

GIVING revised for 3-23-03

2Corinthians 9:6-10

It's likely that you have never heard of sermon on giving quite like this one you are about to hear. So as always, I encourage you to examine the Scriptures to see if these things are true. 'Giving' is a very touchy subject for several reasons. One of the main ones is how it has been abused. Many churches and organizations have set man made goals and then insisted that everyone see that they are supposed to be a part of making that person's dream happen. Guilt has been skillfully applied to get people to conform to a rule. I have been a part of that, which I regret to this day. Thank the Lord He teaches us from our mistakes. Isn't that encouraging? I think it is our many bad experiences that have caused us to shun this topic.

But the other reason is our human nature. People see finances as security and freedom. To understand that the Lord is our source and our freedom sets us free from the bondage money can have on our lives. It enables us to live above any conditions we encounter and frees us from fear. Jesus listed money as the most competitive master to his own Lordship. He said clearly, "You can't serve God and money." One or the other will end up being your director. One causes a hatred of the other. He goes on to say that the world lives for money. Children of God live for the Kingdom and God's righteousness. (Matthew 6:24-34)

In the first century church, most of the offerings went to widows who could not support themselves and the elders, especially those who ruled well and worked in teaching and preaching. (1Corinthians 9:7-14; James 1:27) The early church focused its giving toward the needy. It was people oriented instead of organization and building oriented. The greater the structure and hierarchy, the greater the financial need. That tends to encourage the conviction that everyone should legalistically tithe (give 10%). It also creates a need to believe that all giving should go to the church where they attend. The verse that is used to support this is from Malachi – "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house." (Malachi 3:10) "The storehouse today is the local church," they say. Of course the storehouse in the Old Testament was the Temple.

We know that tithing is an Old Covenant (Testament) Law that was given to Moses along with the other Levitical laws. The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). The Law was a shadow of the good things to come. (Hebrews 10:1) That tithe was used to support the tribe of Levi that were to minister to the Lord and care for the sanctuary, which is a shadow of the support of elders in ministry in this day.

Let us examine this issue in the light of the New Testament teaching. We find Jesus speaking on the 'tithe' (which literally means a tenth) in the Gospels in only one place. Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees. (Matthew 23:23) He tells them that they are paying tithes of garden spices and forgetting about the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. He tells them to do the later without forgetting the former.

Commented [notes1]: ²⁴ "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.

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ... [1]

Commented [notes2]: ⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?

⁸ Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? ... [2]

Commented [notes3]: ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James 1:27 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. Mal 3:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹ The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Heb 10:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ²³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-- justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. Matt 23:23 (NIV)

In other words, He is telling them to not forget the spirit of the law but also obey the letter. The New Covenant in Christ's blood had not yet been made. They are under the Old Covenant – the one received by Moses on Mount Sinai. Nowhere in the New Covenant do we find a command to tithe. In fact, Jesus points out that a repentant heart toward God is more desired than a person who fasts and tithes. (Luke 18:12-18)

But Jesus does talk about giving. He commended the widow that gave all, even though it was a little. (Luke 21:2-3) He tells the Rich Young Ruler to give all to the poor. (Luke 18:22) He tells the disciples that unless they give up everything they cannot be his disciples. (Luke 14:33) Jesus' standard of giving was not a tenth. It was ALL! 100%

There is one more key reference to giving in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians telling them he was sending brothers to Corinth to help take an offering that the Corinthians had earlier promised to give. Let's open our Bibles so that you can follow along. 2 Corinthians 9:6 (NIV) *6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

This is a principle of God's natural laws. You have seen it is true in things you do. It hasn't been true in the stock market lately, but that's another story. When you invest time and energy you get better results. Paul is saying that when you give to others you find you receive more.

Our natural thinking says to store up for ourselves. Jesus had a different mind set. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was correcting man's inaccurate way of viewing the world and God. He taught, "Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened." (Matthew 7:8-9) We tend to think God is stingy. The truth is just the opposite. If we are willing to come to Him and recognize He alone can meet our need, whether spiritual, emotional, or physical, then we find the answers, if we are willing to receive them. But watch what Jesus concludes this teaching with. "Do unto others as you would have them do to you. This fulfills the Old Covenant." (Matthew 7:12) At first the connection isn't obvious. What does asking and receiving have to do with the Golden Rule? It corrects your mindset of a stingy God and replaces it with a loving, generous Father. You see, if I think God is stingy and limited, I'm tight with my assets. If I see Him as a generous Father, I can give freely without fear of lack. Which view reflects your mindset about God?

ABUSE

(This verse has often been misused by the church. A large respectable church in Phoenix encouraged the elderly to mortgage their homes to help fund a building project. They were promised that they would reap abundantly. The more money you give the more you will get. God does provide our needs. But if we give to get... our motives are not pure and we are playing at twisting God's arm. "I gave you so much Lord, so now you have to give me 30,50, 100x." This verse doesn't say whether you will reap it now or in heaven or a little of both. That is up to the Lord. Jesus preached against a heart after earthly treasure. He said, "Lay up your treasures in heaven."

Commented [notes8]: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

13 "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Little Children and Jesus

15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Luke 18:10-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: 2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.

3 "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. Luke 21:2-3 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 22 When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Luke 18:22 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matt 7:7-8 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Matt 7:12 (NIV)

I witnessed a shameful display of manipulation right here in the Verde Valley. A guest speaker told the congregation they were in bondage to their money. He told them they had financial problems because they could not give freely. Then he skillfully used an illustration in which he supposedly was told by the Holy Spirit to give to a guest speaker. He reported that as he started writing a check he noticed someone else do the same thing. Oh how his life was blessed once he obeyed. So then, people who were listening began to follow that suggestion and started bringing him cash and checks. He had glorious predictions about that church becoming the largest church in Cottonwood and a branch in Sedona in 6 months. Neither came to pass, but he left with his pockets bulging with gifts. Sowing and reaping is a true principle, but we are often too earthly minded about the application and expectation. What is the motive of the heart?)

Let's read on to find out what I believe is the main guideline for New Testament giving. 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV) *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* Each man should give what he has decided in his heart. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. When Christ sent the Promise of the Father, our Counselor, under the New Covenant, we received something so much better than the Law. We can ask the very heart of God in the matter of our giving. Within our own spirit, we can commune with the Father and ask His will in regards to our giving. He can prompt us when there is a need. Why go back to the heartless guidelines of the letter when we can go to the Spirit that gives life? Each of us can determine in our own heart what to give. It isn't a percentage based on gross or net or anything other than the will of the Lord in your life at this moment. What if God wants you to give 25% because there is a special need coming up that no one yet knows about? He promises you will reap abundantly in eternity.

I recall a dear brother who sent me a \$100 check. He didn't say anything except the Lord told him to do it. I didn't need the money at the time, but I did need encouragement. His willingness to give encouraged me, and it helped him get the victory over his struggle with money. A year later he had a need and I was able to return the \$100. It just changed hands a few times to teach us about the Lordship of Christ over our finances.

In this passage Paul adds, not reluctantly or under compulsion – there went all the arm-twisting that goes on today to get people to make a tithe pledge. God loves a cheerful giver. It is no longer a law but a matter of the heart. Our assets should all be His, and He should be able to ask you to give whatever you have. Yet, God knows how yielded our hearts are. If it is not a cheerful gift you might as well have kept it. He wants to bless you through your giving, but if your heart isn't right, you block the blessing. You might as well keep it.

I see giving as one form of worship. Look back a page at chapter 8:19 *19 What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help.* The giving was administered in order to honor the Lord himself.

We are blessed with so much! One way we get to show our gratitude and honor God is when we give. If the Lord leads us to give a lot at one time for a need we rejoice at the opportunity to bless our brothers. We realize that if we are in need God may provide through a brother. Giving is a very personal thing between you and your Savior. It can be a wonderful act of worship. It should never be grudgingly or out of duty. Look at the Father's heart when He gives to you. (Matthew 7:11) Imitate that heart of loving generosity. It should be utter joy to give. It should be an act of worship.

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV) *8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.* This verse reminds us we will have all our needs met all the time by God's grace! And because of that we will have more than enough in every good work. That includes giving when there is genuine need. 2 Corinthians 9:9 (NIV) *9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."* Paul often confirms what he writes with Scripture from the Old Covenant. Psalms 112:9 (NIV) *9 He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor.*

Where did the gifts go? The poor, those in need, not another salary raise for the Pastor whose needs are met, not another building fund, but people in need – the poor. Scatter abroad – does that sound like the storehouse doctrine? You should give wherever the Lord leads you. As we go through life we have opportunities all around us to – at the Lord's leading - bless those that have needs.

2 Cor 9:10-12 (NIV) *10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.*

The best way to give is the way Jesus described it, not letting your left hand know what your right hand does (Matthew 6:2-4). Don't take the credit. Do it anonymously. Let the Lord have all the glory, because it was His to give. He gave it to you and then prompted you to pass it on. You just get to act as the conduit. But He will bless you for it, and your righteousness will endure forever – the passage says. That reminds us of Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. A right attitude about our all-sufficient God enables you to open your clenched fist.

I realize this is not the typical way the church at large deals with giving. But I believe it is the Biblical way. Now let me clarify so you don't miss what I'm getting at. Our old nature is so subtle, it would readily say, "Great, now I don't have to tithe!" Our old nature should be dead, but too often we find it rearing its ugly head, telling us why we don't need to obey the voice of the Lord when He says to give.

Abraham gave 10% to Melchizedek of the spoils of battle (Hebrews 7:1-2). That antedated the Law. 10% is not a rule, but when you don't know what the Lord is saying, it is a good historical guideline. Considering what Jesus said about giving all,

Commented [notes14]: 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!
Matt 7:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.
3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
Matt 6:2-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 1 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, his name means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace."
Heb 7:1-2 (NIV)

I think 10% is a good bottom line. But let me clarify that some are not able. The standard teaching today in the church says that they should give anyway in faith. Remember the widow with her two mites. But it seems to me they are the ones that should receive. If the saints that Paul was taking the collection for were given their basic financial need, then you have to add 10% so they can give 10%. If we give help to a widow and, as has been done, she turns around and gives 10% back, why don't we just cut the cash swapping? It's because we think of it as a Law. It's a good guideline, but the Holy Spirit is a much better instructor.

I tried to share this with a denominational pastoral board. No one on that board could deny the Scriptural basis for what I was saying. They could only give examples of why it would not work. The examples were not from God's word. God's word works!

Let the Lord tell you when and how much to give. If you aren't clear, use the guideline of 10%. If you are in need and cannot help yourself, and your family can't help you, ask the church for help. We will not enable people who make excuses for being lazy, but I believe the elders will be willing to help those with genuine need. I believe our elders will always trust that what you give is a decision of your own heart, and if God directs you to give elsewhere, we should honor that.

I don't want to know what anyone gives. That is between you and God. I trust that God will prompt you to give to meet the church's needs and the needs of those in ministry both here and in mission fields. If we focus on Jesus being the Lord of every area of our lives, we won't have a problem letting His Spirit lead us in the giving of our finances and our time and energy. I have faith in God that He can teach us to hear His leading in our hearts. I have faith that He can take you beyond the rule of the Law, and lead you by His Spirit.

When I consider this whole matter, the thing that breaks my heart is that the Church today does not expect to hear from the Lord or get the mind of the Spirit. A rule is much easier than communion with God. There is no fear of the "what if" when you just stick to a rule. It is safer. The ten percent rule as a law never says, "Help that person pay their rent." But brothers and sisters, that is what our relationship is all about, communing with the living God and hearing His heart. It's about letting Him work through us. That is exciting. It's alive! We have many stories this last year of helping people in need through the benevolent fund and outside that fund. I'll tell you just one. Someone gave me an amount of money. I prayed about where it was to go. The Lord reminded me about a certain single mother who was struggling to raise her children. Then He confirmed it with someone else bringing her name up and mentioning her financial need. I called her and told her the Lord was leading me to give her this money. She got choked up as she had been wondering about how she would get by. That story has repeated itself over and over during this last year. It encourages our faith and theirs. We both get blessed.

Giving always takes us back to the Giver. God gave his only Son. The Son gave His life. That gift is ours so that we can live a real life, life of communion with Him, a life of worship. Give as the Lord leads you. It is not a cliché. I mean that literally. Those of us who have been in church a long time have heard it so often we don't

think about the words. Give as the Lord leads you. Let Him lead you. I'm asking you to be a one in a thousand kind of Christian that actually asks God what you should give. Imagine, God being the Lord over your finances. That is a novel idea! Make it a part of your worship, not just a routine. Seek His heart and let His Spirit direct you.

What joy we should have, knowing that the Lord of all has chosen to touch the world through us. He blesses us with more than we need, and then He directs us as to where it needs to go. When we obey, passing on what He generously gave to us, He lays up for us heavenly reward! It's kind of like this, your Father gives you \$120. Then He asks you to give \$20 to someone who is in need. You feel great about being able to help someone. But because you were willing and actually did it, He puts a billion dollars in your heavenly bank account. It just isn't fair. But that's OK with me. My Dad is amazingly generous!

My British mentor, Dennis Turner, lived this to the extreme. He never asked anyone but God for his needs. He spent his time sharing Jesus with people in the hospitals in Japan. Then God placed the burden for Chinese immigrants on his heart, and out of his meager living he would give to them, because God asked it of Him. His heart was filled with joy at being able to help others even more needy than himself. Now my brother is enjoying His heavenly reward. He didn't have much here in the physical sense but he's one of the richest men where it really matters.

To allow all that to happen, we have to listen when God touches our hearts to give and believe by faith what we cannot see. We have to learn to hear God's voice, to discern in our heart His leading. It's not that mystical. When you are walking with Him and living in His word, you just know. God doesn't have any difficulty conveying His will to us. Our biggest problem is willingness to obey. But it is when we obey that the joy and blessings really flow.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the testimony of Wayside Chapel was generosity out of genuine concern and obedience to God? Don't you want people to see you personally as a generous caring person? First, see how generous God has been to you, see the willingness of His heart to meet your needs. We need to surrender our demands for things we don't need. Then we will be freed to express the loving heart of our Father to others and hear His directions to give.

I want to close with the words of instruction and promise from Jesus in Luke 6:38 (NIV) *³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*"

²⁴ "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.

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

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³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matt 6:24-34 (NIV)

⁷ Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk?

⁸ Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing?

⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned?

¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.

¹¹ If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?

¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

¹³ Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?

¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.

1 Cor 9:7-14 (NIV)