

A Guide to New Covenant Giving

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BOOKS OF THEOLOGY

By Grace Alone
A Brief History of the Future
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SCRIPTURAL COMMENTARY

Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Church at Galatia
Commentary on the Hebrews Epistle

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*To the members of GCA
for giving me the freedom
to teach without compromise.*

*To my children, James and Megan,
for giving me the time
to learn about fatherhood.*

*To my wife, Libbie,
for giving me someone to love.*

Contents

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
| | INTRODUCTION | 9 |
| 1 | THE ESCAPE CLAUSE | 19 |
| 2 | KOINONIA | 29 |
| 3 | THE CORINTHIANS, TENT-MAKING, AND LIVING OF THE GOSPEL | 39 |
| 4 | AND JESUS SAID | 51 |
| 5 | A SOBER WARNING | 67 |
| 6 | WHAT ABOUT TITHING? | 75 |
| 7 | DEBATING THE TENTHS | 87 |
| 8 | THE FREEDOM TO GIVE | 105 |

INTRODUCTION
A GUIDE TO NEW COVENANT GIVING

Okay, I'm going to warn you right at the top. My goal is to encourage abundant, generous giving from every Christian who reads this book.

There. That's out of the way. Now, don't say I didn't warn you.

And, I won't be pulling any punches. I'm just going to discuss what the Bible says about the subject and expect you to react accordingly. It has always been my contention that God's people are not offended by God's word. So, I make no apologies for what I've written.

Yes, yes – I know. This is a touchy subject, especially after the scandals that rocked the Evangelical Church world in the 1980's. But, we have two choices, as I see it. We can face the subject head-on and let Scripture dictate our theology and attitudes toward giving, or we can turn a purposefully blind eye and hope that what we're currently doing is meeting with God's approval.

But, ask yourself: Do you really know what the Bible says about proper giving under the New Covenant? Do you know how much to give? Do you know how often? Some churches say you should tithe, giving them 10% (or far more) of everything that comes through your hands. Other churches say that you should pledge money you don't even have in order to obligate God to provide more. Some teach versions of "first fruits" offerings, where the first paycheck of every year belongs to the Church. Or, some don't teach at all, they just pass the plate and hope for enough to pay the bills.

Do you know which one's right? Do you know which one's Biblical? Do you know whether tithing is strictly an Old Testament tax or a New Covenant requirement? You should. After all, every time you go to Church, there will likely be an offering collected. That can be an opportunity or a source of frustration.

You should be prepared and know how to respond properly. Knowing what to do and how to do it can help you shake off the shackles of tradition and trade that yoke around your neck for guilt-free joy. But, you have to know what the Bible teaches in order to step into such freedom.

Point to Consider:

The cure for wrong use is right use.

Money. The very word makes people nervous. Will we have enough of it? Do we have too much of it? If people know we have it, will they try to steal it? It's a sensitive topic. After all, we work hard for our paychecks and we are bombarded daily with information instructing us on ways to invest, save and multiply our wealth. And, most of the information advises that we play safe, store up and keep our money secure.

We are naturally suspicious of anyone who tries to get into our wallets. And, we should be. With the onslaught of telephone solicitors, con men and frauds out there, we are all on guard. So, when a charity organization - especially a Church - collects money, suspicions are raised, motives are scrutinized and questions of accountability are bandied about. And honestly, I understand. I've seen some despicable displays of chicanery, manufactured crises and misuse of Scripture by "churchmen" in order to raise funds. The hucksters, charlatans and cheap "love gifts" that keep many ministries afloat put the cause of Christ to an open shame. I mean, if the Gospel is not worth supporting unless you get a trinket in exchange, keep your money. You're supporting a weak and beggarly religion. And, if you cannot bring yourself to give money to a church unless they are having a crisis, leave the money in your billfold. You're supporting a dying cause.

But, as I've often said, the cure for wrong use is not no use. The cure for wrong use is right use. Just because there are people misusing Scripture to achieve their questionable purposes, we should not be afraid to stand toe-to-toe with Scripture and proclaim unflinchingly what God actually does say about you, your money, and how to worship Him with what He has graciously provided.

Let's start with a fact, a primary reality: Sacrificial giving is a central theme to the whole of Scripture. And, proper giving - for proper reasons in a proper manner - is fundamental to the Christian faith. We simply need to sort out what the Bible actually teaches about the subject and extricate the traditions that have confused and twisted the subject.

That's the purpose of this book. It has been my experience that, like so many other Biblical topics, the truth about New Covenant giving will free us from the "yoke of bondage" and help us to worship God aright.

Now, to begin our examination of this topic, we have to define some terms and lay out some principles. Let's start with -

∞ THE NEW COVENANT

It is not our intention in this short book to define New Covenant theology. There are entire websites and massive tomes devoted to that subject. But, we do need to understand the fundamental difference between the Old and New Covenants. The first place in Scripture where we find the term "New Covenant" used is in Jeremiah 31.

*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord.
(Jer. 31:31-32)*

The primary focus of this passage is a contrast between two covenants. God promised to make a New Covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah, unlike the covenant that He made when He took them out of Egypt. Clearly then, the New Covenant sits in stark contrast with the Law of Moses, established at Mt. Sinai immediately after their deliverance. The great majority of Old Testament Scripture testifies to the fact that Israel failed to keep their portion of that covenant and God scattered them in response. However, even their failure to perform to the standards of that covenant did not prevent God from announcing the coming of a New Covenant with its attendant blessings. So, Jeremiah announced that the covenant struck with Israel at Mt. Sinai would be replaced by a superior "new covenant" that would guarantee the salvation of everyone who entered into that agreement (Jer. 31:27-40).

Now, the longest extant Old Testament quote imported into the New Testament is found in Hebrews 8. It is a direct, intact quotation from Jeremiah 31. Speaking of Christ's superior ministry over the ministry of the Aaronic and Levitical priests, the author of Hebrews wrote –

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith,

'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.'

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away. (Heb 8:6-13)

In his introduction to the Jeremiah passage, the Hebrews' author commented that Jesus was the mediator of a covenant that was superior to the covenant under which the priests served. So, now we know that Christ mediated the New Covenant and that His covenant is superior to the Old, or Mosaic, Covenant. Now, if there had been nothing wrong with the first, there would have been no need for the second. But, God found fault with the people of Israel. The covenant struck at Mt. Sinai was weak in that it could not bend to save fallen

sinner. So, a superior covenant was established in Christ's blood, wherein their sin and wickedness would be forgiven and they would all know God from the least to the greatest.

So, for the purposes of this book, when we speak of the New Covenant, we are speaking of the "new testament in my [Christ's] blood" (Luke 22:20), established by His death and resurrection, under which the Church now resides. The Old Covenant is the Law of Moses, established exclusively with Israel at Mt. Sinai, which has become "obsolete and aging" and has finally disappeared. So, Jewish converts to Christ are free from the ordinances of the Law.

But, this is a point not to be missed – Gentiles were never a part of the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. It was exclusively Israel's covenant. So, Gentile believers are under a sort of "double freedom." Not only are they free from the Law of Moses – which law was never intended for them - but they are also brought into the covenant of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8).

That's a vital distinction, so I'm going to repeat it. The Law of Moses is not part of the New Covenant. They are mutually exclusive. You can only be under one or the other, but you cannot be under both. And, in God's economy of salvation, the Old Covenant was faulty. So, a New Covenant of salvation by grace was established. Meanwhile, Gentiles historically had no part in the Old Covenant, and Paul argued adamantly in his letter to the Galatians that the Gentile Church was never to be subject to that law.

Follow the logic: before they were converted, Gentiles were not subject to the Law of Moses. Plus, the Law of Moses was weak in that it could not save. So, God promised a New Covenant in Christ's blood that would save "to the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25). So, what is the point of leading Gentile believers back to the Law of Moses as part of their Christian experience? That is tantamount to leaving grace and asking God to try you on the basis of your works.

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. (Gal. 5:4)

There is a popular phrase in many "legalistic" churches – "We take people to Christ for salvation and to Moses for sanctification." In other words, Jesus saves

Point to Consider:

The Law of Moses is not part of the New Covenant.

but we must perform the duties of the law in order to lead a holy life. And, in most circumstances, they teach that God will accept us on the basis of our personal sanctification, saying, “Jesus forgave your sins when you were saved, but Moses will keep you clean until you go to glory.”

But, that is precisely the type of theology Paul argued against. Christ is our whole salvation, our total justification and the only means of sanctification.

So, is there any value to the Law of Moses? Yes, absolutely. As Paul said, it is a holy law, a high and righteous standard. But, no human, save Christ, could achieve that standard. And, the Law could not bend. The fault of the Law was that it could not save. It could only stand rigorously to condemn those who failed to keep it.

The purpose of the Law was to make sin all the more obvious. It was a perfect, righteous standard that proved our lack of ability to achieve personal righteousness on the basis of performance.

Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.
(Rom 7:12-13)

So, recognizing our inability to approach God on our own merit, we are led to seek a Savior, an advocate with the Father to plead our case (1 John 2:1). And, Paul said that Law was precisely designed to do just that. It was to lead Israel to Christ –

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. (Gal. 3:24)

Now, inasmuch as the New Covenant was originally promised to the Houses of Judah and Israel, we conclude that one day it will indeed be established with Israel nationally and every promise made to the House of Israel and the House of Judah will most assuredly be fulfilled. But, that does not directly affect the subject

at hand. For a more complete examination of the New Covenant and Israel, please see the author's book, "Is The Church Israel?" and our commentary on the book of Hebrews.

Let me make one last critical distinction. Our Bible is divided into two large sections, called the Old Testament and New Testament. That is a literary division. It divides the books of the historic Hebrew Scriptures from those that were written after the ministry, death and resurrection of Christ. But, the New Covenant was not in effect until after His atonement at Calvary.

And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Testament [or, covenant], that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. (Heb. 9:15-17)

So, as Jesus walked and taught during His three-and-a-half year ministry, the Old Covenant of Moses was still in force. That's why the Pharisees were so accusatory of Him for breaking the Sabbath, the sign of the Mosaic Covenant.

File that in your brain. It will come into play in Chapter 7. The principle you must remember is that not everything written in the four gospels took place during the New Covenant period. The vast majority of what Jesus said and did occurred while the Law of Moses was still binding on Israel. If you do not make that distinction, you will be an easy target for teachers who mix-and-match Old Covenant and New Covenant principles.

So, the question for the moment is: Since the New Covenant/New Testament Church is free from the requirements of the Mosaic Law, what standard of giving and sacrificial worship do we follow? Certainly we are no longer offering the blood of bulls and goats. We no longer take our grain offerings to the priests to wave before God and burn on the altar. So, what form do we follow? And, is there any prescribed New Covenant method of giving?

Point to Consider:

The New Covenant went into effect at Calvary.

Good questions. Let's start with -

∞ THE BIG PICTURE

*Point to
Consider:*

*Sacrificial
giving is a
fundamental
response
to the Gospel.*

Jesus talked more about money than He did about Heaven or Hell. Is that surprising? It's a fact. He understood that how people view their earthly possessions is a good indicator of how they view their Heavenly relationship. Sacrificial giving is an essential element of Christ's teaching. In fact, it was the central purpose of His earthly ministry. He gave His life as a ransom for many (Mat. 20:20).

Consider this: God the Father gave His Son as a propitiation, a sacrifice sufficient to pay the price of sin, eternally purchasing the salvation of His people. God the Son gave Himself to be tortured and brutally murdered on our behalf. He gave Himself to be a sacrifice in our place, bearing the punishment and wrath we deserved. That act of willing obedience to the Father resulted in the gift of the Holy Spirit, the earnest of our inheritance and the proof positive of our salvation.

In other words, the Father gave His Son; the Son gave His life; the Spirit is given to the elect, freely giving us eternal life. Our salvation was accomplished by sacrificial giving on the part of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

So, what type of person will those unfathomable gifts produce? A sacrificial person, of course. The Father gave, the Son gave, and the Spirit gave. Is it possible for the elected, blood-bought, indwelt Christian to shut up the bowels of mercy and kindness, ignore the chain of sacrificial gifts that led to his redemption, and trust in his Heavenly estate while he hoards every crumb and penny to himself? No, that's impossible. Genuine Christianity leads to charity, kindness, sacrifice and joyous giving. Sacrificial giving is a fundamental response to the Gospel.

Now, a common argument against giving to a Church is, "God doesn't need my money." And, that's true. God, to be God, has no needs at all. You add nothing to God when you give to His work. He already owns everything! He is infinitely wealthy. In fact, since He owns everything (including you), anything you may offer is already His.

Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against

thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. (Ps. 50:7-15)

*Point to
Consider:*

*God does not
need our gifts.
We need to give.*

This passage from the Psalms gives us an intriguing insight into the character of God. He declared His total sufficiency, His utter ownership of all creatures, and refused the notion that any of Israel's sacrifices added anything to Him. He neither eats flesh nor drinks blood. And, if He were hungry He would not tell them. They had no capacity to complete Him or serve His needs. And yet, despite His total sufficiency, He insisted that they continue offering and paying their vows to Him. Why?

Simple. God does not need the gift, but Israel needed to give. God did not require gifts in order to enrich Himself. In fact, anything they gave Him was technically already His! But, He demanded Israel to sacrifice to Him in an array of required tithes, gifts, sacrifices and offerings.

So, how does that apply to us? Well, despite the fact that we are not under the Mosaic economy, God remains unchanged. He still expects us to respond to Him in worship and sacrifice. But, some of the terms have changed. Under the New Covenant, God arranges opportunities to give because He knows that our character and Christian life will be enriched as we learn to sacrifice for His glory.

Again, God does not need our gifts. We need to give. Giving is not about enriching God; it is about expanding and enriching us, both spiritually and materially. Notice that it is only after Israel offered their gifts of thanksgiving and paid their vowed offerings that God adjured them to call on Him in the day of trouble and He would deliver them. God responds to charitable, willing, thankful offerings.

Nevertheless, there are plenty of folk in the Church, who consider themselves wholly Christian, but fail to give much of anything to anyone. So, are they Christians? Possibly. If they are looking to Christ for their salvation, we can hardly judge their eternal estate. However, they are probably ill-taught Christians. So many churches teach giving as a form of legal responsibility that all the joy is taken out of the process. And, like any legal obligation, if the rule becomes too burdensome, people will rebel against it.

And, that's a shame. Because one of the few places in the Bible where God eulogizes a particular type of person is in 2 Corinthians 9:7 – “For God loves a cheerful giver.”

And, that seems like a good place to start Chapter One.

CHAPTER ONE
THE ESCAPE CLAUSE

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. (2 Cor 9:7)

Take a few moments and memorize that verse. It is vital to a proper understanding of New Covenant giving. The Apostle Paul went to pains to construct the exact antithesis of Old Covenant requirements for tithes, offerings and sacrifices. Moses absolutely commanded – of necessity, whether grudgingly or not – that every person in Israel bring every last required sacrifice and offering, in keeping with the statutes and rules of the Law. But, Paul went to the opposite extreme, stating that individual people should decide for themselves what their portion would be.

The first phrase of this verse is what I call “the escape clause” and I wish every Christian knew it backward and forward. A great deal of errant teaching would be undermined if Christians simply committed themselves to this principle – according as every man purposes in his heart, so let him give.

That “escape clause” is sufficient to pull the rug out from under every legalistic pulpiteer in the land. The next time some preacher tries to lay guilt on you in order to get into your wallet, simply respond, “According as every man purposes in his heart, so let him give!” That’s solid Bible, and it’s sufficient to free you from their mishandling of the Word.

Your giving relationship is between you and God.

But, there’s much more going on in this verse than simply freeing Christians from imposition. We find very few places in Scripture where God tells us what personality traits please Him or draw His affection. But, this verse does. “For God loves a cheerful giver.”

*Point to
Consider:*

*Your giving
relationship
is between you
and God.*

“So,” I hear you ask, “are you saying that God leaves it up to sinners to decide whether or not they’ll give to God’s work? I mean, won’t the Church go broke?”

Good question. Knowing what God knows about us - our sinful estate and natural tendency toward self-preservation and greed - how could He free us up and tell us to give according to our hearts? Isn’t that a dangerous precedent?

Nope.

God knows our thoughts and the intention of our hearts. He sent His Spirit to change our hearts. God is willing to set redeemed sinners free because He knows that they are driven, restrained, and guided by His Spirit. God allows people to determine the portion of their gift because He knows that His Spirit will drive them to give generously. He will work through them to provide the necessary means to keep His gospel thriving. Remember, Christians are not independent agents. They are bought with a price.

*Point to
Consider:*

*God loves
‘hilarious’
giving.*

For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s. (1 Cor. 6:20)

God did not simply free His people to decide for themselves whether or not they would give. He knows they *will* give. He freed them from any obligation to give a specified amount, or to be pressured into giving through necessity that removes the joy and causes grudging. Then, God reminds us that He loves the person who gives cheerfully.

Actually, the word translated *cheerful* is the Greek word *hilaros*, from which we get the English word *hilarious*. God loves hilarious giving. So, He frees His people from the obligations and legal requirements that Moses imposed on Israel and allows every person to cheerfully determine the size of their gift.

God glorifies Himself as He works through His people. His Spirit inspires them to worship Him the way He desires to be worshipped. But, that’s the way God has always worked.

∞ THE TABERNACLE OFFERING

Back in the book of Exodus, chapter 25, God took an offering from Israel,

allowing them to bring whatever they chose. After 430 years of bondage in Egypt, God cursed the Egyptians with seven plagues, culminating in the death of their firstborn. As God prepared to bring Israel out of Egypt, He instructed them –

And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof; and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people [Israel] favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty; but every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians. (Exod. 3:20-22)

So, the Israelites began their journey with great material wealth. But, it wasn't simply a gift for the Israelites to squander on themselves. After all, gold is of very little use as you're wandering through the desert looking for water. God was preparing His people. He was about to require a tabernacle from them. And, it was to be built to certain specifications, adorned in gold and brass. It was going to flow with a steady stream of sacrifices. The priests would need linen garments and woven headdresses, with a plate of gold reading, "Holiness to the Lord." God would require a brass laver, golden candlesticks and golden table with gold furnishings.

But, it's impossible to expect such lavish construction from impoverished slaves trekking through the sand. So, God prepared them in advance. He made sure that they had abundance. Then, he drowned their debtors! Finally, He took up an offering to build the tabernacle where He would dwell among them.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. (Exod. 25:1-2)

Before they reached Sinai, before the Law of Moses was instituted, God took

an offering of every man who gave willingly.

Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood, oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it. (Exod. 25: 2-9)

*Point to
Consider:*

*God provided
the substance,
the reason
and the
inspiration
to respond
to His offering.*

God was very specific. He expected an offering and He required the very best of what they had. God did not expect cheapness or stinginess. After all, He had delivered them from their captivity, enriched them beyond their wildest imagination, and was preparing to dwell among them. He expected their very best, just as He had given them.

Now, one of two things was going to happen. Moses faithfully instructed the Israelites that God wanted an offering, and he told them what to bring and what it would be used for. They understood that the whole offering would be used for the service and worship of God. So, either they would respond or they wouldn't.

Now, left to themselves, these very people – whom God would become so frustrated with that He would strew their bones through the wilderness and take their children into the promised land – would have turned their backs on God's request and used their newfound wealth to create golden idols, like the calf they built at the foot of Mt. Sinai. But, God did not leave them to themselves. First, He provided them with sufficient wealth to meet His request. Then, He told them that He required a portion of that wealth back from them for His tabernacle. And then, He moved on their hearts, causing them to give generously for His glory. God provided the substance of the offering, the reason for the offering and the inspiration to respond to the offering.

And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD'S offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments. (Exod. 35:21)

The reason God could take a willing offering from Israel is that He moved on their hearts, creating a willingness and desire to serve.

The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the LORD, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the LORD had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses. (Exod. 35:29)

So, did Moses receive sufficient material to complete the project? Yes, more than enough! Even as the work progressed, new offerings arrived every morning (Exod. 36:2-3). In fact, this is the only instance in the whole Bible where the offering was so abundant that the person collecting it told the people to stop giving!

And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work, and too much. (Exod. 36:5-7)

Once God stirred them up, they could not stop giving. They continued bringing their substance into the work of God until Moses restrained them.

And, that is why Paul could boldly write, "Let every man give as he purposes in his heart." He was not demanding a sacrifice from rebellious sinners. He was anticipating a demonstration of God's ability to inspire generosity in His people. Paul knew that the Spirit of God would stir their hearts and minds to bring more

Point to Consider:

Once God stirred the Israelites up, they could not stop giving.

than enough.

The freedom to determine your own gift is regulated by the Spirit of an eternally gracious and abundantly generous God. Your gift is a demonstration of the value of God's Word, His Son, and the sacrifice that resulted in your salvation.

When you respond to God's prodding, giving generously and cheerfully into His work, God pours out His love and affection. God loves a hilarious giver.

Of course, that one verse is not the whole story. To get a full education on Paul's theology of giving, we need to view the wider context. So, let's take a quick tour through this section of Paul's second letter to the Church at Corinth.

Paul was headed for Corinth and had sent a contingent with Titus in advance to prepare an offering, which Paul would take to Jerusalem and distribute to the saints. When Paul arrived, he would have brethren from Macedonia with him, and he had been bragging to them about the generosity of the Corinthians. However, just in case they were less-than-prepared, Paul wrote to encourage their performance.

For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: Lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness. (2 Cor. 9:1-5)

Paul laid out a few principles right at the start. First off, he fully expected that the Corinthians would give a bountiful offering. They were blessed with material possessions and they knew the need in Jerusalem. So, Paul was bold in his expectations. But, he was certain to point out that this offering was a matter of bounty, of overflow, not a matter of covetousness. Neither Paul nor the saints

Point to Consider:

The freedom to determine your own gift is regulated by the Spirit of an eternally gracious and abundantly generous God.

coveted their wealth, nor should they allow their own covetousness to restrain their generosity. And, if they failed in this regard, both Paul and they would be ashamed.

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. (2 Cor. 9:6-7)

Point to Consider:

Here's a principle: In the matter of giving, they that give only a little will also receive little. And, they that give generously will receive generous portions in return. That's basic Pauline doctrine. Notice the placement of that principle, by the way. It leads directly into the "escape clause." Sure, you can give according to your own mind and heart. But remember, if you are stingy you will receive very little in return. But, bountiful giving results in bountiful receiving.

They that give only a little will also receive little. They that give generously will receive generous portions in return.

"So," you ask again, "can you give in order to get rich?"

Well, let me be clear. God may indeed bless you with material wealth as the result of your generosity to others. But, remember that He knows your heart. If you are giving in an attempt to obligate God to enrich you, He can see through that ruse. I mean, if I can figure that out, certainly God can. But, God will undoubtedly put ample means into the hands of those He knows will distribute it generously to His people and His work. That is perfectly in line with Paul's statement. So, can you give to get rich? No. Can you give generously and receive abundantly. Yes, absolutely. Will you end up with more than you started with? Yes, according to Paul. And, the more you receive the more generous you can be. It's cyclical.

"Oh," you respond hesitantly, "but does that actually work?"

Try it. Test it. I have not known it to fail. Remember, God's faithfulness to His own word is at stake. Try to out-give God. Be the first person in history to broke giving to God. Just make sure you are doing it with a cheerful heart for God's glory, whether He responds or not.

You cannot out-give God.

God works through His people to supply everything necessary for the

establishment of His Church and the fruition of His gospel of grace. His grace is poured out on His people, supplying all their needs and providing sufficient means to give generously to His work. Or, as Paul put it -

*Point to
Consider:*

*You cannot
out-give God.
There is no
better method
of thanking
God for His
manifold
blessings than
to bring
generous
offerings for
His sake.*

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth forever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. (2 Cor. 9:8-11)

God gives sufficiency to His people in order to disperse those things among those who have need. He works through His people. And, Paul reminded the Corinthians that God supplies seed from plants and trees, which the sower uses to grow new food. Likewise, Paul prayed that in response to their generosity God would multiply the seed they had sown into his ministry enriching their bounty in “every thing.” And, he called their generosity an act of “righteousness.” Good fruit would grow from their righteous act of giving and Paul prayed that it would grow abundantly.

So, the principle is clear. Give generously and cheerfully. God loves such people and will increase their wealth as He works through them to supply the needs of His work and His people. In that process, both the needy will be filled and the wealth of faithful givers will increase.

But, Paul was not finished. He also wanted the Corinthians to understand that generous giving is a means of thanking God for the abundance of His supply. As He daily feeds His people, brings them health, supplies air in their nostrils and wisdom in their hearts and minds, it is necessary to stop occasionally and say, “Thank you.” There is no better method of thanking God for His manifold blessings than to bring generous offerings for His sake.

Not only do those offerings serve the needs of other saints, but they also serve as abundant thanksgiving to God. The offering is a means of thanking Him.

And, those who receive the offering thank God for His provision. And, they pray for the well being of the givers because of the grace of God demonstrated by such generosity. The whole act redounds to the glory of the gospel of Christ. So, Paul called this circle of giving and receiving, thanksgiving and glory to God, an unspeakable gift -

For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift. (2 Cor. 9:12-15)

Now, if this were the only passage in the New Testament that spoke of giving, it would be ample to determine our attitude and doctrine on the subject. But, this barely scratches the surface. Paul had much more to say on the topic.

And, it gets better. Better blessings, better gifts and better worship.

And, that naturally leads us to Chapter Two and the concept of “joint participation.”

To really grasp Paul's teaching about proper New Covenant giving, we need to become familiar with the word *koinonia*. In word-for-word translations, it is rendered *to communicate, communion, contribution, distribution, or fellowship*. But, we do not actually have a single English word that embraces the scope of the Greek term. The Greek word *koinonia*, and its verb form *koinoneo*, have to do with sharing, or participating in the distribution of things. In simplest terms, it means, "joint or shared participation."

Paul used the word *koinonia* to express the idea that those who gave material goods to him for his personal use, or for the distribution to the saints, had a joint participation in his ministry. They were partners, sharing the rewards of generous giving. And, those who aided him in his journey shared the blessings, temporal and eternal, that fell to Paul's ministry. Mutual participation. That's a key concept in Paul's overall theology. And, it is made most apparent in his letter to the Church at Philippi.

∞ THE JOY LETTER

Paul's letter to the Philippians is often referred to as "The Joy Letter." Paul was greatly encouraged by a gift from Philippi, brought to him by Epaphroditus. The only caveat in this joyous exchange was that Paul was in prison when the gift arrived. Nonetheless, he wrote a wonderful letter, thanking them for their support and teaching them essential truths about Christian charity. His letter began –

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace –

be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship [koinonia] in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil 1:1-6)

*Point to
Consider:*

*God works
through His
people,
inspiring and
sustaining
their giving.*

As he greeted the Philippian saints, sending blessings of grace and peace, Paul told them that he thanked God every time he thought of them, joyfully making requests on their behalf, because of their “joint participation” in the gospel from the beginning of Paul’s ministry right up until the day of his writing. And, Paul boldly asserted that their good work – their fellowship in the gospel – was both wrought by Christ and would be continued in them, until the day of His appearing.

Fundamental to Paul’s doctrine is this central notion: God works through His people, inspiring and sustaining their giving. Christians participate in the ministry of the gospel as they contribute materially to the ones who are advancing the good news. But, they do so in response to the inspiration of God’s Spirit, which began the work of giving through them and will sustain that work until the day of Christ’s return. It is a fundamental element of the Christian life.

Do you want to know something I’ve learned from years in the ministry? I’ll tell you. People can fake any part of Christianity except giving. You can regularly attend services, bow and genuflect, participate in communion, be baptized, sing your heart out, work in the nursery, even serve on the board and never really embrace the genuine faith. Plenty of people do it. But giving - sacrificial giving, consistent giving, continual giving, not looking for anything in return except God’s glory and worth - you cannot fake that.

It is against our sinful nature to willingly part with our hard-earned possessions. And, left to ourselves, that nature will curb our desire to give. We will find excuses aplenty.

“The Church has enough money.”

“I don’t want the pastor to get rich.”

”You keep him humble, Lord, and we’ll keep him poor.”

“I don’t have much and I need what I have.”

“God understands that I don’t need to give in order to be spiritual.”

I’ve heard them all.

But, the reality is that we will only give consistently, continually and sacrificially if the Spirit of God is driving and inspiring us from within. The proof that the Spirit genuinely wields influence over a person is their willingness to joyfully use their material goods to joint-participate in a ministry. You cannot fake that.

Okay, let’s return to Paul’s letter. He expanded on this theme -

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

(Phil 4:9-10)

As it appeared that Paul’s ministry was coming to an end, as he sat in Rome awaiting his ultimate sentence, the Philippian Church renewed their care for him, causing Paul to rejoice greatly. They had given careful thought to their actions and sought to send him an offering, but they had lacked the opportunity. Now, finally, their gifts caught up with him.

But importantly, they were not cajoled, manipulated or pressured into giving. They loved Paul for the truth he had taught them, the message of eternal life through Christ. And, they sought opportunity to testify to the value of that message and his ministry.

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (Phil. 4:11)

Paul wanted the saints at Philippi to understand that he would have continued with or without their gift. He was not commending them because he had wants or needs. He was in prison, after all. He was rejoicing over them because of the spiritual well being their gift demonstrated.

Point to Consider:

You cannot fake giving. The proof that the Spirit genuinely wields influence over a person is their willingness to joyfully use their goods to joint-participate in a ministry.

By the way, the word “therewith” in verse 11 is not in the original text. The translators added it. And, it changes Paul’s meaning. He was not saying that he was content to be in prison, happy with his circumstances. He had a commission to spread the gospel. He was not content to sit by idly. He had learned to be content, despite his conditions. The original text is more aptly translated, “For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content.” He was content in the knowledge that God was in control. He was not contented by the conditions. That is made plainer by the following passage.

I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Phil. 4:12-13)

Paul realized that the circumstances of his life were designed to teach him to rely wholly and completely on God’s provision, knowing that he would never be utterly left or forsaken (Heb. 13:5). As such, Paul was instructed in how to be brought low – having been stoned, beaten, lashed, shipwrecked, and imprisoned. But, he also knew how to abound, graciously accepting gifts and provision from those he taught. He knew how to eat to the full, feasting with the saints, and he knew how to suffer hunger. He knew how to be increased in goods and how to suffer lack. His conclusion was that, whatever his state, he could find contentment in the knowledge that Christ was his Savior and the purpose of this life was nothing more nor less than Christ’s glory (Phil. 1:21). He could endure wealth and poverty, fullness and hunger, abounding and abasement, through Christ who strengthened him.

Now, some will argue that affliction and poverty are much harder to endure than times of prosperity and plenty. But, that’s not always the case. My personal experience has been that nothing destroys a person’s spiritual estate faster than sudden wealth. Money increases choice. The more money a person has, the more limitless their choices. But, sinful humans do not do well with unlimited choice. Almost invariably they will choose to satisfy their lusts and indulge their flesh. It was true in Paul’s day and it is true today. So he said, in essence, “I learned how

to be rich through Christ, to not let money destroy me. But I have also learned how to be broke, destitute and in prison and not let those circumstances destroy me. I have learned how to be content in all conditions through Christ because he strengthens me.”

So again, Paul drove home the point that he was not rejoicing over the gift for his own sake, but for the sake of those who sent it.

Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate [koinonia] with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated [koinonia] with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. (Phil. 4:14-16)

Paul commended their offering, a joint-participation in his ministry. They may have known that their gifts were of little help to him in prison, yet they gave cheerfully in order to raise his spirits and demonstrate their support during his affliction. And, Paul did not take their sacrifice lightly. He recalled their long history of support. At the beginning of his ministry, as he left from Macedonia, taking the gospel to the Gentile world, no church participated with him in the matter of giving and receiving except those of Philippi. Even as he labored to establish the Church at Thessalonica, they continually sent financial support to cover his needs.

Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. (Phil. 4:17)

Once again we see this principle in action. I think Paul’s repetition was purposeful. He was driving home a point. He was not actively soliciting gifts from Philippi. But, he received them gratefully, knowing that their good work in supporting his ministry was accruing rewards, good fruit, compound interest, in their Heavenly accounts. Again, the recipient of the gift was blessed to receive it, but the giver of the gift received far more. Their care for Paul’s physical needs

resulted in spiritual blessings in eternity, good works accounted in Heaven.

∞ A SWEET SAVOR

*Point to
Consider:*

But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. (Phil. 4:18)

*Our gifts
and offerings
are a
sweet smell,
a sacrifice
acceptable,
well-pleasing
to God.*

Now this is really interesting. Having received their offering, Paul professed to be full and abounding. But then he reached back into Israel's history and chose a particular sacrifice – the burnt sacrifice – and likened it to the Church's gift. Why? What's the connection?

The "sweet savour" offering was a very specific sacrifice, initiated by Noah after the flood.

And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. (Gen. 8:20-21)

Then later, as God laid out the requirements of the Sinai Covenant, he began listing the particular sacrifices and offerings He required. Among the "sin offerings," God instructed Moses to take a ram, on whose head Aaron and his sons would place their hands. Then they were to slay the ram, collect the blood and sprinkle it around and upon the altar. Then, they were to cut the ram in pieces, wash the inner parts and legs, and burn the entire ram on the altar.

Now, mind you, this was to be a spotless ram, with no blemish of any kind. That made it a valuable animal, good for breeding and increasing wealth. But, rather than put it to that use, it was to be utterly destroyed as a testimony to the glory and value of God. They were to burn their best possession in order to send a sweet aroma into the nostrils of God.

And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar; it is a burnt offering unto the Lord; it is a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the Lord. (Exod. 29:18)

There was also an offering of consecration, a ram whose blood was used to consecrate the priests, which was burned along with a loaf of bread, a cake of oiled bread, and one wafer out of the basket of unleavened bread. These were all put in Aaron's hands, who would wave them before God and burn them on the altar, a sweet savor before the Lord (Exod. 29:19-25).

Israel learned that burned sacrifices - giving the best that they had and burning it for God's pleasure - sent a pleasing aroma into the heavens, filling the nostrils of God, inspiring His blessings and hand of protection. Paul seized that concept as he conveyed his gratitude to the Philippians. He taught that under the New Covenant, their act of charitable giving was the fulfillment of that "type," a sacrificial gift that was wellpleasing to God, on par with the sweet savor offerings of the past.

You know, as a pastor, I hear people ask, "How can I please God?" The answer is right here. And, it's as plain as the nose on your face. Not only does God love hilarious giving, but charitable gifts given for the purpose of advancing His gospel and supporting His work, create an aroma that pleases Him thoroughly.

I didn't say it. Paul did.

And, what is the upshot of pleasing God in this manner? Plenty. God reaches into the infinite wealth of His possessions and goes to work supplying for our every need.

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:19)

Now, not to overstate the obvious, but the only people who can lay claim to this promise of provision and supply are those who give generously to God's work. Only those who support the advance of the Gospel of Christ as an act of sacrifice for God's glory can expect that He will provide for all their needs. But, to those who take God up on that offer, it's a wonderful and remarkable exchange.

Point to Consider:

Only those who support and advance the Gospel of Christ can expect God to provide for all their needs.

You cannot out-give God. While you give from your limited means, He returns to you from His limitless riches and power.

So, while not everyone is called to preach, to evangelize, or to teach, everyone can participate in the ministry of the gospel by supporting those who are on the front line, advancing the cause of Christ. The action of providing financial support to a ministry is called “koinonia,” joint-participation in that ministry. The blessings, temporal and eternal, that the ministry accrues are shared among the mutual participants. And, the gifts given are seen by God as sweet savor offerings, giving the best that we have for God’s glory. In response, God promises to provide for our every need from His wealth and superabundance.

Now tell me, what sort of person would pass up a deal like that?

∞ HIM THAT IS TAUGHT

Paul’s teaching on “koinonia” was not limited to the Philippians. He taught identically when he instructed the Galatians. As he closed his letter, having labored to bring them back to the truth of salvation by grace through faith, he reminded the saints at Galatia that they owed a debt to those who brought them the good news.

Let him that is taught in the word communicate [koinonia] unto him that teacheth in all good things. (Gal. 6:6)

The instruction is clear. A person who has been taught the Word of God is to share his or her material goods – “all good things” – with the one who taught them. Paul stated this principle boldly and unequivocally.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. (Gal. 6:7)

You know, I have heard that verse preached in connection with everything from alcoholism to building a good marriage. “Do good and don’t sin,” the preachers thunder, “because you will reap what you sow!” But, in Paul’s context

Point to Consider:

You give from your limited means.

God returns to you from His limitless riches and power.

that phrase has one subject, and one subject only – koinonia. He that is taught is to share materially with the one who taught him. He is to share “all good things.” But, do not be deceived into thinking you can mock God. Whatever you sow into the labor of the gospel, that is what you will reap. Sow sparingly; reap sparingly. Give abundantly; receive abundantly. To think you can sow to your flesh and reap spiritual rewards is to mock God. And, at the risk of being obvious, you don’t want to make God out to look foolish.

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (Gal. 6:8)

You can spend your money – be it much or be it little – on you. You can use your money to satisfy your flesh. And, when your flesh dies it will decay, as all corruptible flesh does. But, if you use your money to advance the gospel, supporting the one who teaches, you are sowing to the Holy Spirit and by that Spirit you will reap everlasting life. There’s the choice. It’s cut and dry. It’s black and white. It’s life or death.

I didn’t say it. Paul did.

Remember, God knows. He knows your bills, your debts, your flesh, your heart, your bank account, and the abundant grace He has bestowed on your life. Do not be deceived. You can fool yourself, but you cannot fool Him. God is not mocked.

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Gal. 6:9)

What an amazingly honest guy Paul was. People do get tired of doing well. Doing good and caring for others takes sacrifice. Giving regularly takes discipline. And, it’s easy to slip into bad habits, close our wallets, harden our hearts and take God’s work for granted - especially if the bills pile up, the car needs work, or an unforeseen emergency arises. It’s tough to hand money to the church when your family has needs. It’s easy to get weary.

But, the promise is that we will certainly reap the rewards and benefits if we

*Point to
Consider:*

*You can
fool yourself,
but you
cannot
fool God.
God is not
mocked.*

hold on, resist fainting and continue in well doing. That's a promise. Put God first in everything you do and He will surely work on your behalf. That's a promise. It's a tough promise, sometimes. But, it's a promise nonetheless.

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Gal. 6:10)

*Point to
Consider:*

*We are given
opportunities
to do good,
demonstrate
the Spirit
in us,
and bring
glory to the
One who
saved us.*

Opportunity. That's how Paul viewed giving. Opportunities are placed in our path to do good, demonstrate God's Spirit in us and bring glory to the One who saved us. We are to seize those opportunities and do good at every occasion, with every person. But, we are especially adjured to care for those who share our Christian faith. After all, the hallmark of Christianity is love for the brethren.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:35)

Sow wisely. God is not mocked. Don't be weary in well doing. Trust that you will reap in due time. Keep up the good work. Treat all men well. Realize that God places opportunities in your path and be especially kind to those who share the faith.

That's pretty darned good advice.

Next, we'll examine Paul's argument in favor of fully supporting those who labor for the gospel and look into Paul's tent-making enterprise. Then, we'll look at Jesus's approach to these questions.

And, oh yes, we're going to get to that tithing thing.

Blessings abound!

CHAPTER THREE
THE CORINTHIANS, TENT-MAKING,
AND LIVING OF THE GOSPEL

More than any other New Testament writer, the Apostle Paul laid out the responsibility that comes with hearing the Gospel. One of those responsibilities is giving direct support to those who labor in the Word and teach the Good News. However, there has been considerable debate through the years as to whether a preacher should live entirely off gifts from the Church or whether he ought to work with his own hands to provide for his needs. And, most of that debate centers on the fact that Paul worked as a tent maker during his tenure at Corinth.

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome;) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought; for by their occupation they were tentmakers. (Acts 18:1-3)

It is true that Paul refused to be a burden to the Church at Corinth, but from his letters we also see that his decision to work did not lessen the responsibility, or the charity, of the Church at large. Paul exercised his option to distribute the Good News freely among the Corinthians, all the while instructing them on their absolute need to give. And ultimately, Paul concluded that the Corinthian Church should have carried the burden of having a teacher in their midst. So, let's take a moment and look at what Paul instructed, how he made his way, and why he chose to utilize his tent making skills.

Of the assemblies under Paul's care, the Corinthian Church appears to have

had the greatest internal strife. Even after writing two letters, addressing point after point, Paul concluded his second epistle by reminding them that he was going to visit for yet a third time and there were still problems to iron out. In his first epistle to Corinth, starting at Chapter 9, Paul argued that he was entitled, as an apostle, to all the benefits and support that the apostles in Jerusalem received. He started with the fundamental questions –

Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? (1 Cor. 9:1)

These questions were rhetorical. The answers are axiomatic, self-evident. Yes, Paul was an apostle – a sent one, an emissary of Jesus. He was free from the Law and from the bondage of tradition, free of every man and every opinion. He had seen Christ in the flesh and was constrained to preach His gospel. In fact, the Corinthian Church served as proof of Paul’s apostleship. They had come to know the gospel through his labor. Those facts were not open to debate.

If I be not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. (1 Cor. 9:2)

Even if Paul had failed to establish any other churches or bring about any other conversions, he was undoubtedly the founder and apostle of the Church at Corinth. And, their faith was the proof his apostleship. So, the argument is closed. Among the Corinthians, if nowhere else, Paul was surely an apostle and deserved any benefit to be derived from that office.

Mine answer to them that do examine me is this: (1 Cor. 9:3)

Paul was constantly under scrutiny, both within the Church and without. As a Jew who had previously persecuted those of “the way,” people were wary of his intentions and careful to see if he took advantage of people or used this new teaching as a way to control or rob them. However, Paul lived an exemplary life, insulated from any charge they levied against him.

Paul was quintessentially free. Having been freed by Christ, he lived among sinners, preached among Gentiles and ate and drank as he chose, not allowing the traditions of men to bind his conscience. That rankled the sensibilities of some religious leaders who attempted to undermine his message based on the lifestyle he led. But, Paul refused to be judged by men's standards. He had already told them –

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment, yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.
(1 Cor. 4:4-5)

Corinth was a huge, cosmopolitan Greek city, located on an isthmus about fifty miles west of Athens. It was one of the largest trading cities in the Roman Empire. Greeks, Romans, Jews, and a mixed throng of sailors and merchants frequented the crossroads of Corinth. It was a center of influence from which the gospel could flow to the world. But, it was also a notoriously wicked city, full of heathen customs and false religion. Keeping converts away from their sordid pasts was no small feat, and the heathen priests were always quick to criticize Paul and this new religion. Often, the priests were forbidden to marry, to eat with strangers, or to drink wine. Paul's freedom in Christ made him an easy and frequent target for criticism. But, Paul appealed to the lifestyle of the other apostles, who were widely known to have traveled and lived with Jesus.

Have we not power to eat and drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? (1 Cor. 9:4-5)

These were rhetorical questions, but they drove home a vital point. Paul was not going to let man-made traditions bind his conscience. Paul insisted on his choice of what to eat and drink. While men of a weaker conscience may avoid meat sacrificed to idols, Paul knew that an idol was nothing and such meat was still good for food (1 Cor. 8:4). And if he chose, Paul had the right to take a wife.

After all, Peter had a wife and he was undoubtedly an apostle (Mat. 8:14). Jesus' own brother, James, the chief apostle in Jerusalem, was also married. Paul's point was clear – I am an apostle and if other apostles are free to act certain ways, then I am equally free.

*Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?
(1 Cor. 9:6)*

Paul knew that Peter, James and the other apostles did not work 'day jobs,' but were entirely supported by the Church (Acts 6:1-4). So then, should Paul and Barnabas be forced to continue working? Were they any less deserving of support?

Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? (1 Cor. 9:7)

Again, these are rhetorical questions with assumed answers designed to prove a point. No one goes to war and pays his own way. The government pays the wages of the soldier, as well as outfitting him for battle. Likewise, no man plants a vineyard, labors to grow the grapes, and then refuses to eat or drink from what he has grown. And, no one would care for a flock, feed and shepherd it, and not take advantage of the milk that is available daily. Everyone in Corinth would agree with those examples.

Paul's point is obvious. If he fought the spiritual battles, labored in the gospel field to bring forth fruit, and shepherded the Lord's flock, then certainly he was entitled to the wages and benefits that accompanied that work. He should receive sufficient money, food and drink to continue his work.

So, was Paul simply making this up in order to benefit himself? Or, was there ample Scripture to support his view – remembering that the only Scripture Paul had to work with was what we call the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures?

*Say I these things as a man? Or saith not the law the same also?
(1 Cor. 9:8)*

According to Paul, this was basic, fundamental, historic Bible teaching, in accordance with Torah, the teaching of Moses.

*For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth
of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?
(1 Cor. 9:9)*

That's found in Deuteronomy 25:4. God instructed that yoked oxen pulling plows or threshers through a field should not be muzzled; leaving them free to eat some of the grain they worked to grow. But, Paul found a deeper meaning in that brief command. Was it written exclusively because of God's concern over oxen? Or, was it written to teach a principle?

*Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is
written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that
thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. (1 Cor. 9:10)*

This bit of the law was written to teach the principle that those who "plow," laboring in the field, should have the hope of eating from the fruit of the labor. But, while they are plowing, preparing the land to receive seed, there is nothing to eat. So, they plow in hope, with the earnest expectation that when the harvest comes, the time of threshing, there will be ample food.

Likewise, men who sow the seed of the Word (Luke 8:11) in a field do so hoping for the harvest. The end of their labor will be good fruit and an ample return on their investment. Just as the oxen would eat as they threshed the field of grain, ministers of the gospel should be cared for as they labor to teach and spread the good news. And, they rightly have that hope – the expectancy – that those they teach will provide for them.

If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall

reap your carnal things? (1 Cor. 9:11)

Ultimately, it is a question of value. If Paul taught the Church at Corinth the truth of Christ - spiritual insights and mysteries that he had learned directly from the Lord - what could compare? What could they trade to make a fair exchange?

*Point to
Consider:*

*Ultimately,
giving is a
question
of what you
value.*

What earthly, physical, carnal things do we own that are on equal par with the grace and love of God's plan of salvation? How much is the gospel worth and does anyone have sufficient means to equal its infinite value? These carnal things – money, clothes, houses, food, the requirements of the flesh – are hardly comparable to the truth of salvation by grace through faith. So, if God deigns to send a teacher your way, what harm is done if that man shares the material goods God has blessed you with? That's Paul's question.

To put it in the vernacular – “I have shared great spiritual truths with you, so if I share your physical stuff, what's the big deal?”

The stuff of life is temporal. It is here today and rusted tomorrow. Whatever wealth we amass in this lifetime is left to others on the occasion of our death. How can we compare the eternal life that Christ offers through His gospel with the fading, carnal possessions of this terrestrial life? Surely, said Paul, it was no “great thing” if he shared in their physical substance, given the infinite value of the spiritual things he brought them.

*If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather?
Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we
should hinder the gospel of Christ. (1 Cor. 9:12)*

Other ministers, other religious leaders, priests of every stripe, exercised the power to take offerings and live off the gifts of the faithful. If, said Paul, others have that authority, shouldn't the preacher of the truth have it?

Nonetheless, even though he had that God-given authority, Paul opted not to use it among the Corinthian saints. Knowing that he was going to be scrutinized and analyzed at every turn, Paul chose to take nothing from Corinth rather than give the nay-sayers an opportunity. The free course of the Gospel was Paul's primary consideration, even if it meant relinquishing some of the rights he

had as an apostle. He would rather suffer lack than hinder the gospel.

So, was Paul without an income? Not at all. Not only did he work for his wages as a tent maker, but he also continued to receive gifts from other churches, particularly from Philippi, that made it possible for him to labor at Corinth without charging them for his keep. Later, as we will see, Paul would regret that decision. Ultimately, he concluded that failing to insist on financial support from Corinth was a mistake. But, we will get to that.

Even as he denied himself of his own apostolic rights on behalf of the free flow of the gospel, Paul never backed off from the truth. The Corinthian Church was obligated to give their substance in exchange for the spiritual truths they had learned. That obligation was unabated. However, Paul chose not to avail himself of the power he had to live off that substance. Instead, their offerings were redirected to Jerusalem. The obligation to give was firm. Paul's option to refuse their offering and direct it elsewhere was left to his discretion. And, the offerings from Galatia and Philippi, along with his tent making, gave him the financial wherewithal to exercise that option.

*Point to
Consider:*

*“They that
preach
the gospel
should live of
the gospel.”*

Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? (1 Cor. 9:13)

Once again Paul reached back into Scripture and reminded his readers that the Levitical priests who served in the temple were provided for by the offerings and sacrifices of Israel. They were nourished from the sacrificial animals, drink offerings and grain offerings. Even their clothing and housing was provided. The priests were required to serve in the temple and God equally required all Israel to provide for their livelihood. Paul drew a New Covenant principle from that fact.

Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:14)

Finally, without allegory, Paul stated a simple, cut-and-dry fact. The Lord Himself has ordained that those who preach the Good News of Christ should

make their living from that work. Intrinsic to that statement is the assumption that those who are taught will share materially – “in all good things” - with the one who teaches. Whatever else we may say on the subject, or however else we frame the debate, this one fact remains. Jesus ordained this order of doing things in His Church. The recipients of the gospel are to provide a livelihood for the man God has ordained as their overseer.

Nevertheless, although that principle is firmly established in the Church, Paul chose not to avail himself of this support where Corinth was concerned. Again, that did not diminish the obligation on the saints; it merely proved Paul’s devotion to preaching the gospel at all costs.

But I have used none of these things; neither have I written these things that it should be so done unto me; for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of, for necessity is laid upon me. Yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.
(1 Cor. 9:15-19)

Here we see Paul’s motivation laid out plainly. It was important to him that the gospel remained free and available to everyone in Corinth. He gloried in the gospel and would rather die than let anyone level a charge against him. He knew that Christ laid a responsibility on him and he had no choice but to preach, whether he was monetarily rewarded or not. His reward was that no one could accuse him of abusing his power over the Church and the gospel would go out freely, without charge. But, he never abrogated the power. He had the power to require support, but he opted to reserve that power. Being free from every man’s opinion or pressure, Paul willingly made himself the servant of all men in order to gain the more to Christ.

Now, had that been Paul's last word on the subject, we could certainly use it as a model for church leadership. To wit: though they have the power and right to live off the gospel, preachers should subject themselves to serve the gospel and not expect financial or physical support from their congregation. But, that is not the end of the story. Paul had much more to say on the subject.

∞ CONCERNING THE COLLECTION

Before closing his first epistle to Corinth, Paul wrote -

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. (1 Cor. 16:1)

Separate from the issue of support for Christ's ministers, Paul reminded the saints at Corinth that they were to take up a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Not only did he expect their performance of this duty, he gave an order to all the churches in the region that they should collect this offering, regularly and systematically.

Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. (1 Cor. 16:2)

On the first day of the week, the people were to lay aside a portion of their income and hold it in store until Paul's arrival. Most likely, it was stored in a common holding place, so that they would not be gathering the offering once he had arrived. This became the model for the Church, which takes offerings on Sunday mornings, holding the collection in store to use for the necessity of the saints.

And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me. (1 Cor. 16:3-4)

With letters of recommendation in hand, Paul would send a delegation from Corinth to lay the offering at the feet of the Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 4:34-35). And, if it seemed appropriate (“meet”), Paul would accompany them. But, the key word in this passage is “liberality.” Paul anticipated generous giving and a liberal offering.

∞ FORGIVE ME THIS WRONG

Now, as I mentioned, between his first and second letters to Corinth, Paul came to realize that his decision to refuse support from them was a mistake that actually hindered their growth as a church body. He realized that the gospel must, of necessity, lay the burden of giving on everyone who is converted by it. He never constructed a quotient for giving, he never prescribed a specific amount or size for their gifts, he offered them the “escape clause” that allowed every person to determine their offerings in their own hearts, but he never allowed that Christians would fail to give. And, his failure to insist on their support became a source of sorrow and repentance for Paul. In his second epistle, he wrote -

For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge, but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things. (2 Cor. 11:5-6)

Paul’s apostleship was plain and obvious to them by this point. There was no revelation, no understanding, no gift of the Spirit that Paul failed to exercise and share with them. And, though he was coarse in his manner and unrefined in his speech, yet his knowledge of the gospel was lacking in nothing. The Corinthian Church, on whom Paul has expended so much effort, came to know him fully. His apostleship and calling in Christ were manifested among them.

Have I committed an offense in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?” (2 Cor. 11:7)

That's the key question. Paul, not a whit behind the chief apostles, gave himself fully to the saints at Corinth. Yet, they failed to respond in kind and care for his physical needs. So, he abased himself, working with his own hands and serving them without cost, exalting them over himself. But, was that actually an offense? And if so, where was the offense? Just this –

I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man; for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied, and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. (2 Cor. 11:8-9)

Even as other churches paid Paul's way, he spent their money in order to serve those who gave nothing. Other churches who would have loved to have Paul in their midst, teaching and exhorting them, sent to his needs time and again. Paul said that his use of their gifts in order to serve others without cost was a form of robbery against those who gave. Everyone lost. Not only did the Galatian and Philippian Churches fail to derive the full benefit of Paul's ministry and counsel, the Corinthian Church fell behind the other churches in their spiritual development.

For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong. (2 Cor. 12:13)

His failure to burden the Corinthian Church with the responsibility to care for his physical needs caused Paul to repent and ask forgiveness. Yet again, the third time, Paul was preparing to sojourn with them. And, he was prepared again to be no burden to them. Yet, if they failed to respond this third time, it was proof of what Paul feared – the more earnestly he loved them, the less they loved him in return.

Behold, this third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be

burdensome to you; for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And, I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved. (2 Cor. 12:14-15)

Point to Consider:

How you give is a direct measure of your spiritual well-being.

What a sad state this church was in. Even as Paul taught them the rewards of giving, and the joy of God as He delighted in cheerful givers, they still acted as children and failed to realize the disservice they did both to Paul and to their sister churches. Their failure to rise to the occasion and provide for the apostle God sent their way was ultimately deemed to be a lack of love, though they had been abundantly loved.

The Bible unflinching demonstrates the contrast. Some churches, like Philippi, caused Paul to joyfully celebrate and praise God, remembering them in his prayers that God would provide for their every need. Others, like Corinth, brought Paul's ire and contention. They were fraught with sin and caused him no end of heartache. And, their spiritual state was reflected in their unwillingness and failure to give.

As I said before, the only thing you cannot fake in the Christian life is consistent, cheerful giving for God's sake and the advancement of the Gospel. And, like it or not, how you give is a direct measure of your spiritual well being.

So far, you have been introduced to what Scripture teaches on the subject of sacrificial giving and you have a pretty good overview of Paul's approach to the topic.

"Okay," you say, "but that's Paul. What about Jesus?"

I'm glad you asked. In the next chapter we will discover where Paul learned his giving doctrine and see what Jesus had to say on the subject.

CHAPTER FOUR
AND JESUS SAID

One of the most common complaints against Biblical giving is, “But I can’t afford to give anything.” Most people, regardless of how much money they actually have, manage to live sufficiently above their means that they always feel “broke.” But, believe it or not, lack of sufficient funds is no excuse --- at least according to Jesus.

∞ THE TWO MITES

One day Jesus was in the temple and He sat over by the treasury, watching people cast money into the collection box. One by one, wealthy people came by and openly tossed in large offerings. Jesus watched and did not comment on anyone’s gift or generosity, though He knew their hearts, their minds and their relative worth.

*And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites,
which make a farthing. (Mark. 12:42)*

Farthing is an Old English monetary unit. The Greek term is *kodrantēs*. In real monetary terms, a *kodrantēs* is about two thirds of an English farthing. Meanwhile, a *mite* – the Greek *lepton*– denoted the smallest, thinnest copper Jewish coin. It was regarded as 1/128th of a Roman denarius. In other words, the widow deposited less than two cents. It was nothing in comparison to the money that amassed in the temple treasury. But, Jesus noticed. And, He used her as an example –

And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.
(Mark 12:43-44)

*Point to
Consider:*

*As we give
to God,
we express
His worth.*

To Jesus, it was not a question of amount. It was a question of value and worship. Remember that God needs nothing and He is not enriched by the offerings of the wealthy. Strictly speaking, when people give from their abundance they may be sacrificing nothing. To most of us, a thousand dollars is a significant amount of money. But, to Bill Gates, it's a small fraction of his wealth. If Bill gave one thousand, or even a million, dollars to charity, it would be no sacrifice at all. His lifestyle and net worth would remain virtually unaffected.

This widowed woman, however, sacrificed everything she had for God's glory. With nothing left, she gave her all to God, trusting that He would provide or she would die. And, Jesus immortalized her gift. Here we are, two thousand years later, still discussing it.

Our English word *worship* is a contraction of two Old English words, "worth-ship." What do you value? What has worth? And, how is that worth expressed? As we give to God, we express His worth. Is He worth sacrifice? Or, is He only worth our pocket change? That was the contrast that Jesus demonstrated to His disciples.

≈ DOING THINE ALMS

However, Jesus addressed far more than the amount people gave, or whether they gave from their abundance or their poverty. The method of giving was just as important to Him. What did people seek to accomplish in their giving? Were they seeking God's glory, or were they seeking their own?

*Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them;
otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before*

thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right doeth; that thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (Mat. 6:1-4)

The Old English word *alms* denotes charitable acts, such as giving money, food, or clothing to those in need. The NIV translates it “acts of righteousness.” The NKJ calls it “charitable deeds.” From the context, it is obvious that Jesus was referring to giving gifts in the synagogue or in the street.

Unfortunately, giving has become an “end unto itself” in many churches. The manner in which you give is secondary as long as the money comes in. But, Jesus placed great emphasis on the attitude that accompanied “acts of righteousness.” Some people desire attention from others and they make sure to get due credit for their gifts. Whether they get a plaque, a special seat, or their name in the bulletin, as long as they get recognition for their actions, they are willing to give.

The Pharisees were that way. They blew trumpets and made announcements to make sure that everyone witnessed their deeds. They sought the approval of other men. But, said Jesus, that’s all they got for their money. They received their reward – the reverence of other people. Unlike the Philippians, whose gifts bore fruit in their heavenly accounts (Phil. 4:17), the Pharisees’ gifts perished with the giving. They immediately received everything they would ever attain by those actions.

Giving within the Church is to be so private that Jesus characterized it as one hand keeping secrets from the other hand. No other person needs to know how much anyone else gives. It’s no one else’s business. It is between the giver and God. And, the acts of righteousness that a Christian performs are to be motivated by Christ’s glory and God’s worship, not by the benefits derived from impressing other people.

I once heard a philosopher say, “True humility never looks back to see if it was humble.” That’s true. And, that should be the attitude of all Christians. Knowing that God has provided for our every need, our gifts are given in His

name and for His glory, whether or not any other person ever knows about it. Genuine Christian giving is an act of humility, service and thankfulness.

And, the best part about Jesus's mode of giving is that your Father in Heaven sees your acts. He knows your sacrifice. He knows your mind and your motivation. He knows when you give privately for His glory and "His eyes only." He sees your secret actions and He will reward you openly. Isn't that something? The people whom the Pharisees sought to impress will witness the blessings that fall to God's private-givers.

Point to Consider:

You cannot out-give God.

Do you want God to openly bless you? What sort of rewards could God muster up if He chose to openly reward you? More than you could accomplish on your own? Well then, consider not only how much you give – but, how you give.

Genuine Christian giving is an act of humility, service and thankfulness.

☞ NO COAT, NO SANDALS, NO SCRIP

After Jesus had chosen his twelve apostles, he gave them power to cast out demons and to heal sickness and disease. He sent them out into the surrounding regions, though they were not to approach the Gentiles or go into any city of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Before they left, Jesus instructed –

And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely you have received, freely give. (Mat. 10:8)

What an amazing blessing had befallen Israel. Twelve men, imbued with this remarkable power, were sent out among them, freely healing, cleansing, casting out evil spirits and raising folk from the dead. The message they preached was that the kingdom of heaven was near at hand, and their miracles were certain proof of that fact. And, it was free! They received from Jesus freely and they were to distribute those blessings freely.

But, wait. Did Jesus mean that they were to pay their own way and not

expect support from the people to whom they preached? Jesus continued –

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses. (Mat. 10:9)

Jesus made sure that they left for their journey essentially broke. They took no money with them. No gold, silver or brass; nothing to buy food with and nothing to pay for room and board.

Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat. (Mat. 10:10)

A “scrip” was a begging bag, used by indigents and travelers to beg for coins. In other words, they were instructed not to take a purse with money in it or even a small satchel to beg for support. On top of that, they were forbidden to take an extra coat, or extra shoes, or walking sticks. They were to leave with the clothes on their back and take a prolonged journey, healing and preaching.

How would they survive? Jesus fully expected that those who received the spiritual blessings would provide for the apostles’ every need – food, clothing, shelter, and money. After all, He concluded, every laborer gets paid his wage and he is worthy of the meat it takes to feed him. Or, as the NIV puts it, “the worker is worthy of his keep.”

And, why not? If an apostle entered a city and healed a sick, dying child, what good thing could the parents give that healer in exchange for their child’s life? What gift is adequate to thank an apostle for healing a person’s leprosy or freeing a tortured soul from the chains of demonic possession? How much is enough in such instances? It’s impossible to estimate.

Or, as Jesus put it –

*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?
(Mat. 16:26)*

Now, apply that question to your own situation. Have you been saved? Is the

*Point to
Consider:*

*The worker
is worthy
of his keep.*

Spirit of God living in you? Has God chosen you from the foundation of the world? Has He punished His Son in your stead and promised you eternal life?

Yes?

Okay. What's that worth? At what point in your life of giving will you reach the place where you can confidently proclaim that you have given enough? What would you give in exchange for your soul?

*Point to
Consider:*

Meanwhile, Jesus knew that not every person and every city would welcome His apostles, even with their miraculous gifts. So, he made sure his emissaries were well cared for.

*Jesus expected
people to
respond
materially
when
He prospered
them
spiritually.*

And into whatever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into a house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And, whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. (Mat. 10:11-15)

Failure to receive the apostles, or to listen to their message, resulted not only in the apostle leaving but also in a curse. The wicked cities of the Old Testament would have a more tolerable judgment than any city that refused to hear and care for Jesus' "sent ones." The message of the kingdom of heaven divided people into two camps: the believers and the rejecters. Believers heard gladly, received miracles, and provided for the apostles' every need. The rejecters fell under the condemnation of Christ and await certain judgment. Jesus expected people to respond materially when He prospered them spiritually.

≈ TREASURES IN HEAVEN

It's a simple fact. You cannot divorce spirituality and giving. Jesus intermingled the two concepts constantly. He understood that people cling tightly to their earthly possessions. But, He also knew that a spiritual mindset changes our

attitudes concerning our possessions.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Mat. 6:19-21)

There is the basic principle. Everything on Earth will eventually rust, fade, corrupt, and come to naught. The physical treasures we accumulate during our terrestrial lives become inconsequential when we draw our last breath. Only those treasures we have laid up in Heaven will count for anything eternally. And, as Paul told the Philippians, we build up that account by generous giving.

It's an odd thing about wealth. I have known many millionaires in my life. Most of them made their money in the music or film business. Some were computer experts or business wizards. But, no matter how much money they had, it was never enough. No matter how many dollars they had in the bank, or how grand their success in their respective field, not a one of them were content to relax and enjoy it. In fact, most of them lived in fear that they would somehow lose it. The stock market could tank, they could lose their job, their next album could bomb; whatever the case, their greatest fear was losing what they had worked so hard to attain.

No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one; and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Mat. 6:24)

It's hard for people who spend all their time pursuing physical wealth to devote themselves to spiritual enterprises. It's one or the other. It's impossible to build both accounts at once. "Mammon" is simply an Old English word for monetary wealth. Jesus stated the contrast plainly. You will either live your life in service to God or you will live your life in service to material wealth. You will lay up treasures in Heaven or on Earth. But, wherever your treasure is compiled,

*Point to
Consider:*

*You cannot
devote yourself
to both
God's glory
and your own.*

that's where your devotion is. You simply cannot devote yourself to both God's glory and your own.

∞ ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED

“Okay,” you say, “I understand what Jesus said, but what about my bills? What about buying clothes and food for my family? What about my job? Are you saying it's wrong to work and buy what we need?”

No, not at all. God understands the economy we live in. Our modern economy is quite different from that of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. But, the basic needs of human life remain. We need to eat. We need clothes. We need shelter. And, Jesus is well aware of that. The question is: How do we go about attaining those things? Are we trusting in our own strength and ability to succeed, or do we trust that God knows our needs and provides opportunities to work and prosper?

Here's another primary principle: *Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.* I didn't say it. Jesus did. He was expounding the virtues of serving God and assuring His disciples that they would be well cared for -

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? (Mat. 6:25-26)

We know that life is unpredictable. And, we know that even the shrewdest people get blindsided by unforeseen circumstances. The wealthiest, most confident people in the world are subject to accidents, misfortune and sudden death. And, all their efforts at greatness go down to the grave with them. But, Jesus proposed a better way to live. He adjured his listeners to rest in the knowledge that God cared for them and would provide for their needs. As Peter would put it –

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your care upon him; for He careth for you. (1 Pet. 5:7-8)

If God will feed birds, who do not work jobs or labor to produce their living, then how much more will He care for you? Aren't you more valuable than birds? And, as I said, no man knows the hour of his death. No man has the strength to make himself taller, smarter, or add one additional day to his life.

*Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?
(Mat. 6:27)*

I mean, think about it. Your will is extremely limited. You cannot fly. You cannot keep yourself alive one minute longer than God intends. You cannot even add one foot to your height. And yet, ignoring our intrinsic limitations, we labor to succeed and then claim "self-made-man" status. But, no such man exists. We are all God's creation and whatever we become is exactly what He deigned and empowered us to become. We are products of His grace, not our effort.

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (Mat. 6:28-30)

Or, how about the grass? Flowers don't work day-jobs, but they are arrayed in beauty and clothed in regal splendor. So, said Jesus, if God takes such care to make sure the grass is clothed, doesn't He know that you need clothing? And notice, Jesus insisted that failing to trust in God's ability to provide cuts at the very heart of our Christianity. He said it was a perfect example of dis-faith, failure to fully trust the One who said He would never leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

*Point to
Consider:*

*We are
products
of His grace,
not our effort.*

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. (Mat. 6:31-32)

*Point to
Consider:*

*Most
of us have
far more
than
we need.*

So, do not worry about what you will eat, or drink, or wear. God knows fully that you need those things. Let me share a truism from my own life. Currently, I am 46 years old. I have never missed a meal. I have never failed to have a roof over my head. I have never had to beg for my living. In fact, I have always had at least one car in the driveway and most of the time the air that I breathe has been “conditioned.” I have a refrigerator full of food and there is no one in my household who could not afford to lose a couple of pounds. In fact, if I am out driving around and I feel a bit hungry, I have a plethora – a virtual smorgasbord – of drive-thru joints to choose from. Ten minutes after I realize I’m hungry, I’m shoving my choice of food into my face. That’s quite remarkable.

Most of you who are reading this have computers; and likely you have a TV, radio, CD player, VCR, DVD, a wide assortment of unnecessary but enjoyable diversions. And, you are in your home or office. You have had breakfast, you have had lunch, and I doubt that you are sitting around naked (which would be a whole other subject). But, do you get my point? God has provided. He has cared for you and He has cared for me. Far beyond the mere necessities of life, He has blessed us with abundance. And yet, we will look at what someone else has, feel jealous and think that we have been shortchanged. Shame on us.

God owes us nothing. But, out of his grace and endless mercy he pities us and provides for our physical needs. And, grace above grace, most of us have far more than we need. “So,” you ask, “what is the proper way to continue receiving good things from God?”

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Mat. 6:33)

God knows what you need and He is both willing and capable to provide for your daily life. Just keep your priorities straight. Rather than seek after riches,

which God can sweep away with a single word, seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. When that becomes the primary focus of your life, God provides the essentials – and often much more.

≈ SOW MUCH, BRING IN LITTLE

You know, God not only gives you the power to get wealth (Deut. 8:17), He can just as easily dissolve your earthly treasures and bring you to your knees. For instance, after Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return and rebuild their temple, there was an immediate rush of activity and the first wave of deportees laid the foundation. But, due to opposition from their neighbors, work ground to a halt. Sixteen years later Haggai and Zechariah began to preach the necessity of completing the project. During the lapse, the men of Israel worked to erect homes for themselves, but the temple laid waste. And, God noticed –

Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord. Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? Saith the Lord of Hosts, Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. (Hag. 1:9)

Their priorities were upside down. The men of Israel labored diligently to build their houses, hauling wood and buying fine furnishings. And, they worked anticipating their own splendor. They looked for much, but God saw to it that their plans failed. Since He is the source of everything we eat, drink and wear, He arranged the events of their lives so that they were always hungry, thirsty and cold. And, when they worked to make money, God made sure the money was lost.

And, when they got their goods home, it was less than they thought. And, what little they were left with, God blew away.

God provides for His people when they seek Him and His righteousness. But, He is equally willing and able to bring our efforts to nothing. He will actively work on our behalf or actively work to scatter what we accumulate. It is not a capricious thing, though. He is not arbitrary. The men of Israel had neglected Him, His house, and His worship. Likewise, the people of God of every age are called to glorify Him. We are always called to consider the work of God and put Him first. And, failure to do so may result in chastisement until we learn the lesson – “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...”

∞ THINKING ABOUT TOMORROW

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.
(Mat. 6:34)

This was a common theme in Jesus’s teaching - faith in God, every day. For instance, when He taught His disciples to pray, He said, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Today’s bread is all we can request. He gave no allowance for praying over tomorrow’s bread. Each day we look to God to provide the necessary substance to get through today.

Of course, most of us have enough food and money that we can see our way clear through today and probably into next week. But, Jesus adjured us to pray for today’s provision and trust that God will care for tomorrow’s problems. I had a professor who used to say, “No one ever had a nervous breakdown worrying about today.” And, he’s right. People worry themselves sick over tomorrow, next week, next month, etc. But, we are pretty confident that we will get through today. We don’t really sweat today. It’s tomorrow we are not sure of.

But, Christians know that God has tomorrow in His hands. We don’t worry over tomorrow because we know the One who ruled yesterday, rules today, and rules tomorrow. So, we can ask Him with confidence to provide for our needs. And if we don’t it make it through tomorrow, that’s okay too.

The parable of the wealthy man who had plenty teaches a similar lesson about misplaced priorities –

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21)

The wealthy man had an abundant crop and decided to build larger buildings to store his windfall. Then, he could take it easy. The only thing he did not know was that God would take his life that night. And, all the substance he had put his confidence in was of no value. Someone else would reap the benefit of his hard work and he would stand before the eternal Judge with no defense. And, just to make His meaning clear, Jesus summed up the parable by saying, “So is he that lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

≈ GAIN WITH GODLINESS

Now, let me make a distinction here. Having money, wealth or substance is no sin, in and of itself. Money is an inanimate object. It cannot do righteous works and it cannot sin. It has no soul or capacity to reason. The relative good or evil attached to money is determined by the heart of the person who owns it. For some, money is a useful tool, used for the benefit of many and the advancement of the Gospel. For others, money is a cruel taskmaster and the cause of their spiritual downfall.

Paul picked up on that concept and wrote to Timothy that men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth, supposed that gain was godliness. They fooled

themselves into believing that financial superiority was tantamount to spiritual superiority. But, they were wrong. And, Paul instructed Timothy to withdraw from such folk (1 Tim. 6:5).

*Point to
Consider:*

*Trust that
God has
your best
interests
at heart.*

*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.
(1 Tim 6:6-10)*

This is more than just clever wordplay. Monetary, worldly gain is not godliness. But, being content with what God has given you is great gain. You gain peace of mind. You gain faith and trust. And, you gain the approval of your Father in Heaven.

The English translation “the root of all evil” in this passage is better rendered “the root of all *kinds of evil*.” Paul was not saying that every evil act or thought was inspired by money, but that money was the source of a great many types of evil deeds. Because of money, many had failed to comprehend the true faith and ended up sorrowful. Money can act as a temptation and a trap. And, the love of money leads to all kinds of mischief and trouble.

Trust that God has your best interests at heart. He is too holy not to do that which brings Him the greatest glory and He loves you too much not to do that which is for your greatest good. He knows what you need before you ask. Nevertheless, Jesus taught us to ask. That way, we recognize that God is the provider and sustainer of all that we have and are. And, if we seek His kingdom and His righteousness, the One who owns everything is committed to providing for our needs. It really is that simple.

∞ TO SUM IT UP

Jesus's attitude concerning money and giving should be obvious at this point. It was the basis for Paul's theology of giving. And, it should inspire us not only to be generous with what we have, but also to trust that God is active in our circumstances and is teaching us how to best worship and serve Him. As we learn to lean on Him, He provides for our needs, encouraging the cycle of consistent faith and unfailing provision.

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Pet. 5:7)

Jesus used money to convey the truths of Heaven, as He did in the parable of the woman who lost a silver coin (Luke 15:8), or the man who gave his servants varying amounts of money to hold while he visited a far country (Mat. 25:14-30), or the king who had a reckoning with his servants (Mat. 18:23-35). He showed how easily He could provide for His people when he paid His taxes with money from a fish's mouth (Mat. 17:27). And, He used money to prove God's superiority over the Caesars and earthly rulers (Mat. 22:21).

The Gospels also record the damage that money can do, such as the elders of Jerusalem paying the Roman soldiers to say that Jesus's disciples stole His body (Mat. 28:12-15), or the 30 pieces of silver Judas took to betray the Lord (Mark 14:10-11), or Jesus overturning the tables and driving the moneychangers out of the temple (John 2:15), or the peril of the rich, young ruler who had such great riches that he could not follow Christ (Mat. 19:16-26), ending with Christ's dramatic statement –

Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Mat. 19:23-24)

And, those examples just scratch the surface. Jesus spoke about money openly and freely. He was neither ashamed of it nor afraid of it. He knew the

Point to Consider:

Jesus spoke about money openly and freely.

power it wielded over people and He used their desire for money to teach great eternal truths. He taught that giving was an essential part of genuine Christianity, saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)

Our Lord understood the power of money and the necessities of life. But, He wanted us to learn to trust our Father to provide for our needs. Sure, we work jobs, but it is God who gives us the strength. And, if we succeed in our work, it is God who has shown favor among our bosses and co-workers. Of course we will provide for our families. A man who does not is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8). But, if we are consumed with our ability to amass wealth and we become greedy with what God has given, we will suffer material and spiritual loss.

In the next chapter, we will consider what happens when people try to hoodwink God, pull a fast one, and pull the wool over His eyes.

It’s a sober warning.

And, as promised, we’re nearly ready to address the issue of tithing.

Hang with us.

CHAPTER FIVE
A SOBER WARNING

In the Old Testament, it is not uncommon to find God killing people, singularly or en masse, for their failure to worship Him appropriately or follow His directives. For instance, God killed –

- Everyone on Earth, save Noah and his family, for their sin and continuous evil (Gen. 6:7)
- All the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah for their rampant immorality (Gen. 19:24-25)
- The firstborn of all Egypt for Pharaoh’s refusal to allow Israel to leave (Exod. 4:22-23, 11:5)
- The entire first generation of Israel to leave Egypt, save Joshua and Caleb, for their failure to hear God’s word, trust Him, and inhabit the Promised Land (Num. 14:22-24,29-30)
- Korah and his band for resisting Moses (Num. 16:27-33)
- Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, for bringing strange incense, other than what the Lord commanded, into the tabernacle (Lev. 10:1-2)
- King David’s child for taking Uriah’s wife (2 Sam. 12:13-19)
- Uzzah for attempting to steady the ark of God (2 Sam. 6-7)
- Hananiah for prophesying falsely (Jer. 28:15-17)
- Hophni and Phinehas, and the whole house of Eli, for using their service in the temple to enrich themselves (1 Sam. 2:27-36)
- The prophet of Judah who failed to follow God’s direct command (1 Kings 13:1-24)
- The army of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, five thousand, one hundred and eighty men, for laying siege to Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35)

– The whole house Jeroboam, king of Israel, for following false Gods (1 Kings 14:9-11)

And, that's just a sampling. God avenges Himself time and time again. And, He does it for a wide variety of reasons, all of which have to do with maintaining His holiness and righteousness. However, there is only one instance in the entire New Testament where God personally intervenes and kills two people – a married couple. And, what motivated God to act so decisively?

They lied about their giving.

The infamous couple was Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. As the Holy Spirit established the Church on the day of Pentecost, three thousand souls were converted to Christ (Acts 2:41) and another five thousand soon thereafter (Acts 4:4). They became a community of believers, distinct from their Jewish heritage and Roman culture. And, there was an outpouring of affection and generosity among those early Christians.

And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And, the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:43-47)

It quickly became common tradition among the earliest Christians to share liberally in everything they had. No one suffered any lack and no one hoarded wealth. Charity, giving, sharing and love of the brethren were their hallmark. And, as the Gospel spread, so did that particular characteristic.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great

power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37)

As the Holy Spirit continued to draw people to the faith, there was a spontaneous outgrowth of giving and receiving. “Great grace was upon them all.” As the result of wealthy converts selling their land and homes, there was no one within the Church who suffered any need. The apostles became the central “clearing house” for these offerings, receiving the gifts and distributing them accordingly. But, in the middle of this great outpouring of love and charity, one couple tried to give the impression of genuine conversion while holding back a bit for themselves. It was a fatal miscalculation.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 5:1-2)

Ananias and his wife decided to sell a piece of property and give a portion of the proceeds to the Church. And, that's fine. No problem. But, in order to make themselves look good, they claimed that the portion they gave was the whole profit from the sale. They both agreed to their scam. Ananias brought their offering and laid it at the feet of the apostles, just as their fellow believers had done. They sure looked like part of the group. But, Peter saw through their ruse.

But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in

*thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?
Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. (Acts 5:3-4)*

*Point to
Consider:*

*It is not
the size
of the gift
that matters –
it is the
attitude
of the heart
reflected in
the gift.*

Ananias thought that he was lying to men, lying to the apostles, or maybe lying to the other members of the Church. But, he saw no harm in it. They wouldn't get caught. Who would ever know? But, Peter knew what they were up to. The Spirit of God, speaking by Peter, declared that it was Satan's influence that filled his heart and caused him to lie to God.

Follow Peter's impeccable logic. The land belonged to Ananias in the first place. It was wholly his possession. Even after they sold it, the money belonged to Ananias and his wife. There was no need to lie. It was their land. It was their money. They could easily have brought a portion of the sale. But, when they brought the money before the apostles and represented it as the price of the land, their lie undermined their offering. They lied to God - regardless of the size or amount of their gift.

So, once again we see this principle in action – it is not the size of a gift that matters, it is the attitude of the heart reflected in the gift. Two mites from a widow is more than \$10,000 from a haughty millionaire. Her gift represents a sacrifice for God's glory, while his gift is merely a tip, a pittance from his abundance.

And, clearly Ananias crossed another line – he brought his gift in order to be seen and accepted by other people. Since others displayed an overwhelming generosity, Ananias and Sapphira were moved by the devil to imitate the action, without the genuine change of heart that had motivated the saints. The true believers gave everything they had because they trusted God to provide for their every need. Short of true faith, Ananias and Sapphira held back part of their money and claimed they had given their all.

*And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.
(Acts 5:5-6)*

God killed Ananias instantly for lying about his gift. Ananias tried to pass

himself off as a member of the Church, mimicking their activity and all the while lying to God. So, God eliminated the infiltrator. The young men stood up, bound him for burial and took him out to the grave. Naturally, a Godly fear coursed through the church body as they heard the tale. But, it wasn't over. Sapphira joined the assembly, continued the lie, and followed her husband's fate.

And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. (Acts 5:7-11)

Sapphira carried out the plan, just as she and her husband had agreed. Not knowing that her husband was dead, she approached Peter, who asked her to confirm that the land had sold for the amount her husband had claimed. And, she answered in the affirmative. Peter was amazed. "How is it?" he asked, "that you two agreed to tempt the Spirit of God?"

The young men who had buried Ananias stood in the doorway, waiting to finish their task. Before she could respond, the woman fell down dead. The young men carried her out and buried her next to her lying husband. What ignominious deaths befell these two. Their names are recorded in Scripture to be remembered and considered through every Church age. Their deeds were specifically recorded as a warning against giving falsely or using the Church as means for personal aggrandizement.

The book of Acts tells us that there was a great fear upon all the Church, and upon everyone who heard this story. And, it ought to produce a similar fear in us. God has not changed. The story has not changed. But, the attitude of the Church has changed. These days, we take our giving responsibilities lightly. Our attitude

toward sacrifice for God's glory has become quite cavalier. In most churches, they walk through the liturgy, sleep through the sermon and drop a dollar or two in the plate as it passes. Our attitudes toward giving have become as lazy as our attitudes toward church in general.

True story: After the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, September 11, 2001, there was an ecumenical service held at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. At the end of the service, they collected an offering. The plates passed up and down the rows of politicians, power brokers and the wealthiest folk in our capital. The TV cameras followed the plates. I watched. Not only was this display contrary to Jesus' command to give privately, but one-by-one the congregation dropped ones and five dollar bills into the collection. It was pitiful. They called on God to help them in their hour of dire need, praying for protection and comfort. They invoked His name from every corner of the religious world. But, when it came time to give, they guarded their wealth and offered Him a mere token, less than they would tip a waiter. It was an open shame, but no one seemed concerned by it.

There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Rom. 3:18)

Okay, I can hear your question. "But Jim, are you saying that the Christian Church should return to the First Century model, pool all our resources and live as a commune? Is that the only way to demonstrate that we have the proper fear of God?"

No. That's not my point. I believe that the first Church in Jerusalem was so moved by Peter's use of Joel's prophecy concerning "the day of the Lord," that they expected Christ to return immediately to set up the final Kingdom. After all, the first 8,000-plus converts were all Jews who expected the immanent arrival of the Messianic Kingdom prophesied by Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, etc. What they did not foresee was the inclusion of Gentiles, the scattering of Judah, the fall of Jerusalem, or the 2,000-year gap between Christ's incarnation and His return.

In the interim, the Church has survived torture and trial, inquisitions,

crusades, reformations, internal strife, external pressures, modernization, post-modernization and even the disparate theologies that all claim to represent Christ. Still, the Spirit remains the Spirit. God is still God. Christ never changes. And, God still seeks those who will worship Him “in Spirit and in Truth” (John 4:24). God still expects integrity, humility, honesty, charity and love among His called-out people. Christ still expects our all - all that we are and all that we have.

But, this matter of giving remains a matter of the heart. Every member of the New Testament Church determines what he or she will give. It is between them and God. God knows every heart and every checkbook. He knows the difference between a sacrifice and a tip. And, He knows when people give, or when people lie in order to look good to other church members. He may not kill them instantly, but we are fooling ourselves if we ignore the warning of Ananias and Sapphira.

God takes this giving thing very, very seriously.

∞ ... AND, MANY SLEEP ...

Now, to be accurate and make certain that we’re representing the Word honestly, the New Testament does record one other religious activity that, when done incorrectly, resulted in death. It was “The Lord’s Supper,” commonly called “Communion.” And, while it is not the subject of this book, it is not inconsequential that God intervened in such a manner.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (1 Cor. 11:26-30

The word “sleep” in that verse is a euphemism for death. Failure to take the

*Point to
Consider:*

*Christ still
expects our all.*

Lord's Supper in a worthy manner – properly discerning the Lord's body and His death – had caused many within the Corinthian Church to suffer weakness, sickness and death.

Now, that's interesting to me. There are only two instances in the whole New Testament where God punished people with death as the result of their encroachment on His prescribed methods of worship. Giving and Communion. That ought to give us pause. We understand the elevated place that the Lord's Supper has among the saints of God, but few people seem to realize that it is commensurate with giving.

Again, God is serious about these things.

That said, we are finally moving into an area that has caused no end of confusion in the Church. Is tithing still mandatory in the New Testament Church? And, if so, do we owe offerings above and beyond the tithe? And, how many tithes are there, really? And, what's the deal with "first fruits"? And, isn't tithing a form of legalism?

Good questions. They are questions that deserve serious consideration and honest, Scripture-based answers. Unfortunately, there's very little real discussion of these matters. So, let's be brave enough to actually address what the Bible says about you and ten percent of everything you have.

*Point to
Consider:*

*There are only
two instances
in the New
Testament
where God
punished
people with
death because
of the way they
worshiped –
giving and
communion.
God is serious
about
these things.*

CHAPTER SIX
WHAT ABOUT TITHING?

Let's not "beat around the bush." Nowhere in the New Covenant do you find the command to give 10 percent of your earnings to the Church. Nowhere in Paul's theology of giving will you find him teaching his converts to tithe. Tithing is not a New Covenant principle. It's just that simple.

Tithing contradicts Paul's instruction that every person should give "according as he purposes in his heart." That simple fact should be sufficient to settle the issue. But, to put a fine point on it, many modern pastor/teachers who advocate tithing fail to grasp the logical consequences of their own teaching. For instance, most tithing advocates include Malachi's warning to "inspire" their congregants -

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. (Mal 3:8-9)

I do not remember ever hearing a tithing message that did not include that passage. It is constantly plucked from its context and utilized to create fear in those who hold back their ten percent – "Give it or God will get you!" But conversely, the Apostle Paul never taught Gentile churches to tithe – not once, not anywhere. Now, if it is true that believers are required to pay that ten percent or suffer the consequences of God's curse, Paul not only failed to teach giving correctly, he brought a curse on the whole New Testament Church. That's the logical consequence of modern tithing teaching. Spooky, eh?

Now, I must tell you that I have presented that argument to a few tithing

*Point to
Consider:*

*Tithing is not
a New
Covenant
principle.
It's just that
simple.*

*Point to
Consider:*

*The Church
is under
the New
Covenant.
Tithing was
part of the
Old Covenant.*

advocates. Their responses ranged from indifferent to incredulous. The most common retort was that Paul did not have to teach tithing because it was already established in the early Church. The logic went like this: The Gospel was first preached in Jerusalem to Jewish converts, who would have already been paying tithes and that practice naturally spread throughout the world as part of the Christian life. So, Paul never taught it because it was unnecessary to instruct people to do what they were already doing. His instruction that every person give according to their hearts had to do strictly with offerings, which are “above and beyond” the tithes to which they were already accustomed.

The only flaw with that theory is its utter lack of either historic or Scriptural proof. And, it stretches credulity. It is hard to believe that, of all the traditions of Judaism, the one that caught on universally was tithing. But, more to the point, how did the necessity and doctrine of tithing spread to the far coasts of Gentile Christianity if the apostles did not carry it with them and teach it? And, if they taught it, where is the evidence?

No, the Biblical facts deny that theory. As far as we know, neither Paul, Timothy, Titus, Peter, John Mark, Barnabas, Luke, nor any other early propagator of the Gospel taught the Gentiles to pay tithes. And, there is a reason - a very good reason. The Church is under the New Covenant and tithing was part of the Old.

So, why is such obvious evidence ignored in favor of faulty teaching? What we must realize is that the Church is not what it once was. Our English word *church* comes from the Celtic *chirche*, or *kirke*. Versions of that word appear in all Latin-based languages. The word *kirke* is derived from the Greek word *kyriake*, which means “Lord’s” or from *kyriakos*, which means “belonging to the Lord.” So, the Church belongs to the *kurios*, the Lord.

Meanwhile, the Greek word translated *church* or *assembly* is *ekklesia*, which means “out-called-ones.” So, by definition the Church is not a building or a structure, it is a *people* – the ones called out of the world to God.

But, these days the word *church* refers to a self-perpetuating corporate organization, with large edifices, enormous overhead, and huge budgets that need to be maintained. And the best bet to cover their astronomical expenses is mandatory giving. Most large church structures are built and funded by tithes – and the threat of God’s curse.

I spent several years in a church in Los Angeles that taught tithing as adamantly and constantly as any I have encountered. I know the arguments in favor of tithing. And, I know the legalism that must engulf a church in order for systematic tithing to take hold and continue unabated. But, I also know the freedom that comes from recognizing God's plan of giving from a true motive for His glory.

So, with that bit of introduction, let's begin with some history and then we will refute the arguments. It's enlightening to read what the Bible actually says on the subject. I guarantee – and, that's an absolute, rock-solid guarantee – that you have never heard the whole story about tithing from any church that insists on receiving your ten percent.

But, you need to know.

☞ ISRAEL AND THE TITHE

As God prepared to deliver Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, He chose a man from the House of Levi (one of the twelve tribes of Israel) to be His deliverer. The man was Moses (Exod. 2:1). Along with his brother, Aaron, Moses was given the command to go before the Egyptian Pharaoh and demand the release of Israel in order that they could serve God exclusively.

And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And, I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me; and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn. (Exod. 4:22-23)

And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. (Exod. 11:4-5)

On the night of the Passover, death passed through Egypt. The next

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morning, Israel began their journey to the Promised Land. However, no sooner had they begun their journey – even before their fateful encounter with the Red Sea - than God announced that all the firstborn of Israel were to be consecrated to Him. He had spared them and they now belonged to Him.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast; it is mine. (Exod. 13:1-2)

But, God did not expect every firstborn male in Israel to go into service for Him. He allowed – indeed, He commanded – that the firstborn human male should be redeemed and returned to his family.

And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, that thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast thou hast; the males shall be the LORD's. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck; and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. (Exod. 13:11-13)

In exchange for the firstborn of all Israel, God took to Himself one tribe of the Israelites – the Levites – and assigned them to work in the tabernacle and serve Him continually.

And, the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them ... And thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD; and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites: and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD ... and thou shalt separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine. And, after that shall the

Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering. For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me. (Numbers 8:5-6, 10-11, 13-16)

As a result of God's commission into service, the House of Levi received no parcel of land in Canaan. But, God would not leave them without provision. As we read earlier, those that served in the tabernacle were to live by the tabernacle. So, God required a steady flow of offerings and sacrifices, brought by the children of Israel and administered by the priests and Levites. Those offerings became sustenance for Aaron's family – the lineage of priests – and those who served in the tabernacle – the Levites.

And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever. This shall be thine of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee and for thy sons. In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee. And this is thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it. All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it. Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine. (Num. 18: 8-14)

Provided the children of Israel kept their duties before the Lord, Aaron and his posterity would be well cared for. They were allowed to eat from every meat offering, every sin and trespass offering. The heave offerings, which were usually grain offerings, and the wave offerings, also belonged to Aaron's family. And, look at the language. All the best of the oil, the wine and the wheat, the first portion of every harvest belonged to Aaron, by a statute forever. Aaron's family would never want for anything. The other 11 tribes of Israel were required to sacrifice their best blessings and Aaron partook of those offerings.

Still, there was an entire tribe of Levites to care for. If Aaron received all the offerings, what did the Levites receive in exchange for their lack of land inheritance?

And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. (Num. 18:21)

The Levites received the tithes. One tenth of everything Israel produced went to the Levites on a regular basis. That's pretty generous. Eleven tribes producing food, grain, oil, wine and material wealth all gave one tenth of their production to the Levites. That was the deal.

The tithe was a tax of sorts imposed on Israel by God for the care and sustenance of those who served in the tabernacle. They received no land, no lasting physical inheritance in Canaan, but they had God's Law commanding all Israel to provide for their every need.

But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. (Num. 18:24)

Now, as long as the temple stood and the Levites served, it was Israel's responsibility to bring both the offerings and the tithes – providing for the priests and the Levites. That was the purpose of the tithe.

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 unto the LORD. (Lev. 27:30)

God was jealous over His tithe. He was adamant that all Israel observe His statute and bring their tenths to the tabernacle. He made it very personal. After all, God expects proper worship and service. The tithes of Israel belonged to Him and He chose to give them to the Levites. And, if a man sought to buy back his grain, wine or seed, he had to add twenty percent to the value.

And, if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. (Lev. 27:31)

When a man was counting his herd, every tenth animal belonged to God. He was not allowed to consider whether it was a good animal or not, in order to exchange it. If it was tenth in the counting, it was God's. And, if he sought to exchange it, then both the original animal and the changed animal were God's. The tithe of everything in Israel was Holy unto the Lord, and God was quite serious about it (Lev. 27:32-33).

Tithing was not voluntary in Israel. It was an absolute commandment (Lev. 27:34). To be a member of the community of Israel, you had to pay to support the priests and Levites who served in the tabernacle, working to satisfy the commands, sacrifices and service God demanded. The common people could not enter the tabernacle or approach the holiest place. So, they were required to support the men that God chose for those purposes. And indeed, all the tithes of the land were "holy unto the Lord." They were "separated out" for His purposes.

∞ EAT YOUR TITHES

Now typically, armed with this information, the modern tithing advocate will launch into his sermon, "The tithe is holy unto the Lord!" And, then he will insist that the congregants drop their tenths into the offering plates. But, they have truncated the story. They have left off the best part. There is much more to this tithing thing.

It has always been my contention that if you teach tithing and use the Old Testament to support your insistence on it, then you need to address the entirety of Old Testament teaching on the subject. I mean, there is only one true teaching on the subject, so you need to learn all of it. But, if the modern tithing advocates ever told their congregations the whole story, they would undermine their own financial security. So, you can see the dilemma.

Nonetheless, let's read and understand the whole system of Biblical tithing and let the chips fall where they will. But, as I said before, if you are a member of a "church that tithes built," you have never heard the whole story.

It is true that God required Israel to put aside one tenth of their whole substance. It was set aside for God's purposes and God could do with it as He wished. So, He established a three-year rule regarding the tenths and expected obedience to His system. It worked like this: Every third year, the tithes of Israel were gathered into storage bins, called "storehouses" (Deut. 28:8), and the Levites, widows, fatherless and destitute among them would live off that gathering. The third year was even designated by God as the "year of tithing."

When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them: I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the LORD my God, and have done according to all that thou hast commanded me. (Deut. 26:12-14)

"But," you ask, "I thought all the tenths of all Israel belonged to God. Right? So, what happened to the tithes on the first and second year?" Well, this is where

it gets interesting. Israelites were indeed commanded to put aside a tenth of everything, every year, to use according to God's designation. It is holy – set aside – for the Lord. And, what did God require them to do with those tithes?

≈ EAT THEM AT A FEAST!

You see, three times a year every man who was capable of traveling was required to come up to Jerusalem for God's "feast days" - the "set times" of the Lord.

Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year. (Exod. 23:14)

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee. (Deut. 16:16-17)

So, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which included Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits), the Feast of Weeks (which we know as Pentecost), and during the Feast of Tabernacles (which included the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Atonement) all Israel would gather at Jerusalem. But, they were not to show up empty-handed. They were to bring offerings. Oh, and since it was a feast, they were to bring plenty of food for themselves, their families, and the Levites among them. And, what food would that be?

Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand: But thou must eat them before the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God

in all that thou puttest thine hands unto. Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth.

(Deut 12:17-19)

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always.

(Deut 14:22-23)

Israel learned to fear and trust God, and one way of demonstrating that was to appear before Him three times a year. But, when they arrived, the individual Israelites ate their own tithes – corn, wine, oil, animals, all of it. They were required to appear at God's feasts and He made sure that they had plenty to eat when they got there. They set aside their tithes between the three feast gatherings and brought that abundance with them to Jerusalem.

Now, if a man were particularly well off and his tenths added up to more than he could physically carry to Jerusalem, God allowed that he could sell his tithes, take the money to the feast, and buy whatever he desired with his tithe money.

And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, and the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee. (Deut. 14:24-27)

Let's be clear. If we are going to teach tithing – ten percent of everything you reap, in keeping with the Old Testament standard – then we must of necessity also teach that every individual Christian must eat his own tithes, sharing them with his family, and any Levites we find hanging around. And, of course, we must make the trip to Jerusalem in order to eat them. You certainly are forbidden to eat them “within thy gates.” Plus, we are allowed to sell our tithes for money, take the money to the feast, and use our tithes to buy meat, wine, strong drink, and whatever our soul desires! And, every third year we will set our tithes aside for the benefit of the poor, fatherless, widows and Levites.

At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.
(Deut 14:28-29)

Now, I hope you are getting my point. There is only one system of tithing in the Bible. There are not two systems, one for Israel and one for the Church. The whole of Scripture only prescribes one method and purpose for the tithes. They are eaten at God's feasts or they are laid up in the storehouses so that the poor and downtrodden of Israel, as well as the Levites, are cared for. And, that's it.

So, whenever a preacher insists on taking your tithes and using them for the work of the church, paying bills, or erecting structures, he is taking what is not rightfully his. It belongs to God, for God's purposes. And, God told the Israelites to eat their tithes.

See? You have never heard that in church, have you? I grew up in church and have never once heard a preacher proclaim that. But, that's the Bible. And, we either have to adjust our theology to accommodate what Scripture actually says on the subject, or we must admit that we prefer to act contrary to His will.

The New Covenant also poses some interesting realities. For instance, seeing as how there are no Levites in the Church, is it necessary to provide for them?

Point to Consider:

There is only one system of tithing in the Bible.

Well, it's axiomatic. The answer is no. Should we act charitably toward the poor and oppressed? Yes, absolutely. But, should we lay up our tenths in storehouses every third year? It's not a bad sounding idea, but it's certainly not a New Covenant requirement. We are not to be weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9), we are to love our enemies, and as much as is in us, we are to live at peace with all men. It is an every day lifestyle, not an "every third year" requirement.

And finally, inasmuch as the whole teaching on tithing is part of the Mosaic Covenant, should the New Covenant Church be subject to that standard? No, obviously not. We are subject to the newer, higher lawgiver and His far better covenant.

In the next chapter, we will consider the most popular arguments used to advocate tithing in the Church. And, we will see if they can pass Scriptural muster. I think you already know the answer, but it's a very freeing experience when we let the Word toss off the shackles that we have carried for too long.

CHAPTER SEVEN
DEBATING THE TENTHS

In order to understand and unravel the confusion over tithing, we need to be firmly established in the principles of the New Covenant. Here is a quick refresher course of the primary New Covenant principles that apply to the topic at hand –

- 1) The New Covenant was first promised during the prophecies of Jeremiah and it is repeated verbatim in the book of Hebrews. In both passages, the promised recipients of the New Covenant are the house of Judah and the House of Israel. (Jer. 31:31-34, Heb. 8:8-12)
- 2) By definition, in order for God to speak of a New Covenant, there must of necessity be an Old Covenant. (Heb. 8:13, 2 Cor. 3:6-8)
- 3) The Old Covenant is identified as the Law of Sinai, given to Moses when the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt. (Jer. 31:32, Heb. 8:9, 2 Cor. 3:6-8)
- 4) The New Covenant was established and “in effect” after Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. (Mat. 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25, Col. 2:13-14)
- 5) The New Covenant is superior in every aspect to the Law of Moses – a better covenant based on better promises overseen by a better priesthood. (Heb. 7:19, 7:22, 8:6)
- 6) The Law of Moses was a covenant struck between God and Israel only. Historically and theologically, Gentiles were never under that law. (Exod. 2:24-25, 6:2-5, 31:16-17, 34:27, Deut. 7:6-8)
- 7) It stands to reason that the New Covenant would be struck with Israel and Judah, inasmuch as they were the only people involved with the Old Covenant. (Jer. 31:31, Heb. 8:8)
- 8) When the New Covenant of salvation by grace through faith became

- effective, it utterly superseded the Old Covenant, taking it entirely out of the way for all those that are “in Christ.” (Col. 2:13-14)
- 9) Israelite believers were freed from the bondage of that law by their conversion to faith in Christ. (Rom. 8:1, 2 Cor. 3:6-11)
 - 10) Likewise, Gentile believers, who were never under the Mosaic Law to start with, are free from the restrictions and ordinances of that law. By grace, Gentiles are grafted into a covenant that was not originally their heritage or right. However, their inclusion in the New Covenant in no way eliminates Israel and Judah’s promises or standing in the covenant. (Rom. 8:1, 11:17-18, Gal. 3:17-18, Jer. 31:35-37)
 - 11) Therefore, it is axiomatic that the Mosaic Law is not binding, as a rule of faith or matter of conscience, on the New Covenant Church.
 - 12) The New Testament and the Old Testament are literary divisions in the modern Bible.
 - 13) The Gospel records – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – record events from Jesus’ three-and-a-half year ministry, which took place prior to His death, burial and resurrection. Therefore, the majority of what is recorded in the Gospels took place while the Old Covenant Law of Moses was still in effect and binding on the Israelites.
 - 14) There is a necessary distinction between the terms “New Testament” (when speaking of the literary division) and “New Covenant” (when speaking of the covenant of salvation by grace with superseded the Old Covenant of Law). While the New Covenant has rendered the Law of Moses obsolete, the advent and canonization of New Testament Scripture did not render the entire Old Testament Scripture obsolete.

There is much more to say about New Covenant principles, but these 14 points are adequate to establish our contention that tithing is not a rule in the New Covenant Church. There are some writers and theologians who would argue the details of the points listed above, but all New Covenant theologians agree that the New Covenant has replaced the Mosaic Covenant. That single point is actually sufficient to establish my proposition.

“In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” (Heb. 8:13)

And you [Gentiles], being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. (Col. 2:13-14)

So, with those points in mind, let’s look at the most popular arguments in favor of modern-day tithing.

∞ MALACHI’S CURSE

I can say with absolutely no equivocation that every message I have heard and every book I have read that imposes systematic tithing on the Church includes the following passage from Malachi –

Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts. (Mal 3:7-12)

The teaching then goes something like this –

Do you want God's best? Does it seem like God has been holding back the blessings you need? Have you stolen from Him? Have you held back your tithes? Why that's robbery! Do you have God's holy ten percent in your pocket or in your bank account? That's why you're not being blessed abundantly! You need to give God His rightful due. Bring all the tithes, all of them, into the church, God's storehouse, and He will pour out a blessing you cannot contain. How dare you rob God!

And, what about the Devil? What about the devourer? Don't you want God to rebuke him? God will only rebuke the Devil for you when you bring in your tithes. Do you want to be blessed in such a way that everyone from every nation has to admit that God has blessed you? Then, bring your tithes! Bring them now! And, if you don't, if you hold back, if you keep the holy money that belongs to God, He will curse you with a curse! Don't argue with God! Bring the tithe to the storehouse and God will bless you. But keep it in your pocket and you'll be cursed with a curse!

Have you ever heard that sort of message? Spend any time at all in most churches and you will hear it eventually, especially when giving falls off. Most seasoned churchmen know that giving naturally ebbs and flows. During the holidays it falls off as people buy gifts and travel. And, it falls off in mid-Summer as people make their vacation plans. That's a financial reality in most church organizations. So, you will normally hear the most vehement versions of the Malachi message during those two seasonal slumps. Preachers have to put that fear back into their congregants in order to make their budgets.

But, the Malachi message has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the Church. Nothing. That is the part most preachers fail to mention.

One of the primary rules of Bible interpretation when looking at any single passage is to ask: Who is speaking? What are they speaking about? And, to whom are they speaking? Let's apply those rules to the Malachi passage.

Number One: *Who is speaking?* The name "Malachi" means "my messenger." According to ancient Jewish tradition, Malachi is probably a "pen name" used by one of the prophets. He was writing during the period of

Nehemiah, about 100 years after the first exiles had returned from Babylon – somewhere between 450 and 425 BC.

Number Two: *What is Malachi speaking about?* The enthusiasm that marked the return to Jerusalem 100 years earlier was gone. Crops were bad. Droughts had scorched the land. The prosperity expected by the House of Judah had failed to materialize. The people were discouraged. So, Malachi wrote to remind them that God was still in control. Malachi reminded them that God still dealt with sin, as He did with Edom. So, if they obeyed Him in every facet of their lives, including paying tithes, He would return them to their former glory. Plus, the Messiah and Elijah were coming to destroy the wicked and give victory to the righteous.

Number Three: *To whom was he speaking?* We need only look at the first verse of his testimony to know the answer – “The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.” (Mal. 1:1) In fact, the context of chapter 3 makes clear that Malachi’s intended audience was national Israel. The language is distinctly Jewish, with references to the temple (3:1), the sons of Levi (3:3), sin offerings (3:3), Judah and Jerusalem (3:4), and the audience is directly addressed by name –

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. (Mal. 3:6)

That is a very specific designation – “sons of Jacob.” The sons of Jacob are the twelve tribes of Israel. The Church is never referred to in Scripture by that name. The Gentile Church has never been Israel, nor are they now Israel. And, they are certainly not the tribe of Judah. The southern kingdom of Judah is represented by the modern-day Jews, not the Gentile Church.

However, Malachi’s intended audience was indeed under the Law of Moses and was responsible for every detail and ordinance contained in that Law. They were absolutely required to bring the tenth of all their resources into the storehouses that were scattered throughout their land. Every third year those storehouses were to be filled so that the widows, the fatherless, the destitute and the Levites could eat from it. So, when they failed to provide as God had

instructed, they had indeed robbed God of the portion He had set aside for Himself. They were in default of an absolute requirement of God. So, God entreated them one last time to bring their tithes to the storehouses as they had been instructed, under threat of a curse. And, of course, if they obeyed He would bless them with all the promises He had offered them ever since their establishment as a nation.

*Point to
Consider:*

*The Church
is never under
the threat
of God's curse.*

But, neither that threat nor that offer was ever directed toward the Church. And, we are in serious error any time we attempt to impose it on Christ's blood-bought inheritance. The Church is never under threat of God's curse. In fact, the curse of the Law is removed, completely and utterly.

*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessings of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
(Gal. 3:13-14)*

So, it bears inquiry. Who are these men and what is their purpose in imposing the threat of cursing on the very people Christ labored to redeem? How do they justify such theology? Money? That is hardly just cause.

And, they make a serious exegetical error when they assume that the modern church building has become the storehouse of Israel. The storehouses were a definite, historic series of buildings designed for a specific purpose. There is no "exegetical imperative" (which is a fancy theological phrase that means we are driven to interpret a symbol or passage in a certain way because the Scriptures define and require it) that makes the connection between the church building and the storehouse. They are different structures designed for different purposes.

In fact, the First Century Church met in homes, caves, or catacombs of the dead – anyplace they could avoid detection and persecution. That is diametrically different from the public storehouses where one-tenth of all Israel's wealth was collected every third year. Aboveground church buildings were not erected for hundreds of years after Christ's resurrection. This notion that the church is the storehouse of Israel was a later invention, designed to accumulate wealth. But, the

distinction remains and is absolutely vital to a consistent understanding of our responsibilities and freedoms under the New Covenant.

Now, may a church receive offerings? Yes, absolutely. May a Church hold money and goods in store in order to distribute them among those who have needs? Yes indeed. May a Church use money to pay its bills and cover the cost of the ministries it supports or sponsors? Of course.

But, is a church building - in say, Smyrna, Tennessee - a storehouse where Israel is required to deposit one tenth of their increase every three years in order to support the Levites, widows, fatherless and strangers among the Israelites? No, of course not. That stretches credulity. Simple logic ought to be sufficient to prove the difference between them.

So, must New Covenant Church members bring their tenths to the church building because of a threat of cursing and blessing that God imposed on Israel under the Mosaic Covenant? No, not at all. That fact becomes increasingly obvious when we view the Scriptures seriously and understand the divisions God established in His word.

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

∞ ABRAHAM'S TITHE

The word *tithe* appears only twice in the New Testament: once in Matthew and once in Luke. Both occurrences of the word are in relation to Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees, which we will consider momentarily.

Meanwhile, the word *tithes* appears a mere six times in the New Testament. It occurs once in Luke's telling of Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican –

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even

*as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.
(Luke 18:11-12)*

The Pharisee in Jesus' story offered his fasting and tithing as evidence that he was spiritually superior to the publican. Of course, Jesus went on to condemn that Pharisee. This verse is virtually never used to advocate New Covenant tithing, for obvious reasons.

The remaining five occurrences of the word *tithes* are in the seventh chapter of the book of Hebrews. This epistle was composed by a Hebrew author for the purpose of proving the superiority of Christ's ministry and atonement over all the Old Covenant ministrations and forms of worship. The intended recipients of that letter were (let me know when this is too obvious) Hebrews. The author was writing to Hebrew converts who were struggling to balance their ancient traditions with the new faith. So, he contrasted the fundamentals of Mosaic worship and requirements against faith in Christ under the New Covenant.

And, it is in that context that we read about Abraham's encounter with the King of Salem, a man named Melchizedek –

For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually. Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is

witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him. (Heb 7:1-10)

This passage from Hebrews is a commentary on a very brief passage from the book of Genesis –

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God, and he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. (Gen. 14:18-20)

The essence of the story is that Abraham's nephew, Lot, was caught up in a battle between warring kings. He was captured, along with his family, his servants and his goods. So, Abram and his three hundred and eighteen trained servants attacked the opposing army and returned with all the goods, women and people that had been taken from the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar. And, when Melchizedek met him, Abraham received a blessing and gave the priest of the most high God one tenth of the entire spoil.

The Hebrews' author used that event to prove that the priesthood of Melchizedek was superior to the priesthood of the Levites. The Levites, after all, sprang from Abraham's grandson, Jacob. So, according to the author, when Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek and paid him tithes, the whole house and lineage of Levi admitted his superiority.

Now, what does that have to do with the argument before us? Well, countless preachers have used this event and its record in the New Testament to defend imposing the tithing on their congregation. The argument goes like this –

There are those who will tell you that tithing was only required from Israelites who followed the Law of Moses. But, the Bible tells us that Abraham paid tithes to God's priest long before the Law was given in Moses. So, if Abraham paid his tenths before the Law, certainly tithing is bigger than the Law and was

not done away with when the Law was done away with. If Abraham, the father of the faithful, paid his tenths, surely God expects all faithful people to follow that practice.

But, there are several theological difficulties with using Abraham as the model and prototype for tithing. First of all, *this is the only example of Abraham paying a tithe in his life and he gave nothing at all from his own substance*. He gave Melchizedek one tenth of the spoil he took from the opposing kings. Scripture never tells us that Abraham ever offered a tenth of his own substance to any priest anywhere. This was a singular event and it technically cost Abraham nothing. It cost the kings of the plains of Jordan.

Second, *we create quite a conundrum when we start with the premise that forms of worship that predate the Law are automatically valid for the Church*. Animal sacrifice predates the Law. Whether you start with Abel's "firstling of the flock and of the fat thereof" (Gen. 4:4) or Noah's burnt offering of "every clean beast and every clean fowl" (Gen. 8:20), animal blood was flowing long before Moses reached Sinai. So, either we must include all forms of pre-Law worship or we must produce some hermeneutical reason to include one and exclude the other.

Now, let me presume my opponents' response to that second argument. They will counter, "The New Testament tells us that Christ is the final sacrifice, replacing all the animal blood that was not sufficient to forgive sin. So, animal sacrifice is specifically rescinded while tithing is not." But, that's a shortsighted argument. Animal sacrifice was done away with because the Covenant that required it was done away. When Christ established the New Covenant, every element of Moses' Law, including both animal sacrifice and tithing, was lifted from our shoulders completely. It is not that one part was rescinded and another part was not. It is that the whole covenant was removed in its entirety.

Third, *from an exegetical standpoint, the passage in Hebrews is not a treatise on Church tithing*. That is not its focus or purpose. It is an argument in favor of Christ's superiority over the Levites. The references to Abraham's tenths in this passage are merely supportive of the primary lesson being taught. The tithes proved that even father Abraham worshipped and was blessed by the

Melchizedek priesthood. But, that is all it proves. To use this passage in any other manner is to impose meaning on it that the original author never intended. And, there is absolutely nothing in this passage that teaches New Covenant tithing.

Now, in fairness, I should admit that there is another, more peculiar, argument that rises from this passage. It goes like this –

The book of Hebrews says plainly that here men that die receive tithes.

What else could that mean but that the New Testament Church, which is here now, is meant to receive tithes? And, they are to be received by men who die, like me!

I can hear you chuckling. But honestly, I heard those exact words used by a man who personally collected and spent the tithes of his congregation. But, the Hebrews passage was contrasting the First Century Hebrew religion – “here” – and the exchange between Abraham and Melchizedek – “there.” It has nothing to do with the present day Church or its ministers. Still, it shows you the lengths some people will go to when they get their priorities mixed up and think “that gain is godliness; from such withdraw thyself.” (1 Tim. 6:5)

∞ JESUS SAID TO PAY TITHES

I admit that of the three most popular arguments in favor of tithing, this is the one that most bewilders me. It requires an almost incomprehensible lack of exegetical consistency and hermeneutical honesty. But, I have heard this argument more times than I can count. In various forms and guises, it always goes something like this –

Tithing is a New Testament principle, and even Jesus said that we should tithe. When He confronted the issue of tithing in the books of Matthew and Luke, Jesus said not to leave it undone! And, the Church surely needs to perform everything that Jesus tells us to do. I mean, how can we call ourselves the church of Jesus Christ if we are not willing to follow His commands and do what He says to do?

Okay, let's read the passages that are the basis for that statement. They are parallel accounts of the same event and they are the only two places in Scripture where Jesus says anything at all about tithing.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. (Mat. 23:23)

But woe unto you, Pharisees! For ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. (Luke 11:43)

Now, let's apply the interpretive rules that we learned earlier: Who is speaking? What are they speaking about? And, to whom are they speaking?

Number One: *Who is speaking?* Matthew tells us that these are Jesus' own words. "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples" (Mat. 23:1).

Number Two: *What was Jesus speaking about?* Jesus was pronouncing "woe" against hypocrites for their failure to understand the depth and purpose of the Law. While they exerted every effort to measure exactly one tenth of every spice and powder, taking pains to tithe meticulously, they had failed to exercise the more important aspects of the Law – proper judgment, mercy and faith. As a consequence, Jesus instructed that they should have performed the more important aspects while not forgetting the lesser aspects. In that context, tithing is a "lesser aspect."

Number Three: *To whom was Jesus speaking?* To the scribes and Pharisees, the keepers and teachers of the Law, that were the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

Now let's look at the language Jesus used as He addressed them –

But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (Mat. 24:13,14,15)

Woe unto you, ye blind guides... (v. 16)

Ye fools and blind... (v. 17, 19)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (v. 23)

Ye blind guides... (v. 24)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (v. 25)

Thou blind Pharisee... (v. 26)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (v. 27,29)

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers... (v. 33)

That's the context! That tells us both whom Jesus is speaking to and what He thought of them. He also described them thusly –

- They bind heavy, grievous burdens on people, but will not lift one of their fingers to move them. (Mat. 23:4)
- They do their works to impress men. (v. 5-7)
- They shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men. Neither they are going in nor do they allow anyone else in. (v. 13)
- They devour widow's houses. (v. 14)
- They make a pretense of holiness by long-winded prayers. (v. 14)
- They will receive the greater damnation. (v. 14)
- When they make a convert they make him twice the child of hell that they are. (v. 15)
- They swore foolishly, implicating God in their oaths and failing to accomplish them. (v. 16-22)
- They were meticulous in their public displays of tithing, they failed in the weightier matters of the law - judgment, mercy and faith. (v. 23)
- In their spiritual blindness, they would strain out a gnat – the least of someone else's failings – and swallow camels. (v. 24)
- They made themselves look clean on the outside, but they were full of

extortion. (v. 25-26)

- They were like whitewashed graves, clean and beautiful to behold on the outside, but full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. (v. 27)
- They appeared outwardly righteous, but were full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (v. 28)
- They were the children of them that killed the prophets and would fill up the measure of their fathers. (v. 29-32)
- They would not escape the damnation of hell. (v. 33)
- They were guilty of the blood of all the prophets of God, starting at Abel. (v. 34-36)

Okay, let’s put this together. Jesus was in the middle of pronouncing curses and woe against the hypocrites who led Israel. And, in the midst of His litany of their sins He mentioned that they tithed, but they failed in every weighty matter of the Law.

Now, pray tell me, how are we to apply Jesus’ rebuke and open condemnation of the “generation of vipers” to the New Covenant Church? This is the very definition of an “absurd nonsequitur.” Jesus was clearly not speaking to the Church. Even though these words are recorded in the New Testament, historically they occurred prior to Calvary. The New Covenant was not in effect. He had not yet been to the cross. The Church was not in existence. The Holy Spirit had yet to indwell the elect and produce the Body and Bride of Christ. The simple fact that Jesus’ words are found in the New Testament – a literary division – does not mean that they automatically apply to the New Covenant Church. By what incredibly twisted bit of illogic can we justify applying words to the Body of Christ that Jesus spoke as a condemnation against hell-bound hypocrites? What exegetical chaos allows for that sort of thinking?

Or, let’s approach this differently. If we are allowed to take one phrase out of context – “these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” – that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees and bind it on the conscience of New Covenant saints, then it is open season on everything Jesus said to the Pharisees. I mean, unless we can find some exegetical warrant for only taking this one phrase and applying it, we are forced to take all of Jesus’ corrective statements to the Pharisees and apply them to the Church. If His words in Matthew 23:23 apply to the

Church, then so do His words in Matthew 23:24. So, here are a few prime examples from the above list, all from the same chapter, from Jesus' self-same speech –

- Do not follow after the works of the saints, because they say and do not! (Mat. 24:3)
- The saints shut up Heaven against men! (v. 13)
- The saints make pretentious, long prayers and will suffer the greater damnation! (v. 14)
- The Church makes converts into children of hell! (v. 15)

You get the picture. If the above statements make you queasy, so should the idea that Jesus' condemnation of Pharisaical practices should be preached to the Church as an inducement to tithe. You must either apply all of Jesus' corrections and condemnations in this passage to the Church, or you must realize that none of them apply.

Let's make this clear. Should the Pharisees have tithed? Yes, absolutely! They were under the Law of Moses and were absolutely required to pay their tenths. They should have followed the full course of the Law, including proper judgment, mercy and faith, while not leaving their tithes undone. But, when Jesus spoke his words of condemnation, did He have the Church – His body and Bride – in mind? Of course not. And, we have absolutely no warrant nor permission to impose His words, directed at vipers and serpents, on the Church in order to create a theology of tithing that Jesus never once advocated.

The Church, to put a fine point on it, is not under the Law of Moses. The Church is not bound by the commandment to tithe. As Christ nailed the Law to His cross and took it out of the way, the Church was freed from the handwriting of ordinances that was against us (Col. 2:14). And, the necessity to set aside a tenth of all our increase in order to provide for the Levites disappeared just as surely as the Levitical priesthood did.

The curses and blessings of Malachi do not hang over the head of the New Covenant Church. Abraham's offering to Melchizedek neither prescribes nor dictates a New Covenant system of tithing. And, Jesus' open rebuke of the

Pharisees is definitely no basis for imposing an Old Covenant obligation on the redeemed and beloved Bride of Christ.

∞ THE YOKE OF BONDAGE

Sometimes, the drive to induce tithing among their congregants drives men to make genuinely frightening statements. They equate tithing and salvation, such as the following quote –

If you don't trust God with your wallet, you don't trust God at all. Tithing is a good measure of your faith. If you're not paying your tithes, God has cursed you and you are bound for Hell.

No kidding, I heard a man bellow that from the pulpit. Of course, if salvation is dependent on anything we do, any action we perform, or any legal requirement we keep, then we are requiring God to judge us on the basis of our personal righteousness and merit. And, we are in serious jeopardy once we wander down that path.

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul argued that grace and works do not mix. False brethren had come to Galatia to “spy out” the liberty that Paul preached. The Gentile converts were enticed into succumbing to certain aspects of the Law, such as circumcision. But, Paul argued vehemently that anyone who started down the road of justifying themselves by means of the Law was required to perform the whole Law. They were no longer covered by grace.

For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. (Gal. 5:3-4)

The same argument could be made concerning the way tithing is taught. If it is presented as a requirement, based on the Old Covenant Law (the only Scriptures where tithing is taught), then any man who seeks to justify himself before God through his adherence to the tithing principle is a debtor to the entire

Law and is “fallen from grace.” That may sound harsh, I know. But, that is indeed what Paul was striving to tell us. We are to understand our freedom in Christ, which extends to every aspect of our lives, including our giving. And, we are not to let any man place the yoke of bondage back around our necks.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (Gal. 5:1)

That’s what freedom is all about. We are saved by grace through faith. And, the Church that is built by and belongs to Jesus Christ is free from the teachers and “false brethren” that would bind us up again.

One last point as concerns tithing: it is not uncommon to hear preachers from both sides of this debate conclude -

If ten percent was the standard under the Old Covenant that could not offer genuine salvation, should the standard for the New Covenant be any less?

I think that’s a valid point. But, it remains a matter of conscience between the individual believer and his convictions. What may be my conviction may not be yours. You and God have to work out those details. He will lead you by His Spirit to find the proper level for your giving. And, if you conclude that you are going to give ten percent of your income, that’s all well and good. If that’s what you have purposed in your heart, then it’s right for you and God is well pleased. Some people will give more than that and some people will give less.

Once again, that’s what freedom is all about. So, eat your tithes. But, give generously to God and His work according as you have purposed in your heart.

CHAPTER EIGHT
THE FREEDOM TO GIVE

*Point to
Consider:*

The New Covenant did not free us from the obligation to give, to sacrifice, to worship with thanksgiving. But, it did free us to give. It freed us, for the first time in God's revelatory history, to give to God. This is a completely unique facet of the New Covenant. Let me explain what I mean.

*The New
Covenant
freed us to
give to God.*

Under the Old Covenant, a man could bring his tithes to the storehouse, firstfruit offerings of every increase, sin offerings, burnt offerings, wave offerings, sheaf offerings, drink offerings, meal offerings, and peace offerings. He could systematically, continually, unswervingly bring countless animals, innumerable sacrifices, and rivers of blood, year after year into the tabernacle. But, when he finished, he had not given a thing. Everything he brought was required. It was all God's to start with and God demanded every bit of it. No giving, just obligation.

That is why God included in the Law a "free will offering" that a man could bring after - and only after - he had accomplished all the obligatory sacrifices. But, even that offering was specific; the Israelites could not just bring anything they chose -

Speak unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them, Whatsoever he be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers in Israel, that will offer his oblation for all his vows, and for all his freewill offerings, which they will offer unto the LORD for a burnt offering; ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of the beeves, of the sheep, or of the goats, but whatsoever hath a blemish that shall ye not offer; for it shall not be acceptable for you. (Lev. 22:18-20)

Even when they gave something by choice they were not allowed to decide

in their hearts what they would bring. There was no freedom of giving in the Levitical system. And, eventually God grew weary of that system. Not only did it fail to actually save anyone, it failed to satisfy God's wrath or judgment. And, God ultimately rejected that system.

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. (Amos 5:21-24)

Now, why was God dissatisfied with Israel's feasts and offerings? They had left the worship of the One, True God. They had chased after other gods and idols. Nevertheless, they continued sacrifices to Jehovah right along with their other forms of worship. They brought the prescribed and demanded sacrifices, but God refused to accept them. So, there is a principle to be gleaned from all this -

God, being God, has no needs and we do not enrich Him with our gifts. But, we need to give in order to perfect our worship. It is the heart of the giver that determines the value of the gift and God's acceptance of that gift. It is not the amount of the gift that matters. It is the spirit and attitude of the giver.

Israel could bring every sacrifice God's Law demanded and yet God would turn from them because their hearts were not right before Him. He did not need their sacrifices. They needed to sacrifice. You know, there is no verse in the Bible that reads, "God loves the person who brings the sacrifices Moses prescribed." It was not a cheerful thing. It was a constant, weighty set of requirements designed to bring Israel to the realization that they had sinned against God. And, sin required blood. Sin required death. As Paul said, "The wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23)

The law was a schoolmaster, designed to drive them to their Savior, whose once-for-all sacrifice was sufficient to forgive their sins and perfect them forever in the counsels of Heaven. The sacrifices were for their sakes, not for God's. But,

Israel misunderstood and believed that the death of bulls and goats actually remitted their trespasses and cleansed their unrighteousness. And, weary with their errors and stiff necks, God turned away and refused to accept the very thing they had confidence in.

But! –

Once Christ died, genuinely propitiating the wrath of the Almighty, satisfying the righteous judgment of the omnipotent, the blood of animals was neither necessary nor required. And, a New Covenant relationship based on grace through faith in His finished work was established.

And, giving became possible.

For the first time, satisfied in the death of His Son, God opened a heretofore-unknown avenue of worship and thanksgiving. Without requirement, without pressure or threat of violence, God opened His heart to accept the gifts of love and adoration His people brought before Him.

Not only does His indwelling Spirit enable us to give for His glory, but He also has provided us with means, livelihood and stuff. From that stuff we bring Him gifts and He loves people who bring his provision back to Him with hilarity. He provides the method, the means and the reward. That's really quite amazing.

True freedom, genuine freedom, freedom of conscience – these concepts are inextricably tied to the New Covenant. And, every aspect of the New Covenant must reflect the freedom we have in Christ. We have freedom from bondage, freedom from fear, freedom to celebrate and worship in Spirit and in Truth. And, we have the freedom to give according as we purpose in our hearts. We have the freedom to bring gifts to the Holy God, knowing that He accepts our offerings of thanksgiving and worship. We have the freedom that comes from knowing that we and our gifts are accepted on the basis of Christ's finished work. And, we have the joy that comes from knowing that God loves us as we give.

That has, for far too long, been the missing element in our giving theology. The joy of giving should be our inspiration to give generously. And, the realization that God accepts our gifts should be all the more cause to celebrate and worship.

One of the fundamental theological concepts that I labor to convey to everyone who will listen is that the purpose of salvation is God's glorification of

*Point to
Consider:*

*In New
Covenant
giving,
God provides
the method,
the means and
the reward.*

Himself. In other words, God glorifies Himself in the salvation of His people. And, He provides everything necessary to accomplish that salvation – from the perfect atonement to the Holy Spirit, “the earnest of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14).

He has also provided everything necessary for our complete sanctification – from the indwelling force of the Spirit to the imputed righteousness of Christ. He has also provided everything necessary for our edification – from His word to our shared fellowship within the body, the Church. He has also provided everything necessary for our security, our faith, our freedom, our confidence, our protection, our hope and our standing in eternity.

The same thing holds true for giving. God has already provided everything necessary for you to please Him, thank Him and worship Him. He has given you ample supply - no matter how much or how little you have - to bring gifts that rise to Heaven like a sweet odor. He has placed you in the body so that you can share your abundance with others, giving them cause to pray for you and give thanks to God. He has already told you how to please Him and how much He loves the hilarious attitude of giving.

The next step, my friend, is yours.

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