

Christian Giving

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

Both the Old and New Testaments have numerous instructions for God’s people about giving some of what God has given to us for the benefit of others. In Luke 6 Jesus said: “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (Luke 6:38).

Jesus exhorted us to give, and to give with a generous measure. And He said that with the same measure we use to give to others, we will receive back in return. This is the promise of the Son of God, whose entire life was an example of giving of Himself for the benefit of others.

Jesus also taught us that our giving should be done in secret, and not publicly that we might receive praise and recognition for our generosity. In Matthew 6 we read:

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

“So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:1-4)

Jesus exhorted us to give quietly, not announcing it in order to receive the praise of men, but in secret to please God our Father. God will see to it that we are rewarded when we obey Him by giving in this way.

There is something else that we should consider in our giving. Just as Jesus promised that with the same measure we use to give to others we will receive back in return for ourselves, He also taught that the reward for our giving will not always be realized during our lives here on earth. He gave us this teaching in the Gospel of Luke:

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14).

When we give to the poor and the afflicted, they will likely never be able to repay us. Jesus taught us in this passage that we should not give with the expectation that we will always receive material recompense during our lifetime here on earth. There are times when our acts of kindness and sacrifice are building up for us treasure in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). There are times when our giving will not be paid back in this life, but as Jesus has promised, we will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

The Teaching of the Apostle Paul

Paul taught at length about giving in 2 Corinthians. In the entirety of the eighth and ninth chapters, he spoke of the Corinthians giving to fellow believers in Jerusalem, and he taught on Christian giving in general.

To preface what Paul taught in 2 Corinthians 8-9, we should first look at 1 Corinthians 16, where he first exhorted the Corinthian believers to give for the benefit of the saints living in Jerusalem who were in need at that time. Paul instructed them saying that they should set aside every week a sum of money that would be reflected by their income, so that he would not have to take up collections when he arrived (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to help with the needs of their Christian brothers in Jerusalem, and he instructed them to do so in keeping with their income, or as he said later in his second letter to the Corinthians, according to their means (2 Corinthians 8:11). He taught that those who had more income and more of a surplus would be able to contribute more, and they should do so.

Paul began 2 Corinthians 8 by telling the Corinthians of the generosity of the Macedonian churches in giving to meet the needs of the believers in Jerusalem. He said that even out of the trial of their own poverty, they gave joyfully as much as they were able, and even more than they were able (2 Corinthians 8:2-3). Paul then encouraged the Corinthians to “abound” in the gracious work of giving when he wrote: “But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.” (2 Corinthians 8:7).

The Corinthians had apparently given before for the benefit of the saints in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:10) and had promised to do so again (2 Corinthians 9:5). Paul continued in chapter 8 to instruct them that they should give according to their ability, and then he wrote: “For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” (2 Corinthians 8:12).

Paul then demonstrated a scriptural basis for his efforts to collect money for believers in Jerusalem with a quotation from Exodus 16:18, when he taught: “For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality— at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, ‘He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.’” (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).

Paul continued in 2 Corinthians 9 teaching about Christian giving in general. Paul’s teaching here builds upon Jesus’ teaching in Luke 6:38, when He instructed

us that with the same measure we use to give to others, it will also be measured back to us in return. Paul gave us this instruction:

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, “He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor. His righteousness endures forever.” (2 Corinthians 9:6-9).

Just as Jesus taught many times using analogies, so also Paul used an analogy in his teaching about giving. The analogy he used was that of a farmer sowing seed with the expectation of later reaping a harvest. If the farmer sows seed sparingly, he will reap only sparingly, realizing a meager harvest. But if he sows seed bountifully, he will reap a bountiful harvest, and so it is the same with our giving.

Notice also Paul’s instruction in verse 7 of this passage about how we as believers should give: “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” We are not to give reluctantly, or with the feeling or belief that we are under some sort of compulsion to give beyond our means, or that we are obliged to give some certain amount. Paul taught that we are free to give as we have decided in our own hearts, all the while understanding that if we give bountifully, then we will receive back bountifully, but if we give sparingly using a only a small measure, then we will receive back in return only sparingly, in the same small measure.

In addition to sharing with fellow believers in need, Paul also instructed us that we are to give to those among us who preach and teach the word of God. In 1 Corinthians Paul wrote: “... the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 9:14). And again, in his letter to the Galatians Paul instructed us saying: “The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.” (Galatians 6:6).

Paul also wrote to Timothy telling him that those who preach and teach the word of God deserve to be paid, and in doing so he used quotes from both Deuteronomy 25:4, and Luke 10:7. Paul taught us saying: “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox

while he is threshing”, and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

The Origins of the Tithe

No discussion about Christian giving would be complete without addressing the subject of tithing, which is encouraged in many of our Christian congregations today. Tithing was first instituted in the book of Leviticus as a requirement for Israel. The word “tithe” means “tenth”, and it refers to giving back to the Lord a tenth, or ten percent, of all that He had provided for the children of Israel. This was one of many commands that the Lord gave to Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites. This passage reads:

“Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord. If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord.” (Leviticus 27:30-32).

Later in Numbers 18:24-26, God directed that the tithes collected from the Israelites were to be distributed to the Levites. All of the other tribes of Israel had been given lands as an inheritance from the Lord, but the Levites received no inheritance of land. Instead, their inheritance was the Lord Himself, as they had been chosen for the work of ministering before the Lord. The tithe was God’s way of providing for the Levites. The Levites were in turn required to give a tithe of all they received to the High Priest Aaron.

So it is clear that the Lord had commanded the Israelites to tithe all of the increase that He had given to them for the purpose of providing for the Levites who had received no inheritance of lands, but who had been chosen by the Lord to do the work at the Tent of Meeting. This work included the offering of the various sacrifices required by the Law.

The Israelites were required to obey this command to tithe their increase, as they were required to obey all of the laws that the Lord handed down for them through Moses. These laws are recorded in the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy, and they are referred to collectively as the “Law of Moses”.

There is no question that the people of Israel were commanded by the Lord to tithe all of the increase that He had given to them, and it is clear that these tithes were to provide for the Levites, who were chosen to minister before the Lord. The question that every Christian today should consider is this: are we as believers also required to tithe, or to give a tenth of the increase that the Lord has given to us? As with any question that we have concerning our obedience to God, we look to the Scriptures for our answers.

The Transition from Law to Grace

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”
(Matthew 5:17-18)

Regarding the transition from the Old Covenant of the Mosaic laws to the New Covenant of grace; Jesus made it clear that He had not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the Prophets, but to fulfill them. Further, He said that none of these writings would pass from the Law until everything was accomplished or fulfilled.

What is clear from several passages in the New Testament is that there are many Old Testament laws that we are no longer required to obey. The most obvious of these is the offering of animal sacrifices for the remission of sins as prescribed in the Law of Moses (See Leviticus 1-7).

For a believer in Christ to be told that he was required to offer animal sacrifices to make atonement for the sins he had committed would be the apex of blasphemy. Such a requirement would imply that there was something lacking in the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made of Himself at Calvary, dying on the cross and shedding His blood for the remission of our sins, so that we as His people would be reconciled to God.

It is also obvious that we are no longer required to observe Sabbath days, the various festivals and celebrations, or the dietary restrictions prescribed in the Mosaic Law. Paul wrote about these things in his letter to the Colossians:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (Colossians 2:13-17)

Paul taught in this passage that all of the Old Testament ceremonial laws were only a foreshadowing of things that were to come, and the time of their fulfillment had already taken place with the coming of Christ. Therefore, believers are no longer required to observe these Old Testament laws regarding the observance of feasts, festivals, Sabbaths or dietary laws. This in no way means that we disregard the Old Testament where the Law of Moses is given, because as Paul taught: "...through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20). It is through the Law that we receive instruction and an understanding of what is sin in the sight of God.

Obedience to God's word was required for the Old Testament saints, and it is without question required for us as believers (John 14:15, 21, 23-24, 15:10, many others). At this point, we must ask ourselves how we know which Old Testament laws we are still required to obey.

The answer to this question is that wherever there is a new directive given in the New Testament on a particular subject, that new teaching supersedes what was written earlier in the Mosaic Law, and the new teaching is the one that we are to obey as believers in Christ. ***Any new teachings and directives given in the New Testament on any given subject reveal that for the parallel old directive given in the Mosaic Law, the time of that old directive has come to its fulfillment, and it has passed from the Law, which means that we as believers are no longer required to obey it.***

In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus said that He did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. He fully obeyed its requirements, and He fulfilled all of the prophecies made about the coming Messiah, proving that He was indeed the Christ. According to His Father's will, Jesus Christ shed His blood on Calvary's cross so that we

would not have to fully and without exception or transgression obey the Law in order to obtain salvation.

It is clear from the various New Testament Scripture passages that we have considered that some commands given in the Mosaic Law have indeed reached their time of fulfillment with the coming of Christ. In place of these old directives we have been given various new directives and teachings in the New Testament. All of these new directives are given to us as a result of what Jesus accomplished for us at Calvary.

We are still, however, required to obey many of the Old Testament laws. The Ten Commandments are still required for us. We do not obtain salvation by obeying these laws, but we are called upon to obey them, as well as any Old Testament directives and precepts that are consistent with New Testament teaching. However, some of these Old Testament requirements have, as evidenced by the Scriptures that we have considered, reached their time of fulfillment and have passed from the Law; they are no longer a requirement for believers.

Are Believers Commanded to Tithe?

The question now remains for us concerning Christian giving: Is tithing as commanded in the Old Testament Law still required for the believer today? ***The answer is that tithing is no longer required for us as New Testament believers. As we have seen from the various New Testament Scripture references that we have examined, there are in fact new directives on giving for God's people that have been given to us by Jesus Himself and by the Apostle Paul.***

The new directive is that indeed we are to give. Jesus exhorted us to give, and He said that with the same measure we use to give, it will be measured back to us. Paul taught the same lesson when he compared our giving with a farmer's sowing of seed. He said that if we sow or give sparingly, then we will reap or receive back only sparingly. But if on the other hand we sow or give bountifully, then we will receive back for ourselves bountifully.

Paul also taught that we should not give grudgingly, or under compulsion, because God wants us to give willingly and cheerfully; we are not to give believing that we are compelled or obliged to give some certain amount. This instruction is made clear in 2 Corinthians 9 where Paul wrote: "Each one must do just as he has

purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

If we were still required to give a tithe, then we would indeed be “under compulsion” to give that tithe, or ten percent, in order to be obedient to God, but such is not the case. As we see clearly from Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 9:7, we are **not** to give reluctantly, or under compulsion to give a certain amount, but we are instructed to give as we decide in our own hearts.

Some would disagree with the teaching that we as believers are no longer required to tithe, and they would say that Jesus did indeed teach that we are to tithe. As justification they would reference a verse from the Gospel of Luke which reads: “But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” (Luke 11:42). These would emphasize especially the last sentence in the verse where Jesus told the Pharisees that they should have practiced the latter (justice and the love of God) without leaving the former (tithing) undone.

As with interpreting any Scripture, we must consider who is being addressed in the passage under consideration, and we must also consider the context of the passage from which the Scripture is taken. In Luke 11:42, ***Jesus is addressing Pharisees*** attempting to be justified by observing certain points of the law, while at the same time their lives were filled with hypocrisy and wickedness, and they neglected more important points of the law, such as justice and the love of God.

To be obedient to God under the Old Testament Law, one would be required to obey every point of the Law, including the command in the Law regarding tithing. This is why Jesus said to these Pharisees that they should have practiced the latter (justice and the love of God, which they were neglecting), without leaving the former (tithing) undone.

It is important for us to understand that ***Jesus is not addressing His disciples in this passage***. In fact, in the context of this entire passage of Luke 11:37-54, Jesus addressed the Pharisees and experts in the Law of His day. He sternly rebuked them for their hypocrisy on several points, including their belief that they will be justified before God by their strict observance of commands given in the Law such as tithing, while at the same time they “neglect justice and the love of God”. In the big picture however, it is clear from New Testament teaching that no one will be justified by observing the law (Romans 3:20). As we can see from the

context of this passage, Luke 11:42 is not a command to New Testament believers that we are to tithe. Rather, it is one point in a rebuke that Jesus directed to hypocritical Pharisees.

Nowhere in the New Testament are we as believers commanded to tithe. On the contrary, we are told that we are not to give “under compulsion”, with the belief that we are compelled or obliged to give some certain amount, as we have seen from 2 Corinthians 9:7. Instead, we are told to give as we have decided in our own hearts that we should give.

In the New Testament, we as God’s people have been given new directives regarding our giving. And we have also been given new promises of God’s blessing in return for our giving.

There is nothing wrong with our local church asking us to tithe our income, and we are certainly free to do so if we want. However, with the New Testament directives that we have regarding our giving, let us resolve to let no one impose upon us a legalistic requirement that we must give a tithe, or a tenth, of what God has given to us as in order to be obedient to Him.

Instead, let us do as Paul instructed us, and let us give as we decide in our own hearts, with the understanding that if we give bountifully then we will receive back bountifully. But if we give sparingly, then we will receive back for ourselves only sparingly. As believers in Christ, this is our instruction for giving as taught by Jesus in Luke 6:38, and by Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:6-9.

Other Ways of Giving

At this point something else should be said about Christian giving. The giving of our financial or material resources is not the only way in which we can give. We can and should give in other ways as well.

James taught us about the perspective of the rich brother and the poor brother (James 1:9-10. See also James 2:5), and so we know by the Scriptures and by our own experience that there are those of us in the body of Christ who will have little in the way of material wealth. Such a condition may last for months, or years, or a lifetime. An intense awareness of our own need, whether financial or some other need, is certainly something that will drive us to God in prayer for His

help in our condition of distress, vulnerability and sorrow brought about by these needs. Such things do have a way of keeping us close to God.

If we find ourselves in the situation where we have little in the way of material wealth, then there may be other things that God has given to us that we might share with those in need. For example, we may be able to give of our time in some service to a fellow believer. There may be believers that we know who could benefit from our doing something for them that they are not able to do for themselves. There are also those for whom we can pray, bringing requests for them and their needs before our God and Father.

There are also people from whom most others will turn away, maybe because they are not attractive or witty or interesting or charming, or possibly because of some affliction in their lives. To these we can give a little of our time and attention to converse with them and listen to what they may have to say. Giving something of our time and attention in acts of kindness to edify someone whom others may ignore or reject, is another way in which we can give.

We must be very careful with this type of ministry to others where unbelievers are involved. Jesus warned us not to give what is sacred to dogs, and He told us not to cast our pearls before swine, saying that they may turn on us and tear us to pieces (Matthew 7:6). Jesus also warned us to watch out for false prophets, or those whose profession of being a Christian is false. He said that they will come to us “in sheep’s clothing”, claiming to be Christians, but inwardly they are “ferocious wolves”. He said that we will recognize them by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-23).

However, where a brother or sister in Christ is involved, we are commanded to love them, and a genuine love will be evidenced by how we respond to their need with the resources that we have available to us. If we struggle financially ourselves, we may have nothing else to give but our kind attention and a little of our time, and this we should indeed give.

When we consider a Christian brother or sister from whom many others would turn away and reject, let us also consider our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who went through this same kind of suffering Himself:

For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty

That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53:2-3)

When we as believers possess little more to give than our time and kind attention to another member of the body of Christ who is “like one from whom men hide their face”, let us remember Jesus’ words to His people: “...Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” (Matthew 25:40).