

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers
Volume 00-35

Dear Reader

Probably one of the most abused and neglected truth in connection with the functioning of the local church or assembly has to do with Christian giving. Yet *giving* carries with it some of the greatest promises in relation to our physical and spiritual lives found in the Bible, and we believe many of even the Old Testament promises are at least *applicable* to New Testament times. So, in the next two Assembly Messengers, we will look briefly at some of the more than 100 verses on this important subject.

Most teaching on Christian giving falls into one of the following three general categories, none of which are fully scriptural. All you hear is “Give me” from some Christians or groups. For instance I have heard radio broadcasts where 20 minutes of a half hour program, day after day, were devoted to asking for money to support that broadcast and the preacher. All kinds of gimmicks are used — you send so much and we’ll give you so much, etc. Sometimes the promised blessings are health and great earthly prosperity — psychologically very strong incentives for the sick and poor. And some preachers get very rich as a result!

Other Christians or Christian groups say almost nothing. They give very little instruction on this very important, very practical, and very necessary Scriptural subject. Preachers may shy away from it lest the audience think the preacher is hinting at getting money for himself.

Others take a more middle road. They wrongly request funds from saved and unsaved alike, but their requests are brief and low key. When preaching to a radio or TV audience such groups may simply ask that their listeners “write them a letter” with no specific mention of money.

Now, let's look at what Scripture teaches on giving.

OLD TESTAMENT GIVING

The Tithe

Abraham was the first recorded giver. He gave *tithes* of all to Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God (Gen.14:20). This was about 500 years before the giving of the Law of Moses (the 10 commandments, so-called), a significant fact, as we shall see.

In Genesis 28:22 Jacob promised to give a *tenth* back to the Lord of all the Lord would give him. This also occurred well before the giving of the Law.

The word *tithe*, meaning one-tenth (10%), was the *basis*, the starting point for giving throughout the Old Testament before and during the reign of the Law. Again, it's important to see that the tithe didn't *originate* with the Law, but was established, obviously by God, long before the Law. Then, the tithe was picked up and included in the Mosaic Law (Lev.27:30-32; Num.18:21-28; Dt.12:5-6,11,17; 14:22,27-29; 15:7-11; 2 Chron.31:5-6; Neh.10:37-39; 12:44; 13:5, 12). So, although the Christian is not under Law (Rom.6:15; 7:4; Gal.2:16), the tithe was instituted before the Law and has never been repealed. So we are still responsible for the tithe. Further, since God's *principles* don't change, we can learn valuable lessons from the teachings as to the tithe under the Law of Moses (Rom.15:4).

Further, the principle of Scripture is that the tithe was to be comprised of the *firstfruits* (Ex.23:19; 34:26; Neh.10:35; Prov.3:9), and even the *best* of those firstfruits (Nu.18:29-30). There was to be no thought of using

any of the money or goods until the best 10% had been given to the Lord. How would the Lord consider *our* giving in this regard?

The tithes given in Israel were the *inheritance* of the tribe of Levi. Levi had charge over the house of God and, unlike the other tribes, had no inheritance of land. But the tithes they received were *in return for their work in serving the Lord* (Nu.18:21,31) — a principle found throughout Scripture. The ox was not to be muzzled while treading grain (Dt.25:4), but was to partake of some of the grain in return for its labors.

But even Levi, although called by God to serve Him full time, was to tithe from their tithe (Nu.18:26-28; Neh.10:38) — 10% of their 10%. Otherwise, their tithe was their own; yet they were to realize their calling from God and “not profane the holy gifts” (Nu.18:32). *Profane* has the thought of *making common*. The tribe of Levi were not to use their gifts for common, worldly purposes which would detract them from their God-given work. Today, we Christians all are priests (1 Pet.2:5,9) and have all been given one or more spiritual gifts to use for the Lord. While we all haven’t been called to give up secular employment, we all are His servants. Shouldn’t we be more careful how we spend the money the Lord has allowed us to have, that it not be used for “common” worldly things that take us away from His service? This seems to be a great challenge to all of us in our materialistic and pleasure-seeking society.

Freewill Offerings

The tithe was *required* under the Law; it was the minimum, but freewill offerings — something extra, not required — were encouraged. Almost all future references in the Old Testament to giving, after the giving of the Law, speak of the freewill-aspect of giving. One could get by with the minimum tithe, but “the generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself ... He who has pity on the poor *lends* unto the Lord, and that which he has given will *He* pay him again ... He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses” (Prov.11:25; 19:17; 28:27).

The Lord promised to bless Israel for their giving, as seen above and also in Proverbs 3:9-10, “Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the *firstfruits* of all your increase; your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine” — all an Israelite could desire.

We actually rob God if we fail to give. “Will a man rob God? Yet, you have robbed Me. But, you say, In what way have we robbed You? In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me ... Bring all the tithes *into the storehouse* that there may be food in My house, and prove Me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing *that there will not be room enough to receive it*, and I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes so that he will not destroy the fruits of your ground ...” (Mal.3:8-11). We don’t know how much *hasn’t* gone wrong in our lives as we obey God in such matters.

Earthly prosperity was a mark of blessing for a godly Jew. So the Jew looked for earthly abundance as a sign that God was pleased with him. But, today, our citizenship and outlook and future is heavenly (Phil.3:20-21; 1 Pet.1:3-4). Yet we live on earth and the New Testament makes it clear, as we shall see, that we also will receive a certain amount of practical earthly blessing in connection with our giving, although our primary blessings are future, in “rewards.”

Other Aspects of Old Testament Giving

There was never to be the thought of a *bribe* in giving (Ex.23:8). We are not to give with the thought of *control*.

The poor, even in Israel, were not to be neglected. “I command you, saying, You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in the land” (Dt.15:11). When such practical pity is shown to the poor, God says in Proverbs 19:17 that it is considered as *lending* to the Lord. The implication is there will be a payback with interest!

NEW TESTAMENT GIVING

After the death and resurrection of Christ, the New Testament never speaks of the tithe (except as history, in Hebrews 7:4-10). The New Testament does not endorse tithing, nor does it refute it: *it simply leaves it alone*, but in so doing, *it allows the tithe to stand as the basis for giving*. We are dead to the Law of Moses, but as we have seen, God instituted the tithe long before the Law. Thus the tithe still stands as the basis or starting-point for all Christian giving. It just isn't emphasized in the New Testament. Why? Although God still expects a tenth of all, of the firstfruits — of gross, not net income — the grace of the New Testament emphasizes the freewill aspect of giving (as does about half of the Old Testament teaching on giving).

Liberal Giving

Further, the New Testament emphasizes *liberal* giving. “He who gives, let him do it with *liberality*” (Rom.12:8). But as we have seen, Scripture infers that we begin our liberality on the base of 10% of our gross (before taxes, before expenses) income.

No one has to fear giving 10% of his gross income to the Lord, or intelligent, liberal giving over that 10% base. God always is faithful, and His promises in both the Old and New Testaments indicate (and many have found) that you will get along *better* on the 90% or 80% or 70% that remains of your income after you have given what God leads you to give, than you ever did before on *all* your income. “Concerning the ministering [giving] to the saints ... he who sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity (i.e., not forced, or out of fear), for God loves a cheerful giver, and God is able to make all grace [favor] abound towards you ... having all sufficiency ... have an abundance for every good work” (2 Cor.9:1-15).

Even if someone honestly believes the tithe has no place in New Testament giving, the force of the argument isn't changed. Should we today, under grace, with all the revelations we have of God through Jesus Christ, and with the Lord's coming so near, give less than that *required* in the Old Testament? Liberal giving implies that we should give more.

To WHOM Do We Give?

The money we give is for the needs of the *saints*. “Concerning the collection *for the saints*” (1 Cor.16:1). “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His Name, in that you have ministered [given] *to the saints*, and do minister” (Heb.6:10). See also 2 Corinthians 8:4. This *service* — yes, it is a service to the Lord to give — supplies the *needs of the saints* (2 Cor.9:12).

God doesn't give us a complete list of what such giving *to the saints* is to be used for, because the purposes and needs are many. A few things are mentioned, however. We are to support those who labor in the Lord's things. Quoting again from Deuteronomy 25:4 about not muzzling the laboring ox, Paul adds (from Luke 10:7 and Matthew 10:9-10) that “The laborer is worthy of his wages” (1 Tim.5:17-18). Then in 1 Corinthians 9:9, Paul again quotes from Deuteronomy 25:4 and goes on to explain that “if we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? ... Even so, *the Lord has commanded* that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (vv.10-14). Paul's “gospel” usually went far beyond preaching to the lost, also including the “good news” of God's revelations concerning the Christian; and in particular, those revelations concerning the Church.

There is more! “Let him who is *taught* the Word share in all good things with him who *teaches*. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap, for he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal.6:6-8). So, if we support those who seek to help people, saved and unsaved, at home and abroad, in the Lord's things,

we are sowing to the Spirit and we will reap blessing. Read Philippians 4:10-20 where the Philippians had cared for Paul, shared in his distress, gave to him. God said it was an acceptable *sacrifice*, well-pleasing to Him! Finally, the believing Jews had spiritually helped the Gentiles in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul therefore said, “For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their [the Jews’] spiritual things, their [the Gentiles’] duty is also to minister to them in material things” (Rom.15:26-27). Note in all this, the one or ones ministering the practical gift (whether money or some other service) were not to make a value-judgment as to the financial condition of the one(s) who had helped them spiritually.

The *saints* also include the poor and needy. When there was a great famine, the disciples sent *relief* to the brethren dwelling in Judea (Acts 11:28-30) — to the poor saints at Jerusalem (Rom.15:26). There was to be a certain amount of *equality* — not dollar for dollar — but “that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack — that there may be *equality*. As it is written, He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack” (2 Cor.8:14-15). One member of the “family of God” was not to starve or be in rags while others had abundance. We are to *share* with our fellow-believers (Heb.13:16). But this was to be no excuse for someone to be lazy. “We *commanded* you this, If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thes.3:10). In fact, work was to be done by each person, even ones who previously stole, “that he may have something to give to him who has need” (Eph.4:28).

Godly widows who are “widows indeed” and over 60 years old — really in need, without a family to support them — are to receive *continuing* support from the assembly (1 Tim.5:3-16). See also Acts 6:1-3. But the believing man or woman is to provide for any widows in the family, relieving the local assembly of that responsibility (1 Tim.5:16). In fact, if one “does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim.5:8). But nothing in this portion of Scripture indicates that an assembly can’t give an occasional love-gift to any godly widow, but the assembly is relieved of the day-by-day responsibility when she has caring relatives. Surely, too, the principle given here applies to needy widowers.

All other “causes” to support are left up to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the local assembly.

WHO Should Give?

All Christians should give of what they have. We normally think of giving as only giving money in our money-oriented society, but this is a warped picture. In the Old Testament people gave goods (2 Chron.31:5-6) because that was what they had. Young people may have very little money or goods, but they have time and abundant strength and energy. So in addition to giving what they can in money and goods, they can give *themselves*, as we all can, for none of us can buy our way out of personal, committed involvement in the Lord’s things! We show our faith to those around us by our works (Jas.2:17-20).

On the other hand, *unsaved people should not be allowed to give anything*. The early disciples and traveling brethren “went forth ... taking *nothing* from the Gentiles” (3 Jn.7) — nothing from the unsaved around them, the meaning of “the Gentiles.” Why? At least two good reasons. First, the hearing of the gospel is not based on ability to pay. It is without charge (1 Cor.9:18; 2 Cor.11:7). Secondly, nothing dulls and soothes a person’s conscience as to his sin and need for a Savior, as “giving to the church.” Almost always when you ask a person whether or not he or she is saved, he will tell you about his “good” works, including giving, but we are not saved by works, “lest anyone should boast” (Eph.2:9). In fact, before we are saved, all our “righteousnesses” or “righteous acts” (including giving) are, in God’s sight, “as filthy rags” (Isa.64:6). There isn’t enough money in the universe to buy the ransom for even one person (Ps.49:7). For these reasons, we believe local assemblies should be exercised to *never* pass a collection plate in a gospel meeting or Sunday School when unsaved would likely be present and contribute.

We are impressed in this matter by the recently heavily advertized “Power for Living” national evangelistic campaign from the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation. Even though the television commercials and supplied

literature are first class and surely expensive, they tell the enquirer and the recipient of literature, “No contributions will be solicited or accepted.” They got it right!

The Next Issue

Next issue, the Lord willing, we will continue with *how* we should give and *where* we should give, as well as some other interesting aspects of giving, and a summary. We trust this has proven interesting and thought-provoking.

RPD