

WE BELIEVE IN NEW TESTAMENT GIVING (Selected Scriptures)

There is perhaps no greater lightening rod issue discussed in the Bible than the issue of money and giving our money to God. Perhaps some of you heard me tell about a witnessing encounter that I had with an unsaved man not that long ago. As I began to share Christ with him, he interrupted me and asked, "Does it say anywhere in the Bible that you have to give 10% of your money to the church?" Well, I answered his question as best I could and kept trying to witness to him. He did not give his life to Christ, and when I was about to leave I asked if I could leave a tract with him written by Billy Graham. And he politely told me "No". And then he told me why. He said, "I don't like Billy Graham. All he is interested in is money". In this man's mind all the church does is try to squeeze money out of people who attend. And he is going to make sure that he out-squeezes the church so that it will surely never get any of his!

But it is not just the unsaved that have this tight-fisted mindset. According to recent surveys, 9% of all who claim to be born-again Christians give 10% of their income to God. But the average giving for church members in America is only 2.5%. And then another survey says that one out of four American Protestants are at the lowest percentage. They gave a goose egg. They gave nothing.

Beloved, the Bible has much to say about money and about giving offerings to God. A number of years ago Christian financial expert Larry Burkett wrote a book entitled What the Bible Says about Money, and if Burkett is right 65 of the 66 books in the Bible talk about the proper use of the material wealth that God has given us, the only one silent on the subject is the little book of Jude. Financial planner Dave Ramsay says there are 800 verses in Scripture concerning money, and many of them were words spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ. It was our Lord who said "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." (Matt. 6:19-20).

But God has much to say about money and material things because they play such a critical role in our lives. How critical a role is it? Well, of all the different kinds of sins that there are, Jesus said this about only one. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 9:23). Now, Jesus did not say that being rich was a sin. Abraham was rich, Job was rich, and Solomon was the richest man on earth in his day. The sin is not being rich; it is worshipping your riches. Loving your money and what it buys more than loving God, whether you are rich or poor. Paul said, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). But notice, Jesus did not say that it was hard for an adulterer to go to Heaven, nor did he

say it was hard for a drunkard or a drug addict to go to Heaven, nor did He say that it was hard for a pedophile to go to Heaven. Jesus said that it was hard for a rich man to go to Heaven, harder in fact, than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Matt. 19:24).

So today we are going to look at what the Bible has to say about giving our money to God, about stewardship. For beloved, your stewardship speaks volumes about where you stand with God. To be obedient in stewardship reflects a right relationship with God, and to be disobedient in stewardship reflects a wrong relationship with God at best and no relationship with God at worst. And God wants you to know the joy of His blessings when you are a good steward of the material wealth He has given you.

Now, the first thing that we need to understand about stewardship is the **truth about ownership**. And the truth about ownership, beloved, is that **God owns it all**. Haggai 2:8 says, “‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine’, says the Lord of hosts”. We mentioned a moment ago that Job was a rich man. But Job understood why he was rich. Job said in Job 1:21, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”. Job realized that all his riches came directly from the hand of God.

What about Israel? Israel was a rag-tag bunch of slaves when God liberated them under Moses. They had nothing of any substance of all, and they were heading out into the Palestinian wilderness where there was nothing. But God gave them favor with the Egyptians, who gave them articles of silver, gold, and clothing as they left (Ex. 12:35). And then God fed them, all two million plus of them, for forty years. Try to wrap your mind around that for a moment; feeding perhaps 2½ million people three meals a day. You know, our Baptist association has a disaster relief feeding unit that some of our men work on. So fellows, how many feeding units and how much food would it take to feed 2,500,000 people every day, three meals a day, for 40 years? But the point is God’s people had nothing in the wilderness. They survived solely on the food and clothes God gave them. He owned it all.

And then after 40 years of wandering God’s people claimed their inheritance in the Promised Land. But I ask you, how did they acquire it? Let’s look at Deut. 6:10-12 and find out. Now look at 8:10 as a follow-up. God told Israel that He was going to give them cities which they did not build, houses full of good things which they did not fill, wells which they did not dig and vineyards that they did not plant. And when they finally conquered all of their enemies and occupied their new homes and were sitting out on their patios in the cool of the evening, sipping lemonade and enjoying the sunset, they had to be thinking, “All of this came as a gracious gift from God”.

Friend, it is no different with you and me than it was with Israel. You may be rich compared to your neighbor or you may be poor. But whatever you have, never forget that you have it because God gave it to you! And He gave it to you just to manage for a while. How vividly this has come to my mind in the last several years as Janice's dad and both of my parents have died. Everything they had now belongs to someone else. No, that's not right. Everything they were managing on this earth they've passed on to someone else to manage. For God owned it all when they had it, and God still owns it all, and God will forever own it all!

There is a second truth concerning stewardship that we need to understand. And that is, **from the beginning of time, man has always given offerings to God, both voluntary and by command.** The first offerings we read of in the Bible were by Cain and Able. They were not commanded to bring these offerings, they just did it. Now, we know that only Able's heart was right and only his offering was accepted. And his offering was accepted because it was his best, and because he brought it in faith (Heb. 11) and gratitude for all of the blessings that God had given him. But Cain's offering was rejected, because he gave it only out of duty, and not out of love. Now, beloved, we all should learn a lesson here. A person can be going through the motions of religion and not be a Christian at all. That's what Cain was doing. He showed up at the place of offering just like Able. He brought an offering just like Able. But he was one of those that Jesus spoke of millenniums later when He said, "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me (Matt. 15:8).

But we read of other patriarchs who gave offerings to God. In Genesis 8:20 Noah offered a sacrifice immediately after he left the ark. In Genesis 12-13, when Abraham entered the Promised Land, everywhere he pitched his tents we read that he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. And he also gave an offering. But in addition to the patriarchs, we read in 15 verses in the OT of God's people bringing offerings of their own free will to Him.

We also read in the OT much about the tithe. When Abraham returned from the battle where he delivered Lot from his bondage to the local heathen kings, we read that he gave tithes to Melchizedek, and we read in Genesis 28:22 that Jacob pledged to give a tithe to God. And we know that the law of Moses has numerous commands for God's people to bring tithes to Him. One is Leviticus 27:30, "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord". And the prophet Malachi wrote "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this, Says the LORD of hosts, If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you *such* blessing That *there will not be room enough to receive it*" (Malachi 3:10). Notice the reason that Malachi gives

for tithing – “that there may be food in My house”. In other words, that the work of the Lord’s house might be accomplished.

We have an example of this in Nehemiah 13, where Nehemiah discovered that the work of the Lord had come to a halt and that those who did the work had gone back to work in the fields. And Nehemiah immediately addressed this deplorable situation. Listen to verses 11-12: “So I contended with the rulers, and said, ‘Why is the house of God forsaken?’ And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse”. God’s people got right with Him, began to tithe again, and in verse 13 we see that God’s work resumed.

So all through the Old Testament we see where God’s people brought to Him tithes and offerings. But I want you to see the foundation, the rock bottom purpose for all of these gifts to God. Turn to 1 Chronicles 16. The occasion is the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem after being stolen by the Philistines and being gone about 100 years. It was a time of great celebration, and David seized the moment to offer a psalm of thanksgiving to God. Look at verses 7-10. David cries, “Give thanks unto the Lord. Talk about all of the great things that He has done”. And he goes on and on in the ensuing verses. Verse 12 – “Remember His marvelous works...” Verse 15 – “Remember His covenant”, the covenant that He made with Abraham. Verse 23 – “Proclaim the good news of His salvation”. Now look down at verses 28-29. Beloved, God certainly uses our gifts to support His work. But that is not the primary reason we are to give. We are to give out of a heart of thanksgiving for all that God has given us! And when we do, we’re saying, “Lord, I cannot ever repay you for all that you’ve done for me. You have left Heaven’s glory and have come to dwell among men on this sin-cursed earth for me. You have died on the cross for me and paid my sin debt which I could never pay. You washed my sins away in Your own blood and now I am a joint-heir with you of all the riches of Heaven. I can never repay You for all of these blessings. But as a token of my thanks, I bring this offering to You. Thank you, Lord. You are worthy!”

So we have seen that the Old Testament certainly establishes for us the principle of giving a portion of our money to God, and the tithe is the only undisputed benchmark. But we no longer live in the Old Testament dispensation, which is the law. We live in the New Testament dispensation, the dispensation of grace. And the fact is, Jesus only mentions the tithe twice, and that was only as part of a chastisement of the Pharisees’ for not keeping the greater law of justice, mercy, faith, and love. And even though Paul talks much about giving, he does not mention the tithe at all. So what should our standard of giving be? Is it still the tithe or not? Well, beloved, good men differ widely on this hot potato issue! John MacArthur says that the tithe is not a New Testament command, while W.A.

Criswell says that it is. And each of these men is just conservative and Bible-believing as the other. Each is a scholar of high reputation. Who's right?

Well, to discover the answer here is what we must do. We must get out our New Testament and search Jesus' and the apostles' teachings on giving, and consider the examples of New Testament giving, and by these two factors determine what is the New Testament pattern of giving. Now, beloved, as I have done this I have come to this conclusion: While tithing is not commanded in the New Testament, the teaching and examples of giving in the New Testament strongly point to the tithe as the starting point. And for the remainder of the message I want to show you why.

Now, first of all I want us to look at two teachings about giving from the apostle Paul, where he addressed both **how much** we should give and **how** we should give. In 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul says, "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come". So how much are we to give? We are to give **as we prosper**, which according to how much God has blessed us materially. And it also means that we all do not give equally. Some are able to give more than others. But we see here that we are all to give. He says that **each one** should lay up something to give. And the Greek translation for those words "each one" is "each one". There is no ambiguity. Everyone should give. And Paul also tells us that we should give on the first day of the week, which is Sunday. The Christians were already meeting on Sunday in the mid-first century. But we are all to give on Sunday, as we prosper, as we have been blessed.

The second teaching from Paul is in 2 Corinthians 9:7. Here we see that in addition to giving **as we prosper**, we should give **as we purpose**. In other words, we are to give how our heart tells us to give. But beloved, there is an essential caveat here, and that is to give how your heart led by the Holy Spirit tells you to give. As we saw at the beginning of the message, the hearts of 1/4th of the Protestants in America lead them to give nothing. But we can know how the Holy Spirit is leading us to give by going to the Scriptures. The Spirit of God will never instruct you to give contrary to the Word of God. So let's dig a little further into how we should give according to God's Word.

Look again at 2 Corinthians 9:7. The first way we are to give is to give **cheerfully**. We should give out of a heart of joy that in our giving we are able to help advance God's Kingdom. And, we should give cheerfully because we know that God loves a cheerful giver. Even though He loves us anyway, there is a special place of tenderness in His heart for those who give cheerfully. But friends, anybody can give cheerfully if they give a nickel a week. But we are also to give **abundantly**. Now, remember your abundance will not be the same as someone else's abundance. We are to give as we prosper. But no matter what the amount we give, for **our** budget and bank account it will be abundant.

Look back at 2 Corinthians 8:1-2 for a moment. The churches of Macedonia were full of poor people. You may think that you are poor. Well, the Greek words that describes these Christians are that they were at rock bottom poverty level – they could have been in danger of real starvation. Some of them lived hand to mouth. When you looked at them you would think, “These people have nothing at all to give”. But not so! Paul says that they gave an abundance. They gave liberally. Verse 3 says that they gave beyond their ability. Their sacrificial giving would be similar to the widow in Mark 12, who gave two mites to the treasury in the temple, which was less than one penny. But friends, that was not 10% of her money, that was all of it. And when you read that passage, you notice that Jesus did not rush over to her and say, “Stop, lady! There’s no need for this. Come back and give when you’re not in such a bind”. No, Jesus did not stop her from giving, but He commended her for her giving. And in Mark 14 we read where a woman broke an alabaster box of perfume and poured it on Jesus’ head, and it was worth about one year’s salary for a common laborer, or about \$17,500 at today’s minimum wage. The disciples belittled her, but Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She has done a good work for Me”. So beloved, this is the reason that I say that by the examples we see in the New Testament, 10% should just be the starting place for our giving.

But there is another reason that the New Testament points so strongly to the tithe as the starting point in giving, and that is in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus told a Pharisee in Matthew 22 that all of the laws of God were wrapped up in two simple commands – love God with all of your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. That is the New Testament pattern of obeying God. But even before that, back when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He gave some examples of what that meant. And here is how He did it. He began by quoting an Old Testament command, and he concluded with a New Testament application.

For instance, Jesus quoted one of the Ten Commandments that said, “You shall not murder”, and if you do you will be in danger of the judgment. And then He said, “But I say unto you, that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...” Another quote was this, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery’”. And then Jesus added, “But I say unto you, that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”. And four more times Jesus quotes an Old Testament commandment and trumps it with a New Testament update, in the matter of divorce, giving of oaths, seeking revenge, and loving your enemies. But here’s the deal. In every instance, Jesus’ update surpasses the Old Testament standard, and He calls New Testament believers to go beyond the requirement of the law and do better. So my question is this: if Jesus’ standard for adultery and marital faithfulness and loving your enemies and

the rest was so much higher than the Old Testament law, why should we think that His standard for giving might be any less?

Now, let's begin to put the wraps on New Testament giving by going back to Paul for just a few moments. We saw from 2 Corinthians 9 that we are to give **cheerfully** and **abundantly**, and from New Testament examples of giving and from Jesus' teaching, that the strong conclusion is that the tithe is the place we should start. But the reality is this is such a hard thing to do for most believers! And that is because on the one hand the pull of the world is so very strong and we are covetous and we think we must have so much "stuff" we don't really need. And tithing is hard on the other hand because our faith is so very weak. Even if we do live frugally, we just don't believe God will meet our needs if we give Him 10% or more. And so there is one more way that Paul tells us to give that will enable us to give in a manner pleasing to God. And that is, we must give **gracefully**.

Look one last time at 2 Corinthians 9:7. Beloved, cheerful, abundant, New Testament giving can come in only one way, and that is by God's grace. You see, when God's pours out His amazing grace upon us through Jesus Christ His Son, and when we are so flooded with His marvelous love that He has freely given to us that we cannot contain the joy, there is only one response from our grateful hearts. We want to give back to Him! We **must** give back to Him! We must give back to Him our love, our time, our talents, our treasures, our all!

May I say to you as we close, God did indeed give the very best that He had for you, He gave His Son. And Jesus did indeed give the very best that He had for you. He gave His life's blood on the cross of Calvary. And friend, this thing about stewardship is so much bigger than money. It is about your yielding everything you are and everything that He has given you to manage completely to Him. Some of you need to trust Christ today as your personal Savior and Lord.....Some of you need to yield your marriage to Jesus, some of you need to yield your dating life to Jesus, some of you need to yield your pocketbook to Jesus. All of us needs to yield our total lives to Jesus. What a great way to start the New Year! Won't you come today?