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***Stewardship...  
God's Way***

***Sermons***



# Christian Giving

## *Sermon Number Four*

### **2 Corinthians 9:7-8**

A man who left church in a huff, was asked why. He said, "All they ever say there is "give, give, give!"

I suppose a church that does nothing but beg might be obsessed — but few churches are so crass. The problem is, there are some people who are looking for a place where no one makes any demands of them at all. They are only interested in *getting*. Giving, however, is not a chore, but a blessing.

The church is God's primary tool of His kingdom work in the world today. Giving is central — and crucial— to the church's work.<sup>1</sup> And maturing biblical Christians are happy to give, as an investment in the work of the kingdom in their neighborhood and around the world.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7-8, Paul lays out a basic statement of how the New Testament Christian should give. He says there:

**Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.**

This instruction and promise from Paul are based on God's biblical principles of stewardship. There are two principles of stewardship in these verses. Based on these principles,



there is a great discipline of stewardship every Christian should aim at fulfilling. The first of the two principles, is the principle of proportionate response.

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### **Give As You Receive**

The word of God teaches us to give as we receive. God has given to us. We need to give to God proportionately in return.

Our text says every person is to give “**what he has decided in his heart to give**” (v.7). That means think and pray about your gift. Consider how God has blessed you, take into account your relative ability to give, then give as God leads. The direct implication is that giving is to be proportionate.

Deuteronomy 16:17 says it explicitly: “**Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.**” The “ability” differs, but every person is to give “according to” how God has blessed him. This is proportionate response.

In the New Testament, Jesus says: “**Freely you have received; freely give**” (Matthew 10:8). Here’s the biblical principle:

**God has gifted us uniquely, according to His gracious purposes, and expects us to respond in proportion to our abilities and opportunities.**

The thing about proportion is that nobody has grounds for either pride or shame. You needn't feel small about your response to God, if it's your all for Jesus. No one can justify being proud of his response to God, since it's really just giving God back what belongs to Him.

God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name." Now, we do not submit to Christ only symbolically, but in reality, through the surrender of our lives to His Lordship within us.

What is the bottom line? Tithing was clearly fulfilled as a symbol, and it no longer needs to be practiced in the hopes it will satisfy God's demands; but to practice it as a discipline of a loving, surrendered heart is still very much a part of Christian living.

Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil"

(Mat.5:17). Paul, writing about this fact in Romans 6:14, said, "For ye are not under the law, but under grace." And in Romans he declares "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." The new foundation is faith instead of law for righteousness with God.

There are two kinds of elements in the Old Testament law. One is an element of "transcendence," the other is "symbolism." A transcendent law expresses a moral or ethical absolute. It is fulfilled when people do right and not wrong. Examples are laws against murder, stealing, adultery and lying, or the commandment to love and worship God.

A symbolic law is a temporary rule, obedience to which represents a future reality. It is fulfilled when what it foreshadows appears. Examples are laws of circumcision, ceremonial washing, and clean or unclean animals.

When Jesus said He came to fulfill the law, He meant it in both these ways: He came to keep the covenant perfectly, and bring to reality the symbols foreshadowed.

By itself, Jesus' fulfillment of the law does not mean these laws came to an end, or no longer expressed the expectations of God. But some laws were replaced, because they were solely symbols of things to come.

Where is tithing in all this? The fascinating and important point about tithing is that it has both transcendent and symbolic elements. Tithing expresses a recognition of God's ownership of everything, His provision for His people, trust in God, love for worship and ministry and the mission of God. These things are transcendent principles. But tithing also stood for submission to a Messiah who was yet to come when Abram practiced it, or when the law commanded it. Now that Jesus has come, the symbol has been replaced by the reality. We now submit to Christ directly. Hebrews 13:15 says significantly, "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to

Two boys took music from the same teacher. One went on to study with another teacher after high school, continued past that, and became a concert pianist. The other quit after high school, continued to play daily for enjoyment, but became a minister. They didn't see each other for twenty-five years. When they met again, the minister said, "I have often thought of how much you accomplished. I've imagined what it might have been like if I had gone on to perform on the stage. I guess I don't have the gift you do."

The pianist said candidly, "Oh, you're wrong. I always thought you had the gift. In twenty-five years, I've often thought how unimportant what I do is — I just play the piano for money, but you, you help change peoples lives."

People have different roles in God's plan. Proportionate giving means *your* giving is to be in proportion to *your* blessings.

What worries some people is their blessings aren't sufficient for them to give much. They're concerned about having too little left over to make do. What does God's word say about this?

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### **Trust As You Give**

It says not only are we to give as we receive, but we are to trust as we give. Why? Because the Bible teaches the principle:

**We may trust God to provide sufficiently for us when we obey Him in stewardship, because He has repeatedly proven and promised He can and will.**

2 Corinthians 9:8 tells us this directly: **“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”**

When you come to the point where you want to give proportionately and generously, you will face the temptation to believe that you can't. You have to recognize this is temptation. God has promised and proven otherwise.

The experiences of Israel in the wilderness, or Job in his suffering, illustrate God's provision. Consider the disciples, who gave themselves completely to the work of the kingdom, and never went lacking, or Paul, whose needs were met by the Philippians, the Macedonians, the Ephesians, and others.

God has repeatedly promised this is what He will do. Philippians 4:13 says, **“My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”** We can trust God to supply our need when we give obediently to His kingdom work.

God has promised and proven it. What should ever keep us from being generous with God, who has been so generous with us?

God expects us to give proportionately, and He promises we can trust Him to provide for us when we do. This leads us to a discipline of stewardship that has ancient foundations in the Bible. It's called “the tithe” — the first tenth of God's blessing.

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## Tithe as You Trust

For us to know what place tithing has in Christian giving, we have to look at its long history. Let's look at what can be called “the Circle of the Tithe”<sup>2</sup> in the Bible.

<sup>2</sup>“The Circle of the Tithe” is the concept devised and articulated by Robert Simms in his book, “Ventures in Stewardship,” published by the South Carolina Baptist Convention. It is based on the history of the tithe, from the first instance regarding Abram and Melchizedek, its codification into law under Moses, its fulfillment by Jesus, and its practice by New Testament Christians as a discipline arising out of thanksgiving.

<sup>3</sup>Melchizedek appears in the Bible without any background, and disappears into history after this incident. His name means “my king is righteous.” He was king of Salem, which later became Jerusalem (Ps.76:3). He was also “priest of the high God.” Solid Bible study shows this was the true God, the LORD. Some scholars think he could not have represented the God Abram knew. But his title, “priest of the Most High God,” while similar to known name variations of local Canaanite deities, is applied to the God of the Bible in Psalm 78:35, and in v.22 of Genesis 14, Abram himself identifies his God, who is Yahweh, as the “most high God.”

A tithe in the ancient world was a tribute given in submission to a ruler. When given on the occasion of victory in battle, it was a material expression of thanks to a deity. Abram's tithe to Melchizedek meant he was thankful to the God they both served.

<sup>4</sup>The author of Hebrews finds it most significant that Melchizedek shows up without a lineage or history, and seems mysteriously to symbolize Christ. His point is proven in Hebrews 5:6, 6:20-7:28. Consequently the meaning of Abram's act becomes tremendously significant. While Abram may not have been aware that he was enacting a symbolic worship of Christ, the Holy Spirit by inspiring the account's writing, and then by his commentary on it through Hebrews, clearly points to the significance of this tithe. Historically, it represents submission to and worship of the Christ to come, who is our true salvation.

<sup>5</sup>It is vital to understand what it means that any law is “fulfilled.”

***The Christian tithe is a demonstration of love and surrender, from a heart thankful for God's gift in Jesus Christ.***

Some people say, "I can't afford to tithe." That may be true, but only because they have committed all their income to some other debts or wants. Their problem is one of priorities.

A certain Christian man went through a period during which his income dropped drastically and many things his family had counted on disappeared. His family was living below the poverty level, in borrowed housing. The average age of their cars was 15.6 years. There was no retirement contribution being made. They had no health insurance. They lived hand to mouth. God reminded him how truly blessed he was in the things that matter. He determined to continue to be faithful in service, giving, praying, believing, and worshiping. He realized from a new perspective that he who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much (Lk 6:10). He experienced the provision of God, a God who could be trusted to provide for him.

Should you tithe? Take the principles we've looked at here today, and study them. Under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in prayer and commitment to live by Bible truths, it is not likely any believer will conclude he is free to neglect giving at least a tenth of his increase. After all, Jesus Christ gave everything for you.

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<sup>1</sup>There is no biblical basis for churches to operate commercial enterprises to make money. This need not provoke controversy about churches having savings accounts or CDs to earn interest; but it strongly suggests that churches should not depend on businesses, whether shadow-owned or not, to supply their budget needs.

## **The Circle of the Tithe**

This "Circle of the Tithe" is made up of four points around a center point. The first point is thanksgiving became a tithe.

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### **Thanksgiving Became a Tithe**

Tithing first appeared as an act of submissive thanksgiving, from the heart of the patriarchs. In Genesis 14:17-20 Abram, after rescuing his nephew from marauding kings and saving many other local peoples as well, met Melchizedek,<sup>3</sup> the king of Salem. Melchizedek thanked and blessed him, and Abram, says the Bible, "gave him tithes of all" he had taken as booty. A tithe is a tenth.

Tithing started out as an act of heartfelt worship and thanksgiving. It said "thank you" to the Lord for His grace and mercy.

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### **Tithing Became the Law**

Eventually, things changed. The tithe became a law, part of the covenant agreement of Israel. Leviticus 27:30 specifically says, "All the tithe of the land...is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord." Tithing became a measure of three things: submission, love and faith.

#### ***Submission:***

Tithing was a worship act showing they were committed to obeying God in everything.

#### ***Love:***

Tithing measured love, because as Deuteronomy 26:12 says, the tithe was given to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and widow. To neglect the tithe demonstrated lack of love.

### **Faith:**

Malachi 3:10 shows that tithing also demonstrated the faith of people that God would “**open the floodgates of heaven**” and pour out blessings if they obeyed.

Tithing was made law as a standard for measuring our love and submission to Him. *Essentially, tithing is a yardstick of love and commitment.*

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### **The Symbolic Center of Tithing**

At its heart, tithing has a central meaning: it is a symbol of submission to Christ: the King of Kings receives the tribute of life surrender from all His people. Let's look at where the Bible teaches us this.

Hebrews 7:22 says Abram, when he gave the tithe, represented all Jews of all time, including Levi, father of the priestly line. He gave these tithes to Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a type (or symbol) of Jesus Christ <sup>4</sup> and Abram represented the Jews, so the tithe paid on this occasion represented the submission of the Jews to Christ their Messiah and the King of Kings. This was more than 1,500 years before Christ actually came in history!

Subsequently, Malachi 3:10 describes how the Jews had "robbed God" by withholding tithes. He called for them to repent and renew their surrender to God by bringing "all the tithes into the storehouse." He called for tithing as an appropriate demonstration of repentance for those who have become self-centered and greedy, and lost the conviction that their lives belong to God.

Are you surrendered to Christ? Are you demonstrating that with your tithe?

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### **The Law Became Fulfilled**

So tithing began as thanksgiving, then became law. When Christ came, the law was fulfilled.<sup>5</sup> For the law of tithing this means that its symbolic part is fulfilled when we commit our whole lives to Him in surrender. As a principle of life it still measures our love and faith. *Tithing is still a yardstick of surrender, love and faith in God.*

In ancient Israel, God specifically instructed His people to provide for the redemption or release of bond-servants. Upon being redeemed, if a servant wanted to stay with his former master, he could enter a lifelong agreement to remain in his service. The sign of this new agreement was that he would have his ear pierced.

Servitude is a requirement of law. Service is a free choice. This is the difference between what tithing was before Christ, and what it is now. Namely, the fourth point on the circle of the tithe:

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### **The Tithe Became Thanksgiving**

In Christ, tithing has come "full circle." Once again it is an expression of thanksgiving to a wonderful God and Savior. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." The Christian who tithes out of gratitude isn't even obeying the Old Testament tithe anyway — he's engaging in a willing, New Testament act - love and surrender.

It *must* be willing. “**Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver**” (2 Cor.9:7).

The requirement of willingness doesn't mean we should excuse ourselves from doing it. Is there anyone who can argue with a straight face that it is appropriate to give less to God under grace than was required under law?