

# Sow Bountifully... Reap Bountifully

## Stewardship Emphasis Sunday

*2 Corinthians 9:6-15 Galatians 6:7-10 Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa November 2, 2008*

Over the past few weeks we've been hearing a lot about the need to "Spread the wealth around." We've also heard criticism that this concept, in practice, is a not-very-disguised form of socialism, perhaps even Marxism.

Well here's my personal contribution to this discussion. **While spreading the wealth around may indeed be some kind of form of socialism, it's also a very biblical principle.** Let me give you a few examples.

### *Deuteronomy 14:28-29*

Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.

### *Deuteronomy 15:7-8*

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

### *Matthew 25:37-40*

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" [He answered] them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

### *Luke 12:48*

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

And do I dare mention the passage from the same chapter, *Luke 12:33-34*?

Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Notice what comes first and what follows in this last verse. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Most of us think of it the other way around. Where our heart is, that's where we will put our treasure. But the Bible has it in reverse.

So on this Stewardship Emphasis Sunday let me commend this biblical principle to all of us. **Where we put our treasure – which includes the giving of our time, our talents, and our financial resources – our hearts will follow.**

This morning's Scripture passages from Galatians and 2 Corinthians commend another, yet somewhat different principle, that also relates to good stewardship. The Apostle Paul phrases it in agricultural terms, **"You will reap what you sow."**

This principle is simple and straightforward. Plant wheat, you get wheat; plant corn, you get corn. So if you want roses, for example, plant a rose bush, not crabgrass. Even modern psychology confirms this principle as it applies to people. **If you live your life a certain way, that's usually the kind of person you are going to end up becoming.**

Parents often use this line of thinking in rightfully warning their children not to lead destructive lives, because sooner or later they may end up causing harm to themselves and others. This applies equally to adults.

But the Apostle Paul's principle includes more than just a negative application. "You reap what you sow," also means that we can expect good consequences resulting from our good choices and actions. (That doesn't mean, of course, that bad things or unexpected consequences can't result. But generally, good results in good.)

We must remind ourselves often, therefore, that the choices we make each and every day concerning our actions and attitudes – and where we put our treasure – do matter, and they do make a difference. Paul encourages us in Galatians 6 with the words, **"do not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not give up."**

Paul comes at all of this from a different approach in his letter to the church he founded in the Greek city of Corinth. Using the same concept that we reap what we sow, he now applies this directly to the giving of our financial resources to help support the church's mission and ministry efforts. Paul tells the congregation that he is sending a delegation to take a collection of money to help support the overall Christian mission, especially in Jerusalem. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:5-8:

So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have

promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion.

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

The claim made is this last verse should prod each of us, on a personal level, to ask of ourselves: **Do I really have enough of everything so that I may share abundantly?** It goes back to the old argument of differentiating between our wants and our needs.

The Rev. Karl Travis, the new pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Fort Worth (where I used to serve as an associate pastor) gave an address at a meeting of Grace Presbytery earlier this year on the topic of stewardship. He wonderfully summarized many of the ways we should be addressing this issue in our congregations today.

One point addresses this difference between wants and needs. He writes, **“Stewardship is the church’s theological antidote to the chief idols of our age, namely, consumerism, materialism, and acquisition.”** This certainly speaks to the problem that so many of us find ourselves in with **mounting debt** (especially credit card debt), and how we budget our money.

Another point he made is that **disciplined and intentional generosity is a foundational spiritual discipline**. This goes back to those scripture passages I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon about God’s desire that we share with others, especially those in need. The biblical term often used is “giving alms.” The spiritual discipline of giving is yet another example of the biblical principle of where our treasure is, there our heart will be also.

And a third point is one that I think is also particularly important given our current economic concerns. **A proper biblical understanding of stewardship is not primarily about the church’s need to receive. Rather, it’s more about our individual need to give.**

Travis writes, “Far too many of our congregations take collections, not receive offerings. Do you hear the difference? In the first, something is pulled away in order to benefit the recipient [the church]. In the second, the recipient embraces a gift from those who freely furnish it.”

**This shifts the primary emphasis of stewardship away from simple fundraising once a year in order to meet the church budget, to an act of conscious, joyous, and disciplined generosity** – an act that soon becomes a daily way of life. It is out of gratitude and thanksgiving, then, not compulsion,

that we generously pledge and offer our time, our talents, and our financial resources.

**Good stewardship, therefore, is indeed a spiritual issue – both in how we respond to the goodness of God and to the call to minister to others.** As we reflect upon this spiritual discipline of giving, and make it an intentional part of our lifestyle, let us also remember Paul's words, "The one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

So maybe it's not such a bad idea to after all (from a theological standpoint) to, "Spread the wealth around."

Amen.