

INTRODUCTION

GIVING is one of the graces God wants His children to embrace. After all, He is the One who is the ultimate giver of all good things and always initiates in giving to us, His children.

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights ...

In fact, the word “grace” is what Paul calls the gift of giving. Note these two examples:

2 Corinthians 8:1, 3 Now brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia ... they gave of their own accord

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

God wants us to give of our talents, our time and our treasure – these three “T’s.” After all, He has given us these gifts of time, talent and treasure, and He wants us to use them to benefit His kingdom purposes.

Today in this message I’m going to focus on the gift or grace of giving of our treasure – our financial resource - largely because that’s the one that people seem to struggle with the most. As part of our FAITH ENGAGE series in helping us to better engage our friends with our beliefs, I want us to understand and be able to communicate God’s plan and purpose in asking us to be givers of our money.

Every organization seems to have its “hand out” for contributions. And the church often gets a bad rap for being more about asking for money than for dispensing spiritual benefits. Some of that bad rap is justified if the church continually asks for money, rather than correctly teaching the Biblical grace of giving. So that’s what I hope to do today – correctly teach what God tells us about the giving of our money.

HOW GOD WANTS US TO GIVE

Jesus said “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) – often called “the supreme Beatitude.” But how does God want us to give? Here are some “quick takes” from a number of verses on the subject.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. One the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

1. Give regularly – establish a habit! – on Sunday
2. Give responsibly – “each one”
3. Give reciprocally - as God has prospered

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given to the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord ... and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

1. Give sacrificially - costing something
2. Give spontaneously - from an inward compulsion given by the Lord
3. Give spiritually - first giving oneself to the Lord

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap 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; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

1. Give generously
2. Give willingly
3. Give cheerfully
3. Give in faith that God will supply

WHAT ABOUT THE TITHE?

So, you say, but what about the tithe? Are New Testament Christians suppose to give 10%, or are we free from that law and only supposed to give as we are moved by the Spirit of God? Good question. If you search on the internet under “tithing today” you will find that about 9 out of 10 sites are “anti-tithe” – teaching that tithing has no place in the church today. Most of them could even be called “hate-tithe” sites, they are so critical of anyone or any church that would encourage people to tithe, since they say it is only for the past.

First – let’s affirm that we are not under the law, but free from the law by grace. But what does that mean? It means that keeping the law has nothing to do with our salvation and that salvation is by the grace of God alone. What is DOESN’T mean, is that the Old Testament law has no place in our life today. Yes, the ceremonial law of sacrificing bulls and goats upon the altar has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ as our “once for all” sacrifice for our sins. All the ceremonial law of the Old Testament has been fulfilled through the sacrifice of Jesus. Yet the moral law, though also fulfilled in Jesus by reaffirmation, is still in effect. We don’t throw out the law to honor our parents or love our neighbor, do we?

The critics of the tithe are right in this – the tithe (tenth) in the Old Testament was a tithe of produce, grain and livestock – food, not of material wealth. Yet they miss the “beginning and end” of the matter – what the principle of the tithe is really about as first revealed way back in Genesis and then explained in Hebrews.

So I say we are not under the law of the tithe, but still under the principle of the tithe as a standard or basis for the grace of giving. Let’s examine the tithe’s Biblical history.

BIBLICAL HISTORY OF THE TITHE (Tenth)

PRE-LAW

Genesis 14:17-20 *After [Abraham's] return from the defeat of [the kings] ... Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. Now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.*

THE LAW

Leviticus 27:30 *Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord.*

Deuteronomy 14:22 *You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year.*

Nehemiah 10:37 *We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.*

THE OLD TESTAMENT CHALLENGE

Malachi 3:8-10 *"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test 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 a blessing until it overflows."*

JESUS' BRIEF REFERENCE

Matthew 23:23 (also Luke 11:42) *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.*

THE NEW TESTAMENT EXPLANATION

Hebrews 6:20-7:4 *Jesus ... [has] become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually. Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils.*

So here's my summary –

The principle of the tithe (tenth) was instituted in the day of Abraham, pre-dating the Law.

The tithe was first given to Melchizedek, the first of a priestly order that only Jesus has joined. And it appears that Melchizedek might well have been an earthly, Old Testament manifestation of the Son of God Himself.

The tithe was given in the law to provide for the Levites and the poor

The challenge in Malachi, though directed to the people who were withholding the tithe, is also applicable to us today who fail to give appropriately to God

Jesus affirms the principle of the tithe by telling the Pharisees that they should have tithed without neglecting the more important matters

The book of Hebrews, which ties the Old Testament to the New, tells us that the tithe given to Melchizedek was really given to Jesus – confirming that the principle of the tithe is still in operation today.

Our tithe is not a keeping of the Law, but a standard of giving and gift of love, not to a church or a leader, but to the Lord Jesus Himself.

The only time in the Bible that God asks mankind to test Him, is in Malachi 3:10 where he asks us to test him in the giving of the tithe. He promises blessing that will pour out of heaven.

We are to give purposefully, regularly, personally and in reciprocation of what God has given us.

We are to give sacrificially, spontaneously out of joy and giving ourselves to the Lord first.

We are to give generously, willingly, cheerfully and in faith that God will supply.

Polls show that some 92% of Christians don't even try to give 10%.

And those that do tithe, often don't give 10%.

We are to give "as the Lord has prospered" but somehow this is not working very well for the well being of the Lord's work.

It is estimated that if God's people truly gave around 10% of their income, all churches and missions would be funded fully and to abundance.

Give God a test – He asks for it!

And don't give to a church or a leader. Your gift is a love gift to God to whom you can never out-give in time, talent or treasure!

Let's learn the GRACE of GIVING !