

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is Giving/Tithing? (Part 3)

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I. Introduction

If God owns everything, why does He need our money? And can we just give and be done with it, i.e., can we simply treat it as one of the other items on our list? Or does God actually care about our attitude when we give? That is, does God want me to smile even though I'm not happy about it? I'll give, but to I have to smile?!

II. Giving in the New Testament: *How Should You Give?*

The money you give God is actually God's to begin with, God doesn't need our money, yet He wants it, why? Psalm 50 tells us why. First, God owns everything in this world, the birds, the beasts, everything, 50:1, 10-12. Second, God doesn't need something from us; we need something from Him and giving is how we get it. That is, giving is one way our life remains one with His. And in Him is the only place our life makes sense and is secure, 50:5, 14-15, 23....then why does God strong-arm us in 50:22? He doesn't, He's simply stating those facts: if you live your life outside of God, there's nothing left but death, John 8:24.

Giving is not just for the rich, it's for everyone, in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Paul urges the Corinthians to financially help their suffering brethren in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). And we notice that God's command is for each one of us not just the rich.

God doesn't force you to give, it's voluntary, even though God wants each one of us to give, He leaves it voluntary. Giving today is like the voluntary offerings in the Old Testament (Exodus 25:1-9) not like the three mandated tithes of the Mosaic Law (Numbers 18:21-24; Deuteronomy 14:22-27, 28-29). We're in control of what we'll give, Acts 2:44-45; 5:4 (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:3; 9:7). Therefore, no church should ever coerce people to give. This is God's Church and it's His responsibility to fund it. If people aren't giving enough, then the church first needs to work on the people's hearts not their wallets.

You should look for opportunities to give? Do you ever look for ways to give to God? When we think of giving, we normally think of the weekly/monthly check we put in the offering Sunday morning. But when God captures your heart, your view of giving will change dramatically. Notice the Macedonians, their Jewish brethren in Judea were in need and the Macedonians looked at this as an opportunity they couldn't miss, 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.

No one should know how much you give, Matthew 6 describes how to live life in Jesus' Kingdom. Part of life in the Kingdom involves giving some of our money back to God. But there's a right way and a wrong way to do it. In Matthew 6:1-4 Jesus tells us that our giving should remain private; we shouldn't announce it as some of the hypocrites did in His day. It should be so private that our left hand doesn't know what our right hand is doing.

Your giving is a reflection of where your heart is, what did God give? He gave an indescribable gift, His only Son, 2 Corinthians 9:15. What does this reveal about God's heart? It is filled with love for us, John 3:16. This is God demonstrating what it means to give. So when we give, it's a reflection of our love, 1 John 3:16-18. The rich are supposed to learn this lesson and give as God did, 1 Timothy 6:17-18. Paul learned it from Jesus and gave sacrificially, Acts 20:33-35. The Macedonians did likewise, 2 Corinthians 8:5-8.

Is it tax deductible? Do you ever think of giving to an individual or cause but their nonprofit status stops from giving? Sometimes God will put opportunities in front of you that have no tax benefit to you at all. When we refuse to give because we get no tax benefit, who are we thinking about and how does that reconcile with God's definition of giving?

You should be ecstatic to give not unhappy and filled with regret, do you ever get excited when you give the salesperson your check to buy a new car? How much excitement do you get when you give your check to God? God wants us to be excited when we give and if we're not, He'd rather we keep our money, 2 Corinthians, 9:5, 7. If you're not happy to give to God, why not, what's stopping you?

It should be preplanned, do you find yourself Sunday morning scrambling to write a check for the offering because you forgot? In the Old Testament God teaches us to put Him at the top of our list when it comes to our money, Proverbs 3:9. In the New Testament God tells us that it should be pre-planned: in 2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul tells the Corinthians that each one should give "as he purposes in his heart." The Greek word for "purposes" means *to reach a decision beforehand*. And in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Paul tells them to do this on the first day of the week. All this says that our giving should be preplanned part of our budget.

How do I apply this? If you don't have a budget, create one and place God at the top of your list. And realize that God doesn't need your money; it's a way for Him to stay connected with you. He does want your money, but not if you see it as an obligation. Now think of ways you can give to Him. Are you planning to buy something in the near future? Is that something you need or want? If it's something you want, what if you sacrificed and gave that money or a portion of it to God instead? And if the entity you're thinking of giving to has no tax benefit, give the money to God anyway...see if He doesn't make up for that missed tax benefit.

III. Conclusion

Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.