

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers
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Dear Reader

In the last issue we looked at *giving* in the Old Testament and saw that the *tithe* was instituted before the Law and has never been repealed. But even in the Old Testament much giving was on the freewill offering basis, over and above the tithe. There were a number of interesting points found there that are “for our learning” (Rom.15:4) and “our examples” (1 Cor.10:6,11). Then turning to the New Testament we looked at “liberal giving,” to *whom* do we give, and *who* should give. After a brief introduction we will continue.

The Giving God

Giving is the very heart of Christianity. God has given us His only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He has given us eternal life in Christ Jesus, as well as giving us the blessed Holy Spirit who indwells every believer. Our salvation is the gift of God, including the gift of faith needed to be saved (Eph.2:8). Then, too, He has given us freely all things with Him (Rom.8:32) so we lack nothing spiritually. We have received everything we have in one way or another, from Him. Therefore, if God is so gracious, magnanimous and wonderful, should we not also want to give in return, since we have been made partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet.1:4)?

HOW Should We Give?

We saw that under the Old Testament law, a tithe was required, and even though we are not under that law, we should give at least that much, and really more (1 Cor.16:1-2), as God has prospered us. Every person is to purpose in his heart what to give so it won't be given grudgingly, but cheerfully (2 Cor.9:6-9), which God loves! Further, God does not expect us to give what we don't have, or to burden one to relieve another, but that there may be *equality*, basing this on the Old Testament practice of gathering the manna (2 Cor.8:12-15; Ex.16:16-18). Further, we are to be *generous* givers, as Paul shows us in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. Let's look at some of these principles in more detail.

Our giving is to be secret. “But, when you do a charitable deed [when you give], do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret, will Himself reward you openly” (Mt.6:3-4). So we are not to be seen by people when we give. Look at the wisdom of this. If other members of the body of Christ and particularly those of the local assembly where you express fellowship (who still have the old nature) knew how much you gave, they might be jealous, resentful, disgusted, or might look up to you as a leader or spiritual-giant, depending on their own point of view and on how much *they* gave in comparison. Many a person has bought himself into some high “church” position or fleshly place of influence by “giving” in violation of this rule of Matthew 6. Our approval in the matter of giving is to come from God alone! Otherwise, instead of the *Father's* reward, the only reward we get is our “approval” from man (Mt.6:2) — surely second best by a long way!

Finally Romans 12:8 tells us to give, as JND's notes say, “with *liberality*, from ‘giving without hesitation,’ ‘not avoiding to give on false excuses,’ ‘readily,’ ” as we distribute to the “needs of the saints” (Rom.12:13). Also, we should be like those assemblies in Macedonia who first gave themselves to the Lord, and abounded in their liberality in ministering to the saints (2 Cor.8:1-5).

Storehouse-tithing is a common expression used to denote how we should give. The expression comes from Malachi 3:10, “Bring all the tithes into the *storehouse*, that there may be food in My house ... says the Lord of Hosts.” See also Nehemiah 10:35-38 and 13:12. The same thing is implied in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, “On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay something aside, storing as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” — no rushing around, scraping up money or goods at the last moment. Whether the money actually

is given weekly is not so important, but given or not, *it is to be laid aside as if already put in the collection basket!* It is the *Lord's* money!

Further, one is to give “as he may prosper” (1 Cor.16:2) and “according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing” (2 Cor.8:3). The churches (local assemblies) in Macedonia were in “deep poverty,” yet the brethren gave what they possibly could and Paul highly praised them. See Acts 11:29-30. “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a *cheerful* giver” (2 Cor.9:7) — one who is most happy, who is *overjoyed*, to give to the Lord! Giving out of fear — of necessity — isn't giving cheerfully.

Although stated before the Church was formed, the Lord's words in Luke 6:38 sound remarkably like what we saw in Proverbs 3:9-10 and Malachi 3. The Lord said, “Give, and it will be given you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” Although this is “kingdom truth” and not “church truth,” it shows that the Lord is debtor to no one. Isn't the promise, although undefined as to specifics, too good to pass over lightly? Mr. LeTourneau, owner of a large construction equipment firm, and who gave the vast majority of his income to the Lord, is reported to have said, “It pays to serve the Lord, but if you serve the Lord because it pays, it won't pay to serve the Lord.” We don't give *because* the Lord blesses, but out of love and obedience to our Savior.

Two interesting verses are found in Deuteronomy 16:16-17 in relation to appearing before the Lord in the place He chooses. They say, “... they shall not appear before the Lord *empty-handed*. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.” See also Exodus 23:15. In application to our times, it seems that we should not gather around the Lord without some funds to give Him, even as the Lord has prospered him. Can any of us say the Lord hasn't given us anything?

WHERE and to WHOM Should We Give?

In Deuteronomy 12:5-6, the Jews were told that “you shall seek the *place* where the Lord your God chooses out of all your tribes, *to put His Name for His habitation*, and ... *there* you shall ... take your ... tithes ... and your freewill offerings.” The same is said in Deuteronomy 12:11,14,26 and 14:23. It is nicely put in Deuteronomy 26:2, “... and go to the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide.” So, at least in the Old Testament, the people gave at the place where they gathered to the Name of the Lord.

By example the same thing is implied in the New Testament. God has chosen to make His Name abide in the Assembly. It is “the Church of God” (1 Cor.10:32) and “of Christ” (1 Cor.11:16). It is the body *of Christ*. And the local assembly represents in practice the whole Body of Christ — the place locally where people gather to the name of the Lord (Mt.18:20). The collection for the saints took place on the first day of the week *at the gathering of the local assembly* (1 Cor.16:1-2) as part of the worship.

Now, not all the members of the Body of Christ are walking as they should — not walking their earthly church pathway according to God's instructions for them. Even though we are thankful for much they do, that Christ is preached (Phil.1:15-18) and saints are helped, we must be careful not to support, and in that way *encourage* them in what they are doing wrong. Half-truth often is more deadly, more spiritually-disastrous than no truth, because it often *sounds* so good and may *appear* to be the full truth, at least to the casual observer. Paul was about to administer a lavish gift and he stated it was important not to be *blamed* — to provide honorable things [“for things honest,” JND] *in the sight of the Lord and of men* (2 Cor.8:20-21). Would the Lord and our fellow brethren be pleased where we distributed His money? We need to be prayerfully careful where and to whom we give! We will answer to Him!

Therefore, both the Old and New Testaments indicate that, at least to a substantial degree, our giving should be *to the local assembly* where the money and goods *carefully* are distributed by the whole for the Lord's work wherever support is needed, where the work can be stamped as being Scriptural and truly of God. Of course this assumes the local assembly is in the spiritual condition to show the proper care that the gifts are going where the *Lord* would want them to go at that particular moment, and not going where the *Lord* would not want them to go. Going down

some “list” does not provide for the necessary spiritual exercise. What is needed is the prayerful and exercised help of *many* in deciding whether the things *I* want to support are Scriptural and appropriate. All this recognizes the unity of the body of Christ and the help we need to give to one another. *And we should be prepared to modify our personal “wants” to comply with the exercised and prayerfully-arrived at “mind of the assembly,” without anger or bitterness.*

Then there is *individual work*, and using the Lord’s money for that work, as in the case of immediate-need (Rom.12:13; Jas.2:15-16) or personal exercise. The Lord may lay it on my heart to give something large or small *today* — not next month — to a brother or sister, and that is between the Lord, the brother or sister, and myself. It may be because that person has specially helped in some spiritual need (Gal.6:6) or has incurred considerable expense in meeting that need. There may be many other reasons too, again between the Lord and oneself. Others may be exercised to give individually but *anonymously* through the various “funds” set up for that purpose. Then there may be other more personal ways to use the Lord’s money such, for instance, in building a Christian library or in tract work, etc. Further, if the local assembly is not in a good spiritual condition and is using the funds provided in ways that do not meet the righteous requirements of the Word (and one must first of all be true to one’s Lord and His Word), then individual giving may be the *only way* one can give with a clear conscience.

There is an interesting verse in 3 John. Despite problems in the local assembly where Gaius expressed fellowship, he was a man of hospitality. He faithfully did what he could for the local brethren and for strangers from other assemblies. The apostle John adds, “If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well” (v.6). The JND translation indicates that this was his common practice. To house and feed the saints is expensive and takes time and energy, but what a wonderful personal use for the Lord’s money and the physical strength and resources He allows us to have!

Although the Bible doesn’t absolutely insist that to give, one must be breaking bread, thus expressing fellowship together in the local assembly, *giving* usually is spoken of in connection with the local assembly because such fellowship in the practical-representation of the body of Christ is the natural, normal, expected condition for the Christian. Giving has its fullest meaning, its fullest blessings when one is personally fully obedient to the Lord, and that includes expressing fellowship, breaking bread, with the other believers. So giving or any other good work never can replace obedience to God as an active participant in the local expression of the body of Christ.

Other New Testament Examples and Instructions as to Giving

In Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46 and John 2:13-16 we have accounts of the Lord driving out the moneychangers at the temple at Jerusalem. They had made the temple “a den of thieves” and a “house of merchandise.” These accounts indicate that the local assembly is never to be a business, not a bingo-parlor, to raise funds. Funds raised are by the voluntary giving of believers.

Mark 12:41-44 gives the account of the poor widow giving “two mites” — all she had — to the Lord’s work. She had every right to only give one mite, a wonderful 50% contribution, but she loved the Lord so much that she gave *all*. How much do we love the Lord as exhibited to Him by our giving?

Paul was a unique, very specially called apostle of the Lord, and was used to spread the Word far and wide to the then-known world. Yet he had the *personal exercise* to do secular work so as to not burden the saints (1 Cor.4:12; 1 Thes.2:9; 2 Thes.3:7-8). It seems he made tents (Acts 18:3), surely a menial job for one of the world’s most highly educated men. He did this even though he taught that God *commanded* that the preacher is to live by the gifts of the saints. Paul restated the Lord’s words, evidently paraphrasing Luke 14:12-14, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). It seems that, although the saints are not to make a value-judgment when giving, of someone’s other sources of income, the person himself or herself may inform the assembly that his or her needs are less. I recall a widow thanking an assembly for a love-gift, but informing that her needs were completely met.

Paul thus showed the proper attitude of the true servant of God. He was not in the ministry to get rich, but because God had called him to that work. This is so unlike many preachers today (thank God, not all). Paul was “not

seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor.10:32-33). I once heard discussions between a denominational “church” and prospective preachers. They negotiated working hours, living conditions, salary, living expenses and pension requirements! That was so unlike Paul and so far from the teachings of Scripture as to giving, where the preacher lives off the *gifts* of the saints sent by the leading of the Holy Spirit. If the work truly is of God, then the Holy Spirit will see that the needs are met. If not, one should consider what is wrong.

SUMMARY

Surely a book could be written on Christian giving and we are sure some have been written. But we have attempted to summarize the highlights in two issues of the Assembly Messenger. We trust you will do further studying on your own. If you have read things that differ from your practice or the practice of the local church where you express fellowship, then prayerfully and carefully test what has been written with the Word of God (Acts 17:11; 1 Thes.5:21). If you are convinced *God’s Word* has said it, then we pray you would consider changing to conform to the Word, not to us. Following is a brief summary of some of the main points we have studied in the last two issues.

- Every believer is to give, as God has prospered him or her. Obviously, a Christian young person on a small allowance or with a low-paying part time job, can’t give what a working adult can, money-wise, but they should give (and provision should be made for them to give). Further, they can give time and energy.
- The unsaved are not to be allowed to give anything.
- The tithe was instituted before the Law and has never been repealed as God’s *basis* for giving, even though we today are not under the Law. But even the Old Testament emphasized the freewill aspect of giving, over and above the tithe, and that is the emphasis of the New Testament too. The New Testament speaks of giving *liberally*.
- We *rob God* when we don’t give according to Scripture (Malachi 3). As a result He likely will withhold certain blessings from us. Our giving is to be done *cheerfully* (happy to do so), not grudgingly; generously, not sparingly; simply desiring to serve and please our Lord whom we love.
- Giving is connected closely with the local assembly where even young Christians should be expressing fellowship. This is seen by both Old and New Testament example. Our giving is to be weekly and when needs arise, not when we feel like it. Giving is to be a regular habit. The money put aside for the Lord is to be *untouchable* for personal wants. Whether actually put in the collection each week or not, the money is to be put aside each Sunday.
- The New Testament also encourages *individual giving* when needs arise or one is exercised to do so. “Do not forget to do good *and to share*, for with such sacrifice God is well pleased” (Heb.13:16).
- We give *to the saints* — to those in need, to those who labor in ministering the Word to us, to certain widows, etc.
- Our giving should be in secret — not known by the other believers of the local assembly, or generally.

In reality, all our money and possessions are God’s. He has loaned them to us for a short time. So all we have is to be used carefully, with the Lord’s guidance, but God asks that we give back to Him a liberal portion of our income and goods (and strength and time) to be used for His practical work on earth. If we obey Him in this, He turns around in love and grace, and promises us much practical and spiritual blessing.

Suggested Reading

Although not a book on the subject of giving, a book recently edited and republished, *Malachi*, by Walter Lickley, has a number of pages of discussion of *giving* in Chapter 3. The book should also be of interest if you found our recent series on the “Seven Churches of Asia” interesting and thought-provoking. Available through Believers Bookshelf, Phone 570-672-2134 USA; 905-563-4929 Canada.

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