

The Church: Generously Advancing God's Kingdom

Psalm 24:1; 2 Corinthians 8:1–15; 9:1–15; Matthew 6

A quick overview of the giving and tithing before we get to our text today. The concept of giving back to God has been around since Genesis 4. Abel and Cain brought offerings to God. So at the very beginning there is an understanding that the Earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. Everything is God's. Also in Genesis 4 we see that there are acceptable offerings, and unacceptable offerings.

The concept of the tithe first shows up in Genesis 14 where Abraham gave Melchizedek, the pre-incarnate Christ, a tithe. The tithe — 10% — was later explicitly defined in the Mosaic law, and ownership of the tithe is defined in **Leviticus 27**: the tithe belongs to the Lord. It doesn't belong to us. I do not think the ceremonial aspects of the Law of the tithe continues into the New Testament. The sacrificial work, the festivals— these are fulfilled in the perfect work of the Lord Jesus. As he said in Matthew 5, he did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. But the needs of Church, the preacher, widows and orphans and those who need financial help — these needs continue, of course, are still provided through the giving of God's people who give not out of compulsion, but out of abundant, overflowing gratitude that reflects what God has given them in Christ.

But before you get too excited, I think giving under grace sets the bar higher than the exacting Mosaic law, because being under grace, establishes a love that reflects Christ's love as the standard for giving.

While I don't think tithing continues in the covenant of grace, these things were given to us for examples so that we understand how God provides for his work. There are 3 tithes described in the Law, which scholars tell us group together as one.

- First, there was the **regular tithe** given to support the priests and the work of the temple. You recall from our study in 1 Corinthians 9 that the Apostle points to the Old Testament pattern to care for those in the church who give themselves to proclaiming the Gospel— in essence, pastors, should be provided for by the Church. And I am personally grateful that you provide generously for me.
- 2nd, the Festival tithe was given to support the required feasts.
- 3rd, a Charity tithe was given every third year to care for the widow, the fatherless, the Levites and sojourners. When added together as one tithe, these come up to 23.3% of their income.

God uses the giving of his people to advance his Kingdom. It is given that we may both love the Lord through what we give, and participate with him in advancing his work. Let's pray, then dig in a bit. **PRAY.**

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1st General Principle: Psalm 24:1 — The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. When we speak of stewardship, managing what God has given— we are not just talking about 10% of your income that you give to God. Stewardship covers 100% of your income. As we have seen 3 times now in our small group study of 1st Corinthians (beginning in Ch 6), you are not your own; you are bought with a price. That obviously also applies to **things that you are responsible for**. You belong to God – all of you. And your stuff, your family, and you money belong to God— everything.

Imagine applying some 10% rule to **you** when the Lord returns on the Great Day. God I gave you your 10%, so he takes 10% of you to heaven. The other 9/10 of you, he leaves in the ground. No, he bought all of you, all of you belongs to him, and he's taking all of you. Everything the Creator made belongs to him. He has **ceded** nothing, **given away** nothing, **lost** nothing. Remember **Kuyper**: There is not one square inch in all creation where Jesus Christ does not point and declare, "Mine!" We must grasp that the Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; that includes us and **everything** about us. We own nothing. It is all his. We steward; we manage what belongs to **him** as those who will give account to the owner. We are to do so in such a way that we advance his kingdom and care for ourselves and those around us. Recall from **Ephesians 6** that thieves are no longer to steal, but work with their own hands — not only to provide for themselves, but to have something to share with others. 100% of what passes through our hands belongs to God, 0% belongs to us. 100% is to be used in a way that brings glory to him.

2nd General Principle: We are to set our hearts (what we love), and our minds (how we think) on his Kingdom, and seek it as priority. That's a summary of Matthew 6:19–34 and Colossians 3:1–3— Do not worry about you will eat or drink or wear, but seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. And, set your mind on things that are above. Consider these three graces from godward **seeking** and **setting**:

1. Seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness governs our hearts and directs our love where it should be. Our hearts are not uncontrollable. There's an off-the-cuff phrase that I hear now again: *Well, the heart loves what the heart loves.* Well, the heart and the grip of sin loves sin. Do we just let it go and love sin? No, we rein in our hearts in and direct them where they should be. Seek first his kingdom and so corral your heart to love the things of God as priority.
2. Seeking first his kingdom builds faith. We see that when we are obedient to him as priority, he provides what we need, and we know that our God is not only able, but loves us.
3. Further, seeking first his kingdom reduces anxiety. If I think everything is dependent on me, I'm prone to panic about how I'm going to manage everything. But if I obey God and seek his Kingdom he has

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promised to provide all I need. It is his responsibility, and he is faithful, as we've already sung. All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided.

Now I want to move from principle to practical. Look with me at the 2nd letter to the Corinthian church, 2 Corinthians 8, and 9. They are fairly short chapters, but pack a practical punch that helps us move forward and excel in giving. 2 Corinthians 8:1–15, then we will skip over to Chapter 9. 2 Corinthians 8:1–15 — We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ²for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. ⁶Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. ⁷But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

⁸I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹²For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

*Now skipping to **Ch 9*** — Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ²for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³But I am sending the brothers so that our boasting about you may not prove empty in this matter, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be.⁴ Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident. ⁵So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction.

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under

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compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.⁹ As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Strap in, and we will move fast in practical steps. You can get my notes if they are helpful.

Step 1. Paul writes here to the Corinthians to encourage generous giving by use the churches of Macedonia, which includes the Philippian church and the Thessalonian church as an example. These were both churches of lower income people. They were not rich churches. **Ch 8, v 2:** these churches gave out of two realities in their Christian lives: the abundance of joy, and extreme poverty. Imagine setting up a simple equation involving these generous churches. The top line of the equation: abundance of joy. The second line of the equation, extreme poverty. Then draw a line under those and add them up. What would those two things add up to for you? For Philippi and Thessalonica, they added up to a wealth of generosity. A wealth of generosity! Isn't that beautiful? **v 4** — they begged for the favor of taking part and providing for the Saints. These impoverished believers considered it a favor to be able to help other believers. How does your ear hear it and your heart receive it when you think about giving to God's work?

How did they get in such a beautiful, generous place — because I want to be there with them! 2 massive things noted in **v 5** — They gave themselves to God, and then, by the will of God, gave themselves to the serve God's people. If we want to be people who give with an abundance of joy, even in extreme poverty, we must first give ourselves to God, and then give ourselves to love the brothers. It is possible to give with an abundance of joy regardless of your bank account. The way to do it is to give yourself to the Lord, and then give yourself to love his people.

2. Grow in the grace of giving. Don't stop at some artificial plateau. **v 7** — excel in this act of grace also. We acknowledge that our faith needs to grow; we need to grow in knowledge of Christ, in love... We know we need to grow in the fruit of the spirit. Are you growing in the grace of giving? Have you even

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considered that you should be growing in it. Have you ever begged for an opportunity to give more to God's kingdom? Well, if not, there is room for growth. And you will grow as you first give yourself to the Lord and then to his people. Practical step 2: By God's grace, I will follow the heart and example of the Philippians and Thessalonians and grow, move forward in giving to advance his kingdom.

3. Following on from 2, Freely give as you have freely received. v 8 — God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all thing at all times, you may abound in every good work. He has distributed freely. He has given to the poor. God has not been chintzy with you; He is able to make his grace abound to you. Your giving should reflect that. Luke 6:38 — give, and it will be given to you— good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over... with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. Matthew 10:8b — You received without paying; give without pay.

Leave calculating to the miserly. Leave exacting measurement to the Pharisees who make sure they give precisely 10% in a tithe, not 10.001%. Err on the side of generosity. Remember it is not yours. Let your giving reflect the One to whom it belongs. God supplies seed to the sower and bread for food. He will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. What is given to God and to advance his Kingdom is never lost. No such thing as a bad investment. There is divine multiplication — increase which you may or may not see on earth, but will increase the harvest of your righteousness now and in eternity.

4. Prepare to give. Make yourself ready. I ask myself, how can I grow in my giving? Our walk of faith is never abstract theology or pie in the sky theory. There's always a practical aspect to obedience. They are to make a deliberate effort to prepare to give. Five times in Chapters 8 and 9 he uses a form of the word ready — 8:12, then 9:2, 3, 4, and 5. Another time says that things need to be arranged in advance — v 9:5. There is preparation we need to make to give to advance God's kingdom. Preparation is going to require some thought about where I send my resources, and growing in this grace will surely require changing my habits in how, and what I spend. It may even require carefully evaluating how I make a living so that I can get a better job and make more in order to give more.

If I could put this in the context of Matthew 6, those not in Christ are concerned about making more money so that they can get more of what they want to eat, drink, and wear. The people of God do well to think about making more money so that they can seek first, and give to it— **resource** the kingdom of God. If you are young, hear this **now** and think about this for a **lifetime**: make as much as you can so that you can give away as much as you can. John Wesley, the 18th Century Great Awakening preacher had a concise little triplet to wisely manage one's money: **Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all**

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you can. Spurgeon had his own saying: **Give till you feel it, and then give till you don't feel it.** In other words, delight in it! Get ready. Get your finances in order so that what you give to the mortgage company, or to the cable company, or the credit card company, you can give to advance God's kingdom. Arrange in advance what you have so that you will be ready to give willingly, not as an exaction, as **v 5** says.

Live in the Reality of God's Economy — not the world's. **9:6** — whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. The world works to get everything you can, and turn loose of his little as you can. In so doing they hope to scrap, fight, and claw their way to gain. God's economy turns that upside down. Beg to be involved in generous giving. Give bountifully, generously, cheerfully. With the measure that you measure out, God will measure back to you. Giving in this way will produce Thanksgiving, and it will produce a remarkable unity in the Saints. We will all glorify God together because of the submission of each of us that comes both from our confessing of the gospel of Christ, and our generosity in supporting the kingdom.

Here's the most important part of the sermon. If you dozed off, re-engage in these final few minutes. Why should I do any of this? **Ch 8, v 9** — **You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is what we have received, and it is our greatest motivation. What is his grace? Though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.**

For our sake – for the sake of rebellious sinners. For those who repeatedly sin against holy God and defy his righteous laws – those who say to the king who owns everything, “I will not submit.”

For the sake of such as you and I, the king of kings set aside the glory of heaven, the worship that he is worthy of, the anthems of the inhabitants of heaven, who declare his praise, and entered into poverty. That poverty resulted in his being beaten, spat on, stripped, and hung on a cross— where he had the full weight of my sin, and the full sin of everyone who turns to him in faith, placed on him by God the father. The Creator who owns everything ransomed us. He bore the full wrath of God until the full price of sin was extracted from him. In his forsaken poverty the Father crushed him as a substitute for those who look to him for salvation. He died and rose in victory, having defeated death so that you and I through all of his poverty might become rich and share in his inheritance with the saints in light. This is the ultimate motivation for our giving. How can we who have received so great salvation – who have benefited from so great a sacrifice, be anything other than generous. This is the Gospel, and our giving should reflect this. This is the reason we owe our very lives to him for eternity. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

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All that Christ has done remains of no value to me as long as I remain outside of Christ. Enter in to Christ and his Kingdom today by turning to him in faith, and leave the poverty of your sin, exchanging it for the riches of eternal life in Him.

PRAY