invest, but your investments aren't paying off as well as you would like. Let's face it times are some-what tough.

But they aren't that tough. No one here has gone without food because they can't afford it. We all have beds to sleep in and houses to live in. We all have things we don't need—like large t.v's, multiple vehicles, and smartphones. If you add up all the money you spend each month eating at restaurants, it would be one of your largest expenses. It may seem as if it's hard to make ends meet—that the necessities are barely getting paid. But what we consider necessities today—things like cable/satellite T.V., cell phone plans, or internet access, aren't really necessities. Just a generation a two ago most people didn't have these expenses, so they can't hardly be considered necessities!

So we see that the financial decisions we make are often a matter of the heart—what is important to you in your life. Examine your life—what is most important to you? I hope and pray that you say Christ and his Word. Good, that is what it should be, in keeping with the first commandment. But how does it actually play-out in your life? Does your happiness and that of your family win out? You like to have the newest and the best. You are always shopping; always getting something new. You see a commercial, or you see your friend with something, you read an article about a new product and you just have to get it and try it out for yourself, or simply so that you can brag to others that you have it.

What do your action say about your heart? It seems as if we are more concerned about money and our possessions than we are about God and the spread of his gospel. We focus so much on what we make and how we can make it, or what we can buy, or what and how we can save that God and his Word get pushed off to the side. He's not even second-fiddle, but gets pushed back further and further. It's as if we pay all of our bills for both now and in the future, and then we give to God the crumbs that are left, if we didn't already clean our plate. Or maybe it's about having new things; it's about having enough for the future. You're investments are down—will you have a good enough life if you retire early, or if you are already retired, can you live the life you want until you die? Perhaps you would like to be able to help out your kids when they go to college, and with college getting so expensive now, you need to do a lot of saving! Or maybe you aren't even thinking about retirement you just like some security. You want to have the peace of mind knowing that if you or a loved one would lose their job, or get sick, or if some other tragedy might happen, you have some security to fall back, you have enough finances to cover you for a while.

And I'm not advocating that you be foolish with your money—that you simply give it all away without thinking about it. I'm also not saying that it's wrong to save your money up for retirement, or to have some in the bank to fall back on in cases of emergency. The Lord gives to us more than we need now so that he can provide for us in the future when we can't work—so it is good to save our money. But, where is your heart at?

Where is your trust and assurance? We often rely on our own planning, on the nest egg we have built for ourselves, on our own gifts and abilities. We feel safe and secure because of what we have. But in reality it could all come crashing down at any moment. We could lose our jobs, or get sick and lose our ability to hold a job, or get sick and give all our money to doctors and hospitals, or lose all our money if the markets crash. And we know that, so we like to keep as much as possible for ourselves, just in case something would happen. And we keep back money from God, just so we can have a little extra.

But then we forget who exactly provides for us in the first place and that it is the Lord that blesses us with everything that we have.

So we look at what the Lord promises us in verses five and six of our text as the Writer to the Hebrews quotes from when the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land and face their enemies, **God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”**

The Lord promises to be with us and to take care of us. He promises that he won't leave us alone, making us fend for ourselves. But that he will always provide for us and take care of us. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about how the birds of the air always have enough food to eat and that the flowers of the field are always provided for. And if God provides for these two seemingly insignificant creatures, don't you think he will provide for you, who are the crown of his creation, and one of his own dear children?

The truth is, he always has provided for you. And he always will. No one has ever failed to make ends meet because they have given too much to the Church. No one has ever been so generous that they couldn't provide for their family. That is because God richly provides with those who give to him generously. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9, **Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously... 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.** The Lord promises to take care of you and provide for you. The more you give the more he will bless you, so that you will never be in need or fail to make ends meet. No matter how much you give, you will never struggle to make ends meet.

And in fact he challenges you to give too much to him. He says in Malachi 3, **Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.**

But there is another reason why you have nothing to be afraid of. As the Writer to the Hebrews quoted Psalm 118, **The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?** All your money may be stolen, you may lose all of your savings in the stock market, you may have to give it all to pay for medical bills. But in the end, they can do you no real damage. For the Lord is your helper. There is no reason to be afraid.

And in the end you will be in heaven—a place where there will be no need for any money. A perfect place with your Savior forever. So it doesn't matter what you have or what you don't have. It doesn't matter what you lose—because in the end you'll be in heaven, where there are no worries!

And you will only be there because of Christ who gave up the riches of heaven to come down to heaven to live as one of us. And while here he kept God's law perfectly—not once did he put money or the things of this world ahead of God. And he took our sins upon the cross, suffering through the eternal punishment that we deserved. The perfect life he lived he gave to us on the cross. So that the Lord looks at us and pure and innocent, as if we had obeyed all of his laws perfectly.

And then, three days he died he rose from the dead. And his resurrection is a proof and guarantee that we too will rise from the dead. And on the Last Day, through faith in him, we will join him—body and soul, in heaven forever. This salvation—the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life, are won for us by Christ and are ours only through faith in him. So Christ gives us the greatest gift of all. It is worth more than any amount of gold or silver. It can't be purchased or earned. It is a precious gift of God's grace. And it is one that he gives to us out of his love.

And this gift is the reason why we give to God. He doesn't want us to give to him reluctantly—because it's expected of us. But he wants us to give cheerfully—out of love and thanks to him in our heart. We give graciously to him because he first gave graciously to us. We give graciously to him because he gave us the greatest gift of all—our salvation. We give to him out of thanks for this gift. So we ask ourselves—what is our salvation worth? If we could, we would give it all back to God!

And we ask ourselves what is the salvation of others worth? Maybe it's your own child, or you neighbor—how much is their salvation worth? What about the person at the new mission down in Texas or across the world? How much is it worth to train pastors and teachers for the gospel ministry and to start new congregations and spread the gospel throughout the world? Again, we do everything we can to help the spread of the gospel so that more people would hear it, believe, and join us in heaven.

Everyone is interested in money. And here's the bottom line about money—it is certainly a gift from God, and as a gift from God we want to use it the best we can—to his glory. No amount of money will get you into heaven and you won't be able to take any of it with you. But Christ has won for you salvation—a gift he gives to you for free. So we willingly give first to Christ and we give him our best. The firstfruits is what the Lord deserves. We cheerfully give to him—generously as he gives to us. We give for the spread of the gospel so others may receive this free gift of salvation.

And we know that he will not leave us or forsake us. We will not suffer no matter how much we give to him. We simply put it in his hands and know that he is with us; and soon we'll be with him and all our fellow believers forever. Amen.