

Are We Robbing God?

Series on Stewardship

*"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." **Malachi 3:7-9***

The phrase "Will a man rob God?" gives the alternative sense of defrauding or cheating God. Plainly put – the people were cheating God.

The people were withholding their tithes and their contributions; they were neglecting caring for the poor; and they were so impudent and arrogant that they questioned how they had been robbing God!

And God says "You are cursed with a curse . . ." Pretty strong words. But then God does something that is unusual; He issues a challenge –

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse . . . and thereby put me to the test . . ."

So the question that I'll keep coming back to is, "How do we rob God?"

More than 2,350 verses in the Bible address God's way of handling money and possessions. Did you know that Jesus said more about stewardship than almost any other subject?

I want to offer now two truths about God that are foundational for our lives; bedrock for our faith, in this broad life concept that we call Stewardship.

- The first foundational Truth is: **God owns everything!**
*Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O LORD, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. **Wealth and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and at your discretion people are made great and given strength. 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 (NLT)***

Notice some key truths here:

- 1) EVERYTHING in the heavens and on earth belong to God
- 2) Wealth and honor come from God alone
- 3) Power and might are in His hand
- 4) At His discretion people are made great and given strength.

In Psalm 50:10-12, God states: "For every beast of the forest is **Mine**, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is **Mine**. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is **Mine**, and all it contains."

The question: How do we Rob God?

He already owns it all! And everything we have is a gift from God. We rob or cheat God when we buy into the lie that, "This is mine". Whether it is wealth, possessions, or money; it is not really mine, but God's.

If you are involved in one of the Home groups, you have come across the "Oikonomia Principle":

"All that we are and all that we have belongs to God. He has temporarily entrusted it to us to manage according to his wishes."

The surest way I know to live out the truth God owns everything is to continually confess it before God.

One way that we (Vilma and I) make this truth a reality in our lives is to prayerfully acknowledge God's reign and authority over our possessions, money, family, jobs . . . everything.

We are stewards of all that God says is His. And it's **not** just about money. We are stewards of our time, spouses, children, spiritual gifts, people and the gospel.

- The second foundational Truth is: **God is the Faithful Provider**

Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things (food, shelter, clothing) shall be given to you."

God is both predictable and unpredictable. God is totally predictable in His faithfulness to provide for our needs. What we cannot predict is HOW He will provide. Regardless of how He chooses to provide or our needs, God is completely reliable! (from Crown UK, page 14). But do we really believe that?

Proverbs 3:5-6 – Trust in the Lord . . .

If God owns it all and He is the provider, do you think He's more interested in how much we put into the offering or the attitude and condition of our hearts?

It's like the man who reaches into his pocket to grab a 1 Franc coin (or a dollar, pound, euro) to put into the offering. But by mistake he puts in a 100 Franc note! The man turns to his wife and says, I meant to only give 1 franc but by mistake I put in 100 Francs!!

His wife replies "Don't worry dear. God only credited you for the 1 Franc."

The question: How do we Rob God?

Remember the story of the woman who gave mere pennies? What did Jesus commend?

Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on. (Lk 21:1-4)

I know it's extreme, but when is the last time you gave away all you had to live on? That is what the poor widow did.

Years ago, as a new follower of Christ, I did just that. I had just gotten out of the military and I had received my final paycheck. I was at a mission's conference and there was a family heading out to the missions field. I sensed God urging me to give. So I did. I literally gave all I had! That was a huge step of faith, but I gave joyfully. And I sincerely believed that God would honor his promise to take care of my needs.

We rob God when we worry about things we can't really control, or we're anxious about something. Did you know that worry is a form of atheism?

Think about it. When we worry or we're anxious, we're buying into the lie that God is not reliable or faithful! In effect I'm saying, "God, you're not trustworthy. I don't rely on you.

Oh, and by the way . . . just a few days after I had given away all I had, I received a check in the mail. And it was for the exact amount I had given away! God provided!

And I am sure many of you can tell stories about how God provided for your needs. I think it is important to remember and celebrate God's faithful provision. Because it's in times of doubt that we can remember God's faithfulness and be encouraged.

Now don't get me wrong here. I'm not advocating recklessness or being unwise with what God has entrusted to us.

But I am declaring that God is faithful and reliable and He will meet our needs; He is trustworthy.

Here are three reasons why how we perceive money and possessions are so critical (From Crown UK Student Manual):

1. How we handle money impacts our fellowship with God

Jesus equates how we handle money with the quality of our spiritual life. --"and if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?" (Lk 16:11). The true riches in life are a close relationship with Christ.

The pastor of our church back in Atlanta says this: "I think there is a direct relationship between being [Christ-centered] and what is happening in stewardship".

If we handle what God has entrusted to us according to the principles of Scripture, we enjoy closer fellowship with Christ. The parable of the talents demonstrates this as the master congratulates the servant who managed his money faithfully: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness." (Matt 25:21) We can enter into the joy of a more intimate relationship with God as we handle possessions, money and wealth His way.

But here is a thought provoking thought – "God doesn't need our money to accomplish His purposes?"

Two men were shipwrecked near an island. When they landed ashore, one of them began screaming and yelling, "We're going to die! We're going to die! There's no food! No water! We're going to die!"

The second man leaned calmly against a palm tree.

When the first man saw how calm his friend was, he went crazy and shouted, "Don't you understand?! We're going to die!"

Undisturbed, the second man replied "You don't understand; I make \$100,000 a week".

Dumbfounded, the first man looked at him and asked, "What difference does that make? We're on an island with no food and no water! We're going to DIE!!!"

The second man answered, "You just don't get it. I make \$100,000 a week and I tithe 10 percent every week. Wherever I am, my pastor will be sure to find me!"

NB: We don't earn God's love or favor through tithing. We don't give in order to "get". The Bible has much to say about generosity, and here are just a couple of verses:

Proverbs 3: 9-10 Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 The point is this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his 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.

2. Money and possessions compete with the Lord for first place in our lives

Money is a primary competitor with Christ for our affection. Jesus tells us we must choose to serve only one of these two masters. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (Matt 6:24). We use money, but it is impossible for us to serve money and still serve and love God.

During the crusades of the 12th century, the Crusaders hired mercenaries to fight for them. Because it was a religious war, the mercenaries were baptized before fighting. Before going under the water, the soldiers would take their swords and hold them up out of the water to symbolize that Jesus Christ was not in control of their weapons. The claimed freedom to use their weapons in any way they wished.

Unfortunately, this illustrates the way many people today handle their money as they hold their wallet or purse 'out of the water'. Their attitude is, "God, you may be Lord of my entire life EXCEPT in the area of money – I am perfectly capable of handling that myself!"

How do we rob God? With an attitude that says, "My money is mine; what I earn from my hard work is mine." We rob God when we refuse to completely surrender everything -- our wealth, possessions and money to Him.

3. God wants us to be money-smart

Jesus also talked about money so much because He knew that money problems would be a challenge for all of us. Because He loves and cares for us so deeply, He wanted to equip us to make the wisest possible decisions.

And this is why we have launched the Crown Financial study. So that we could begin to have a Biblical view of money, possessions and wealth. So that we, as a body of believer, might begin to understand what it means to be Stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.

What about you? What is the condition of your heart when it comes to worshiping God with the fruits of your life? When you give, are you doing it out of obligation— a sense of duty—or from a heart overflowing with joy and gratitude for what God has given you? Consider carefully what Jesus said: Worship that doesn't come from the heart is just religious activity.

Applications (Putting truth into practice and making it vibrant!):

1. Memorize 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 and meditate on it for the next 30 days.
2. When you tithe, whether by putting money in the offering on Sunday or online through your bank, stop and acknowledge God's Kingship, His provision. Make your act of tithing an act of worship.

Curt Tyler
Westlake Church in Nyon, Switzerland