

WISE INVESTING

GALATIANS 6:6-10

GOD GIVES ALL HIS CHILDREN GIFTS, TALENTS, AND ALL SORTS OF RESOURCES. HE EXPECTS US TO INVEST THEM WISELY.

I. INVESTING IN THE PASTOR (VS 6)

SINCE WE USUALLY GET WHAT WE PAY FOR, IT BENEFITS CHURCHES TO INVEST IN A GOOD PASTOR.

- A. CHURCH LEADERSHIP
- B. PAID CLERGY

II. INVESTING GOD'S RESOURCES (VS 7-10)

WE DEMONSTRATE OUR FAITH BY THE WAY WE INVEST WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN US.

- A. GOD'S INVESTMENT LAW (7)
- B. INVESTMENT OPTIONS (8)
- C. INVESTMENT MATURITY (9)
- D. INVESTMENT STRATEGY (10)

Wise Investing

Galatians 6:6-10

For the last couple of weeks, we have been trying to understand what our lives should look like if we are truly living free in Christ. We have said that living free in Christ has nothing to do with self-indulgence or self-centered behavior. In fact that is exactly what Christ freed us from. We are free from the bondage of sin, Satan, death, fear, and our own self-destructive and rebellious behavior. In other words, we are free to become the men and women God created us to be. In other words, we are now free to pursue holiness and free to become more like our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the ways Jesus gave us to evaluate if we are living free or living enslaved to the ideas of this world is to examine how we use our money and other resources. Jesus said you can tell where a person's heart is by what they value and spend their time, money and energy on.

Even in church we often get confused where our treasures and hearts are. Let me give you an example from our church. A couple of years back, we were a little behind our budget. And so in order to get the congregation to see the need and to encourage them to give a little more, I approached them like this, "Brothers and Sisters, we have kind of fallen behind in our giving. This morning, I hope we can find it in our hearts to give a little more. As an added incentive, in honor of the person who gives the most, they will be able to choose the hymn of their choice."

As it turned out, there was a group of women who pooled their money together to make the largest offering. The next Sunday I called them up to the front and said, "You ladies are amazing. That was a very generous gift. Now, as I promised, pick the hymn of your choice. They looked at each other, giggled a little, pointed right at Leo and said, "We choose him!"

I never thought of auctioning off Leo to raise money for the church, but I'm sure if I did, we could raise a lot of money.

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If you have been attending here any length of time, I'm sure you are aware that we don't talk much about money or giving. God has provided for us in the past and I'm sure He will continue to provide for us in the future. We really do believe that giving is between each person and God. Having said that, Jesus has a lot to say about how we use our money, time, energy, and all our resources. Paul addresses that theme in this morning's text. The main idea is this. **GOD GIVES ALL HIS CHILDREN GIFTS, TALENTS, AND ALL SORTS OF RESOURCES. HE EXPECTS US TO INVEST THEM WISELY.**

In other words, everything we have, everything we are, and everything we will ever have or become is a direct gift from God. We think that when we work hard, save our money, and buy things, ... those things are our personal possessions. And further, we feel that since they are our possessions, we can do whatever we want with them. But you see that once again enslaves us to the world and our own self-indulgent lust. Paul wants the Galatians to know that living free means that we are free to participate in the community life of the church. In verse 6, Paul reminds them to invest in the pastor. For Paul, investing in a good pastor is a great investment. **SINCE WE USUALLY GET WHAT WE PAY FOR, IT BENEFITS CHURCHES TO INVEST IN A GOOD PASTOR.** This concept is going to be a little confusing because of our ideas of what a pastor is or what she ought to be.

Let's take a moment to describe the New Testament notion of Church Leadership. In many Christian denominations, the pastor is set up to be the leader of his local church. In fact in the high church system, there are ordained pastors to be the head of the local church. Over the local pastors are regional pastors, and in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and other churches, there is one head pastor who rules over all the pastors. In these systems, the pastor becomes the priest, prophet, and king of the church.

In other Christian models of a pastor, the pastor is the spiritual leader of the church. She preaches and teaches, counsels, baptizes, celebrates communion, marries, and buries the congregation members.

Even in the least authoritative ideas of a pastor, the local church looks to the pastor to be the leader of the church. And in my opinion, that is why there is so much argumentation over the issue of women's ordination.

I have to say that I think our view of what a pastor is, is very anti-biblical. Nowhere in the New Testament is the pastor set up like the Old Testament priest or prophet, and certainly not king. Nowhere in the New Testament does it say pastors have to be ordained and only these ordained ministers can celebrate communion, preach the Word, or perform any other functions. And certainly to place the pastor as the head of the congregation is clearly anti-biblical.

I am going to read to you the clearest passage in the New Testament of church leadership. In his letter to the church in Ephesus Paul writes about God's design for church leadership:

"¹¹He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹²Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, ¹³until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13 / NLT).

First of all, there is no head of the local church singled out here. It is a picture of group leadership. Pastor is only one of the gifts listed and it is not elevated above the others. To look to the pastor as the head of the church is mistaken from the beginning. Leadership authority in each local church rests in the hands of several gifted individuals.

Secondly, the goal of this leadership group is not primarily to exercise authority. The primary function of church leadership is instruction, empowerment, coordination, and encouragement. The goal of the leadership team is to get the church members functioning in harmony. I don't think I have twisted the passage. In fact, in order to set the pastor up as the head of the church takes a lot of clever bible exegesis.

Thirdly, as we finish the passage, we can see that Christ is the head of the universal church and the local church. And watch how good leadership instructs so that each person will be able to know God's will and how to avoid being tricked by the world:

"¹⁴Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. ¹⁵Instead, we will hold to the truth in love, becoming more and more in every way like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love" (Ephesians 4:14-16 / NLT.)

Therefore, if we want to understand the role of a pastor, we have to get rid of all these worldly notions of leadership and all these unbiblical religious traditions.

So if that's the case, why does Paul address the concept of a paid clergy in verse 6 here? He says, "Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor. This is clearly referring to caring for the instructors' needs. This verse has to do with the financial care of teachers. In Paul's mind, the teacher gives out care in the form of teaching, guidance, and counsel. The student should care for the instructor in terms of financial care.

In the United States, we need an ordained pastor to be recognized as a licensed official who can legally marry people. Also, since our churches have followed the way of western ideas of democracy, the institutional church has to have by-laws to be an official organization. Now this institutional organization we call the church today has nothing to do with the New Testament model of the church.

At any rate, Paul indicates there should be a group of people in the church that should be paid. Remember from the Ephesians passage and from his instructor/student relationship here, it seems as if teachers are the ones who are to be paid. I'm sure there are many, many people in the church who have the gift of pastor. But the one who Paul says should be paid are the teachers.

Now you can see how the modern day church has worked itself into a dilemma. They often hire people who are gifted teachers and preachers. They may have the gift of pastor as well and the gift of administration. But when the church hires a "pastor," they have in mind they are hiring the whole leadership team. Any of you who know me, have probably come to the conclusion that I am a gifted teacher, but you would also come to the conclusion that I am not a very gifted pastor. Thank God here at Devon Church we have several leaders who have the gifts of pastor, compassion, etc. In Paul's mind, the teacher is the one who is to be paid because she can instruct the people as how to read, to study, to understand, and to apply the bible. So for Paul, when hiring a person to minister in church, they should be gifted teachers.

This is exactly what people have to decide when hiring a modern day pastor. Good teachers and preachers are hard to come by. If you find one, you should spend whatever it takes to get him or her. It is a great investment. Here is the principal. **SINCE WE USUALLY GET WHAT WE PAY FOR, IT BENEFITS CHURCHES TO INVEST IN A GOOD PASTOR.**

Yes, we must invest in a good pastor, but investment goes far beyond investing in the pastor. We are also called to invest in the Christian community and to the salvation of the lost. In verses 7-10 Paul says that we should be investing God's resources. If we are going to remain free and live good solid healthy Christian lives, we have to first understand that everything belongs to God. Our time, our money, all of our resources and possessions all belong to God. We are called to invest them. Think of all we have as our 401K plans. Our investment plan matures when we get to heaven and see Jesus face to face. The interesting thing about this 401K plan is that Jesus funds the whole thing. He gives us spiritual gifts, natural talents and abilities, money and other resources. We are now responsible to invest these funds.

Verse 7 lays out God's investment law. God's investment law is simple. What you sow and how much you sow is directly proportional to what you reap. In other words, the more we invest in God's kingdom and in God's work, the more free and happy we will be, especially in heaven.

Look what Paul says in verse 7, "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked." In other words, Paul is saying several things. First of all, even though we cannot be

saved by doing good and living holy lives, ... those who have genuinely received Jesus as Lord and Savior will be doing all sorts of good things and they will be on a constant journey that pursues holy living. If you are living an immoral life, ... and think you are saved, ... Paul is saying that you'd better think again. We may be able to fool others and we may even be able to fool ourselves, ... but we cannot ever fool God.

Secondly, last week we talked about how pride can lead to a life of self-indulgence and self-deception. Humility will take us a long way in fulfilling our destinies in Christ.

In verse 8 Paul describes the investment options. Either we will invest in the flesh or the Spirit. Again the NIV translates the word flesh as sinful nature. Let me remind us that flesh here is living our lives apart from God, under sin's control. When we invest our time, money, energy, gifts, and talents to indulge our sinful nature, then we are headed for destruction. Think about how much time, energy, and resources we use in trying to impress others. Even in the church, we say and do things in order to cause people to think highly of us. There is that pride again that will jump up and bite us every time. We cannot spend time, money, and energy in trying to chase everything the world tells us is desirable. Boys and girls expend a lot of emotional energy and money on trying to impress members of the opposite sex. Men and women sacrifice their moral integrity in order to get a boyfriend or girlfriend. People sacrifice their ethics to get ahead in school or at work. People sell their souls trying to climb the corporate ladder. It is part of our flesh, part of our sinful nature to be selfish and self-indulgent. If we find ourselves saying things, doing things, spending time, money, energy, and resources on things that are valued in this world, then the chances are that we are investing in the flesh.

And just what is the rate of return on a flesh investment? Destruction, an eternity in hell and separated from God is the payment of fleshly investments. Let's just take a moment to slow down and ask ourselves if we are investing in the things of this world? Who are we trying to impress? What is it that we want? Do these things draw attention to God and His love or do these things we are chasing after draw attention to us and make us happy? Investing in the flesh is a bad investment. That investment is headed for bankruptcy.

On the other hand, we have freedom to invest in the Spirit. Do you remember that we said that living according to the Spirit is living under the control and direction of God's Holy Spirit? When we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we were set free from fear and from our bondage to sin, Satan, and death. We were set free now to do all the good things God expects of us and planned out for us. We are now free to love God not out of fear but out of gratitude. We are not free to love and serve others without trying to get ahead of them or over them. We are not in competition with others. We are free to serve them and help them to succeed. We are free to become more like Jesus by letting the Holy Spirit manifest love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control in our lives. Investing in the Spirit means that we allow God to bless all those around us through us. If we don't want to serve and love God, if we don't want to serve and love one another, ... then perhaps we are not authentic Christians at all. The principle is pretty clear. If we invest in the Spirit, our investment will mature into eternal life, in heaven, with Christ. That is quite a rate of return.

Let me make just an aside application to this principle. There will come a time for all of us, that even though we are living in the Spirit, we will stumble and serve the flesh for a time. When we repent, we will be forgiven and put back on the right track. However, what we have sown in the flesh will mature and we will have to

reap the consequences. For example, you may be a teenage girl or boy who is trying to follow Christ. You may stumble and have sex. You may repent, be forgiven, and restored. However, you may have an unplanned baby, or a sexually transmitted disease. You may commit adultery. God will forgive you, but you will probably end up with a divorce and now have to arrange a time to see your children. You may climb the corporate ladder but arrive at the top alone. You may have lost a lot of important relationships along the way. You may be forgiven, but you will have to live with the consequences of your sins. That's why it is so important that we live under the influence, guidance, and control of the Holy Spirit.

This concept of sowing and reaping is a cause and effect relationship that God built into the universe. Verse 9 describes the investment at maturity. Again, we must emphasize that being free in Christ does not mean that we are free to be self-indulgent. We are free to keep doing good. Paul says, "Let us not become weary in doing good." In other words, we are to continue to work hard at loving one another. We must work hard in putting pride to death in our lives. It is hard work to love, forgive and serve one another. It's hard enough to be humble in loving, serving, and forgiving people we really like. But it is truly love, service, and forgiveness, when we extend it to all in the community of Christ. That's why arguments, jealousies, and cliques in the church are unacceptable.

The reformed theologians talk about the perseverance of the saints. They believe that if one is authentically saved, they will continue to live the good Christian life. They may fall down, but ultimately they will get back up and continue to serve and love God and one another. By the way, this idea of perseverance is contained in the fruit of the Spirit. Patience and faithfulness are what lead to perseverance. Perseverance is the determination to live free in Christ and never return to the slavery of this world. How good will it be to persevere in our Christian faith, to pursue holiness, and to pursue loving and serving one another, and then one day have Jesus put His hands on our shoulders, look us squarely in the eyes, and say, "Well done good and faithful servant." That should motivate us to persevere in our living according to the Spirit.

And in verse 10 Paul explains the whole investment strategy to us. As I studied through this verse, I gained some new insight into two of Jesus' parables. In Matthew 25 verses 14-30 Jesus told a story of three servants given a sum of money to invest by their master. They were given different sums of money according to their ability. The master left for a period of time and then returned. He gathered the three servants and asked them for an accounting of their investments. The first two servants invested and doubled the money. To each of these the master said, "Well done good and faithful servant." But the third servant was lazy and afraid. He was afraid to invest the money and he was lazy so he simply buried the money. When the master asked him for a report, the servant started out by accusing the master of being hard. These are people who have no faith in God's love, God's mercy, and God's acceptance. They don't trust God. The master condemned the wicked servant, took his money away, and gave it to one of the faithful servants.

I think we understand that parable. God has given us forgiveness, freedom, and confidence in His love through the death and resurrection of Jesus. When we became Christians, God gave us spiritual gifts, He has given us skills and talents. In other words, we are all talented at something. In addition to this, He has provided us with money, jobs, careers, and all sorts of resources. He expects us to invest all of this into the community of faith. Based on how we invest we will either hear, "Well done good and faithful servant," or "Depart from me you wicked servant."

I think I understand that pretty well. In fact, one year we did something called a kingdom assignment. I handed out \$100 bills at a service and preached on this passage. There were those who took the challenge, took the \$100, and invested in a particular work for God. You can read about it on the church website.

But while studying through the Galatians passage, I realized that the next story Jesus tells in Matthew 25 verses 31-46 is directly related to the first story. Matthew 25:31-46 is a story about the final judgment. In this story, Jesus separates the sheep from the goats. At the judgment Jesus says:

"³⁴Then the King will say to those on the right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. ³⁶I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me'" (Matthew 25:34-36 / NLT).

Jesus goes on:

⁴¹"Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons! ⁴²For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me anything to drink. ⁴³I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me no clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me'" (Matthew 25:41-43 / NLT).

This sounds a lot like working for our salvation. In other words, if we do these things we will be saved. Let me quote the rest of the story.

This is how the people respond to Jesus' judgment:

"³⁹When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' ⁴⁰And the King will tell them, 'I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!' (Matthew 25:39-40 / NLT).

In other words, the people who fed the poor visited the sick, clothed the naked and sheltered the homeless weren't even aware they were doing something they would be rewarded for. It's the same for the wicked:

⁴⁴"Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' ⁴⁵And he will answer, 'I assure you, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.' ⁴⁶And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life" (Matthew 25:44-46 / NLT).

This parable is clearly connected to the parable that preceded it. God has given us His treasure. He has given us His Son Jesus in death and resurrection to provide us with salvation and peace with Him. He has given us the Holy Spirit to live in us, empower us, gift us, and guide us. God has given us a lot of natural talent as well. Some are good at art, music, teaching, playing sports, and all sorts of other talents. He has given us all money, time, and energy. And then Jesus returned to heaven. Someday He will return to call us home. If we are true believers, we will invest everything God has given us and everything He has made us into building up His Kingdom. We will use everything we have to love and serve one another. We won't do it to earn our salvation. We will invest in one another because we love God and want to further His kingdom. We will invest because God loves us and because we want to love others. It is a way of life. That's why the people who are rewarded and taken to heaven are surprised. They don't think they have done anything

remarkable or extraordinary. And yet, Jesus commends them for their kindness and generosity.

Here is what is really strange to me. God gives us all the resources to invest. None of it belongs to us. We invest it all, God blesses it, and the investment brings great blessings to others. It is God's resources and God's work, yet He rewards and commends us. That is remarkable to me.

Now look at verse 10 in this morning's passage. That is exactly what Paul is saying. Any time God presents us with an opportunity to invest in the kingdom, and in one another, we are supposed to do it. We are to be kind, generous, and loving to all people. But our primary concern is with the well being of other Christians. Paul said that we are God's masterpieces. And He has prepared us and equipped us to do all sorts of good works. **WE DEMONSTRATE OUR FAITH BY THE WAY WE INVEST WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN US.**

Jesus said that the world would recognize that we belong to Him by the way we love one another. As each of us examines our lives could we say that we are investing our lives in self-indulgence or in the building up of God's people? **GOD GIVES ALL HIS CHILDREN GIFTS, TALENTS, AND ALL SORTS OF RESOURCES. HE EXPECTS US TO INVEST THEM WISELY.**

He expects us not only to invest wisely, but wholeheartedly and passionately. D. James Kennedy tells the story of a peasant woman in Africa:

"A peasant woman in West Africa had been wonderfully saved. ... She had always longed to do something for Jesus. People were bringing gifts of corn to an evangelistic crusade, but this woman was so poor that she had nothing to offer. Yet later in the week, she went forward and placed a silver coin on the altar. Although it was worth only a dollar, at the time it represented a large sum. Thinking she might have gotten it dishonestly, the missionary hesitated to receive it. But he didn't want to make a scene, so he said nothing.

Following the service he found the woman and questioned her about the money. She said that because the Lord Jesus had freed her from the bondage of her sins and had given her eternal life, she wanted to serve Him and help make Him known to others. So she had gone to a nearby plantation and sold herself as a slave for life for one dollar. That was the gift she laid on the altar that night."

That woman was truly a free woman. In love for God and love for others, she sold herself into a lifetime of slavery. But I can tell all of us here this morning; this woman is freer than any of us could ever be. Are we starting to get what biblical freedom is all about? It is freedom to love and serve God, to love and serve one another.