PART FOUR

WEALTH AND STEWARDSHIP

I. WHAT’S WRONG WITH BEING WEALTHY? Nothing. Wealth too is a gift given by God. When used properly, wealth not only provides security for us and our family, but is also shared with those in need. Paul cautions us not to become too possessive of wealth. Rather, we need to realize that “…we brought nothing into the world, so … we can take nothing out of it” (1 Timothy 6:7).

A. Although intended as a gift and blessing, wealth often comes between us and God. When wealth becomes too important to us, it hardens our hearts, prevents us from understanding our steward obligations in God’s world, and leads to spiritual poverty. If we concentrate on heavenly treasures, our earthly treasures will have a whole different meaning for us. “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” (1 Timothy 6:9). Jesus warns “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasurers in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-20). Following the telling of Simon’s baptism (Acts 8:9-13), Luke warns against trying to purchase God’s gifts with money. Rather, we are to have a right heart before God (Acts 8:20-22).

B. Jesus spoke frequently about wealth and warned us about letting wealth become our God: “…it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:23-24). Why do we focus so much on sins, especially sexual sins, when Jesus spoke more frequently about the problems that wealth causes to the relationship between God and humankind?
1. Jesus said “no slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Luke 16:13).

2. Jesus warned us about greed and the dangers of being preoccupied with possessions (Luke 12:15). In the parable of the rich man and his barns, we see a person preoccupied with himself and his wealth: “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?’ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20-21). Why does God call the man a fool? One answer is that ample storage already exists — in the mouths of the poor and needy! Unfortunately, the fool’s vision was myopic and his interest centered upon himself.

3. Paul says that “For the love of money is at the 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” (1 Timothy 6:10). The writer of Hebrews urges us to keep free from the love of money, and be content with what we have (Hebrews 13:5).

II. WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH OUR WEALTH? If we believe that wealth is a gift from God, then, we must use this gift in ways that are pleasing to God. “As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19). The good works we do are not done to earn salvation; rather, we are justified by faith apart from works (Romans 3:28). Our works should be done knowingly and with grateful hearts in response to God’s most amazing gift — salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection. This gift is given to us as a blessing so that we will be free to be a blessing to others — we are blessed to be a blessing.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can wealth be both a blessing (gift from God) and a curse?

2. If wealth is a gift from God, are the poor cursed by God?

3. Why did Jesus spend so much time talking about wealth?

4. What are we to do with our wealth? What do we actually do with it?

5. How can our giving inspire generosity in others?

6. Can our giving also condemn us?

7. Is it easier to be generous to someone we know will return our generosity?

8. If we give a gift to someone we know will repay us, have we really made a gift?