

New Testament Giving

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"...He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity..." (Romans 12:8). Giving is a gift of grace, a working of God in the heart of the believer. The nature of God is love. Love gives, gives, and gives again. Love serves others, meets others' needs. Jesus came, not to receive, but to give. God gave His best when He sent His Son to earth to die that we might live.

God did not establish the Kingdom with riches of this world. In fact, Jesus told His disciples to go sell what they had, give to the poor, and make for themselves purses which would not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven. Jesus had no money when He was here on earth, nor did He ask for money. The Scripture reveals exactly the opposite: that He had no place to lay His head. The church was born out of divine love and exists because of His presence. It does not owe its existence to anything in this world or of this world. If we were to remove all money matters from the church, it should still exist. The church is first heavenly, and then expressed here on earth. It is the body of Christ, expressing the nature and authority of God. The church exists by faith in the lives of all its members, and the Lord knows what we have need of, before we ask.

Jesus became poor that we might become rich. He did not tell us to give a percentage or a set amount, but gave us His life so that His life in us would be the principle of our giving. This is the principle of love, which characterizes the expression of the believer and the church. We see this life principle working in the early church (Acts 2:44-45). The believers *"sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."* To understand the New Testament pattern of giving, we must allow the Spirit to remove giving from the realm of set amounts, and see that Christians give because of the life they possess. Even our work in God's great plan and purpose cannot be for money or for what we can get. All ministry of God's life must come forth from our relationship with God, and from the life of God which is love.

Man's programs will have man's means of support, or even use God's pattern from the old order, but men usually miss the new principle of giving that God has set forth in His Word. The church must know this new principle of giving, that of the Spirit and not of the letter. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life, even in the area of our giving. If we give only because we are expected to or because we have been commanded to, we will never enter into the joy of giving. We do not give because we have to; we give because we have His life. We give because we see a need, and because the life we possess is love, which urges us to meet that need.

The sons of God are those who are led by the Spirit and give an expression of His life in their daily walk. We can't separate our new life in Christ from our money and substance. God's Word tells us that the love of money is the root of all evil. We cannot love money or what it can purchase for us. We must move to a higher principle if we are going to please God, and our direction in this grace must come from the Holy Spirit.

Old Testament Tithing vs. New Testament Giving

The basic principle of New Testament giving is seen within the Old Testament, but the church does not take its pattern from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, the tithe went to the priesthood. In the New Testament, every believer is a priest. We are a holy priesthood because we are in Christ. He is our High Priest, so does He get the tithe? If that is the pattern, do the priests get the tithe? Where should we bring our money? The Old Testament said to bring it into the storehouse. Where is the storehouse today? You can't be honest with the Word of God and say that the church is the storehouse. These are all questions without answers if we try to bring Old Testament order over into the New Testament.

We cannot find Jesus or any of His disciples or the writers of the New Testament speaking to the church about tithing. Any time tithing is mentioned, it is associated with the old order and never with the new way of life. Some try to bring tithing over into the "church" with its memberships, so that its program might be supported. Most people want to belong to something, so they satisfy that desire by joining a group, rather than realizing they must be born into the family of God. We must know our place in the body of Christ by faith, and then go on to move in life. We can never satisfy God's heart in the dead letter of the law. The law was never designed to give life, but to bring us to a knowledge of our need.

Circumcision was not a part of the law, and neither was tithing. They were a pattern for a time, to reach fulfillment in Christ. The Christian is not required to be circumcised, nor is he required to tithe, because both of these were types that foreshadowed realities to come, and Christians live in these realities today. God did not bring any of the old over into the new. The law or "the letter" was never given to bring life, so it is important for us to see the truth which will set us free, allowing us to move out of the letter, out of types, into God's life. We don't need a program taken from God's old working to build God's kingdom in the new. Even though the old may seem better for a moment, it can never take the place of moving in the reality of love, out of the life God has given us in Christ. The old could make nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:11), but the new covenant brings us to fullness in Christ Jesus. We now have a Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises (Hebrews 8:6).

Let us look briefly at the principle of giving in the Old Testament. In Exodus 35:21, we get a glimpse of what God later set forth in the New Testament. *"And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all His service, and for the holy garments."* A spirit made willing is what we want to see today. God is not building a natural building in this day; He is building a spiritual building out of spiritual members. The so-called "church" has fallen a long way from what God designed it to be. There still is only one way to build in God, and that is God's way. There is a spiritual principle in this, if God's children want to find it. We cannot look to man; we must look to God. We can't look to the Old Testament; we must look to the New.

Jesus did give us direction for our giving, if we have ears to hear it. Mark 12:42-44, containing the story of the widow's mite, gives us insight into the life (or love) principle of giving. Jesus called His disciples to Him and pointed out that it was not a tithe that pleased God or satisfied His command, but the *all* that the widow gave. Just as God gave all, this same life working through and in us will never find peace in the Holy Ghost except when we give *all* as He directs us. Luke's account of this same widow's mite gives further witness to the equality of God. Jesus drew attention to His principle of giving, and He never set forth or mentioned the tithe as the New Testament pattern. You may question as many do, saying, "Has God ever done away with the tithe?" We must answer, "Yes." In Christ all things are new.

Luke 5:36-39 (NASV) says, *"And He was also telling them a parable: No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment, otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the new wine will burst the skins, and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one, after drinking old wine wishes for new, for he says, The old is good enough."* This is enough to tell us that the old will not work in the new. Life is altogether different from the law, and only the spiritual person can comprehend God's demands. They are spiritually discerned; they are withheld from the natural mind.

The Spirit brings us back, through the writings of Paul, to one of the life principles in giving. It is the Lord's divine law of sowing and reaping. II Corinthians 9:6, *"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully."* Also, God's equality of return is different from man's. II Corinthians 8:14-15, *"At this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack.'"*

II Corinthians 9:7 plainly tells us how to give, and the amount to give--this being in the life principle: *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."* God's life principle has always been a freewill offering from the heart. Paul could never have given this exhortation if God's pattern was giving a set amount or a certain demand such as a tithe. He goes on in verses 8-12 to show us God's faithfulness in multiplying His blessing to us, as we allow God to use us as a channel for His righteousness to be established. All of our expression of His life will bring thanksgiving and praise to our Father above. It will also show our subjection to Christ, who is our life. II Corinthians 8:9 shows us what real love will do. Christ is our example of God's love expressed. If we possess this life, we will give forth the same expression of that life.

Hebrews 9:9-10 speaks about the *"more perfect way."* It tells us that all the sacrifices and carnal ordinances, all kinds of different rites, could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. Verse 10 tells us that all of these were *"until the time of reformation."* We see in Hebrews 10:5-9 that the old was not what pleased God (verse 6). From the beginning, God's purpose was to indwell man and express His life in and through man. Verse 9 tells us that Jesus had a body prepared that He might do the will of God. Jesus *"taketh away the first, that He may establish the second."* Verse 20 plainly tells us that we have a new and living way. Then in verse 24, the living way is to *"consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works."*

In the new, all is by faith. There is no other way to please God or to be a partaker of God's promises. The Word tells us that without faith we cannot please God, and that faith comes by hearing God. As with all else, giving must be in our walk of faith--and walking by faith means hearing God. Faith in God is life. With God, *"to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams"* (I Samuel 15:22). Obedience to what? To a set of rules, or to God's voice? Even the children of Israel wanted God to instruct them through someone else, and did not want to hear God for themselves. Could this be why most of the "church" has fallen back on the old order to support its program? It uses tithing as a crutch, relieving its members of the necessity of hearing God for themselves.

Jesus said He did not come to destroy the law; He came that the law might be fulfilled. Every demand of the law has been met by Christ. So we can see that to try to bring any of the old over into the new will only bring death. Again, the one principle in the new order is life--that which is born out of our

relationship with God in the Spirit. One of the important reasons for settling this matter of tithes is that if we try to put new wine into old bottles, both will be lost. Giving of tithes works death rather than life. We must always remind one another that the way of the church is life.

Supporting Those Who Labor in the Gospel

The life principle always sees the needs of others and gives of itself to meet those needs. The Word exhorts us to know those who labor among us, and we should take heed to the Word of God. I Thessalonians 5:12-13 instructs us, *"But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another."* Every Christian should realize the needs of those who labor among them. True ministers of God are not laboring for gain, but neither are they on charity, nor should God's people make them beggars. They do have a right to be supported, according to the Word of God. I Timothy 5:17-18, *"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'"*

We see this same principle again in I Corinthians 9:9-11, *"For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.' God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the ploughman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?"* So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. We do not see that the New Testament provides for fixed amounts, such as salaries, to be paid regularly. But spiritual brethren should realize the needs. If God's ministers care for spiritual needs, should not the people see the ministers' temporal needs and give out of love to meet them? The Word has told us that the laborer is worthy of his hire. This should not be a demand by the minister or the one laboring, but a recognition by those who receive the ministry, and giving from a heart of love--love being the force which moves us to meet the need. A true minister does not labor for money, but because of the love that is working in his heart. He labors whether or not anyone gives to meet his needs. But if God's people allow those who labor among the local brethren to look as if they were on charity, then our testimony of His life and love is not a glory to God.

Even as instruction is given in this matter of giving, God's people must not become carnal or take things into their own hands; they should be led by the Spirit. This is the only way of life for every believer. Man's programs need some means of support for their ministers, so as Hebrews 7:5 tells us, *"The sons of Levi have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law."* But God's children could never be truthful with His Word and bring this commandment over into the church. So we do need God's program for the church; we need the Spirit to reveal the heart of God on this matter. The church has one purpose in the world: to express the life of God. This can only be seen when each member is taken up with doing His will.

The Assembly

All assemblies should be self-supporting, not looking for others to support them. If an assembly is to be strong spiritually, its members must learn to give to the needs of others and to the work. We cannot excuse ourselves from the life principle of giving on the basis of poor members or poor conditions. We have found too often that when people are poor, they use this as an excuse for not giving. In the life of Christ, we are all to give, because this is the life of love. Those who are poor need to experience the blessedness of giving, in the same way as others who may have more to give. Remember, it is not the amount that you give--it is how you give. Giving is from the heart and by the direction of the Spirit.

The church or assembly that does not exercise this principle of life will be weak, always looking to others for support rather than to God. God knows how to meet needs--let us leave that in His hands--but each member of a local assembly needs to give as the Lord has blessed. If we sow sparingly, we can but reap sparingly. Let us see each body of believers as an expression of the will and life of God. By looking to others for support, many have come under the bondage of others rather than finding purpose in God's will alone. God has never designed one church to be over another, nor has He ever called His children to give with strings attached to the gift. If we give in order to control, we are not moving in the life principle. All giving must be as unto the Lord, born out of love.

There is never any need for the church to gather money. The one purpose of the church, as we have said, is to express the life of Christ. The church has never been called to own buildings or to support the work of God. God supports His own work, and He does it through members of the local assemblies. The reason that we see things not working as they should be is that man has taken the working of the assembly out of God's hands, and undertaken to give expression by commandment rather than life. That is why we see some who are teaching "storehouse tithing." But what purpose would the church have in getting into the finance business if it were simply functioning in the will of God?

The expressions and the principles we see today do not even come close to what Jesus set forth in the Word for support of the work and the workers, and also those in need (the poor). We can never turn the church into the organization that supports these needs. If we are going to move in life, it must be the members of the assembly moving out of love to meet these temporal needs. The grace of giving is always spoken of as being given to individuals (Romans 12:8).

Let me repeat it again. The church, as the body of Christ, is purely spiritual, giving forth a practical expression of the life of Christ. When we make the church into something more than God designed, we depart from His glory and take the working into our own hands. This is always dangerous because of the spiritual blindness it brings. We then cannot see that our efforts are not God's requirements.

As long as we keep to God's pattern of life, God will build His church on the Rock. Only as we start to build in the church by our own efforts do we build on the sand. God is building His church, so let us not settle for second-best or we will miss God's will altogether. Man is afraid to let go of the things he is building, because without his support they will fall. So they should, if they are not being built by God. Without man's natural support, many gatherings would collapse, because God's Spirit has never been in control. Aren't many simply fooling themselves, in their labors and their many religious works around the world? Would it not be better to let them die, so that maybe life could come out of death to the glory of God?

Equality and the Way of Faith

When God speaks of equality, what does He mean? Is equality a plan in which those who have much give more than those who have little? We can see some truth here, but not what the natural mind can figure out. In II Corinthians 8:15, Paul shows us an outworking of God's equality, "*He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.*" This verse speaks to us about what we receive--here is where God moves supernaturally to bring about His equality. Equality is seen in another way in verse 14: the abundance of one becomes the supply of another. This speaks to us of the blessings and overflow of God. We can see this in other areas also. Our lives can never bless others until there is an overflowing or abundance. Knowing this, the question to ask ourselves is, "How do I get this abundance so that my life can bless others?"

In II Corinthians 9:6, Paul tells us something of how this abundance works. "*He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, but he that soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully.*" One verse speaks of God's blessings on what we receive; the other verse speaks of God's blessings on what we give--so equality lies in the blessing of God's hand. If we are living in His life, we are being blessed and have abundance because of the fullness of God's life, love, which is flowing out to others. That same love is flowing through others to us. Each supply is sufficient. This is God's equality. This can only be fully realized when we are moving in the life principle. Any other plan or method will never bring God's results. We must be directed by the Spirit if we are going to share in God's equality.

In the scripture we never see any church or believer begging or asking for support. This would not be in keeping with faith. Faith depends only on God and His promises. God's children are never called to beg. Psalm 37:25, "*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" In II Corinthians 8:4, we see that the believers in the church at Corinth were entreating for the favor of participation in the support (or service to the saints) of the Jerusalem church. But we never read about the believers at Jerusalem sending out an appeal for help.

We will never have a spiritual work until believers begin to look to the Lord for their support and provision. A work that has a natural means of support can never be a spiritual work. If those who do the work of God cannot trust God in the area of support, where can they begin to really believe God? If workers use natural ways and methods to obtain support, we can be sure they will also ask God's blessing on the rest of their schemes and methods, and say they are living by faith. After a while, they will begin to believe this is how faith works. They will believe that to have your needs met, you must make them known. But aren't we only fooling ourselves to believe that this is faith?

Man will always propagate what he believes and make disciples like himself. This is why there is begging today in the "church" world. Men have built their golden calf, and God is letting them feed it--it will never be any other way. Man may call his methods faith, but he has only made himself an image and is trying to get others to bow down to it. There are some moving in the natural who have been taught that this is the way. Then there are others who are very sincere, but this doesn't make them right. So the blind are only following the blind. They are both walking in the ditch, the way of the flesh--man serving God in his own way and strength.

If our lives and work are not based on faith, it is sin. God's children need to enter into the "rest" of God, ceasing from their own labors and letting God labor through them. This always brings honor and glory to the Lord. In Luke 12:25-32, Jesus gives us the way of faith. First, our hearts must seek for His kingdom. Then He will add the things we need. In verse 29 He says, "*And do not seek what you shall eat and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying.*" If we can't come to this place of trust in the One who has called us, then how can our work be based on faith? Let every worker enter into his

prayer closet and ask his heavenly Father in secret (Matthew 6:6). If God is not hearing us secretly and rewarding us openly, we had better not work for Him until we have a better relationship with Him.

Any work that is not based on faith will fail, or there will be no glory to God. Oh, for a reviving of the revelation, that men would get back to God's plan and His ways! The way of discipleship is always the way of faith, and the least likely to please the flesh or the carnal mind. The natural mind would pick the ways and means of man, or even try to convert some of God's ways and make them work to do what man desires. The spiritual mind chooses Christ. Christ has made the way; He upholds that which He is building and those whom He has called. All provisions must come from God's direction, born out of a vital relationship with Christ. The principle of life is the way of faith, for those who want to please God and walk in truth.