

## Proverbs 31:10-21 and Galatians 6:4-10

### Generous Working for Generous Living

Good morning – finance, money, filthy lucre – the subject ministers hate to talk about, and perhaps the subject congregations don't want to hear about. So, why bring it up.

Because it is important.

The old adage that 'money makes the world go round' has a ring of truth to it – money is predominantly the measure of wealth and the means for exchange of goods and services in the world. It is this same world that the church operates and therefore we have a need to operate in the world of money and exchange.

But what does the Bible have to say about it – quite a lot actually

1 Corinthians 10:26

<sup>26</sup> for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

God is the source of ALL wealth

Proverbs 10:22

<sup>22</sup> The blessing of the LORD brings wealth,  
without painful toil for it.

Prosperity is God's reward to righteousness

Jeremiah 12:1-2

You are always righteous, LORD,  
when I bring a case before you.

Yet I would speak with you about your justice:

Why does the way of the wicked prosper?

Why do all the faithless live at ease?

<sup>2</sup> You have planted them, and they have taken root;  
they grow and bear fruit.

You are always on their lips  
but far from their hearts.

The wicked can also be wealthy

Scripture talks about unhealthy relationships to wealth – hoarding is, becoming greedy and falling into sin, putting trust in wealth and proud because of it.

But the Bible also speaks of using wealth to help the poor; to bring about peace, and it gives us examples of the wealthy – Abraham, Isaac, Esau, Laban, Jacob, David, Solomon, Job,

Joseph of Arimathea; as well as the poor – Lot, Naomi and Ruth, Lazarus, and Paul at times and of course Jesus who said

Matthew 8:20

<sup>20</sup>“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

And so, the Bible has plenty to say about money and wealth or the lack of it... but what of today's passages – what about the stewardship of what we have individually and as church.

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I want to consider the stewardship of finance through the lens of the ‘Wife of Noble Character’ – a personification of wisdom from the book of Proverbs. The passage which goes on for a further 10 verses is a treatise, persuasive words for a young man to seek a good wife. But from the verses we hear what the characteristics of this noble wife are – where her worth and her strength lie. In essence this passage gives us a summary of all wisdom itself found in Proverbs...

In 10-12 we hear that her character is valuable – valuable to her family and her husband. But what is value - value is not found in individuality but rather in relationship with others. The value of our souls, our very being in isolation is worthless – it is only in relation to others we find value in ourselves... and the same goes for material things. In an of themselves they have no value... only in relations to the world and our relationships in it do the materials things of this life have value and meaning.

But where does this woman gain her wealth – in vv.13-19 she works with wool and she trades, takes her earnings and invests in a field and plants a vineyard. She is industrious, working the hours needed, doing what is needed – holding the material being spun into thread on the spindle.

But for what, what is the purpose of this industriousness – yes, we have heard she is the noble wife, of good character – good you could say in industry and in household management – but she also has care of the needy...

<sup>20</sup> She **opens her arms to the poor**  
**and extends her hands to the needy.**

... and provision at times of hardship.

<sup>21</sup> **When it snows, she has no fear for her household;**  
for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

What are the lessons for us today – indeed, can we draw lessons from a reading that some may consider outdated, perhaps sexist.

The NIV Application Commentary says:

‘The practical counsel of Proverbs has helped generations of believers get their heads out of the clouds and down to the business of living as though the world really is inhabited by other people, a welcome antidote to the self-indulgent values of contemporary life.’

... an antidote to the self-indulgent values of contemporary life.

Is that what we need to do in our lives?

Examine ourselves, and if we do will we find ourselves tainted by the world and its relationship to money and finance?

Our passage from Proverbs is not only advice for a woman of a household, but for all – it is about good stewardship at home, at the workplace and of what resources you do have.

If we take another line from Proverbs, from 8.35 it says...

*For those who find me [wisdom] find life  
and receive favour from the LORD.*

This ideal woman is an example – an example of wisdom, learn from her and receive the Lord’s favour.

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And so, to the passage from Galatians...

The few verses before our reading talks about

- being caught in sin,
- that there should be restoration,
- that we should seek to carry one another’s burdens, and...
- not thinking too highly of ourselves – for if we do, we deceive ourselves.

Then we get to the first line of our reading ...

*<sup>4</sup>Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, <sup>5</sup>for each one should carry their own load*

On first reading this could be a call to personal individualism – personal responsibility – that we are only responsible to God. And in this understanding, it would mean that a pastor would have no rights to enquire about someone’s past, their present or future plans – that religion is exclusively a private matter, that it is between the individual and God.

But this is a wrong reading... it ignores the wider context that where there is personal responsibility before God, there is also the context of mutual accountability!!

This fights against the major western feature of life – individualism.

Mutual accountability forces us to abandon the sense of aloneness and forces us to reach out to others – it makes us say ‘I am truly your neighbour and therefore I must be neighbourly’.

As church we are called to mutual accountability and to the call of God on our lives – to serve Him and serve His people.

This series on stewardship is all about that – it is about giving of ourselves – time, our talents and gifts... and our money for God, for His kingdom and glory – for the bride of Christ – His church – and to serve into the community.

And so, to the verse about finance...

*Nevertheless, **the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.***

This exhortation is neither a suggestion nor a commandment but rather a broad principle applied by Paul.

John Stott points out two potential dangers of this principle – one for the minister and the other for the congregation.

Financially – Paul is not suggesting that teacher / ministers could demand salaries and benefits but rather would expect their needs be taken care of. The directive is for the congregation to obey – not the minister to demand. Also, there is a potential for ministers who live off the financial benefit of others for laziness or neglectfulness – I would hope I am neither and would never be so.

In the case of the congregation abuse could take several shades – paying for ministry can lead to the idea that ‘They pay the piper, so they must be allowed to call the tune’. It also may lead to feelings over how the minister spends his or her money – judgement made on what they buy or own.

A final area of abuse could be a sense of arrival - namely that we’ve met our obligations (not that GMC have) to the minister’s costs so all is good, and other ministries of the church are neglected. Perhaps though here it has been the other way round as money is easily given to projects but less to general giving.

Now why do I mention these issues – because the subject of money is a sensitive one, but I don’t think it should be.

As I mentioned near the beginning – God is the source of all we have, and so giving for His work is just giving what is his already.

The final verses speak to us about the reasons of sound, sacrificial giving

<sup>7</sup>Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows’ <sup>8</sup>**Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.**

Whoever sows to please their flesh – where are you putting your money?

Are you a good steward like the noble wife, or are there areas of expenditure that do not really honour yourself or God?

Sure, we will spend on entertainment, on relaxation and holidays – I talked last week about the need for rest, but at heart of what I'm saying here is our motivation...

- why do we spend on what we spend?
- where is God in it? Where is God in our life outside of these walls?

And what about sowing to please the spirit – our time, our talents and yes, our money, are they really sowed for the glory of God?

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And of course, if we sow, and sow generously according to our ability, there will be harvest...

<sup>9</sup>Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, **as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**

Note the words – especially to those who belong to the family of believers. In other words, the church.

Sure, there are plenty of places we can give – medical charities, childrens charities, suicide charities, natural disaster appeals – the list could go on... but where does the giving to the work of the church, the Lord's people come on your list.

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I must of course add this caveat - and that is about a person's ability to give to.

The ratio of our giving of time, of talent and gifts, and of our money can change over our lifetime – all affected by family life, age, work and income.

My giving to church during my training, as I took on student loans to get through my training for ministry, was reduced. But now I am in post, on a stipend it has greatly increased... as I balance my giving to our church here at GMC and our four Compassion children.

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SO, when did you last re-evaluate your giving?

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Remember – giving should be with a joyful heart and be out of a generous heart.

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If you have nothing to give because financially life is hard at the moment – that’s all good, remember the noble wife ensured good stewardship at home. So, if you have nothing to give, then as we take an offering and the plate passes, rededicate yourself to serving Christ – just give Him yourself.

I truly believe that as we seek God, seek him daily in our lives, come together in friendship at this church – generously and genuinely offer friendship to the new folk among us, and be the welcoming church God desires us to be – we will be blessed by him... blessed in growth of our faith, blessed in the resource of peoples and their gifts, and blessed in the financial resources to do what God is calling this church to be...

I will leave you with the words of St. Paul to the Corinthian church from The Message paraphrase Bible

2 Corinthians 9:7 The Message

*6-7 Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.*