

### *Being Rich toward God*

**1 Timothy 6:6-10** Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; <sup>7</sup> for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; <sup>8</sup> but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. <sup>9</sup> But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

**Luke 12:15-21** And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." <sup>16</sup> Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. <sup>17</sup> And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup> Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' <sup>21</sup> So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

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Jack Benny, a comedian from the past, used to joke about his stinginess. In one of his routines a mugger holds him up, shoves the cold steel of a gun barrel into his back, and commands with a shrill voice: "Your money or your life!" Silence. The mugger repeats his line. Silence. Repeats again! Jack finally blurts out: "I'm thinking it over" This line is funny because it contains so much truth. We can become so attached to money and material things... wanting more... bigger... fancier... that it seems as important as our very lives!

Our text teaches a vital lesson on the subject of greed. *"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions."* Jesus goes on to tell the story of an extremely successful and wealthy farmer. His fields produce abundant crops. He loves his work; he's energized by it; everything he does seems to turn to gold! We aren't told what opportunities he had to develop his spiritual life, but apparently he considered doing bigger and bigger deals a more valuable, a more urgent use of his time and energy than seeking God! It's an easy pattern to fall into, isn't it?

The farmer's fields continued to produce spectacularly! His operation grew beyond his wildest dreams. Eventually, he had to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to hold all his grain and goods! Bursting with satisfaction, he exclaimed, "I've got tons of money in the bank; my future is secure; now I'll eat, drink and be merry!"

Then God said, "You fool!" This is shocking! A fool? At his funeral, everyone said, "He was a genius, a shrewd business man, a wise investor!" Notice that the world looks at things in a much different way than God does. Our Lord goes on to say, *"You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you!"* What good did his barn full of grains and goods do him then? What good did all his business deals do? He invested prime time and energy in storing up mountains of riches, but he had invested nothing in what mattered the most, and he stood before God empty-handed. The hearse doesn't have a luggage rack!

Jesus concluded, *"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but isn't rich toward God."* So here is what's important: we need to be rich toward God! What does that mean? It simply means to invest our lives in a relationship with God! We spend so much time and money

investing in education, work, friends, families, pleasures, and we may be rich in these things, but are we rich toward God? A disciple, one who is learning to be more like Jesus, needs to learn to invest their life in loving God and meeting the needs of others.

An important way for us to be rich toward God is through our faithful giving. To be rich toward God in our giving, we need to ask: "What is God asking me to give?" Giving one tenth or tithing was the amount given in both the Old and New Testaments. However, Jesus taught us to move beyond blind compliance with the letter of the law - to seeking to live in harmony with the spirit of the law. As New Covenant Christians, what's an appropriate percentage of our income to give? What portion would show our gratitude for who God is and what God has done for us? We aren't commanded to tithe, but, just as Jesus encouraged the Pharisees to continue their tithing (Matthew 23:23), we're encouraged to use the tithe as a guide for our giving. It's important for us to remember that the amount or percentage that we give is less important than our attitudes and motives for giving. God is honored even if we give less than the tithe - if we give our gifts cheerfully and faithfully. Then, through the working of the Holy Spirit, we can grow in our giving so that we not only become tithers, but even go beyond it.

Embedded within the principle of tithing are principles of giving found in Scripture. These help us to be rich toward God. First, we're rich toward God when we give to God first. Exodus 23:19: "*Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.*" Today, in a non-agricultural society, rather than bringing in our crops, we give from the firstfruits of our income. We're to honor our commitment to God **before** buying the things we desire. God doesn't appreciate leftovers. Our greediness can cause us to spend everything and be rich in possessions, and not have any left over to give. Budget the money to build God's Kingdom FIRST – on earth as it is in heaven. How much should be budgeted? For an answer to that question, we need to understand that the tithe acts as a benchmark for us. Although tithing isn't commanded in the New Testament, tithing is a healthy goal. In 1 Corinthians 16:2 the Apostle Paul wrote: "*On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income . . .*" Jesus said in Luke 12:48: "*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.*" The greater the income you have, the more you're expected to give!

Second, we're rich toward God when we give generously to God's work.. 2 Corinthians 9:11: "*You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.*" You might reason: "I've worked up to tithing, and now I can coast!" Not really! Ten percent is not the goal. Giving generously is the goal! In Ephesians 4:28 Paul wrote: "*He... must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need!*"

The reason you have what you have is not to experience a higher standard of living, not to buy a bigger house and bigger cars, but to **give generously**! God doesn't prosper your business so that you can buy newer furniture, but so that you can have a greater impact on spreading the Gospel! When we get a raise, we normally think, "Now I can afford that 50" TV." We ought to think differently! A raise, now I can **give more**! In other words, having a \$100,000 salary does not have to be accompanied by a \$100,000 lifestyle. We need to think as disciples and ask ourselves, "How do I honor God by my lifestyle and my giving? How can I be rich toward God?"

What is a generous percentage of your income? If you live in poverty, three percent may be generous; if you are wealthy, 30 percent may not be generous. If our mortgage payments, or any other payments, are so high we can't afford to give generously, we may need to downsize!

Now, you should know that the Bible is not teaching us not to invest or prepare for emergencies and retirement, etc. We are to plan wisely for the future. Nor, is the Bible teaching that we can't have

luxuries. I Timothy 6:17, 18: “*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*” We need to keep a balance. We're to enjoy the pleasures of life as gifts from God and to be generous in giving.

Third, we're rich toward God when we give cheerfully, “... *for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Corinthians 9:7). The Greek here is *hilaros*. God loves a hilarious giver! The church should never make people feel guilty about giving. We give under God's grace - and grace never threatens or condemns. The principles of giving generously and cheerfully are beautifully illustrated in the following story:

Two brothers shared a field and a mill, and each night they evenly divided the grain they had ground together during the day. One brother lived alone; the other had a wife and large family. The single brother started thinking, “It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I only have myself to care for and my brother has children to feed.” So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary to see that he was never without.

The married brother said to himself one day, “It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do when he is old?” So every night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished each morning.

When we generously give our firstfruits to God with a proper attitude, we become rich toward God. Well, here's the bottom line: God is pleased when we give our gifts from loving and thankful hearts. God wants us to give cheerfully and faithfully. The tithe acts as a Biblical benchmark and, if need be, an encouragement for us to grow in our giving.

Very few of us give really generously. Very few of us obey God in any area as we should: Bible study, prayer, spiritual gifts, loving others – yet God still loves us. Even if you didn't give a cent, God wouldn't love you any less. Paul wrote in Romans 5:8, “*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” Christ didn't die because we were good. Christ died because we are sinners.

As we grow as disciples, as we understand more and more what God has done for us in Christ, as we see the infinite love of God shown to us, we're prompted by the Holy Spirit to respond by sharing the resources that God has given us to help those in need. We give because it's a tangible expression of the depth of our relationship with God. It illustrates our maturity as disciples. It shows our understanding of what's really important in life. In so doing, we're rich toward God! Amen.