

Theology of Giving

Introduction:

Ephesians 5:1-2 (NASB) ¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ²and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Paul is encouraging believers to be like God. Not that believers can be like God in the sense that he is God. But, to be like God is to *resemble* Him, for instance, in acts of kindness. The Greek word for imitate is *mimētēs* (mim-ay-tace'), from which we get *mimic*. Though the word can be used in a *comical* or *trifling* sense, like when siblings irritate one another by mocking or copying the other's speech or actions, in this verse, *mimic* is to be understood in a very earnest and noble sense. Like when children imitate their parents; what they see, what they hear, the very temperaments of their parents, they end up copying.

You know that a son is very much like his father and a daughter like her mother when some of the same character traits and habits that parents possess are seen in sons and daughters as well.

The way in which we imitate God is perhaps the greatest expression of our faithfulness to Him, our commitment to Him, and of a mature knowledge of Him. As children of God, we are to imitate Him in His acts of kindness, grace, love, mercy, etc. But, another way in which we are to imitate God, which is the topic for this and next week's sermon, is in the act of giving.

Giving is such an important and broad topic. I want to be careful and present as much about giving as is possible. Therefore, I want to take the next two weeks to establish what I have entitled, the **Theology of Giving!**

My aim is not to make anyone feel guilty about giving, but to help us all grasp the importance of giving, to clear up some inaccuracies about giving, and to present the incredible promise of return blessings that the Lord has given to those who give to honor Him. ***Knowledge always precedes application... Therefore, you get a heavy dose of biblical knowledge at first. Then I'll give you some practical applications.***

Luke 6:38 is a verse that most false teachers distort and most sound teachers dodge:

Luke 6:38 (NASB)

³⁸ "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

It is not uncommon for believers to hear or even read this verse and see it through the lens of prosperity teachers, who teach that God wants believers to be rich. Some even say that God gives back to you as much as a hundredfold. Well, part of what they say is actually not far from the truth!

Proverbs 3:9-10 (NASB)

⁹ Honor the Lord from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; ¹⁰ So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Proverbs 11:24 (NASB)

²⁴ There is one who scatters, and *yet* increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, *and yet it results* only in want.

Mark 10:28-30 (NASB) reads, ²⁸ Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, ³⁰ but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

2 Corinthians 9:6 (NASB)

⁶ Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

2 Corinthians 9:10 (NASB)

¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;

Can you see what all these verses have in common? They each speak of God responding to a generous heart with a blessing of abundance. But, there is far more to it than that. If you walk away thinking as the prosperity preachers want you to think that these are promises from God simply to make you rich, you've missed the point. **And that is the kind of teaching that I believe has ruined giving in the church. And next week, I'll show you how it ruins giving.**

So, here is the plan:

- 1) Biblical Doctrine of Tithing:
- 2) Old Testament Example of Freewill Giving
- 3) New Testament Example of Freewill Giving
- 4) Biblical Doctrine of Freewill Giving

I. Biblical View of Tithing

I want to begin by examining what the bible teaches about tithing since the idea of the tithe for some, is such an important part of giving. In fact, most of you are probably very familiar with Malachi 3:8-9:

Malachi 3:8-9 (NASB)

⁸"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. ⁹"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation *of you!*

This is the most prevalent verse when it comes to “convicting the church about giving.” My aim is to show you that this verse does not apply to church giving!

But, to do that, I’ll begin by giving some facts about the tithe...

A. Tithing Defined

Tithe is from the Hebrew word, ‘āśār, which means tenth. Or the Greek word dekatē (dek-at'-ay), which also means a tenth as in a percentage. References to the tithe are found in both the OT and the NT, but the main teaching about the tithe is incorporated in the Law of Moses that was given to the nation, Israel, by God through Moses. The major passages include Lev 27:30-33, Num 18:21-32; and Deut 12:5-18; 14:21-32.

B. Tithing in Secular History

Besides the Jews and even before the Jewish nation, other ancient nations generally practiced tithing to some degree. Giving portions of one’s income or the spoils of war were practices among a number of nations in antiquity. In Egypt, the people gave 1/5 or 2/10 of their harvest to the Pharaoh (Gen 47:24). Other nations included Syrians, Lydians, and Babylonians. The Tithe was kind of a taxation imposed by a ruler on a conquered people or the ruler’s own countrymen.

C. Tithing Before The Law of Moses

With respect to the church, there are those who begin the discussion of tithing with the Old Testament precedent, first recorded in **Genesis 14:20**. After winning an astounding victory in battle and rescuing his nephew Lot along with all his lost possessions, Abraham thanked God by giving Melchizedek 1/10 of all he had captured. The only other mention of the tithe prior to the giving of the law is in **Gen 28:22** by Jacob as he was fleeing from his brother Esau. Jacob, being very immature in his experience with God, tried to bargain with God to get God to provide what God had already unconditionally promised him. Jacob was no doubt reflecting what was common in the culture.

D. Tithing Under The Law of Moses

The greatest emphasis on tithing was during the times of the Mosaic Law. In **Numbers 18:20-21**, we find tithing included in the Mosaic Law.

Its purpose was to provide for the Levites, whom God wanted to concentrate on priestly duties. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible says that *The tithe was the tenth of produce or property for the support of the priesthood or for other religious objectives*. Unlike the other tribes of Israel, the Levites were not given any property. Their portion was to be the Lord, Himself, and they would be supported by what the nation dedicated to the Lord. This is recorded in **Numbers 18:20-21**:

Numbers 18:20-21 (NASB)

²⁰ Then the Lord said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel. ²¹ "To the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting.

Under the Law of Moses, a tithe of everything from the land (grain from the soil or fruit from the trees), the herd and the flock was mandatory. To not provide the tithe would be considered robbing God and a cause for judgment (**Lev 27:30-34**). There were strict regulations given regarding redeeming the tithe, when to present the tithe, and festive times when the tithe would be eaten by the people in Jerusalem.

All and all, there were 3 separate tithes, the one mentioned in **Lev 27:30-34**, which was given to the Levites as their portions; the tithe mentioned in **Deut 14:22-29** that was brought to Jerusalem and eaten as a festive offering before the Lord; and the third year tithe which was to be given to the Levites, the aliens, and the fatherless (orphan) and to the widows. (**READ Deut 14:22-29**)

So, in the end tithe constituted between 23% and 33% of ones possessions. By the way, there is no indication that the tithe was ever money!

E. Tithing In the New Testament

As we move to the Gospel, Jesus supported the giving of the tithe even by the corrupt Scribes and Pharisees:

Matthew 23:23 (NASB)

²³ "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.

Jesus is speaking to those of the Jewish nation who were bound by the Law of Moses, which included the giving of Tithes. The point is not that there was a problem with their, they should have because as He stated, these are **provisions of the Law**. The contrast is in how minute attention they paid to tithe, but neglected the **weightier provisions of the Law**, justice and mercy and faithfulness.

Aside from the gospels, there is no other mention of the tithe except in **Hebrews 7:4-10 (Read)**. Here the writer used the example of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek to show the supremacy of Jesus' priesthood, which is after the order of Melchizedek, over the priesthood of Aaron. In essence, the writer makes the point that Aaron who was still in the loins of Abraham, paid tithes to Melchizedek. Thus, the Aaronic priesthood was lesser, paying tithes to the greater, the priesthood of Melchizedek.

I want to clarify what's happening in Malachi:

In looking at the book of Malachi as a whole, you'll discover that the phrase, *Robbing God*, comes from only one of six oracles that Malachi pronounced concerning sinful Israel. Here are the six (notice how the people questioned God in each of them):

1st Respond to God's Love (1:2-5): Question: "How have you loved us?"

2nd Honor God (1:6-2:9): Question: "How have we shown contempt for your name?"
"How have we defiled you?"

3rd Be Faithful as God's Covenant People (2:10-16): Question: "Why?"

4th Hope in God (2:17-3:6): Question: "How have we wearied Him?"
"Where is the God of justice?"

5th Obey God (3:7-12): Question: "How are we to return?" "How do we rob You?"

6th Fear God (3:13-4:3): Question: "What have we said against You?"

Those six oracles constitute the book of Malachi. A closer look at each of these six oracles will reveal how impossible it would be to apply to the Church what was being demanded of Israel. **There are, however, principles and great truths that are useful in bringing us to a greater knowledge of our God and Savior.**

In conclusion, Israel was a theocracy with God as the governor and tithing was God's governmental system of taxation for the nation with the Levitical tribe serving as God's officials. Is this not unlike our system? Doesn't each of you who work, pay into the system of taxation that supports our governing officials? And like the Levites, even governing officials pay or should pay taxes. This is true of most, if not, all nations. Notice what Paul says about paying taxes:

Romans 13:5-7 (NASB)

⁵Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. ⁷Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Some of might say, well our rulers are evil. **You do understand that the original recipients of this epistle was Christians in Rome whose ruler was who? Nero.** The first rule of scripture interpretation is to first understand it as the original recipients would have.

I'll end this section on tithing by pointing out that of all the doctrines that the apostles taught to the churches, none of them taught Christians to tithe. In fact, I could not find one occasion where Paul, Peter or James even used the term, tithe.

Before I leave this this topic, I want to hasten to say that there are some cautions and some commendable points regarding tithing: first caution is to recognize that teaching the church to tithe does not alone make one a false teacher. I know many who I believe to be men of God who teach this as the way the church is to give. About commendable points: (1) Those who tithe are often acting in obedience to what they believe God has commanded. (2) Tithing actually causes some to increase what they give. (3) Tithing sometimes helps with consistency and discipline in giving. Nevertheless, tithing is not God's standard of giving for Christians.

So, if the church is not to tithe, how is giving to be regulated in the church? We'll cover that next week. But, I believe we can begin to see some of it unfold as we examine the concept of Freewill giving?

II. OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF FREEWILL GIVING

A. Definition

I don't think I need to give you the Hebrew word for freewill. In whatever language, freewill is probably pretty self-explanatory. But, just so we capture the nuances of meanings the Hebrew word for freewill is *Nedābâ*, (ned-aw-baw). It is the noun form and means a freewill gift, a freewill offering. The verb form is *naw-dab'*, **and it means to incite, to impel, to impel one's self, to be willing, to do freely, to give freely**. It has the flavor of an uncompelled, free movement of the will for divine service or sacrifice. This word, for example, described the inner state of those who contributed to the construction of the temple (Jud 5:2, 9).

Judges 5:1-2 (NASB)

¹ Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying,
² "That the leaders led in Israel, That the people volunteered, Bless the Lord!

Judges 5:2 (ESV)

² "That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord!

B. Old Testament Use

Freewill offering was listed as part of the Levitical system of sacrifices and offerings. There were certain animal sacrifices that was mandatory on certain occasions and for specific reasons within the Law of Moses, which I'll not expound upon here. But, suffice it to say at this point that not only did God charge the Israelites with mandatory sacrifices, he also gave them offerings that included *peace offering, wave offering, thank offering, votive offering, and freewill offering*.

Freewill offerings were not always animals, grain, or drink offerings. The first mention of freewill offering in the OT occurs in **Exodus 25:1–4** and it refers to offering valuable merchandise, including forms of wealth. Here, God gave Moses instructions on how to raise a contribution for the building of the tabernacle, and Moses is called upon to relay God's message to the people:

Exodus 25:1-4 (NASB)

¹ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution.
³ "This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze,
⁴ blue, purple and scarlet...

Here is Moses message to the people!

Exodus 35:4-6 (NASB)

⁴ Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the Lord has commanded, saying, ⁵ 'Take from among you a contribution to the Lord; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the Lord's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁶ and blue, purple and scarlet...

(Talk about similarity, Moses said almost word for word what God said. No manipulation, no pressure).

Now, for the results: Exodus 36:5-7 (NASB)

Conclusion:

We have seen two systems of giving in the OT. There is a stark contrast between the two, tithing and freewill giving. Tithing is legal in nature, thus obligatory. Freewill giving was generous in nature, emanating from the heart. One is based on a much more glorified principle than the other.

Giving is the essence of our relationship with God! Remove the concept of giving and we have no relationship with God. For our relationship with Him begins with Him giving Jesus (Jn 3:16). Now, those of us how believe, that is to say, we who have trusted Him for life now and in the future are to mimic God, we are to resemble Him, especially in this Act of Giving. The Bible says, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Why is that? Why is it more blessed to give than to receive?

If Tithing is not for the church, what should motivate our giving?

How has false teaching about giving, ruined giving in the church?

We'll answer those questions next week.

III. NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF FREEWILL GIVING

Last week, we began this exposition of the Theology of Giving with a Biblical look the tithe. As we saw from Scripture, the tithe was a form of governmental taxation which God imposed on the nation as national income to provide for the Levites, whose work was to provide spiritual services to the Lord.

We ended the study with a brief look at the Biblical View of Freewill Giving. The ultimate example being how Moses got the resources for the construction of the tabernacle. All based on freewill offering. In fact, the only command issued by Moses during this time was a command to stop giving because of the flood of resources. It was too abundant. The KJV reads, “the stuff they had was sufficient...”

Now we want to turn our attention to the final section, which deals with the Biblical View of NT Giving. For this, we turn to 2Cor 8:1 as you turn there, let me just say that there are many was of giving and several reasons for giving to the church. First, it is to support those who formerly minister the gospel. Jesus gives us a great example of this in Matt 10 (sending out His disciples with the message of the gospel):

Matthew 10:9-10 (NASB)

⁹"Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, ¹⁰or a bag for *your* journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.

So that this whole context is so far from militating against a minister's maintenance by the people, that it most strongly establishes it; for if the apostles were not to take any money or provisions with them, to support themselves with, it clearly follows, that it was the will of Christ, that they should live by the Gospel, upon those to whom they preached, as the following words show: and though they were not to make gain of the Gospel, or preach it for filthy lucre's sake; yet they might expect a comfortable subsistence, at the charge of the people, to whom they ministered, and which was their duty to provide for them.¹

This was also true of Paul and the apostles. Although Paul did not exercise this right, he and the other ministers of the gospel had the right to receive their “livelihood” from the Gospel:

1 Corinthians 9:13-14 (NASB)

¹³ Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? ¹⁴ So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

All of this applies to Elders who lead the church. Paul makes this specific point in 1Tim 5:17-18:

1 Timothy 5:17-18 (NASB)

¹ Gill, John. "Commentary on Matthew 10:10". "The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible". //www.studydrive.org/commentary. 1999.

¹⁷The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

A second reason why we give to the church is to support the various needs encountered in and out of the church:

Acts 11:29-30 (NASB)

²⁹And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a *contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. ³⁰And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

Here, a collection was made by the church in Antioch to be presented to the elders of another church, the church in Jerusalem. The elders then had the responsibility of dispensing the collection among the needed people of the church. With that said, let's learn from the example of the Macedonians:

The context is money being gathered to support the poor Christians of Jerusalem. The doctrine or teaching comes out of this is a permanent theology of Giving. This really is where we establish the title of this message:

Why were they so poor? Why are they always in need of support?

A precedent was established in the Old Testament for Jews to migrate to Jerusalem for various observances and feasts. Pentecost was one such feast. Well, the Pentecost described in Acts 2 proved to be no ordinary Pentecost for it is the birth of the church. Acts 2 describes all the places from which these Jews came, (Jews returning for Pentecost were saved (Ch 2 was 3K; ch 4 was 5k men) and many did not return, but remained with the church in Jerusalem for obvious reasons. This was the first and only church at the time. They knew very little about the one in whom they placed their faith and needed to learn (Acts 2:41-47). But, this created great economic needs since people who came as travelers, staying in lodges and with family; not became tenants, staying with other believers. Thus, putting an economic strain on everyone. Being rejected and persecuted by devout Jews added to the problem. Then there was a famine that Agabus the prophet prophesied in Acts 11. Paul, took up the mantle of making a huge collection from the gentile churches to be delivered to the church in Jerusalem. More on that in a moment... the first element you'll notice is that the unction to give is a Grace

A. The Grace of God in Giving

There are two things simultaneously happening here worthy of our attention. First, the actions of God. Second, the actions of the Macedonians. Both are essential to be able to appreciate why Paul is using the Macedonian churches (Macedonian division belonged *Philippi*, where the first European church was established; and *Thessalonica*, the seat of the second church; and *Berea*, where there certainly were "noble" Christians),

We see the work of God right at the beginning in verse 1: **2 Corinthians 8:1 (NASB)** ¹Now, brethren, we *wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,*

Notice how Paul describes this act of giving. He says in essence, “let me tell you about God’s work in the Macedonia churches.” He speaks of a grace that God gave to the Macedonian Christians. Now, the grace he speaks of is not the money they collected, but the disposition or attitude that incited the Macedonians to give.

God is its author of their actions. Their bountiful gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem is to be traced back to the work of God. This is a great example of Paul’s words to the Philippians: **workout your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to act according to His good pleasure.** They were obedient to the leading of the Spirit working in their hearts. Paul uses the Macedonian churches to spur on the Corinthians to do the same. So the first phenomenon is the actions of God granting a grace among the churches so that they were moved to give. The second marvel is the actions of the Macedonians.

B. The Generosity of Believers in Giving

Do you know why the actions of the Macedonians is so remarkable? What makes their generosity something to marvel at? What makes it a worthy example to the church at Corinth and all believers for that matter? Well, verses 2-6 are packed with reasons why:

2 Corinthians 8:2-6 (NASB) ²that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord, ⁴begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, ⁵and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. ⁶So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

1) They Gave In Spite of Tribulation

Tribulation is a nice old word to describe their situation. I could have used a words like misfortune, bad luck, distress, hard times, but tribulation is associated with God more than these other words. In fact, the phrase, *ordeal of affliction* (NASB), *trial of affliction* (KJV), *severe test of affliction* (ESV), or *severe trial* (NIV), each describes their situation as being a severe test of their faith. The word here describing the nature of their affliction is dokimē (dok-ee-may' ee). This word is often associated with testing that comes from God. Here is what James says:

James 1:2-4 (NASB) ² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The severity of this testing is seen in the word **affliction**. What do you think of when you say some one is afflicted? Well, the English definition of affliction is **to distress so severely as to cause persistent suffering or anguish**. The Greek word is **thlipsis (thlip'-sis)**, which is also translated **tribulation**. The verb form of **thlipsis** literally means **to press or to crush**. Used to describe the pressing of pressing of grapes in the wine press. Figuratively, like used here, it means to be under intense pressure... far beyond what we sometimes say when we say, man, I’m under so much pressure... We don’t mean someone is squeezing us, but we do mean that the situation we find ourselves in is pressing hard against us and bringing us even to a state of depression or despair.

In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul mention affliction a number of times:

1 Thessalonians 1:6-7 (NASB)

⁶You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, ¹⁵who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men,

1 Thessalonians 3:1-4 (NASB)

¹Therefore when we could endure *it* no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, ²and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, ³so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. ⁴For indeed when we were with you, we *kept* telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

Affliction was promised, it came to pass, but it did not discourage these believers from living in faith and producing really good works. That is certainly a remarkable reason to set the Macedonian churches as a model of giving. But there's more. Not only did they give in spite of tribulation, but they gave in spite of poverty.

2) The Gave In spite of Poverty

Paul says in the middle of the verse, **their deep poverty**. They were not just poor, but deeply destitute of resources. If there was a poverty line, they would have been far below it. If there was a scale from 1 to 10, they would not have been on the scale. Although they were amazingly poor, they gave abundantly. To add to the list of giving in spite of tribulation, giving in spite of poverty, is that they gave out of Joy.

3) Thy Gave Joyously

Paul says, **their abundance of joy**- So, not just some joy, but an abundance of Joy. How often do you expect someone who is under duress from life's circumstances and living in deep poverty to act joyously? But, that is the normal Christian life. In fact, it is exactly what Paul expects of the Corinthians. He expects them to give out of a joyous disposition. Let me just comment on this joy for a while: Peter describes this emotion or sentiment that exists in the heart of a believer as "an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1Pet 1:8). This is a joy that is not of this world. It is the kind of joy that can only come from Jesus. This is not happy, this is far deeper. Happy is more associated with *happenstance*, in that happiness is usually a product of one's circumstances. Joy on the other hand is a product of the Holy Spirit that is produced in spite of one's circumstances.

When David sinned and was distressed, he appealed to God to return to him the joy of God's salvation!

These believers represent a model of Christians maintaining the joy of the Lord in the mists of challenging times. So, not only did they give out of tribulation, they gave in spite of poverty, they gave joyously, but they also gave abundantly!

4) They Gave Richly

Paul says, that **in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality**. This seems like a contradiction. How can Christians who are facing such afflictions with so little, give so much! And the giving is described as an overflow of in the wealth of their liberality. You could say, the Macedonian Christians joyfully gave richly in spite extreme poverty and severe testing. But that's not all...

5) They Gave Sacrificially

You know sacrifice had to appear somewhere in the narrative.

2 Corinthians 8:3-4 (NASB) ³For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord, ⁴begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

Paul describes their sacrifice as giving within and beyond their ability... First, he says they gave according to their ability. There is no rule in the NT for church giving. Freewill giving has no set percentage. Freewill giving has no low or high limits. Freewill giving has no rule. The only requirement really is to give, and to give within your means to give. Even as they Macedonian believers gave beyond their means, it still means they gave out of what they had. There are church leaders who encourage believers to give, even if they don't have the money. They recommend that they give by credit. That is going beyond one's ability to give. In these churches, *their giving was above what Paul had expected, and even beyond what their extreme poverty indicated as possible*.

This list just keeps on growing: they gave in spite of tribulation, they gave in spite of poverty, they gave joyously, they gave richly, they gave sacrificially, and now, they gave voluntarily.

6) They Gave Voluntarily

2 Corinthians 8:3-4 (NASB)

³For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave of their own accord*, ⁴begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,

Here is a reverse of what we so often see in churches around the world today. Rather than Paul and team begging and imploring the believers to give, these believers begged Paul and his company to include them in the effort to raise money for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Perhaps, Paul knowing their condition, encouraged them to keep what little they had for themselves and their family. You can't make it any more intense than to say that they were "begging with much urging." It's enough to say, "They were begging us." or even to say, "They were urging us." But,

you see the intensity of their pleading in that both are used, begging with much urging. But, the phrase that is so important to understanding how exceptional this is and to really lay hold of the grace element in it is the phrase “of their own accord.” This phrase is the interpretation of one Greek word, *authairetos* (ow-thah'ee-ret-os). The word is a combination of *auto* (self) and *hairetizō* (har-ret-id'-zo) to make a choice. It's clear whether Greek or English that these believers acted on their own accord.

They chose to do this. They weren't coerced. They weren't manipulated. They weren't intimidated into this. They weren't bribed into it. They weren't sort of coddled into it. They weren't brought into it by some promise of something or some trickery or some gimmick. There was no manipulation. There was no coercion. It was out of their own hearts.²

If you would have told me someone gave 1) in spite of severe tribulation and 2) deep poverty, I would commend their faith. But, if you went on to add that 3) they gave joyously, 4) they gave richly, 5) they gave sacrificially, and now, 6) they gave voluntarily, I would put together a sermon and preach it to the church... but that's not even all. The top of the list is the most noteworthy of them all: They gave first to the Lord

7) They Gave Worshipfully

Notice verse 5:

2 Corinthians 8:5 (NASB)

⁵and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

This is fascinating! Paul essentially says, this is not what we had expected. This was the ultimate blessing for Paul who founded these churches. What a blessing to know how spiritually mature they were in the faith. **They gave themselves to Jesus, first.** First is the word *protos*, which speaks not of order, but of priority. The priority of the believers was to give themselves to Jesus first, then to Paul and the poor believers at Jerusalem. My friends, this is what separates Christian giving from all the philanthropic giving around the world.

Severely tested and extremely generous.

Revelation 2:9 (NASB)

⁹I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

IV. Biblical Doctrine of Freewill Giving

² MacArthur, John. A Biblical Model for Giving, Part 3, 2 Corinthians 8:3, 47-57

Moving then to 2Corinthians chapter 9, we come to the place where we can begin to establish the doctrine of giving. Up to this point, I have expounded on the tithe, pointing out that OT tithing was a system of governmental taxation given to Israel by God. Israel was a theocracy and the tithe was used to feed the governing officials, particularly the Levites. I also gave an OT and a NT example of freewill giving.

Exodus 25:1-3 (NASB)

¹Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. ³"This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze...

The only command was to raise a contribution. God indicated through Moses what the need was and Moses communicated that need to the people. This really shows the limit of our responsibility as leaders. We indicate the need, but are not to use any form of coercion, guilt, manipulation to see that the need is met. No, we commit the need to those whose heart moves them to give. This was God's plan for giving from the beginning and it has not changed. Notice how Paul related this same truth to the church:

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NASB)

⁶Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

A. The Axiom in Giving

I labeled this point an axiom, because that is what it is. An axiom is a self-evident truth that requires no proof. The meaning of verse 6 is totally spiritual. However, it helps to take a quick look at the literal meaning first, for a broader appreciation of its spiritual meaning. There is no doubt that if you sow seeds sparingly, you will reap a harvest sparingly. Being brought up in an agricultural society certainly helps a person relate to this axiom. But, in keeping with the self-evident truth of an axiom, even for those who are totally unfamiliar with planting and harvesting, no explanation is necessary. You just get it!

As a boy growing up in South Carolina, I lived on a pig farm and we planted lots of crops. We did not have machinery, but sowed seeds by hand and we harvested the crop by hand. This was especially exhausting work when my dad wanted a bigger harvest of corn for the pigs. To our dismay, he would acquire more fields to sow more corn, making his harvest more plentiful. If he desired a plentiful harvest, but refused to put out more seeds, it would have simply been wishful thinking. To get more, he had to sow or plant more... That's the literal meaning!

The spiritual application of this axiom is obviously based on the context. Paul is speaking about the Corinthians collecting money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem. He is not simply making the point of literally planting seeds. The correlation is of giving money. He equates giving money as the sowing of seeds.

A man that sows little must expect to reap little. If he sows a small piece of land he will reap a small harvest; or if he is [meager] in sowing and wishes to save his seed and will not commit it to the earth, he must expect to reap little. So it is in giving. Money given in alms, money bestowed to aid the poor and needy, or to extend the influence of virtue and pure religion, is money bestowed in a way similar to the act of committing seed to the earth. It will be returned again in some way with an abundant increase. It shall not be lost. The seed may be buried long.³

There is a difference in the definition and application of the words, *sparingly and bountifully*, when applied in a spiritual sense: First, both words have both a quantitative and a qualitative meaning. The quantitative has to do with amount a person gives and qualitative has to do with the attitude of the heart from which a person gives. ***The priority here has to do with the heart!*** Sparingly comes from a word that describes actions coming from an attitude of stinginess. Bountifully comes from the word, ***eulogia***, which means blessings. The verb form is ***eulogeō***, which means to bless. It is the word from which we get eulogize, which means to bless with words or to speak well of. So, blessings is what is being emphasized in sowing or giving. ***Lenski wrote: He who sows "on the basis of, on the principle of blessings," he shall reap on this basis and this principle.***

In other words, ***to sow bountifully is to sow on the principle that you are blessing others***, which will not only impact the quantity or amount of your giving, but will certainly establish the quality of your giving or the attitude behind your giving. This is very important to grasp... you could give hundreds, thousands, even millions to the church or directly to the poor, but none of that would receive a return of blessings if it is done with wrong motives. Let me give you an example:

Micah 6:6-8 (NASB)

⁶With what shall I come to the Lord *And* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? ⁷Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? ⁸He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

Hosea 6:6 (NASB)

⁶For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

These verses and many others do not negate the obligation for the Jews adhering to the sacrificial system that the Lord required and for which many died for violating. What these verses indicate is that it's a heart issue. Simply bringing sacrifices with no regard for the heart attitude that should be associated with the sacrifices was unacceptable and rejected by God. To be sure, the Levites still got the portion of the sacrifice that fed them. However, those presenting the sacrifice got no benefit or blessing from their offering.

In the same way, when one gives, if it is not with the attitude or on the principal of it being a blessing, there may not be a return of blessings. To say it simply, when you give, you should see your giving as an investment in the kingdom of God. This is what Jesus taught about giving:

³ Barnes, Albert. "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 9:6". "Barnes' Notes on the New Testament". //www.studydrive.org/commentary. 1870

Luke 6:38 (NASB)

³⁸ "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, *and* running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

As I mentioned the first message, false teachers use this passage in teaching you reap what you sow. At that time, I also said that they are only half correct. What they don't say is that to get a return on your investment into the kingdom, you must have the proper heart attitude. Here is how James puts it:

James 4:2-3 (NASB)

²...You do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

The Lord has given the promise of bountiful return to those who give bountifully. Now, some object to this motive, thinking it is wrong! Some are even uncomfortable with even hearing that this is a motive that comes from God. Nevertheless, it is what God says. In Coffman's commentary of 2Corinthians, he says this about those who hold this view:

The view that "This is not a very exalted motive for giving" should not be accepted. Giving as an exhibition of trust in God's promise to bless the giver is as exalted as any other motive taught in the word of God.⁴

He is obviously correct, because that is exactly what Jesus taught in Luke 6:38 and it is exactly what Paul is teaching here in 2Corinthians. The question is how? How do you ensure that your giving is on the principle of it being a blessing? Well the obvious is that giving must be done from a heart free of known sin:

Matthew 5:23-24 (NASB)

²³ "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

The Lord was making clear that the offering was not more important than reconciliation and having removed any hindrance from having a clear conscience and giving with the right heart attitude.

Another very important consideration to make when ensuring the heart attitude is right when giving is found in verse 7:

B. The Action**2 Corinthians 9:7 (NASB)**

⁷ Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

This verse has *two actions to take* (give & purpose), *two approaches to avoid* (grudgingly & compulsion), and *one attribute* to seek (cheerful). So, if we take the two actions, avoid the two

⁴ Coffman, James Burton. "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 9:6". "Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament". <http://www.studydrive.org/commentary>. Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.

approaches, and seek the one attribute, we will go a long way to ensure we have the right heart attitude about giving and will reap benefits and blessings in return.

First, we must give. Giving should be a natural to the believer as breathing is to the physical life. This is because we have God as our father and we are being matured to be like Him. When the bible says be imitators of God, we can because we have been granted the privilege of participating in the divine nature:

and

Constable quotes Hughes, "The important lesson which Paul is urging upon the Corinthians at this point is that *to give is to sow*. What is given is not lost, but, like the seed sown by the farmer, contrary to all appearances it possesses the potency of life and increase. At the same time it is important to remember that, as the whole context shows, the Apostle is speaking of the quality, not the quantity, of giving." [Note: Hughes, p329.]⁵

Lenski, "the word means more than quantity, namely generosity from a deep desire to help."

In the grace of God Christians are rewarded in three ways for their generosity: (1) the givers are enriched ([vv. 6-10](#)); (2) the receivers' needs are met ([vv. 11-12](#)); and (3) God, the Source of all blessing, is praised ([vv. 13-15](#)).

They Gave In spite of Tribulation:

If we remove giving from God's character, what would God then be to us? Judge! Giving is the very means whereby I enter into an eternal, peaceful, familial, relationship with God!

⁵ Constable, Thomas. DD. "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 9:6". "Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable". [//www.studylight.org/commentary](http://www.studylight.org/commentary). 2012.

John Bunyan: "A man there was, though some did count him mad, the more he cast away the more he had."

Giving to the Lord is an investment... the sense that we all have of not spending our hard earned money and getting nothing in return is sound. So, when you give to the Lord, you are not "spending" in vain. But, your return is far greater than anything this world can give you in return. In other words, is there a greater investment? And you must be willing to ask and answer this question.