

The Chapel Ministry



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

Stewardship - The Grace of Giving

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*S*avoring the *S*upremacy of *G*od
*S*tudying the *W*ord of *G*od
*S*haping the *P*eople of *G*od
*S*preaching the *G*ospel of *G*od

Contents

Introduction	1
Understanding the Issues	1
Conquering Worry	13
Bridging the Gap	23
Cultivating Contentment	32
Abounding by Grace	38
Resting in God's Provision	46
Obeying by Faith	53
Outlines	0

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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this series is to stir up a Bible based, God centered, Christ exalting and need meeting commitment to proportional, sacrificial giving.

Principles

What are the key principles that emerge from the texts in this series?

- Money is a major measure of our spiritual condition.
- All we have belongs to God – He grants to us a portion to be used wisely.
- There are consequences attached to our stewardship – either blessing or curse.
- The major connection between the OT giving and NT giving is *continuity* not *discontinuity*.
- Christian giving builds upon and enlarges the scope of Old Testament giving.
- Christian giving is enabled by grace, proportional to income, planned and budgeted for and rises up accompanied by gratitude and gladness.
- There is accountability to leadership for faithfulness in giving.

Preaching

The following develops the series locating it in two major texts.

<i>The Grace of Giving</i>					
Sunday	Title	Text	Summary	Speaker	
Sept 7	A M	Understanding the Issues	Malachi 3:6-12	Precepts for Christian grace giving as developed in Old Covenant categories.	Ed McNeese
	P M	Conquering Worry	Matthew 6:24-34	Worry and anxiety over the future destroy grace and glad giving.	Greg Cook
Sept 14	A M	Bridging the Gap	Malachi 3:6-12	Perspectives on Christian grace giving as transitioning from Old Covenant to New Covenant.	Russ Kennedy
	P M	Cultivating Contentment	Hebrews 13:5-6	Contentment is a great ground and root for sustaining grace giving.	
Sept 21	A M	Abounding by Grace	2 Corinthians 9:6-15	Principles of Christian grace giving as observed from Paul's interaction with the church	Dan Turner
	P M	Resting in God's Provision	Philippians 4:10-19	Sacrificial giving abounds where God's provision is sought and supplied.	Dale Evans
Sept 28	A M	Obeying by Faith	2 Corinthians 9:6-15	Practices of Christian grace giving as applied to us and for us today.	Russ Kennedy
	P M	Open Forum		Presentation of Budget Opportunity to discuss and apply the series.	Ed McNeese Dan Turner

Understanding the Issues

Malachi 3:7-12

Ed McNeese

Summary

Precepts for Christian grace giving as developed in Old Covenant categories.

Introduction

This morning we start a series entitled *The Grace of Giving*. The intent in presenting this series of messages is to cultivate in you a biblically based, God-honoring approach to proportional, sacrificial giving; to instill a commitment to obedience. It is not our purpose to abuse the pulpit and thump you over the head with our Bibles. It is our desire to be instructive and corrective in our messages; not to be destructive.

The way we handle the money that the Lord has entrusted to us is a significant measure of our spiritual condition. We 'know' that all that we have belongs to God but do we really believe it? Do we trust in Him and put that trust into practice through faith in wise uses of the portion that He grants us.

God's plan for church finance is a simple one. By the faithful tithes and offerings of His people, the work is to be supported. God never intended for the work of the church to be supported in any other way. To use raffles, bazaars, bingo, and the like is not in His plan. Nor does He desire for the church to go into the world begging. The Lord is not pleased with high-pressure campaigns and other cleverly designed schemes to raise money. His simple plan is for His people to give a minimum of a tithe to support His work. This is the beginning place of Christian stewardship.

The fact that Jesus stood by the treasury of the temple (Mark 12:41-44) and watched His people put in their money indicates that He is interested in what they gave, and how they gave it. The subject of money is a touchy one for some people, but it should not be. We should be eager to know God's intended method for our giving and be eager to obey God in this area. God has given us many wonderful promises, which depend on our obedience in this area. As we become obedient to God in our giving, we will begin to see His blessing of provision in an amazing way. Anyone who is serious about following the Lord must take giving seriously.

There are four reasons why some do not tithe. The first is that they have never been taught to tithe. Because of the way some people react, many preachers never approach the subject. But we do not do our people a favor by neglecting this teaching.

A second reason for Christian's withholding their tithe is lack of trust! That is sin. They don't trust God to meet their needs. You hold back on tithing because in your heart you're worried that you won't have enough.

The third reason people do not tithe is that they misunderstand the place of tithing in the Bible. Some do not think that it is for today. But this is a misunderstanding of the principle of tithing as God's plan for giving. I suspect the real reason they object is that they do not want to tithe anyway. American humorist Frank Hubbard has said, "When a fellow says, it hain't the money but the principle o' the thing, it's th' money." And he is right. Do you really believe that you are glorifying God by not tithing? We will attempt to clear up this misunderstanding in this series.

The fourth reason that people do not tithe is because they refuse to do so. I hope you are not in this category. If you are you may want to look closely at your life. If you do you may see the hand of God's judgment on your life. You see, Many people are living lives filled with tragic events; events which cause them not only financial suffering, but emotional suffering as well. They may be suffering, because as Christians, they refuse to give God His tithe. They, in the words of our text today, have been, "cursed with a curse." May God give you repentance today if you are in this category of those who refuse to tithe.

May God enable us by His grace to hear and to heed His warnings and encouragement from the Word.

Analysis - The Meaning of This Text

In the book of Malachi, the Lord repeatedly refers to His covenant promises with Israel reminding them of their unfaithfulness. God's love for His people permeates the book. The promises had only made the people and their leaders more stubborn in their self-righteousness. They thought that their relationship with God could be maintained by formal ritual alone, no matter how they lived. However, the Lord not only wanted outward compliance to the law but an inward acceptance as well.

The prophet lays out before them their corruption, wickedness, hypocrisy, infidelity, compromise, false worship, and arrogance. In a rebuke of both priests and people, the prophet reminds them that the Lord's coming, which they were seeking, would be in judgment to refine, purify, and purge.



God through Malachi posed penetrating questions that revealed the hearts of His people. The people, in response to the Lord's accusations, were cynical and defiant. Malachi exposed how the people dis-

honored God. In our text this morning Malachi accuses them of theft. We may well stand liable to the same accusation. Let us examine this text to see what it says and how the Israelites were to hear it. Turn to our text in Malachi 3.6.

6“For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. return to Me, and I will return to you,” Says the LORD of hosts. “But you said, “In what way shall we return?”

8 “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, “In what way have we robbed You?” In tithes and offerings. 9You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. 10Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try 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. 11”And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” Says the LORD of hosts; 12And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land,” Says the LORD of hosts. (NKJV)

The Charge against Israel

(v.7-9)

Israel was robbing God of what He required of them and deserved from them as His people. They brought marred sacrifices before the Lord - what they felt they could afford to give Him (what they had no use for themselves!) Their sacrifices were entirely unworthy of God, and it was disobedient to His command.

The real root problem was that there was no devotion in their service for God -no love for God - no honor and respect for the Holy One of Israel. They begrudged and withheld. It's easy to fall into “begrudging” and “withholding” if all you have is a mere form of “religion”; All external, nothing of Spirit and truth. The word “robs” means: “to defraud, to spoil”. Malachi says you have sought to defraud God of what is rightfully His! Stealing means not only taking what is not yours, but also “keeping back for yourself what belongs to someone else”.

Israel was committing grand larceny against God. They were thieves. They, having received from God all that they owned, did not return to Him what was required of them. In turning away from the command of God, they had turned away from God Himself. Robbing God had a ruinous effect on Israel; distancing them from God.

The Command to Israel

(v.10)

God clearly commands Israel to do what the statutes specified they must do. They are warned of the consequences of disobedience, but enticed to be obedient.

The Precept to Honor God

Each family was called upon to fulfill their obligation; to bring in the whole tithe into God's house. The whole tithe was 10% on their increase as well as the firstfruits of their children, livestock and harvest. It was a measurable, proportional amount directed toward specific obedience. It was to be brought into God's house (the Temple) where storerooms had been built to hold all that was given. The charitable giving of the people of God that was not brought to the house of God was not recognized as the tithe. Generous giving was commanded and encouraged.

The Purpose in Honoring God

Nehemiah, a contemporary of Malachi, spelled out the purpose for Israel's obligation to tithe. He records how this was understood and implemented by the very people who heard this message. Turn to Nehemiah 10:37 for a moment.



37to bring the firstfruits of our dough, our offerings, the fruit from all kinds of trees, the new wine and oil, to the priests, to the storerooms of the house of our God; and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites, for the Levites should receive the tithes in all our farming communities. 38And the priest, the descendant of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes; and the Levites shall bring up a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms of the storehouse.

39For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the grain, of the new wine and the oil, to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are, where the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers are; and we will not neglect the house of our God. (NKJV)

We see from this text that the tithe was given in order that there might be provision for the ministry of the house of God. That which was brought in was to sustain the priests, provide for the needs of the Temple facilities and to maintain the services and ministries of the house of the Lord. Nehemiah tells us that the commitment to do this was motivated by a desire not to neglect the house of the Lord. (Nehemiah 10:39)

The Pleasure in Honoring God

The grace of God is so evident here! God says: "I want to encourage you to try this. Test me out. Your obedience in this area, rather than impoverishing you, will cause me to open the windows of heaven and to pour out provision for you more than you need." The obvious illusion here is to the giving of the manna in the wilderness. God provided on a daily basis all that they needed and in abundance. What emerges here is that God desired that they give with an eye to the command and a heart to the pleasure.

The Consequences for Israel (v.11-12)

Faithful, God honoring obedience calls forth blessing from God. It is His pleasure to respond to the prompting of the faith He gives to us by gracing us with blessing.

The Blessing Described (v.11)

The sense here is that God would shield those families who obeyed God from the effects of the curse; it says He will “rebuke the devourer”. God is not promising to send these awful disasters if they do not tithe, but is providing a deliverance from the natural effects of living in a sin cursed world. Their efforts at tilling the ground would be attended by special protection by God so that there would be an abundance of produce

The Blessing Observed (v.12)

The effect on the people around them would be to see the lands of Israel as being a place of special delight. The land would have glorious gardens, havens of great harvest, islands of bounteous blessing in the midst of a sin-ravaged world.

But beyond this, the people would be a delightful land says the LORD of hosts, the all-sufficient, all-satisfying One, the Almighty.

Application - The Message of This Text

What Should We Give?

The Elders believe that the Bible is clear on this point. The beginning point of Christian stewardship is the tithe. Some may say, “That is the Law, and we are free from the Law.” This is a misunderstanding of both the Law and the tithe in relation to the Law.

Our Relationship To The Law

We are not free from the Law of God today. We are only free from the Law as a means of righteousness. But it is just as much a sin against God’s Law to murder, or steal, or commit adultery, as it was when the Ten Commandments were given. The new covenant, which Christ inaugurated, did not do away with the Law, it fulfilled the Law. It is true that we do not have to keep the ceremonial laws of Israel. They were never for us anyway. But the moral law of God has not changed. And in Christ, we fulfill the Law. As we follow Him, we keep the Law. As a matter of fact, Christ’s standard for keeping the Law is higher than the standards the religious leaders of Jesus’ day had. Over and over in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed to a higher standard than outward obedience only. The Pharisees were guilty of keeping the letter of the Law only, and not the spirit of the

Law. And Jesus said our righteousness must exceed that of scribes and Pharisees.

Where this argument really falls apart is when you see that tithing didn't originate from the Law. Tithing precedes the Law, and as we will see, it was neither instituted by Law, nor terminated by grace.

Tithing Precedes the Law

Tithing may go back as far as the Garden of Eden. And Abel may have been the first to tithe. He offered the firstfruits to the Lord. This principle of firstfruits is one, which is important in Scripture. Firstfruits represent the totality of the thing. The first man's sin had a damning effect on the whole human race. Paul says in Romans 11:16, "For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches." The first is the governing factor for the totality. All of the firstfruits belonged to the Lord. The reason is, that this was a declaration that all belonged to God. It was and is a testimony that Christ is King and Lord over all. That is why our tithe should be the first of our income, not the leftovers.

Whether Abel was the first to tithe or not, we know Abraham tithed. He is the Biblical example of tithing. In Genesis 14, we find the story of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek. Abraham had rescued his nephew Lot from the Kings who had captured him. He had plundered these kings and was returning victoriously. Out of the blue comes Melchizedek, King of Salem and priest of the Most High God, who brought him bread and wine and blessed him. Genesis 14:20 says that Abraham gave him, "a tithe of all." What Abraham did, was to give gratefully, voluntarily, and systematically. And he did it 430 years before the Law was given.

Now this required care on Abraham's part. He had to take careful inventory of his bounty and carefully calculate a tenth of all his income. You see, that is what a tithe really is. Some people believe (or make believe) that to tithe simply means to give. That is incorrect. The word tithe actually means tenth. It is a precise mathematical term. The Lord asks us to give Him a tenth of all our income. Abraham gave a tenth, and to do so he gave carefully.

Do you give carefully to the Lord? Have you looked at your income and tithing records to be sure that you are giving at least a tenth? You might say, "That's being legalistic." Well, let me ask you something. If you opened your paycheck this week and it was short \$100 and your employer said, "Don't be so legalistic, it's only \$100." What would you think of that? Do you want your employer to be careful in figuring your wages and to give you what is 'rightfully' yours? Then be careful in figuring your tithe to the Lord; it rightfully belongs to Him.

Tithing is an Old Testament word. But many other key words are as well. Words like “faith”, “atonement”, “redemption”, “righteousness”, “sin”, and the like, have their origin in the Old Testament, but not in the Law. Neither does tithing.

Melchizedek, according to Hebrews 7, is a figure for Christ. And Abraham is the forerunner of all those who trust Christ by faith according to Romans 4:11. So the symbolism is that the man Abraham, a picture of the believer, pays tithes to Melchizedek, a picture of Christ.

So we see that the tithe was established before the Law was given. We will also see that Jesus himself affirmed the tithe, and you find that this kind of systematic giving continued on in the life of the early church.

Tithing in the New Testament

Paul almost echoes the words of our text in Malachi in I Corinthians 16:2, “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” Here we see reference to proportionate giving, as God has prospered him. The NIV says, “in keeping with his income.” What is in keeping with everyone’s income? The same percent for all is. This is New Testament tithing.

Is the tithe net or gross? Those who make an argument for a net tithe, do so generally to evade the issue. Let me emphasize however, that the tithe is only a beginning place of Christian stewardship, not an ending place. In addition to tithes, there are offerings, which are gifts over and above the tithes. Some can give much more than a tithe because you are well able to do so. We are to give as we have been prospered, it says in I Corinthians 16:2, and we are reminded in Luke 12:48 that to whom much has been given, much is required. We should seek to grow in the grace of giving, just as we seek to grow in our knowledge of the Lord.

Why Should We Give?

It Is Not Ours To Begin With

We need to give because God is the owner of all that we possess. Everything that we have is a gift from God. Our life, our health, our mate, our children, and all our material and monetary blessings are from Him. So when we give to God we are acknowledging His ownership and lordship over every area of our lives. This was the idea of the bringing of the firstfruits in Old Testament times. By giving God the first of all our increase, we declare that He is Lord over it all. You see, we are accountable to God for how we use the material possessions, which He has entrusted, to our care. We are stewards of what

we possess, not owners. Our possessions have merely been entrusted to us for our use. All that we have really belongs to God. How we use what God has entrusted to us is the responsibility of stewardship. I Corinthians 4:2 says, “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”

We Are Commanded To Give

We also need to give because God has commanded us to give. In Malachi 3:10 it says, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse . . .” Another passage of Scripture is Leviticus 27:30, which says, “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 to the LORD.” It is clear that God has commanded tithing (Deuteronomy 14:22), which is, giving one-tenth of all your income to the Lord. God accuses the people of robbing Him. When they asked Him how, He said, “In tithes and offerings.”

Jesus Didn’t Nullify The Tithe

Jesus also spoke of tithing, in Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42. These are parallel passages dealing with the legalistic Pharisees who were interested only in external appearances. Look at Matthew’s account:

23”Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (NKJV)

In light of this, do you really think that Jesus lowered the standard of giving from 10% to something less? No! Jesus rebuked the legalistic Pharisees for being so exceedingly careful in tithing even the minutest possession, while they neglected the weightier aspects of the law; justice, mercy and faithfulness. Jesus had numerous encounters with the legalistic Pharisees, and in these encounters He was always quick to point out those things that were merely outward ceremony without spiritual value. His rebuke for their attitude towards healing on the Sabbath is but one example. If there was ever a place where Jesus could have abolished tithing, this would have been it. Jesus was never reluctant to point out bad practices of religious men. He could have pointed out with one word, the error of tithing if He wished to. But He did not. Rather than abolish the tithe, He affirmed it. He reminded these Pharisees that it was not an either/or proposition, but a both/and practice. He made a point of saying that they ought not to leave tithing undone, but to do it in the context of justice, mercy and faithfulness. They were to show mercy and tithe. He said clearly not to neglect tithing. Jesus taught that we should tithe. We should tithe because God has commanded us to give.

Give Because There is a Need

Furthermore we should give because of the great need. The work of God in the church depends on the tithe. God has chosen to tie His work to the faithfulness of His people. In order for the church to be blessed, and enabled to carry out His work, we must all tithe. We are exhorted to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, “that there may be food in my house.”

Just think of what could be accomplished if everyone would just tithe. Think of the support that could be given to missions. Think of the extra money that would be available to local outreach. Buildings could be refurbished and needed improvements made. More money could be made available to the poor and hungry. Money could be channeled to agencies and ministries that are worthy. Money would be freed up to help struggling churches get on their feet. New churches could be started, and the list could go on.

All this could happen in most churches if the people would just tithe. Ten percent of all the incomes of the families in most churches would more than meet these needs. If all of God’s people in every church would be faithful to bring forth God’s tithe, there is no question that God’s work would prosper everywhere. The church would not only have enough money to pay basic operating expenses, the church would also have enough money to reach out worldwide. God has called the church to be the agent of the Kingdom on Earth. He has charged the church with winning the world to Jesus and training Christian disciples. And to do that great work it takes money.

Give Out Of Gratitude

Perhaps the highest reason we should give is because of our gratitude for all the Lord has done for us. He has blessed us beyond what we deserve. Because of all that He has done for us, we can give out of a heart full of love for Him. We give because we want to. This is the best and highest motivation for Christian giving. We should give because we love Jesus. It is not really a very large thing, considering what He did for us. A missionary, C.T. Studd, said, “If Jesus Christ be God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”

What’s In It for Us?

We all expect that there will be a reward for doing well. Even though all obedience ought to be driven by a desire to please God; it is also decided with an eye on what God will do for us.

Our text in verse 10 says, “Try 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.” This is the only place where the Lord says to prove or test Him. We have His permission to put Him to the test in this. Do you believe Him? Try Him out on this. See if you can out give God. Test Him. He gives you the challenge.

Luke 6:38 says, “Give and it will be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over...” Proverbs 3:9-10 says, “Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty and vats will overflow with new wine.” II Corinthians 9:6 says “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he sows bountifully, will reap also bountifully.” God has committed Himself to bless you. John Bunyan said, “There was a man; some called him mad, the more he gave, the more he had.” God will keep His promise to you, if you will be faithful and obedient in the matter of giving.

Where & When Should We Give?

To whom is the tithe due? The simple answer is the Lord. We tithe to God. But how do we do that? Is there a God-ordained agency, which enables us to do that? I believe the answer is an emphatic YES!

Let’s look again at what Paul says in I Corinthians 16:2. He says, “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” Two things are clear. The first is the when of giving. It is to be on the first day of the week. This is Sunday. We worship on the first day, the day of Resurrection. The Church calls it, “The Lord’s Day.” Secondly, just as the when is clear, so also is the where. Where are Christians to gather on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day?

They are to be meeting and worshipping together as the church on the Lord’s Day. In other words, tithing is an act of worship, and is to be included in our worship on Sunday.

The Church is the only human agency, which Jesus established. The church is the organization through which Jesus is revealed to the world, and through which the Kingdom of God is manifested. Therefore, the church is the place where the tithe belongs. The church is the storehouse (Malachi 3:8-10) where the tithes are to be brought to enable the work of the Lord to be accomplished.

All the work of the Kingdom begins with the local church. When people move away from their commitment to the local church, they begin to move into dangerous territory. The ministry in the New Testament has an even greater need than that in the Old for financial sustenance.

There is the responsibility to provide for its teaching and governing elders as Paul writes in Galatians 6:6 “Let him who is taught the word

share in all good things with him who teaches.” and in 1 Timothy 5:17-18, “¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”

There is the responsibility to support the widows who have no family and the poor in the church according to 1 Timothy 5 and Romans 15:26. This is done by some method of systematic giving.

There is also the responsibility to support the missionary enterprise of the church, beginning at home and extending abroad in Romans 15:24 and 1 Corinthians 9:7.

If there are ministries that need to be done, I believe that the church should be the one to do them. The fact that many churches, even Clearcreek Chapel, are not is not so much a testimony to those who are, but a testimony against God’s people who send their tithe away from the Church thus making it anemic and weak. If God’s people would give God’s way, then God’s work could be carried out by God’s organization, the local church.

Conclusion

The New Testament attitude toward stewardship and giving is addressed in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. 5And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God. 6So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. 7But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.

8 I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. 9For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

10And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; 11but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have. 12For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have. (2 Corinthians 8:1-12 NKJV)

- The GRACE of Giving - Paul tells the Corinthians that the grace of giving should be pursued as a virtue, just as we would seek after faith, godly and wholesome speech, knowledge of God and His ways, and love for the saints. We should seek the grace of liberality in our giving. We should be characterized by our generosity – our liberality in giving. (2 Corinthians 8:7)
- The EXAMPLE of Giving – Jesus, our savior, was the greatest example of giving. He became poor so that we may become rich. He gave His all for us; not just a tithe of Himself. He gave us His whole life. And Paul says that He is to be our example - He possessed the grace of giving in greater measure than any other man. (2 Corinthians 8:9)
- The EXTENT of Giving - We are called by God to give “out of what we have”. God simply says bring to Him out of what we have - what He has blessed us with. (2 Corinthians 8:11) Paul says that in response to our obedience in giving to the work of God, He 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.” and why does he pour these blessings into our lives – so that you “...may have an abundance for every good work.” - to give more - and to do the works of ministry He’s called us all to! (2 Corinthians 9:8)
- The ATTITUDE of Giving - The attitude of the Christian toward giving to God’s work needs to be cheerful (2 Corinthians 9:7) and with “a willing mind” (2 Corinthians 8:12). You should be laughing with joy at the privilege of being able to give to God! (When was the last time you saw that in church?) That is to be our attitude.

Conquering Worry

Matthew 6:24-34

Greg Cook

Summary

Worry and anxiety over the future destroy grace and glad giving.

Introduction

We are in the midst of a stewardship series. This is the second of a multitude of parts. And I must tell you, as elders, we are coming into this series with fear and trepidation; at least I have, in the sense that we have done a stewardship series in the fall of the year for the last 2 or 3 years. But the circumstances in which we find ourselves in our giving makes it appear that we are clubbing you. And that is not the issue at all. I, myself, am being challenged in my heart about this matter of giving. It is our prayer that this series will be an encouragement to you. It is always good to review and I hope that you will be not be saying to yourselves that the elders are trying to beat you into submission on this matter of giving.

Our series is going to be running for a number of weeks, both the morning and evening services. We are going to be covering the following topics:

Understanding the Issues – Ed did a great job this morning in taking us through understanding the issues.

Tonight I am going to take us through Conquering Worry. The question you may be asking is why would a stewardship series have a message on worry. I am going to try to answer that question tonight.

Next Sunday morning we will have Bridging the Gap and Sunday evening will be Cultivating Contentment.

The following Sunday morning will be Abounding by Grace and Sunday evening - Resting in God's Provision.

The last Sunday morning will be Obeying by Faith and that night we will have our Open Forum as has become our custom whenever we have series.

Having moved among you as your brother and elder, I know that you have questions about this matter of giving. We hope that you will be very kind, very honest, and very open at that Forum. We want you to ask your questions so that this issue can be understood Biblically and we can all know what God asks of us, His children. I know that some of you sat there this morning as Pastor Ed took us through this matter

of tithing and you are saying to yourself, “I’m not so sure about this tithing bit. I don’t know if I believe that is a New Testament principle.” Please come to the Forum on that Sunday evening and ask, if after hearing all of the messages you are still not certain what is Biblical.

Well, your question might be, “Why would we have worry as a part of a stewardship series?” If you were listening this morning, you heard Pastor Ed say that sometimes we don’t tithe because we are worried that if we tithe, we won’t be able to make ends meet. I have been there myself and I know what you are saying. When there isn’t any money, what should you do about giving? Or, when there are more bills than there is income, what should you do? Is this giving issue really that critical? So tonight, as we look at this issue of worry, If there is one thing I would like for us to come away with tonight that is the principle that in 2 Corinthians, God says that He loves a glad and hilarious giver. And it is very difficult, if not impossible, to be a glad giver when I’m worried about paying the bills.

Let’s pray and ask God to give us understanding and grace as we look at our passage this evening. <PRAY>

The Governing Heart Issue

(v.24)

Please come with me to the sixth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. This is a familiar passage of Scripture, verses 25 to the end of the chapter, but I would like to read it anyhow. I hope that tonight we will have a fresh look at this passage. <READ PASSAGE>

When we look at verse 24 it says, “Therefore”, so we need to look back at what precedes it. Going back to verse 19, that section ends with the statement found in verse 25, “you cannot serve both God and money.”

What is the governing heart issues that we see in this entire passage about worry? I believe that it is found in verse 24. The governing heart issue is that you cannot serve both God and money.

You cannot serve God and money

The passage says that you cannot serve both God and money. Your heart cannot be in two places at one time. I am either going to be concerned about what I’m going to eat, how I’m going to pay the rent, what am I going to do about the car, and the hundreds of other things about which I worry, or I am going to be concerned about serving God with my life. Where my treasure is that’s where my heart will be. Now, be careful. This passage is not teaching that you shouldn’t be concerned about being a good steward with what God has given to you. What He is saying is, “What is occupying your thoughts? What

is your mind dwelling on? What is taking a great amount of time, my worry or my service?" The underlying heart issue is whom will you serve? Will you serve God or will you serve money. That is the heart issue about which we are talking.

The Overarching Imperative

There is an imperative that is overarching this entire topic of worry and that is do not be anxious about your life.

Do not be anxious about your life

Don't worry about your life. Is that easy to say when the checkbook balance is minus \$5.31 and the rent is due tomorrow? The passage says don't worry about your life. OK. That sounds real good, Greg, but what am I supposed to do about the rent tomorrow? That's an excellent question. I am going to hold off answering that until later. I know that it is a serious issue, but we are told not to worry about our lives. This passage cannot mean that we are not to be concerned about paying our rent. What it is concerned about is that worry cannot be the overarching theme of our lives. He has given us this command – Do not worry! It is a command. And it is a very difficult command to obey. We pass off worry as being concerned.

It sounds like this: "I am concerned about being a good testimony to the outside world. I'm concerned about not paying my bills because I'm giving to God. That makes me not have enough money for my bills, so I'm concerned about giving to God and the testimony that it will be to those who are not believers."

He says do not worry! End of story.

I don't know about you, but this is hitting me way too hard. How can I now worry? How can I not be concerned when I'm working week to week not knowing if I will have a job next week? When I could be displaced from my job tomorrow? When my shoulder is killing me and I don't have hospitalization? And the list is endless. Our Saviour has the audacity to say to us "do not worry". You say, "I can't do that!" He says that we had better since it is a command, not a suggestion.

Worry is sin

(v.25a)

Since the Savior has given us this command to not worry, then what does that tell us about worry? It tells us that to worry is to sin. What! You can't tell me that worry is sin. That makes me feel bad and means that I'm guilty of sinning against God. But we cannot call it anything else besides sin. In fact, it is the sin of idolatry. He tells us that we cannot serve God and money and when we worry about

money, it is the sin of idolatry because we are giving something else besides God the preeminence in our lives. “Greg, I can understand that bowing down to an idol or worshipping an image would be idolatry, but please do not call my concern about life idolatry.” My friends, that is exactly what Jesus calls it – idolatry.

But the good news is that our Savior died for sin. And it is He Who will help us to obey His commands. But you say, “I can’t obey that one.” We know from the Scriptures that whatever God commands us to do, He will enable us to do. We are without excuse. Be careful. Worry is sin. Unadulterated, blatant sin.

Some of the people who come into our counseling rooms are eaten up with worry. They are on medications. They have great difficulty with their digestive systems. They have high blood pressure. That are irritable. You can’t hardly talk to them without having them take your head off. These people are eaten up inside. But He says, do not worry. He gives the grace to stop worry. He gives the Holy Spirit to enable us to obey. Call worry sin, because He does.

The Penetrating Interrogatives

(v.25b-30a)

Christ goes on to help us to begin to think differently about this win of worry. He asks us some very penetrating questions.

Isn’t life more than food, drink, and clothing?

Starting in the last part of verse 25 He asks us if life isn’t made up of more than food, drink, and clothes. And the obvious answer is, “Well of course it is.”

Are you not more important than birds?

Then He continues by using the birds. He says that aren’t we more important than the birds. And again, we must say, “Well of course we are.”

Who can add one hour to his life by worrying?

Then the next verse asks us if we can add even one hour to our entire lifetimes by worrying. And of course the obvious answer is that we can’t.

Why are you anxious about clothing?

Then He asks about our clothing. And He gives reasons as to why worrying about clothing is so futile.

Will God not clothe you?

And then He asks if God is able to clothe you. And we must answer, yes.

In fact, all of these questions are really getting to the heart issues. Isn't your life more important than food, drink, and clothing? Aren't you more important than the birds? Can you add one hour to your life? Why do you worry about clothes? Won't God clothe you? These questions are getting to the heart of the issue.

You respond, "Well, of course God can do all of that. No one has ever said that He couldn't. Those are silly questions. But what about the \$750 that I need for the rent tomorrow? I understand about silly birds and flowers, but what about me!?"

The Fundamental Indictment

(v.30b)

And, my brothers and sisters, that is the whole point of these questions.

You have so little faith.

The point of these questions is that you have little faith – little faith. In our Level One counseling class, the lecture on worry was written by Pastor Tim Pasma and he subtitled it *A mild case of atheism*. That is what God is saying. You have a mild case of atheism. You have little faith. He does not say that you have no faith. He says that you have little faith. And that is what these questions are pointing to.

"How can He say that I have little faith. I believe that He can clothe flowers and He can feed birds, but what about the \$3,000 hospital bill that I have. I have no money and I only make \$7 an hour. How is He going to take care of that?!" He says that you have little faith.

This is getting worse the farther we go in this passage. Wouldn't you agree? Not only am I sinning, but I am sinning by idolatry. And this idolatry stems from my little faith.

Do you understand what Jesus is saying. He is saying, "You don't trust me. In fact, you don't trust me so much that you are taking your life back into your own hands. You do not trust me with your life"

Now we would never say that out loud. But if we were honest, we would say it something like this, "Well, God, I've been watching how things have been going. And I must admit, that you are not doing things the way I would. In fact, I don't understand how or why You do things the way You do. In fact, the more I think about it, You are not doing things the way I think they should be done. I know what's best for me and things are not going that way. Since I know what is best, I had better take over from here. I think I can do a much better

job than you are doing. Or, at least I can trust myself easier than I can trust You.”

When we do not trust God we are saying that we are more wise, more good, and can do a better job with our lives than God can. When we put it that baldly, there isn't one of us here who raise our hands and admit that is what we are saying, but that is exactly what we are saying.

So what are we going to do about it?

Jesus gives us the ways that we can implement His command to not worry.

The Contrasting Implementation

(v.31-34)

Do not be anxious about food, drink, or clothing; God know all your needs.

He tells us in verse 31 that we are not to be anxious about food, drink, or clothing. And He tells us in verse 32 that God knows **all** that we need.

As I have consulted the commentaries, there is a disagreement among them. Some of them say that there is an argument from the greater to the lesser and others say there is an argument from the lesser to the greater. I don't really see that it matters much, since both views are making a similar argument. And here is how the argument goes. If you are a believer, someone for whom Christ died and for whom He gave His all, are you more important than a bird? Is a bird created in God's image? Does a bird have all that a believer has in Christ? Is a flower created in God's image? And all of us are saying, “This is so silly. Of course the birds and the flowers are not created in God's image! Why are you asking us these questions?” And the answer is. “That's what He is asking us. That's what He is showing us! Aren't you more important than birds and flowers?”

How silly is this?! Birds don't plant seeds, they don't plow, weed, or harvest anything. What does the flower do to make clothes for itself? And that's the argument. If God stoops so low and is so concerned about a bird who flies around, that He feeds him, won't He feed you?

How big is your God? How big is the God that you serve? Is He sovereign over all things? Is everything that comes into my life part of His sovereign plan? Is it for my good and His Glory? Is God really more concerned about me than He is about birds? Shake your heads yes. And so He says don't be anxious you people who have little faith, because He knows all that I need. He knows **all** that I need.

So if you're like me you might be saying, "Yea, He knows it, but what's He going to do about it?"

Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

So the next step of implementation is to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and is found in verse 33. I must admit to you that I have struggled with this verse for years. Now I want you to look down at your copy of God's Word and see if it says something similar to what my does in the ESV. Follow along. "And if you will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all of these things will be added to you." Do any of your translations say that? No. Well let me read it again, "But if you will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all of these things will be added to you." Does anyone have that translation that uses the if-then construction? I don't see any hands.

The reason that you don't see that is because it is not a conditional sentence. And yet, that is the way we think about it. We think that if we will start doing what God wants us to do, then we put Him under some kind of obligation to provide for us. If we will start pursuing His righteousness and become more righteous, then God is under an obligation to provide me with the things that I need. We do not put God under obligation. The Scriptures tell us that He knows all that we need. They tell us that He feeds the birds and clothes the flowers and that He knows all that we need. We are told later in this sermon that He is a loving Father. We, as fathers, know how to give good gifts, and surely He as our loving heavenly Father will give us all that we need. The issue here is not that we will be coerced into not being worried by seeking His kingdom and His righteousness. The issue is, "Folks, don't get entangled in worry because it is all taken care of! You serve Me rather than your worry. Don't you worship yourself! Don't you worship idols! Worship Me! Because I am worthy. I know what you need. I will take care of it. I take care of the birds." That's what He is saying here and that's what we have to believe as the truth in our minds.

This is not me making some kind of a contract with God. "OK, God, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to stop working on Sunday, I'm going to start giving some money to church, I'm going to read my Bible every morning, I'm going to be the father and husband I need to be, and I'm going to watch my language from now on. So you make it so that I don't have money problems anymore." This is not what He is saying in this passage. Guess what. Even when you do all of those things, you may still have money problems. God does not promise us that we are going to get out from under the pressure. He says, "I know what you need. I am the all-wise, all-loving, all-sovereign God Who will take care of you according to My will, not yours. In My time-

frame, not yours, And in my way, nor yours.” That’s what we are to be seeking. We are to be seeking God for where my treasure is that’s where my heart will be. So don’t be anxious. Seek first the Kingdom of God.

But how do we do this? We do it by using the Scriptures. Every time that we are finding ourselves worrying we need to meditate on this passage. We need to tell ourselves that God knows all that we need. He is so concerned about the inconsequential birds of the air that He feeds them and He clothes the flowers of the fields. He provides all that they need. Surely, He will provide all that we need in His time and in His way.

Do not be anxious about tomorrow.

Then He goes on in the next verse and continues by telling us not to be anxious about tomorrow. There is enough trouble for today without bringing tomorrow’s trouble into today. We are not to be worried about the future. What is the worst thing that can happen? We can lose our lives and go to glory. That’s a pretty bad thing, isn’t it.

“But Greg, you don’t have to answer the phone calls from the bill collectors demanding their money.” You’re right, I am not answering your calls. But let’s consider what He is really saying.

He is not saying, on the one hand, that you don’t have to have any thought about tomorrow, just let go and let God take care of you. It’s not really your concern. That’s like saying that you need a job. And all you have to do is pray. In fact you pray all day and sit home waiting for the phone to ring with an employer offering you the position of a lifetime. I have the faith that God will provide and I’m going to pray and sit right here at this kitchen table, believing God until He provides me with that job. That is sliding down one side of the mountain.

On the other hand, you say that God isn’t really involved in this and it’s all up to me. I need to do everything that I can including what my not be pleasing to God, because the end justifies the means. It’s all up to me and I am going to spend every waking hour, and some of the ones when I should be sleeping, trying to manipulate, or whatever it takes, to get a job. This is the other side of the mountain slope. We have the two extremes – the two slippery slopes of error.

Remember, we have talked about the third way, the ridge of the mountain. That says that I am not going to worry. I am going to pray asking God for His provision in His time, as well as being a good steward of the time and pursue seeking a job trusting that He will guide my steps.

One of the things that we struggle with, especially in this country, is that we have so much, but we want so much more. We are not satisfied. In my position as a Certified Financial Planner, I have observed that it doesn't matter how much income you make, it is never enough. I have a few clients who make large incomes and they don't have 2 nickels to rub against each other. They are in not better shape, financially, than anyone else in this room. Although they may make \$500,000 or even \$750,000 per year, it is not enough. Now I don't know about you, but I think that I could probably make ends meet on \$750,000. don't you. It's not how much you make, it's how much you live on. It's what does it take for your lifestyle? And I know that I am probably no different than most of you. Whenever there is a raise, that raise is used to increase my standard of living. We don't define our lifestyles and how much it would take to maintain them. We define our lifestyle by how much we make.

I remember when my wife and I used to discuss what it would be like to be able to go out to eat after church on Sundays. We would know that we had made it when we could go out to eat at a restaurant on Sunday afternoons. We would be living high on the hog when that happened. Well, guess what? That has happened. Now what? We aren't satisfied. We never have enough to satisfy our lifestyle desires. We live on what we make, not what we need for a defined lifestyle.

Folks, when we sit down and look at our finances and there isn't enough money to pay all the bills and give money to the Lord's work, it's because we haven't looked at our lifestyles and evaluated them for how pleasing they are to God. Even if you were having trouble with the teaching of the tithe, there are some of you out there who are not even giving regularly and proportionately because there isn't enough to do it. You haven't looked at your lifestyle and decided what it should be before God.

You may be reasoning, well if I made \$750,000 a year, I would be able to give generously. Maybe that might be true, but it is my experience that people do not have anymore to give then because they have raised their lifestyle to that level. So make sure that you're not fooling yourself by thinking that the answer is just making more money. The answer is in defining your lifestyle. And in one of the messages later on, the speaker is going to be helping us to work with what God has given us.

But here is the bottom line. Jesus says that it is you of little faith. If God has told us that worry is sin. If God has told us that worry is idolatry. And He has told us not to worry, and that He will give us all that we need, then He has given to us, now, all that we need to obey Him by giving Him what He requires. He has supplied all that we need, currently, to obey Him. We have enough. What are we doing with it? What are we spending it on? What kind of a steward are we

being? One of the things that we need to decide is what are we going to give God. But more importantly, what am I going to live on so I can give God the rest. I need to look at my lifestyle. Am I more concerned about the Kingdom of God than I am about the house in which I live, the car I drive, the restaurants that I eat at, and all the other things that I am concerned about?

So how do we get rid of this worry? We do it by stopping the worry and trusting God and His provision. We are to be seeking Him and not worrying about tomorrow. Being good stewards using that third way of not letting go and letting God nor of doing everything myself without regard to God, but in faith, looking to God knowing that He will give me all that I need to obey Him. He has given me everything I need, in my hands, right now, to obey Him. I must be a good steward of what He has given and not worry.

Conclusion

Let's wrap this all up.

Worry is sin.

First of all, worry is sin.

Worry comes from a lack of faith.

Worry comes from a lack of faith in a God Who provides all that we need. A God Who is the sovereign God Who is more concerned about me than He is about birds and flowers.

Do not act like unbelievers. Place your treasures in heaven.

Also, I need to quit acting like an unbeliever. He says that the unbelievers are the ones who are concerned about food, clothing, and the things of life. He tells us to place our treasures in heaven.

Stop worrying and start believing God. Make the Kingdom your primary concern.

Stop your worrying and start believing God and make His Kingdom your primary concern.

Worry and anxiety over the future destroys grace-filled and glad giving.

And lastly, worry and anxiety over the future destroys grace-filled and glad giving. Folks, I am going to be so bold as to say that God doesn't want your check when you write it out of guilt or out of obligation or out of fear of reprisal, or under pressure, or trying to manipulate God. God says that He wants a glad-hearted joyful giver. And the only way we can do that is to stop our worrying about tomorrow and to trust in our loving, sovereign God and His provision.

Bridging the Gap

Malachi 3:6-12

Russ Kennedy

Summary

Perspectives on Christian grace giving as transitioning from Old Covenant to New Covenant.

Introduction

Everyone comes to the Bible with a framework, a grid through which they see the Bible. This is inevitable. It is not possible to come to the Bible as a neutral observer. So we must be very careful to know what our framework is and to make it under not over the text. If we are not aware that we have a framework we will confuse it with the text. And if the framework is sovereign over the text, the text will be shaped to fit our framework, rather than our framework being informed by and changed to fit the text.

Now why is this important as we consider the grace of giving? Because the way we approach the arch of Scripture, the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament is a framework that will drive our understanding and our practice of Christian giving. If you believe that the Old Testament is pre-Christian and Jewish only, then what it commands and commends will be of very limited value. And much of what Pastor Ed preached last week will fall on deaf ears.

I believe that much of the disagreement over Christian giving are two opposite frameworks being worked out practically. The effect is that both are down-slope. Both have an inadequate Canonical/Biblical Theology of Giving. It is my aim in *Bridging the Gap* to bring us to the third way. We need a Canonical/Biblical Theology of Giving that understands and applies the principles being taught in Sunday Bible Study.

Russ Kennedy

The Concept of a Canonical Theology

First, let's establish four essential principles derived from the Scriptures that will constitute a Biblically informed framework. I am choosing these because they have the most impact on how we work through the text.

Revelation is Progressive

This principle simply acknowledges that there is a development through the Bible. Moses does not know all that David does. David does not know all that Isaiah does. Isaiah does not know all that Paul does. Revelation is unfolding. As we come to greater light, we use it to interpret what has gone before. The Old Testament informs the New and the New Testament interprets the Old.

Revelation is Redemptive-Historical

This principle recognizes that the Bible is about God who is moving through time and history to redeem and restore His people. Revelation is given in the midst of the mess – it is first and foremost, given in the context of real history. It also is recognizing that the Bible is sufficient for life and godliness without being exhaustive. How each generation of God's people are to live is informed by not only its immediate context, but by what God has revealed before.

Revelation is Christ-Centered

John 5:36-47

This principle recognizes that the Bible's revelation reaches its apex in the Lord Jesus. Now this is not a chronological center as though the 33 years on earth are what we are talking about. No, Christ is its theological center as illustrated by the cross. Jesus is the revelation of God. The Bible is the unfolding revelation of Jesus.

Revelation is Promise-Fulfillment

This principle recognizes the trajectory of the Bible. It is moving from old to new, promises to fulfillment, from shadows to substance, from copies to realities, from lesser to greater, from local to global, from earth to heaven, from death to life, from fall to fullness. At first this seems obvious and trite. I contend that a great deal of bad and down-slope interpretation and application of Scripture has failed to really grasp this principle.

Now, make no mistake – undergirding all this is a strong commitment to the necessity at the first level to understand the Bible as revelation through human language requiring all the work at grammar, definition, meaning, flow and so on. To work the above principles with integrity means we must have the sense of the text right. But it also means that no meaning is entirely localized. All texts contribute to the

whole. This is what D.A. Carson calls grammatical integrity, textual fidelity and inter-canonical connections.

The Content of a Biblical Trajectory

So let's do a jet flyover of a Canonical/Biblical Theology of Giving.

Abraham and Melchizedek

Genesis 14:17-15:1

This is the first clear reference to tithing as giving in the Bible. Here, Abraham has achieved a great victory in rescuing and is met by Melchizedek, King of Salem and Priest of God who brings bread and wine to the meeting. Abraham takes a tenth and gives it to him. He is blessed by Melchizedek.

Twice in this text, both in the blessing by Melchizedek and in the affirmation that follows by Abraham, God is asserted to be the Most High Sovereign, creator and owner of all of heaven and earth. These two statements lay the Canonical foundation for giving. God is our sovereign, superior and owner.

It is important to note that the author of Hebrews unpacks this event and makes those very attributes the center of his argument to show the superiority of Christ to Abraham and to Aaron.

Tithing in the Mosaic Covenant

Leviticus

The Mosaic Covenant, or what we commonly call The Law, governed the nation of Israel as the standard of holiness until Jesus came. What was written in the Law codified the righteousness of Christ and the holiness of God for a people in a particular culture until the in-breaking of the eschatological kingdom in this age through Christ. So the holy practice of Abraham did not look to the Law, but to God. The Law reflects the holy standard God sets and then shows in Christ in His life and in His Body.

Precept under Law

Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:21-28

A number of texts in Leviticus establish clear guidelines for what an Israelite was to give. There was the tithe which was 10% of each households "income" as measured in an agricultural economy. It was to be brought to the Temple. If a person lived far away, it could be store housed or stockpiled for up to three years, but had to be brought. It was considered dedicated to the Lord like the Temple vessels and was not to be put to any other use. Period. The tithe was used to maintain the Temple and Levites, who were responsible to tithe on what they received.

Preached by Moses**Deuteronomy 12;14;26**

In Moses final 3 sermons before entering the land, he reinforces the necessity of heart obedience in giving. He intimates that the place the tithe is brought to will change in the language he uses. Listen to Deuteronomy 26:16-19, “This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. 17 You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. 18 And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, 19 and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.”

Practiced by the People

In this as in most of the Law, Israel failed over and over again. They sometimes gave from a good heart. They sometimes gave out of hard, resentful hearts and sometimes they didn't give at all. In many cases where this is exposed, the failure of the people to recognize the trajectory from Abraham through Moses where God is sovereign and owner, and our very great treasure is lost.

Prophesied in Malachi

That then brings us to our Malachi text. Are there distinctly Mosaic Covenant elements here? Yes. Are there elements that are Canonical and not limited to the Law? Yes. Later, at the end, we will summarize by looking at the Canonical Principles, Purposes and Precepts for giving.

It is important for me at this point to correct some mistakes commonly made in relation to the Mosaic Law.

- Tithes and offerings are not the same thing. Offerings were voluntary, but still had clear guidelines. They were not to be confused with the tithe and could never substitute for the tithe.
- The tithe was never more than 10%. Those who say it is up to 40% are making a very simple mistake. 10% of flocks, 10% of herds, and 10% of harvest is still 10% of the whole, not 30%. If I give 10% of my church income, 10% of my consulting income and 10% of my speaking honorariums, I have still only given 10% of my income.
- The tithe was not the government tax. That was separate and different. The Kings levied taxes. God required a tithe. Those who lump them together are simply not reading the Old Testament closely.

Giving in the New Covenant

As we come into the New Covenant age, we find the shift from shadow to substance, lesser to greater impacting giving. Now, will be going into greater detail to unpack this next week, so I will not spend much time on this today.

Practiced by the Early Church

As the New Testament church began to see itself as the new covenant community of God, it took to heart the teaching of the Scriptures about faithful giving and benevolent sharing. These two things came to the center of giving – to send the gospel and to help God's people in need. They were often extravagant and sacrificial in their giving.

Preached by the Apostles

The apostles charged and commended a faithful, regular giving as a response to grace and with gratitude. Interestingly, there is a seeming silence from the Apostles in governing giving. Yet, they seem to understand giving as a vital necessity. Since they were largely preaching the OT Scriptures as interpreted through the cross and resurrection, they often reach back for OT texts, applying them a New Covenant, church framed understanding.

It is quite evident that whatever changes from the Old to the New is because of the centrality of Christ.

The Centrality of Christ

John 5:39 & 46 as well as Luke 24:27 tell us that Christ is not only the center of the Bible, but that there is some way in which all the Bible can point to Christ. Further, Jesus argues that Moses wrote about Jesus in such a way that believing Moses' requires belief in Jesus. So how is Jesus central to our giving?

As the Reality to which OT Giving Points

Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1 all tell us that the Mosaic Covenant was a shadow and Jesus is substance, the reality. The picture is that of the Lord Jesus in all that He is in solid truth and reality, cast a dim, insufficient yet divinely revealed shadow in the Mosaic Covenant. Thus the tithing, giving and offerings all point to Jesus who gives Himself fully and wholly to God and for His people. OT giving anticipates the self-giving of Jesus. NT giving reflects the self-giving of Jesus.

As the Great Gift at the Center of OT and NT

2 Corinthians 9:15 closes Paul's long exhortation on giving with the following exclamation, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!" Commentators are divided as to whether this is the gift of grace or the gift of Christ. A compelling case can be made that this is the doxological response to verse 13 where the glory of God is manifested in a confession of the gospel and the contribution made by grace.

Jesus is not only the center of a Canonical Theology of Giving in His own self-giving, but also in His being the great Gift. God's love for the world is such that He gave His Son. This great gift of God of His Son brings Him glory and supplies us grace. Thus our giving is suspended from this tower upholding all the lines of Biblical giving.

As the Pattern of NT Giving

Finally, Christ is the center of a Canonical Theology of Giving because of 2 Corinthians 8:9 where His giving up His own very great spiritual wealth for the relief of our very great spiritual poverty is urged as a motivation to give when the command to give is not pressed. Instead of being driven on by a command even when it is in force, Paul appeals to us to be drawn out by a compelling example.

Here is the glory of a Canonical Theology: Jesus is magnified at its core as the great giver, the grand gift and our gracious example.

The Challenge of Third Way

How do we follow the high road of Biblical third way and practice Christian giving shaped by a Canonical Theology? I want to offer the following as a summary of what we find.

Patterns – Framing of Biblical Categories

The giving of God's people is framed by three Biblical presuppositions.

CANONICAL – The Bible as a whole defines, describes and draws out our giving. It establishes both local and global, cultural and trans-cultural, immediate and through-time categories and commands for giving.

CHRISTOLOGICAL – At the center of all giving is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great giver, gift and giving of our great God.

CATEGORICAL – As we follow the trajectory of the Scriptures, we find categories for our giving established, exemplified and enabled by the grace of God.

Principles – Foundations for Biblical Commands

The giving of God's people has as its foundation God centered principles taught through the whole Bible.

- God is the creator, owner and possessor of heaven and earth.
- God is the sovereign ruler from whom all flows and to whom all is due.
- We are subjects, servants and stewards of the great King so that all we own is held and used in trust. At the end of days, we will be accountable to Him, both individually and corporately.
- At all points, God is to be acknowledged as the provider of all – from life and breath to our material sustenance. As sovereign, it is entirely up to His providence to distribute as He wills according to His plan and purposes.
- God has required that His people give in recognition of His status as God. Our act of giving is worship, acknowledging His worth as our great treasure.
- God has called His people to give out of hearts that delight in Him, not as mere duty. Our response in giving arises from reverential, grateful and grace filled hearts.
- God has ordained over time that giving to Him is done primarily through the central and visible locus of worship in that age. The giving of His people is first to a Person, God Himself through the men he ordains, then in the varying places and times and manners He decrees.

Purposes – Focus of Biblical Call

The giving of God's people is aimed by purposes revealed by the whole Bible.

- To magnify and elevate the greatness of God in acknowledging Him as He truly is.
- To humble us and motivate a response to God from the heart.
- To provide for the ministers and ministry of His Word and spiritual kingdom in a way that maximizes community.
- To release our grasping for material things and thus its deadly grip on us.
- To respond to grace with gladness and gratitude as we give ourselves and then of our material things.

Precepts – Function of Biblical Commitment

The giving of God's people is focused by a commitment to God expressed and fleshed out in practical obedience to God's directives.

- **PURPOSED** – The giving of God's people is shaped by an inward, heart purpose to please and glorify God, responding to His provisions of grace and goods.
- **PROPORTIONAL** – The giving of God's people is in a proportional or percentage relation to their income or, in Biblical terms, increase.
- **PLANNED** – The giving of God's people is a matter of careful planning and discipline as well as spontaneous responses to God's provisions and people's needs.
- **PERIODIC** – The giving of God's people is primarily done on the day of worship, particularly the expression of obedient giving to the place of worship.
- **PLEASURABLE** – The giving of God's people is to be done with extravagant joy and gratitude as a Godward act of worship.

Conclusion

In conclusion let me highlight several items.

- May we have a Canonical, whole Bible theology of all we do. Let's be sure that we listen to all of God's Word, interpreted by the cross and resurrection and applied by the Apostles.
- May we have patience: patience to allow the teaching to unfold and patience when we disagree. While the Elders believe that tithing is an appropriate starting place for Christian giving, what we are more interested in is that you give yourself to God, obey Him with a clear conscience and give by grace, with generosity and gladness.
- Let us have the inner integrity to examine our struggles over giving as reflecting sometimes a greater struggle over stewardship. Simply this, does your giving make God look large in your life?
- May we look to our Lord Jesus Christ as the great Gift from God, as the generous Giver of Himself and the glorious act of Giving.

Cultivating Contentment

1 Timothy 6:6-8; Hebrews 13:5-6

Russ Kennedy

Summary

Contentment is a great ground and root for sustaining grace giving.

Introduction

The great British thinker and leader of years gone by, G.K. Chesterton wrote, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried." Nothing is more to the point than when we think about money and contentment.

The sign on a bank, "We can loan you enough money to get you completely out of debt" says it all. Many Christians so caught up in the pursuit of money and wealth would chuckle nervously at such folly.

In stark contrast to that stands C.T. Studd, one of the great pioneer missionaries in England in the 19th century. He was an outstanding cricket player in England who had also received a large inheritance. But he had decided to go to Africa as a missionary. As a great witness to the world of the sufficiency of Christ and the supremacy of loving sacrifice, he gave away all of his wealth to several ministries. He gave some to his fiancée who immediately gave hers away as well. Then he went to Africa on the barest of support.

What kind of thinking and wanting can be the fruitful soil of such sacrifice and spending for the Kingdom? All through the hardships that his mission endeavors brought, there runs this constant theme of having cultivated a deep and abiding contentment with Christ.

So let's take up two Scriptures and consider them together.

Its Supreme Gain

1 Timothy 6:2b-10

Here is both wonder and warning: gain and pain. At the center of it is the relationship between doctrine and danger where what we crave makes us vulnerable to error in teaching and to sin in living.

In the Practical Connections

(v.2b-6)

The Biblical *standard* against which all teaching much be judged is *established* (v.3). It is weighed against sound words, correct propositional statements that correspond to the teaching of the Scriptures and the Lord. It is also weighed against the teaching that shapes true godliness.

The inward *characteristics* of the false teacher's heart are *evaluated* (v.4a). He is shown to conceited, ignorant and primarily concerned about controversy, particularly controversial questions and word-strife.

The divisive *consequences* of controversy are *explained* (v.4b-5a). The focus on controversial questions and disputes about words is the seedbed of envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions and never ending friction. It is error that divides and truth that unites.

The underlying *rationalization* of a materialistic heart is *exposed* (v.5b). They wrongly believe that religion is the way to riches.

This text frames for us how to evaluate an error:

- Content – What is being taught over against the texts of Scripture?
- Character – What are the people like who are teaching it?
- Consequences – What does the teaching produce?
- Cause – What is the primary underlying reasoning?

What is portrayed here is men, depraved in mind and deprived of truth, who stir up controversy by teaching error; men whose hearts are actually pursuing *gain* instead of *godliness*. It is important to realize that we think of as the health and wealth teaching is not new. All through history in general and in the history of the church, religion has been used to justify or even to generate sinful wealth.

So we don't come to this topic as though it were merely a matter of money – truth and error in doctrine often have error in stewardship connected. Religious leaders can misuse the Bible to try to extract money from you or to promise you things the Bible does not. While there are many appeals that are used, the most fundamental is a lack of contentment.

In the Power of Contentment

(v.6-8)

Godliness does bring real gain, but only when accompanied by contentment. The gain that godliness brings is not material, but rather true treasures that can only be appreciated by a heart satisfied with God, His providences (v.7) and His provision (v.8).

How can I be a person whose godliness is accompanied by contentment and is therefore a real gain?

- Right evaluation of the failing and fleeting nature of all that we often prize so much but is temporal and passing (v.7).

We didn't bring it with us and we can't take it with us. As one will and testament read, "Being of sound mind and body, I spent it all." It rusts and corrupts and breaks here. We buy insurances and warranties to replace it. Yet we have no warranty for it beyond our

death. Why is it so hard for us to see how passing and fleeting all this is in this life?

At the end when we die, I will take nothing with me and will have what treasures I have in heaven laid up. I can't send my stereos, and computers and houses on ahead. But I can invest in the gospel locally and globally so that the purposes and plans of the Kingdom are supported and sustained.

And finally, I will not face God with any of my stuff. I will give an accounting for my stewardship. What lasting treasures did I invest in? How much did I really value and treasure this life with all its stuff and not value and treasure God?

- Deep satisfaction with the basic provisions of life (v.8).

We are reminded often in Scripture to be content with basic necessities. What we consider to be basic necessities often reveals what we want and will cling to. Our “must haves” that are supported by debt show us where we are not content with the basics.

John Piper (and others as well) have called for Christians to return to living more simple, basic lives and give the wealth of our world and time to serve the Gospel. He calls having a war-time mentality. I agree that this is a Biblical call. But I am concerned that it becomes a mark of spiritual place and thus feeds spiritual pride.

What I would call for is an utter commitment to the Kingdom of God, the local expression in a gathered, covenant community, a church. If we have a vision for our selves as loving God supremely through loving people sacrificially, I am convinced that, yes, we will need messages like this, but they will rest on you more as affirmation than as admonition.

In the Potential of Riches

(v.9-10)

Christians must be wary of wealth. That sounds strange in our ears, doesn't it? These two verses show us the corrupting power of prizing and pursuing wealth. Now it is not *being* wealthy that destroys; it is the *desire* for wealth (v.9) and the *love* of money (v.10) that has a soul and life destroying capacity.

- Wanting riches exposes us to the kind of temptations that ensnare us into addictive and harmful practices. We become entrapped in the mesh of our desires and thus are plunged into spiritual and physical ruin. Wanting riches, for example, may cause us to borrow more that we are able to pay and thus make us the servant of our debt. Wanting riches may expose us to terribly addictive sins whose grip ever tightens until we are destroyed in its tentacles.

- Loving money is a root from which all kinds of evil grows up whose clinging vines choke out our spiritual life and whose thorns pierce and poison bringing terrible grief. Pursuing money may lead you to wander from the faith and bring deep depression and despair.

Why is this so? Consider Matthew 6:24. Because Jesus has taught us clearly that it is not possible to serve both God and money: not that it is not desirable, not that it is not the best, not that it is forbidden – rather, it is impossible. When you serve money and wealth, you are not serving God and cannot serve God. And when you are truly serving God, you will not and cannot be serving money.

Its Solid Grounds

Hebrews 13:5-6

In this closing section of Hebrews, the author shows what acceptable worship yields in practical godly living. After dealing with how love lives in our hospitality and in our homes, he points to how love must not be allowed to fasten onto things.

In its Clear Precept

(v.5a)

This exhortation speaks to our materialism. Listen to how this is phrased. “Keep your lives free from the love of money.” That command is so plain and clear yet is so often repeated in the Bible. Is your lifestyle marked by not loving money? Do people look at the way you live and have no questions about whether you are serving God and money?

What is the remedy? Satisfied contentment. A Biblical Christian is marked by a deep contentment with God’s provision for Him. He is grateful for it. He keeps laying up treasure in heaven so that his heart will not long for earthly riches. Whether in much or in need, Paul had learned the secret of contentment.

So then, do we go out and sell our houses and cars and stereos and give away our bank accounts? Only if you make choices to serve them and want them and provide for more and better of them rather than serving and wanting and sacrificing for Christ.

In Its Sure Promise

(v.5b)

How are we motivated to keep our hearts free from the love of money? We are motivated by the power of a promise. We have God’s sure promise. This is stated in the most emphatic way possible. “I will not ever for sure never leave you and will not and cannot forsake you ever.”

I know that the sinfulness of my own heart is exposed when this really does not motivate me. This promise is supposed to stir up hearts to the hard work of sacrificial love, hospitality to strangers, keeping our marriage vows and not loving money. But does it? Frankly, are you ready now to go out to the task because God is there with you and will never leave you?

Why is this? Is it because we simply do not value and prize the presence of God with us? Does this promise excite you for love and hospitality and purity and so on? Here it is once again. Loved ones, hungering and desiring God ought to so burn in our hearts that we will be satisfied with no less. And that hunger and desire will leap up with an affirming “Yes!” when promises of the abiding presence of God are heard.

In Its Spoken Purpose

(v.6)

That is what verse 6 is all about. The presence of God motivates godly living when we respond with thought out and committed confidence. We say to ourselves and others that God’s promises mean that God will help us. And because He will help us, we will not fear the threats or pressure or persecution of man. What can man do? The worst is to cause pain and bring death. But they cannot do even that if God does not allow it.

Do you respond to God’s sure promises with inward spoken purposes? God says He will be with us when we are tempted to sin. He will be with us when we choose to treasure heaven more than we value earth. And we will not fear what man can do to us when we care for one another. We will not fear the scorn of others when we stand for purity. We will not fear for our future security and safety.

For many there is nothing like financial uncertainty and personal threat to make them tremble and maybe not trust. And we do live in uncertain times. Some of you do not know if your job will be there next week or next month. You want to be sure that your future is secured – that you will have the money to pay the bills. But here we are with our hearts wrapped around things the promises of God at hand and the preserving grace of God in our hearts. So, we must not fear – we must trust.

Conclusion

Now let me bring this message to bear on stewardship.

- Contentment will keep us from taking God's money and spending it on ourselves. It will protect us from misspending and misappropriating the resources God has placed in our hands and under our stewardship.
- Contentment will free us to pursue God's Kingdom and store up treasures in heaven. It will release our hearts from being gripped by greed and being graced by God.
- Contentment will shape us to work hard to gain so that we can give. It will turn our ever increasing salaries into resources for ever increasing giving. Rather than our spending rising with our income, our giving does.
- Contentment will help us to make Christ look large to the world around us. There is no witness of the glory of God as when Christians will utterly sacrifice themselves for good of God and His people.

Abounding by Grace

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Dan Turner

Summary

Principles of Christian grace giving as observed from Paul's interaction with the church

Introduction

A few months ago your elders were caring for you in prayer. We empathized over your pain as we asked God for his grace. We were concerned over your confusion as we asked God for his grace. We rejoiced over your obedience as we asked God for his grace. Coming out of prayer and planning a series emerged. It was September Stewardship; how we are to glorify God with God-given resources (especially as it relates to money).

The first message was delivered by Pastor Ed. He set structure. What biblical giving looks like and how to measure obedience in our giving were some of his concerns. This was followed up by Pastor Greg whose message was on worry. His burden was to demonstrate that when we are not giving due to worry over finances we are not believing God; not trusting Him. His message was to dislodge us from fear in order to launch us into faith. Following this message Pastor Russ came and delivered two messages; the former was an overview of the theology of giving. He desired us to notice how the Old Testament and the New Testament have more in common than some think. He labored to show that the pattern of individual giving was to make Christ appear through our lifestyles as He actually is; LARGE AND GLORIOUS. Sacrificial liberality is this pattern. He concluded that the way God will look important and valuable in our lives through our giving is when we are satisfied / content in Him and not money. Out of this contentment in God comes generous, regular, proportionate giving.

I was asked by the Elders to come to you this morning with the next message in our series. This message is titled *Abounding by Grace*. Its purpose is to motivate us toward grace-producing, joy-generating, trouble-alleviating, God-glorifying generosity. And so, as Titus came to Corinth in his own accord with zeal given by God for their well-being I come to you. Let's pray that I will speak truth and that God will perform this truth and that we will be transformed by this truth.

Let's pray

It's just natural.

Let's think together over a natural phenomenon. It is my observation that *when misery increases ministry decreases*. It's just natural. During periods of tension in our family we tend to pull back from other relationships until home is in harmony. When we are sick we focus on getting well. When our job is threatened generosity is calculated. When conflict needs resolution we play it safe with others lest additional conflict start. When interactions go sour at work interactions go silent at home (and church). I think our general movement when hardships come is inward until the storms of trouble blow by. This is just natural.

The flip side seems to be generally true too. *When suffering goes down serving goes up*. When the stock market is up generosity is up. When the meal is tasty and the chest x-ray is clear, we like to serve. When primary relationships seem warm and engaged we give of our time. This is just natural.

Now someone might say at this point, "What's wrong with this? You seem to be building up to introduce a problem. What you've talked about is simply a normal thing. It's just natural".

If the trend I just described is even marginally accurate can you see the primal, most basic problem we face in relation to generosity? Are to able to detect what fundamentally hinders proportional, sacrificial, regular giving to the local church of the money God has entrusted to us?

The message for this morning is called Abounding by Grace. The arch enemy to generosity is not outside us. It is not hardships and income loss. It is not busy lives and pressing responsibilities. It is this: Thinking that Christian giving is just natural. God is watching. People are wanting. And I take inventory of my resources to see whether or not I can help. Beloved, listen to the Bible. (cf. Pr.3:5,6; Matt.6:33; Phil.4:19; 2Cor.9:8).

The book of the Bible from which we get today's text starts in an amazing way. 2 Corinthians 1:3-11 tell us that suffering is meant by and used by God to wean us off of self-reliance and to fix us upon the All-sufficiency of Himself. (quote v.9; see also 2 Cor.8:1-8). That all of the Christian life starts by and is sustained by and is stopped by God is clearly demonstrated throughout the Bible (cf. Rom.11:36; Acts 17:25). What does Abounding **by** grace mean? In what ways does the idea that "Christianity is supernatural or it is nothing at all" affect our tithes and offerings? What facts must renew our minds so that we will be motivated toward generous giving?

Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. (Read and pray)

In order for us to abound by grace, we need to be aware of grace giving. First, we need to be aware of and believe the principles of grace giving. This is found in vv.6-11.

The Principles of Grace Giving

(v.6-11)

We can observe from this passage key principles which are to guide our thinking and doing of giving. Notice with me v.6.

Foundational Principles

(v.6)

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”. Here we have a basic farming principle or proverb. It was a simple observation from an agrarian society. The Apostle Paul is motivating the people in the church at Corinth toward generous giving. He desires to fuel their generosity by using a commonly known event.

But the more one ponders this principle and does a word study on its key terms the more one sees. The two basic words Paul uses to motivate generosity are “sparingly” and “bountifully”. The contrast Paul is making is clear. On the one hand the giver who gives sparingly (that is, cautiously and thinly) will receive back small portions. But, in contrast with that type of giver, the one who gives bountifully (that is, generously or abundantly) will receive back ample supply.

The word for bountifully is a curious one. It is used in other contexts to talk about praising or blessing. The word is εὐλογίαισ from which we derive our English word eulogy. In effect, what Paul is talking about is not merely the quantity of the gift. It has much to do with the quality of the giver. The source of giving is not the checkbook. It’s the heart. The Corinthian church is to give not merely much but praisingly with an eye on blessing the recipients.

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 power of life and increase. Giving is not decreasing but rather increasing ones resources. Generosity does not take away but rather multiplies the storehouse of the giver. It does not decrease but rather develops reserve. Giving IS sowing!

In order for us as a church to abound by grace in giving we first must believe the foundational principle of v.6.

We also need to be clear on faithful practices of grace giving. What practices spring from belief in the principle found in v.6? Faithful practices of grace giving are seen in v.7.

Faithful Practices

(v.7)

Giving is to be...

Collectively

Notice how Paul starts his teaching on the practices of giving. He says “each one must give”. It is for each of us (“Each one”). And it is non-optional (“must give”)! Whether we have much or little the Bible commands us all to bountifully sow. Grace giving is not just for the mature or well-to-do. We all are commanded to enter into the happiness of giving sacrificially. We all get the bumper crop as we all respond by faith through obedient giving.

Purposefully

The second thing we notice about faithful practices is seen in the phrase “as he has made up his mind”. This phrase highlights the importance of purpose and intention. The emphasis lands on planned giving done on purpose with thought and conscious obedience to God’s Word. This giving should be done on Sunday at the meeting of the gathered church as seen in 1Corinthians 16:1-2.

The Lord through the Apostle is telling His people that giving is to be thought through. The issue at hand is placed squarely on the shoulders of the individual believer. We know that giving is like sowing. And so, there is no need of fear. We also know that giving is to be faithfully practiced by everyone of us. And now we know that it is our responsibility (and opportunity) to think about and decide upon how much we are to give. Beloved, proportionate giving does not lock us into 10% of our income. We look at the ability and generosity of the Great Giver; Jesus Christ himself (cf. 8:9). We look at how he has prospered us. We ponder the faithfulness and ability of our God. We discern that giving is to be done by faith bountifully. We then, by faith, come to a decision over what we will give. No vacillating! Stop wavering! Away with our two minds!

Resolve to systematically give generously.

Cheerfully

Thirdly, we see that faithful practice of grace giving is done voluntarily. Notice with me the phrase that captures some of this way of giving; “not grudgingly or under compulsion”. As we have been thinking over our discipline of giving these last few weeks, we are to decide to give regularly, generously and sacrificially. And this decision is not to be done either resentfully or to be done under pressure from the outside. No sadness. No regret. No guilt trips. No passing the offering basket by you twice. We are to delight in the glory of God and let loose gladly of God’s money that He has entrusted to us. We

are to be “cheerful givers”. This demonstrates that God is our treasure; not money.

Worshipfully

Listen again to how the Apostle teaches God’s people of faithful practices of grace giving. “Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, FOR God loves a cheerful giver”. The little word “for” connects how we are to give (i.e. not grudgingly nor under compulsion) with why we are to give (i.e. God loves a cheerful giver). Grace giving is to be done worshipfully.

As we grow in grace giving we will become more and more aware that it is a most precious form of worship. It is a component of God’s happiness. When God sees His grace effectually changing us into cheerful, purposeful, steady, sacrificial givers He sees His Son in the midst of His church. He sees the very center of His joy; the likeness of Jesus. God Almighty loves to see and smell (cf. Eph.5:1,2) the fragrant aroma of such giving. Faithful practices of grace giving are all about God. It is to rejoice the heart of God!

What we’ve seen thus far is that abounding by grace is done by believing the foundational principle (To give is to sow). We then noticed that abounding by grace is seen through faithful practices. What we haven’t talked about is capability. What is the spring from which all faithful grace giving flows? From where do we get the ability to do all that we’ve noticed?

This leads us to vv.8-9 and the topic of “the power for grace giving”.

The Power for Grace Giving

(v.8-9)

God gives the inward and outward ability to give as we ought. Grace does not nullify requirement - it just makes us able to do the requirement and to do it with gladness. Let’s see this by first noticing the enabling power of grace; v.8.

Enabling Power of Grace

(v.8)

Look at v.8 carefully. Notice the heaping up of the words *all* and *abound*. The sense of the verse seems to be that if we are willing to give, God will always make it possible for us to give. If the arch enemy to generosity is self-reliance as we asserted at the beginning of this message what is the arch friend of generosity? If we are not to look to ourselves for sufficiency to whom shall we look? Should you be ready to order new checks for your family consider printing v.8 on every check. GOD IS ABLE should be written over all our hesitancy. Is there anything in view here that we are not enabled to do?

The power for grace giving enables us to obey. It also encourages us when we face uncertainties.

Encouraging Purpose of Scripture (v.9)

Verse 9 quotes from Psalm 112:9. Perhaps you are sitting here this morning with thoughts haunting you. Your age is a strike against you. Your body and employment are more frail today than they were in your prime. When you think of giving it scares you; for how will you take care of your needs. You might be here this morning without work or with little hope that you will enjoy gainful employment. Bad news greets you in the news papers and over the nightly news. You hear these words this morning and there is a flicker of hope. Now you need encouragement to overcome your fears. Listen to what Paul is doing in order to motivate and convince the Corinthians for generosity.

Quoting from Ps.112 listen to these words. “It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever. He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid. He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor, his righteousness endures forever”. Paul is using this as a means of actually communicating the enabling grace of verse 8 and of encouraging obedience grounded in Scripture. We are learning this morning to take our gaze off of ourselves and situations and place it upon the all-sufficient, all-happy, all-gracious, all-powerful, all-generous God.

We will not be afraid of bad news; for our God is able!

Enriching Provision of God (v.10-11)

Not only do we have the enabling power of grace and the encouraging purpose of Scripture, we find in vv.10-11 the enriching provision of God.

“He who supplies” must echo around constantly in our souls; lest we lean upon our own understanding in financial decisions. This is a God-centered concept. The word for supply is used only in 1 Peter 4:11. It is a curious word meaning *to lead a chorus, to sponsor a performing group, to meet its needs*. In other words, God is seen as giving us grace to sponsor the unified response of giving and the harvest of righteousness. A God-sponsored choir in which and through which a symphony of grace-produced giving resounds to the good of man and the glory of God. This is the enriching provision of God!

It is a symptom of our very materialism, that we hear these verses in terms of money. “If we give to God, then God will prosper us.” Notice though that the sowing God does in our lives bring **first** a harvest

of **righteousness**. In the end, our very prosperity is in order that we might be generous and liberal in our giving.

To this point we've covered what the fundamental principle for grace giving is. We saw that grace giving increases; not decreases our resources. Giving is sowing. Next we put some hands and feet to the principle by showing what faithful practices of grace giving are. We saw that grace giving must be done by all of us, done cheerfully, done purposefully and finally done worshipfully. Giving is all about God.

Next we pointed out that the capacity to do grace giving is not found in us. Self-reliance is deadly. Rather we look to God who supplies us with all we need; both the money to give and the heart to give it come from God. He is developing a choir of grace givers; for the good of his people and the glory of his Name.

The Products of Grace Giving (v.12-15)

Now we come to the end of this paragraph in the Scriptures which talks about the products of grace giving. How do we know that we as a church are actually giving according to the grace being given us? The answer we see in vv.12-15 is by what it produces.

Supplying of Needs (v.12a)

The first product (i.e. result from grace giving) Paul alludes to is found in the first part of v.12. When we are involved in grace giving needs will be supplied. Grace giving allows ministry to function. Frankly, we will have what we have a vision for and are willing to give in order to have. When your elders cast vision and we catch the vision and we rely upon God this God-produced choir of grace giving will see to it that the vision is realized. Supplying the needs is the first result of grace giving.

Motivating of Gratitude (v.12b)

Secondly, Paul points to thanksgiving. Remember our definition of grace? "Grace does not nullify requirement - it just makes us able to do the requirement and to do it with gladness". So we would expect thanksgiving somewhere in all this! Grace giving produces thanksgiving.

Glorifying to God (v.13)

Thirdly, we see the primary result of grace giving. Glory to God is the produce of all that God does for us in Christ Jesus! As Dr. Piper frequently says, "the giver gets the glory". When we believe that all ability; both change in the pocket and change in the heart come from God we give in such a way that makes God look like he really is.

People around grace giving recognize and relish the fact that supernatural living is occurring. The One who contributes gets the tributes. God is magnified and we are satisfied when grace giving happens.

Encouraging of Prayer

(vv.14-15)

Fourthly, we come to Paul's last item in his list of results from grace giving. Paul often uses this word *to long for* to express his relationship with other believers and his yearning for heaven. Grace giving produces prayer; a desire for more God!

Lessons

I'll land this message this morning with lessons gleaned from this passage.

- Giving is to be:
 - ☞ Collectively
 - ☞ Purposefully
 - ☞ Cheerfully
 - ☞ Worshipfully
- If you are not giving, you are:
 - ☞ Not supplying others needs in the church
 - ☞ Not glorifying God
 - ☞ Resisting grace
 - ☞ Disobeying the command of God
 - ☞ Disregarding the example of the church
 - ☞ Misspending a portion of God's provision
- If you have already spent that portion you should be giving, you need to do what is Biblically necessary to do God's will. This involves:
 - ☞ Confession of sin
 - ☞ Correcting the financial problem (may involve the selling of something which is keeping you from doing what God wants.)
 - ☞ Trusting God for change.
 - ☞ Doing what God has commanded.
- All of the Scripture points toward proportional giving to God's local expression of Himself; namely the local church. God's people give through God's house. Please be very careful in giving to para-church ministries, particularly to those who are wrong in their theology and practice.

It is our prayer that your God-honoring giving comes from a glad heart that has experienced the grace of God.

Resting in God's Provision

Philippians 4:10-19

Dale Evans

Summary

Sacrificial giving abounds where God's provision is sought and supplied.

Concerns

This series is a continued effort on the part of the ministry leadership at Clearcreek Chapel to challenge us to consistent Godly living based upon a clear and understandable interpretation of the Bible. We believe that God calls us and challenges us to a life that is holy and consistent with his own character. Our inability to accomplish this task is the fundamental problem with us and the reason that a substitutionary means of justifying us is necessary. But in the act of declaring us "right", he then positions us to reflect this glorious "rightness" in our own lives.

We are constantly engaged in the practice of encouraging each of us to a more Christ-like character because of the work of Christ and the power of the Gospel. The constant interaction between the indicative and the imperative motivates our actions. Who we are in Christ and the response of faith in Christ are the engines of holiness. We must realize our position in Christ and the character of the righteousness that has been placed in our accounts and then live in faithfulness to the King who has graciously worked this wonder in our lives.

If you haven't figured it out by now, stewardship implies a sense of caretaking. This is when you are responsible for something that is not your own. Like babysitting, house-sitting, or taking care of the neighbor's dog while they are away, it involves responsibility for something that you do not own. For our lives then the implication is that God has provided for us everything that we have and we are but "stewards" in its care. Even just reminding ourselves of this fact often goes a long way in shaping how we think about our time energy and money.

Thus far we have been challenged to consider the context of stewardship as it has been displayed in the Old Covenant and how we are to appropriate that to our lives in the New Covenant. We were confronted with the idolatry of worry and how it renders us paralyzed to live for his glory. The stewardship series this year is structured in a way to challenge us to place our entire lives at the foot of the cross and to examine our motivations and our treasures...

Context

The problem with preaching any isolated text is you often end up ignoring why that particular text is where it is found. This can seriously affect what you end up deciding the text means and how it is to be used. To get to this evening's text we will start further up in the letter to see if we can distill any thoughts to help us ground our context.

Let's begin by reflecting on the "thanksgiving-prayer" found in chapter 1, verses 3-11.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

The standard format for a first century letter often included some wish-prayer or thanksgiving. Paul uses this convention to establish his main themes and allude to material he will elaborate on later in his letter. He, in a sense, sets his agenda and gets his readers' attention.

The core of this first sentence (a typical Pauline run-on sentence that extends from verse 3 down to verse 8) is seen in verse 6. Paul has a 'sureness,' a confidence, an excitement even, over the work that *God* is doing in their lives. It is God who is "bringing this work to completion" and this work is evidenced in the lives of the Philippian believers. Indeed, several times in the letter he refers to God's work in his and his readers' lives. Chapter 1:29 speaks of their belief and suffering as being "granted" to them. In 2:13 Paul explicitly refers to God's "work in them."

This core thought is flanked by two parallel thoughts (a chiasm if you will) that speak of the Philippians' "partnership" in the gospel, verse 5 and of their "partaking" in grace seen in verse 7. Some translations render this thought as "fellowship" in verse 5, and "sharing" in verse 7. This thought is of mutual *endeavor* for a common goal, not just relationship. D.A. Carson has this to say on this verse, "Paul does not commend them for the fine times they had shared watching games in the arena. He doesn't mention their literature discussion groups or the

excellent meals they had, although undoubtedly they had enjoyed some fine times together. What lies at the center of all his ties with them, doubtless including meals and discussion, is this passion for the gospel, this partnership in the gospel.”

God is at work and they are evidence of it in the promotion of the gospel. On into verses 9-11 he desires their love to abound all under the governing motivation of the praise and glory of God. In a sentence we should see this letter as emphasizing *God's work* in the *lives* of Paul and his readers to bring *glory* and praise to God. So let's see how these verses in chapter 4 promote and relate to these great themes.

Partnership Renewed (vs. 10-13)

First of all we see that this “partnership” has been “renewed.” This first section can be seen as an assertion and then two qualifications that temper or modify that statement.

Anticipated Joy (vs. 10a)

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me.

First of all we see that this “partnership” is received with great rejoicing. They had sent a monetary and material gift through Epaphroditus and Paul is replying in thanks. After some delay he is made aware again of their friendship and concern.

Providential Delay (vs. 10b)

You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.

But he knows that the delay and apparent absence of “help” was not because of their lack of concern, but of opportunity. God had not provided them the circumstances (either in the collection or in the delivery) to demonstrate the reality that was in their hearts. So he thanks them for their gift, but recognizes the delay to be in God's planning and providence and then qualifies this even further.

Circumstantial Grace (vs. 11-13)

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Even though they had been unable to “help,” Paul knew the source of all that he needed and could rest in that provision. The concept of

contentment that Paul refers to here is likely to be foreign to most of us. Our culture drives us to want. It encourages us to pursue the bigger and the better. Paul was not without initiative nor was he without vision. He apparently had an evangelistic program and strategy to accomplish his divinely established mission. And, Paul would have known of “needs” required to maintain this enterprise. However, he had *learned* to be satisfied with the circumstances and consequences that he found himself in and to make the best of that situation. The common denominator of all these times was his identity in the Christ who redeemed him and empowered him. He could trust that God’s grace would strengthen him in any circumstance.

Partnership Valued (vs. 14-17)

That last sentence clearly echoes the sentiment initially put forward in 1:6, that is it is God is working in the life of the apostle, and here this gift as demonstrating their “partnering” is made more obvious as he relates to the Philippians how much their partnership is valued.

Acknowledged Quality (vs. 14)

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.

Here Paul reflects back to 1:7 where here commented on the Philippians and the fact of their sharing in grace of the gospel. Here Paul notes that they are sharing in his trouble. Paul understood that the gospel would not only bring great times of celebration but tremendous trouble. Sharing in grace would by definition include sharing in trouble. And in this he could recognize the quality of their participation and thank them.

Consistent Pattern (vs. 15-16)

And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.

As in the section above, Paul makes an assertion and then he elaborates on it. Here he further places accolades upon the Philippians for their historic and consistent care for him. The language introduced here and continued into the next two verses in certainly commercial. The ideas of “giving and receiving” can be understood as debit and credit, with verse 17 alluding to compounding interest and verse 18 to a final payment. But the concept of friendship in the first century also spoke of relationships as giving and receiving and could often end up “unbalanced.” Paul affirms and values this “friendship” but adds a third party to this relationship.

Dale Evans

Direct Deposit (vs. 17)

Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.

Here he tells them that this reciprocity is indeed to their credit. The implication is not that Paul is “repaying” them, but that God adds to their account. The ESV has this as an alternate translation: “I seek the profit that accrues to your account.”

Partnership Explained (vs. 18-20)

As he elaborates on this “third-party” accounting he shows them the ultimacy of this partnering. This partnering in the gospel is what life is all about. He finishes this “thank-you note” with a rehearsal of 1:11, the ground of all Paul’s and the Philippians’ work.

Gratitude with Gratuity (vs. 18)

I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Paul again makes an assertion and then qualifies it. He informs the Philippians of their “full payment.” Perhaps they felt guilty that they had been unable to meet some previously agreed-to commitment. We don’t know the exact circumstances but he lets them know he is “well supplied” and then puts the theological turn on this exchange. Their gifts are indeed sacrificial offerings that are well received by God. Frequently in the Old Testament, accepted offerings are referred to as being “fragrant.” The Philippians’ service is to be recognized in this context, that of partnering not only with Paul but with God himself in this gospel enterprise.

Glory! – God-sent (vs. 19)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul wants them to have confidence in the provision of the daily needs but he “kicks it up a notch” by the language he chooses. He doesn’t just speak of their material needs he speaks of – bam!—their “every” need. What would be their greatest need but to rest in Christ as their all sufficient sacrifice for sin. It is the Christ who suffered death on a cross (2:8) and whose righteousness is imputed to our accounts through faith (3:7-11).

He also kicks it up when he doesn’t just speak of his riches, but – bam!—speaks of “riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” He is the one that

Paul gives up everything for! In 1:21 “for to me to live is Christ” and in 3:12 “Christ Jesus has made me his own” are just two places in the letter where he glories in the wonder of Christ. He alone is the one who “did not find equality with God something to be grasped.”

It is glory that supplies and guarantees our already and not yet as that which is sent, and yet we also give him the glory as well as the motivation for all we do.

Glory! – God-ward (vs. 20)

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is not just some religious sentiment that Paul inserts in his letters from time to time because as a teacher of religion he is expected to sound this way. His doxology, his praise of God’s glory, flows from his heart as he considers the wonder of this partnering in the gospel that God has placed *in* our care to *steward* with care.

Conclusion

Partnership in the gospel...is an expression of our hearts.

Paul teaches how to respond to giving. He is joyful and uses the gift to his “needs.” But he is well aware that God is giving him everything that he “needs” even if the Philippians had not provided this timely delivery.

The Philippians on the other hand teach how to give in that they gave out of recognition of their partnering in the gospel. They partnered in providing material assistance whenever their circumstances allowed and did so on a regular basis.

Are we partnering in the gospel from hearts that recognize the ultimacy of the gospel endeavor? We speak of the Scriptures as presenting a Redemptive-Historical worldview. Do we share the vision that God has created all that is to bring Him glory and demonstrate the glory of His son? If so, shouldn’t we see all that we do and have through this framework?

Partnership in the gospel...is empowered by grace.

Both the ministry (in this case the apostle Paul) and the giver (here, the Philippians themselves) are enabled in their tasks in the work of the gospel because of the work of God in them. God strengthens the Apostle and he supplies all that the Philippians need.

We work because He is working in us. Do we really rest in God’s enablement, or do we rush ahead in our own talents? This requires wisdom to recognize the difference. God’s enablement is often in

what he has “graced” us to be able to do, but when we fail to give the glory and recognition of this fact to Him we steal and rob him of his gift and fail to offer a sweet-smelling sacrifice.

Partnership in the gospel...has spiritual value.

When we work in partnering for the gospel, when are engaging in God's means for growth. It adds benefit to our accounts. Try not to think of this on a material plane. Philippians 4:7-9 is the immediate context for our passage, and there the apostle challenges us to set our minds and hearts on in our requests to God. Do we engage in ministry only when we see the immediate tangible value? Do we only participate when we can answer, “what's in it for me?”

Partnership in the gospel...is visible.

It can be visible in our monetary gifts. But it can be visible in our time and energy. Do we sacrifice what is only convenient for me or my family? The ideas of sacrifice and convenience really shouldn't be used in the same sentence. The one thought is mutually exclusive of the other. Is your partnership in the gospel visible to anyone else?

Partnership in the gospel...is God-centered.

For Paul, our position with God is based on our relation to Christ. Being “in Christ” is the ground of all that we are. We are vile, wretched sinners deserving nothing but his wrath in ourselves, but when placed in Christ and his righteousness we now have peace with God and peace from God. Just skim the text of Philippians and see how much emphasis on Christ is here. Just a sampling: 1:1, 1:8, 1:11, 1:13, 1:19, 1:21, 1:27, 2:1, 2:5, 3:3, 3:7,8, 3:12, 3:14, and 4:23. Romans 11:36 contains a great doxology expressing Paul's sentiment regarding the Christ-centeredness, and therefore God-centeredness of his life when he proclaims that “from Him and through Him and to Him are all things To Him be glory forever.” Are we looking to bring Him glory or are we looking to elevate our own esteem, our own position, our own family smoothness, to eliminate our personal problems, our headaches, our weaknesses, our illnesses. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever, Amen.

Partnership in the gospel is the easiest hard work we can do...As we rest in God's provision, he brings us to completion, to see His glory face to face.

Obeying by Faith

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Russ Kennedy

Introduction

These last 3 weeks have been an adventure of discovery – about God’s Word and about ourselves. We have come first and primarily to the text to hear, over the whole of Scripture, what God says to us about giving. It is my privilege this morning to bring this to a very pointed and practical conclusion. Frankly, all this talk from the Bible is merely theory if at the end of it we do not give.

One other concern that we have is that you get “stuck” on the issue of tithing. If 7 messages are heard to be about tithing then the Word preached is not profiting as we aimed and hoped. In other words, yes, we believe there is a connection between tithing and proportional giving. But what we desire is that you give in such a way that the profit, the piled up interest is spiritual and there is a harvest of righteousness that is pleasing to God. May I encourage you then to come to this message with a poise to hear and heed, each according to their light, their conscience and the grace of God for you.

It is my aim to stir up your joy in God by helping you to be, not only a hearer of the Word, but a doer also. So we will recapture what your elders have preached to you and then we will give some practical counsel to guide you into an obedient, God pleasing, grace enabled giving.

Pastor Greg and I challenged you to recognize:

- How worry and anxiety exposes our treasures and undermines our giving;
- How contentment with God and His provisions releases our treasures and fuels our giving.

In the context of thinking about the Old Covenant tithe in a Christian way, Pastor Ed gave us 4 key principles.

- The GRACE of Giving - We should seek the grace of liberality in our giving. We should be characterized by our generosity – our liberality in giving.
- The EXAMPLE of Giving – Jesus, our savior, was the greatest example of giving. He became poor so that we may become rich.

- The EXTENT of Giving - We are called by God to give “out of what we have”. God simply says bring to Him out of what we have - what He has blessed us with.
- The ATTITUDE of Giving - The attitude of the Christian toward giving to God’s work needs to be cheerful and with “a willing mind”.

Pastor Dan challenged us that giving is to be:

- Collective – All are to be involved
- Purposeful – Committed plan for obedience
- Cheerful – Seeking my joy in the pleasure of God over my obedience
- Worshipful – An act of sacrifice acknowledging the greatness of God

If you are not giving, you are:

- Not supplying others needs in the church
- Not glorifying God
- Resisting grace
- Disobeying the command of God
- Disregarding the example of the church
- Misspending a portion of God’s provision

Pastor Dale showed us our partnership in the gospel through giving:

- is an expression of our hearts.
- is empowered by grace.
- has spiritual value.
- is visible.
- is God-centered

Identifying Key Questions

As I have wrestled with this topic in the past and as we have moved through this series there are lingering questions in people's minds that we should address.

Isn't grace giving spontaneous?

This is not how most would ask the question? They actually say, "If our giving is not spontaneous, then how can it be by grace?" There is a notion that grace causes spontaneous giving.

That leads to the next question...

Can grace giving function with discipline and planning?

If I sit down, analyze my budget, plan what I want to give, establish on what weeks I am going to give then all this discipline and planning replaces or even thwarts the spontaneity of grace. It is Law, not grace. However, the Scripture shows grace functioning through means and structure. Grace produces the self-discipline and work of giving. It may produce spontaneous acts of worship and response to need, but this is occasional. Grace enables planned regular giving.

Why is giving seemingly treated differently in the New Testament than the Old?

The movement from the Old to the New with Christ as the center of both largely accounts for the difference. The Old Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ. But the category and principle of regular, proportional giving weaves its way through the whole Bible. In the Old Testament, we have all kinds of details that are applications of the principles applied to the Jews in their culture until Christ. In the New Covenant, we have the same principles, but broadened so as to be applicable to any culture, since the gospel is to all people groups. As a result, the Old Covenant seems to be all about detailed commands and the New Covenant about broad principles.

Should giving be primarily based on needs or on principles?

It is both. Giving in the Bible is called for from God's people as:

- Principle based – foundational is God's character and our response to that character by surrender and sacrifice.
- Need oriented – as the principles are put in place, then the need is presented and met. The tabernacle and temple were built this way and most of the New Testament's giving is focused on needs.

Russ Kennedy

If I disagree with the teaching by the elders on tithing, then what should I do?

First, let me say this: there can be no disagreement on the New Covenant responsibility of every believer to give. This is the clear and unequivocal teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. But, on our understanding that a tenth is a guideline, let me suggest some questions to ask yourself in the midst of genuine, God-fearing and honest disagreement.

1. Be sure that you have sound, exegetical grounds for your disagreement. Root and ground your position in the texts themselves. We respect and respond to Bible people – people who disagree because of what the Bible says not because some other popular preacher or commentator or theological argument says.
2. Be sure your disagreement is not driven by the realities of your financial situation. Too many people either have spent God's provision or have little desire to give and use a theological argument to salve their consciences.
3. Am I still committed to my covenantal responsibilities as a member? All of us when we committed to membership at the Chapel covenanted together to regular, proportional giving. This is not referring to a tithe, but to grace enabled obedience to 2 Corinthians 9:6. Doing God's will means that we keep our covenants.
4. Does my position free me to give more or less? If we are freed from the restraints of the Law and redeemed by the death of Christ so that we are no longer our own, but owned and mastered by God, does my giving reflect both abiding freedom and abounding generosity.
5. How then do I give according to 2 Corinthians 9: that is (a) planned, (b) proportional (c) periodic and (d) with pleasure? I would challenge you to pay close attention to the texts so that we carefully and cheerfully obey God.

Interacting with Key Truths

Giving is anchored to several key truths emerging from the texts we have studied. Let's review and then make some practical application. To be doers of the Word and not hearers only, we need to think through truth with an eye towards real, practical implementation.

Personal

All of God's people are to give. "Each one must..." is Paul's language. Every family and every Christian is to give. We taught our children to give even from their allowances. Grace flows where Christians hear and heed God's Word.

Purposed

The giving of God's people is shaped by an inward, heart purpose to please and glorify God, responding to His provisions of grace and goods. We should not approach such an important topic casually, but carefully. Determine in your heart to please God in all your finances and to demonstrate that God is great in your life by the kind of giving you do. Determine in your heart that you will give and how much you plan to give. Do so with prayer, openness to God's Word and to counsel and with a pure conscience.

Purposing for us has meant no less than a tenth not only on our salary, but on any form of increase. We have determined to give on the gross, to give on any increase, to give it to the church and the church alone and to do so on the next Sunday we can. These are non-negotiable for us. We have determined to trust God's provision and have never ever found Him wanting. We have pointed our wants to the priorities of God's kingdom and have great joy in not only faithful proportional giving but also in great opportunities to do more my helping people and supporting missionaries above it.

Proportional

The giving of God's people is in a proportional or percentage relation to their income or, in Biblical terms, increase. Further, 1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 indicate that there is a greater responsibility on the part of those with greater means for greater and larger sacrifice. For those who have little financial means, determine what proportion you can give now and set a tenth as a target. Pray and plan towards, not as a matter of Law, but as an expression of love for God. For those with greater financial means, determine what proportion you want to give that is sacrificial and then give with great liberty and liberality.

Russ Kennedy

Planned

The giving of God's people is a matter of careful planning and discipline as well as spontaneous responses to God's provisions and people's needs. Honoring God with planned proportional giving means you have to have a budget, a sense of what you earn and spend. If you have no plan, you will give casually and possibly carnally. If you do not know what you will give, plan your budget accordingly and write the checks or bring the cash the Sunday after you will get paid, your giving will probably function like tipping.

Planning for my family has meant that from the beginning, we have taken our gross income, deducted our proportion (which for us has never been less than a tenth, even when I made \$100 a week), deducted our taxes then budgeted the rest. In other words, God's Kingdom was the first priority. Further, when we have been "between" churches, we set aside our giving each week, stored it up until we committed to a church, then we brought all our stored up offering. And brothers and sisters, it was great! It was fun!

Periodic

The giving of God's people is primarily done on the day of worship, particularly the expression of obedient giving to the place of worship. Paul told the churches in Galatia and Corinth to set aside on the Lord's day (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Many wise Christians I know give every Sunday, planning their giving so that while they may not be paid every week, they are prepared to give every week. We do not believe that this is neither necessary nor even the intent of Scripture. But certainly, this periodic giving is identified to be on the Lord's Day.

Now let me address at this point a question many of you have raised. It gets asked in all sorts of ways but the essence of all the forms of the question is simply this: do I give my regular, proportional, planned, periodic giving *only* to the church. We believe the answer is, "Yes". I know that there are all kinds of ministries out there, a very few of whom are worthy of support. While it is commendable to give offerings to them, your proportional giving ought to be to the church. All through the Bible and in most texts in the New Testament, all offerings – benevolent offerings, missions offerings, support offerings, proportional offerings were all brought to the church and then distributed by the church.

If you want to support a missionary or a ministry not supported by the Chapel, then do so through offerings/givings that are above and beyond your regular proportional giving. We have tried to be faithful to this principle even here when we have done special fund raising for

building, debt-reduction and projects in that we have clearly asked you to support these with above and beyond offerings.

Pleasurable

The giving of God's people is to be done with extravagant joy and gratitude as a Godward act of worship. One of the commentators said that gratitude cannot be commanded, only commended. The problem with this is that several times in the New Testament "be thankful" is an imperative, a command. So your attitude in giving and your action of giving are both commanded (as well as commended) by God.

So what do I do if I do not want to give or am struggling with giving as it is emerging from the Bible in this series? As with all other commands in the Bible you are disobeying, what you must do is repent. Repentance is not just sorrow over failure. Repentance is change inwardly and outwardly. Repentance is when we recognize what God is commanding, acknowledge that we have disobeyed by not believing the Bible and not wanting to please God and affirm. Further true repentance is when we assert truth in our hearts and begin to want to please God and to want the particular obedience required. Both of these are done through confession to God and through words in our hearts that speak truth and desires to ourselves, to others and to God. In other words, repent of you actions, your unbelief and your wants/desires.

So, I want to pause at this moment and ask you to examine yourself:

- If you have been faithful and proportional in your giving, then express gratitude to God for His grace to you. Then, in the quietness of the next few minutes, evaluate your purposes and plans as to whether your giving is sacrificial and extravagant.
- If you know that you have failed in your giving, then repent. And do so now. Acknowledge to God not only the facts of your sin, but its reasons, causes and motivations as well. In the light of Jesus' great sacrifice for us, see your giving for what it truly is (or is not). Purpose to believe the Bible and want what God commands and commends. Say these things to God in confession. Receive His forgiveness. Commit yourself to do what it takes to be obedient.
- If you find yourself bristling at the above calls, dearly beloved, please examine yourself. We are here teaching the Bible and calling for Biblical change. Our aim here is for you to walk with our God in faithful love and obedience. Where is your treasure? Are you living so Christ-like with your treasures in heaven that dying is gain, not loss?

<< Pause for reflection and response >>

Russ Kennedy

Implementing Key Strategies

So you say to me, “What should I do? How can I begin to obey God?”

Budget

Make a budget. Add up all your income. Determine what proportion you want to give, and deduct it. Then, deduct your taxes. Now, everything else you do must be less than that.

Harvest

Recognize that you may be harvesting the fruit of sinful choices – that is, you may be way over your head in debt or God has been chastening you in your finances and now it seems as though there is no way. You simply do not have the money. So, confess your sin to God. Commit yourself to obedience. Trust that God will supply.

Amputation

Do radical amputation in order to avoid sin. In other words, many of you will have to downsize, sell, unload, get rid-of, cut back, and reduce in order to obey God. Here is where the issues of the heart will surface. Do you really want to obey God? Do you really want to please Him? Or will you serve your stuff and hold tightly to what you own and actually owns you?

No Excuses

Stop making excuses. God has heard them all. He is not impressed:

- a. *I give/tithe my time and ability instead of my money.* Then you should be giving 16.8 hours per week to God in ministry at this church.
- b. *I give to other churches, missions, ministries or charities.* The proportional giving ought to go to the church you are committed to, serving in and benefiting from. Give to those other organizations the above the your regular proportional giving.
- c. *I split my regular proportional giving between General and Project (or some other fund).* The Elders want this people to understand that we do not endorse such a practice. We have consistently called for Special Funds to be supported above the tithe.

Conclusion

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

Brothers and sisters, may God increase the harvest of your righteousness in this grace of giving so that there will be an abundant supply overflowing with thanksgiving for glory of God because of His inexpressible gift to us of Jesus Christ.