

## ***Acts of Devotion that Glorify God***

In Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus warns against the hypocrisy that can accompany giving, praying, and fasting, but we shouldn't miss that in these verses He is also assuming that these acts of devotion will be practiced by His disciples.

### ***-Giving-***

The word "tithe" literally means 1/10. In the OT God commanded Israel to tithe (i.e., give 1/10 of their wealth) to Him (Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:21-32).

Two observations can be made about tithing from Deuteronomy 14:22-23: <sup>22</sup> Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. <sup>23</sup> Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

First, every year the Jews were to set aside a tenth of all the produce of their fields to go to the place that God chose to dwell (in later years this would be at the temple in Jerusalem). If the logistics in transporting 1/10 of the fields produce was difficult, it could be sold and the money from the sale brought instead (Deut. 23:24-25). Then they would eat part of their tithe in a feast of joy. Tithing was not to be reduced to a mindless payment as if it were a tax; it was an expression of fellowship and gratitude to God. God did not need the tithe, He owns the world and all it contains. In commanding the Israelites to tithe, He was seeking not what was theirs but them.

Secondly, the purpose of tithing was "that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always." Tithing was a means of remembering how dependent they were on God and that they should never dishonor Him with ingratitude.

The NT also sees tithing as a normal practice of the Jews (Matt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42; 18:12; Heb. 7:2, 5); however, when we come to the New Testament the picture changes dramatically. Jesus mentions tithing about three times, but all are in reference to its legalistic abuse. In Matthew 23:23 He says, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith; these you ought to have done without neglecting the others." Luke 11:42 says "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. In Luke 18:9-14, "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.'" Although the Jews continued to tithe they neglected the weightier elements of the Law – they ignored the things that really mattered most to God, like justice, mercy, and faith and the love of God Himself!. Paul never even refers to tithing even once.

Jesus' demands turn out being much more radical than giving 10% of our income. Jesus said, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none. And he who has food, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11). That is giving 50% not 10. Zacchaeus told the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor" (Luke 19:8). That's 50% as well. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (Matthew 19:21). Likewise He said, "whoever of you does not renounce *all that he has* cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). On another occasion "a man said to Jesus, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head'" (Luke 9:57f.). Jesus had nothing, and He expected His disciple to have nothing either. Instead He said "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor moth destroys." (Lk. 12:33).

In the NT, giving sacrificially wasn't just a lofty ideal; it was normative Christian behavior. In the book of Acts it says, "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44f.). "There was not a needy person among them for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:34f.). When writing to the Corinthians Paul testified of the generosity of the churches in Macedonia. He reported that "in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints- and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us." (2 Corinthians 8:2-4).

Although tithing does not play a part in Christian practice, giving does because giving is the necessary response of a changed heart to a dying world. Paul instructed the believer: "On the first day of the week each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper" (1 Cor.16:2). In 2 Corinthians 8:3 he said, "they gave according to their means and beyond their means of their own accord." In 2 Corinthians 9:7 his instruction is "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." And finally, in 2 Corinthians 9:8 we are reminded that "God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work."

Why is giving so important?

. . . because it is an act of worship, a good work, evidence of our commitment to Christ, and is the natural outcome of understanding that we are stewards not owners .

**1) Giving reveals that we understand that we are only stewards of the resources that God has given us to manage**

Jesus speaks of people as managers, not owners, of God's resources (Lk. 16:1-9). He likens them to servants who are each given a measure of wealth from their Master (Matt. 25:14ff) and then held accountable for the way they manage it (Lk. 16:2).

A good steward is one who faithfully manages the resources he has been given in a way that benefits his master, not himself. Paul says that it is required in stewards that they be found faithful (I Cor. 4:2) and Jesus says that it is the faithful and wise steward whom God puts in charge of His household (Lk. 12:42-44, cf. Lk. 16:10). Of course this is just common sense; who would put a servant who squandered their wealth in charge of their whole household?

If we see ourselves as simply managers of God's resources we will look at our wealth differently. We will no longer think in terms of giving "my money" to the church, but look at giving as a means of using God's resources to accomplish His desires.

As Piper says so well, "In a world of such immense need, and in a country of such immense luxury, and under the commission of such a powerful Lord, the issue of stewardship is not: Shall I tithe? but rather, How much of God's trust fund dare I use to surround myself with comforts? The question that Jesus drives us to ask again and again is not, "How much should I give?" but rather, "How much dare I keep?" "

**2) Giving is worship.**

Giving is an outward, material expression of worship to God. This is important to remember for many people give money only in response to need. If the church budget is low, they give, if it is not, they don't. But Paul calls giving financial support to the work of the ministry "a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." (Phil. 4:18)

"The first expression (lit. an odor of sweet smell), appears frequently in the OT, first as a description of Noah's sacrifice (Gen. 8:21) and then in the directions for the Levitical offerings (cf. Exo. 2:18, 25, 41; Lv. 1:9, 13, 17). At Ezek. 20:40, 41, in an eschatological context, the language is transferred and applied to the house of Israel, whom the Lord promises to accept as "a sweet smelling sacrifice" when He gathers them from the nations where they had been scattered. The original imagery of a fragrant offering is that of God taking pleasure in the odor of the sacrifices that His people offer Him. In the NT the sacrificial death of Christ is also called "a fragrant offering" (Eph 5:2).

In speaking of the financial gifts of the Philippians as a fragrant odor Paul is asserting that they are of the highest worth since they are pleasing to God (O'Brien, 541).

The second sacrificial expression in Philippians 4:18 means "acceptable sacrifice" and was the common word used for either animal or grain sacrifices in the OT. "In addition it could include spiritual sacrifices

such as a broken spirit (Ps. 51:17) or of the sacrifice of praise (Ps. 50:8)" (O'Brien, 541). Paul uses the term "acceptable" as the goal and motivation of the whole Christian life (Ro. 12:1,2; 14:18; II Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:10, cf. Col. 1:10). Giving is part of a well-rounded life that brings pleasure to God.

### **3) Giving is a concrete way of demonstrating our commitment to God**

God clearly understood that men are desirous of, and easily corrupted by wealth, so the Bible is full of warnings about loving money or coveting possessions. "For the love of money" says Paul, "is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:10). In Matthew 13:22 Jesus says that it is the deceitfulness of riches that choke the word and cause it to be unfruitful.

Both those who hoard and those who give reveal through their actions where their affections lie. Paul reminded the Corinthians that not only had the Macedonians given to them in the midst of severe testing (II Cor. 8:1-3), but that their giving was a function of the fact that they had first given themselves to the Lord (II Cor. 8:5).

We may be tempted to think there isn't really a connection between our spiritual commitment to Christ and our giving, but Jesus concludes "if you have not been faithful with unrighteous wealth, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Lk. 16:11)

Giving money is a tangible way to measure of our commitment to God (Mal. 3:8; Jam. 2:14-17; I Jn. 3:17).

### **4) Giving is a good work that pleases God**

Generosity is one of the characteristics in which Christians as a whole should excel. II Corinthians 8:7 says, "But 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." In the context "this grace" is the grace of giving. Just as the believer should abound in faith and love, he should also abound in generosity.

I Timothy 6:18-19 lists giving among other good works: "Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

The Corinthians' giving gave glory to God and proved that their confession of the gospel was real. II Corinthians 9:13 says that "Through the proof of this ministry [i.e. the ministry of giving] you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others."



for a more complete discussion about God's views on money go to [gracefellowshiphawaii.org](http://gracefellowshiphawaii.org) (home page); then go to the tab "study resources" > "Christian living" > "money - giving and tithing" or "money - borrowing"