

Session 18

# GIVING AND RECEIVING



“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

**Acts 2:42-47**

In the last session, we saw that to be in fellowship means to be joined together with others in outworking a common purpose. The Greek word translated as “fellowship” in **Acts 2:42**, *koinonia*, is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “sharing”. In this session, we will look at two further ways in which we express fellowship with God and one another: sharing bread and wine (“The Lord’s Supper”), and sharing our finances.

## THE LORD’S SUPPER

“And he [Jesus] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

**Luke 22:19-20**

As we see in **Acts 2**, the early Church was devoted to breaking bread with one another. This term can simply mean eating together, but we know that they were also committed to sharing bread and wine in obedience to the command of Jesus, and in remembrance of Him. Churches through the ages have practiced this in one form or another. In some cases, it has become so ceremonial and ritualistic as to have lost all sense of intimacy. In others, it has become so casual as to have lost all sense of awe and wonder. We need to look at the intention of Jesus in directing us to remember Him in this way, and it is helpful to start by considering the roots of the practice.

In **Luke 22**, we have an account of what has become known as “The Last Supper.” Jesus had gathered with his disciples to partake in the Passover Meal, an annual Jewish event commemorating one of the greatest moments in Israel’s history – the deliverance of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt (**Exodus 11-12**). By His imminent death, Jesus was going to bring about a far greater deliverance – deliverance

from slavery to sin and Satan. In anticipation of this, He inaugurated a wonderful way to help us contemplate the significance of this deliverance, and to celebrate it.

## A COVENANT MEAL

As already noted, this act can be referred to simply as “breaking bread”, but it has been given several specific names by the Church: the Lord’s Supper (**1 Corinthians 11:20**); the Eucharist (from the Greek verb meaning “to give thanks” in **1 Corinthians 11:24**); the Lord’s Table (**1 Corinthians 10:21 NIV 1984**); and Communion (**1 Corinthians 10:16 KJV**).

It has also often been referred to as “The Covenant Meal”. A covenant is a binding agreement or special arrangement. Covenants in biblical times were usually celebrated with a meal, rather like a marriage banquet (marriage is, of course, a covenant; see **Malachi 2:14**). As Christians, we are beneficiaries of the New Covenant, the arrangement that God made, enabling those who trust in the saving work of Jesus on the cross to live in right relationship with Him. Our “covenant meal” celebrates this. It is not a ‘once only’ meal, like a wedding reception, or even just once a year, like the Passover Meal. We can and should celebrate it regularly.

**WHERE?** Sometimes breaking bread will take place at gatherings of the whole church (see **Acts 20:7** and **1 Corinthians 11:20-22**), but it can be anywhere that any Christians are together. As already noted, the believers in Jerusalem were “**breaking bread in their homes**” (**Acts 2:46**). The home can provide a great environment in which to share, give thanks and pray together in an unhurried and meaningful way.

**WHAT?** The bread is just ordinary bread, and the wine ordinary wine. They are not ‘sacred’ in and of themselves, nor ‘made sacred’ by prayer or any other process. They represent the body and blood of Jesus but, contrary to what some denominations teach, they do not become his actual flesh and blood!

**WHEN?** The Bible does not tell us exactly when or how frequently to do it. The believers in Jerusalem met together every day, and may have broken bread in this way every day (**Acts 2:46**). In **Acts 20:7**, we read that the believers in Troas came together on the first day of the week to break bread, though we cannot assume they only (or even always) broke bread on the first day of the week. However, since Jesus commanded us to do it in remembrance of Him, it should certainly be a regular part of our fellowship.

**WHO?** Only those who know they are saved through Christ’s death on the cross should participate, because it only applies to them. However, *all* for whom this is the case can participate – a believing child does not have to have attained a certain age, nor does a person have to be a ‘member’ of the congregation. A church leader does not have to ‘officiate’; any Christian may offer the bread and wine to others.

## WHAT’S THE POINT OF IT?

The Lord’s Supper is sometimes referred to as a ‘sacrament’. By ‘sacrament’, some denominations mean a religious act that is an outward/physical sign of an inward/spiritual reality, though others go as far as to say that sacraments convey a benefit to the partaker, irrespective of that person’s spiritual state. There is no biblical justification for this latter view. Just as baptism (which is also often referred to as a sacrament) does nothing unless one is submitting to it in obedient response to salvation, neither does



taking the bread and wine. However, just as baptism *is* of great significance for those who approach it properly, the Lord's Supper should be also.

So what is the significance of the Lord's Supper, and what truths are conveyed by it? In **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**, Paul shows that our attention is to be directed in several different ways as we participate in this act. We are to:

**LOOK BACK** – “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” **1 Corinthians 11:26**

The Lord's Supper directs our thoughts back in history to the cross. The bread reminds us of Christ's body, given up for us, and the wine reminds us of his blood, shed for us. We are sobered and filled with gratitude as we consider the cost of our salvation, paid willingly by Jesus out of his great love for us. We proclaim it to one another, and determine to proclaim it to the world.

**LOOK UP** – Jesus said, “...‘Do this in remembrance of me.’” **1 Corinthians 11:24**

We take the bread and wine in remembrance not just of His death, but also to focus on Jesus Himself. While not brushing over Christ's suffering on the cross, we must never forget that it was followed by the resurrection. He is no longer dead! The Supper reminds us to look up, with the eyes of faith, to see Jesus seated at the Father's right hand in glory (see **Colossians 3:1**), and to worship Him.

**LOOK AROUND** – “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” **1 Corinthians 10:17**

The Lord's Supper is a communal meal; we take it with other Christians. When Paul refers in **1 Corinthians 11:29 (NIV 1984)** to “recognizing the body of the Lord”, he is speaking not of the bread but of fellow believers, the body of Christ. As he goes on to say, “Now you [plural] are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (**1 Corinthians 12:27 NIV 1984**). So as we eat and drink, we should look around at our spiritual brothers and sisters, thanking the Lord for joining us to them. There is a sobering aspect to this, too...

**LOOK WITHIN** – “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.” **1 Corinthians 11:28-29 (NIV 1984)**

Many suppose this to mean that we need to check whether we are free of sin before we eat “the body of the Lord” (i.e., supposedly the bread). This can lead some to refrain from partaking if they do not feel ‘worthy’. The Lord's Supper can certainly make us mindful of shortcomings in our walk with the Lord, but where necessary we should just repent and receive God's forgiveness. We can then thankfully participate in the act that reminds us that we rely on Christ's performance, not our own!

However, as previously noted, “the body of the Lord” that we are to recognize, and in regard to which we are to examine ourselves, is our spiritual family. The problem in Corinth was that many were selfishly being disrespectful and dismissive of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Their approach to the Lord's Supper made it a travesty, and brought God's judgment. This covenant meal is meant to demonstrate our oneness as believers. By it, we declare, “We are joined together in Christ; I love you and am for you!” If this is not actually our heart, we are inviting God's judgment (see **1 Corinthians 11:27-30**). We must, therefore, take the opportunity to deal with any grievances there and then (see **Matthew 5:23-24** and **18:15-17**).



**LOOK FORWARD** – “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” **1 Corinthians 11:26**

It is not just about the past or even the present – it is also about the future. Our celebration now is just a foretaste of the unspeakable joy that awaits us when Christ returns. The Bible describes this in terms of a marriage, when Christ, the bridegroom, will at last be united with the Church, His bride. Therefore, as we partake in the Lord’s Supper now, we look forward to “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (**Revelation 19:9**). It will be the meal to end all meals, a great heavenly banquet that will last forever.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

God, in His great wisdom, has given us this practice so that we might be continually reminded of what He has done for us through Christ. It should be as significant to us as baptism, but with the advantage of it being something we can do again and again, with ever-deepening revelation.

Let us turn now to another way of expressing fellowship – with our money!

## FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” **Acts 2:44-45, 4:34-35**

This aspect of the life of the early Church may seem surprisingly radical to us, but it is entirely in keeping with their wholehearted response to the gospel. It is also in keeping with God’s intention for His people.

Even a casual reading of Scripture reveals that money plays an important part in the Kingdom of God. It has been estimated that around 15% of Jesus’ words recorded in the New Testament relate to money and financial issues, and that He says twice as much on these subjects as on faith and prayer combined, or on heaven and hell combined!

## MONEY: THE HEART MONITOR

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not say that money is the root of all evil. Money is not evil; God blesses us with it! However, in **1 Timothy 6:10**, we see that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” Our attitude towards money, and our handling of it, can reveal a lot about us (“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...” **Matthew 6:21**). It is also a basis on which God will determine what of real and eternal value can be entrusted to us:

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?” **Luke 16:10-12**

If our desire is to be faithful to God with what He has given us, we must learn the importance of giving.



## GODLY GIVING

“But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” **2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIV 1984)**

Before looking at specific types of giving, there are some fundamental truths that must be understood. First, we see in the above passage of Scripture that Paul refers to giving as a “**grace**”. It is something that God graciously enables us to do, first by providing the resources, then by putting it in our hearts to share those resources with others. Giving is to be a Spirit-led act of worship to God, and a way of ministering His love to others. Secondly, we see that it is a grace in which we can grow and excel. This will happen as we reach to God for a greater revelation of His mind and heart in this regard – and as we actually do it! Scripture gives us some very practical guidance to help us get started. Our giving is to be:

**SYSTEMATIC** – “**On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...**” **1 Corinthians 16:2a (NIV 1984)**

Thought, prayer and preparation should go into our giving. We should not be taken by surprise when it is time for the collection. And we should determine to give regularly and consistently. Some are inclined to wait until they feel ‘led’ to give, or to postpone it with the intent of catching up later in the month/year. They tend to end up giving relatively little. God understands how this can happen – so He tells us to give regularly and consistently!

**IN PROPORTION TO OUR INCOME** – “**On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...**” **1 Corinthians 16:2a (NIV 1984)**

When deciding what to give, we start by looking at what we receive. Our giving should never be at the mercy of our fluctuating expenses.

**SACRIFICIAL** – “**For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord...**” **2 Corinthians 8:3**

Our giving is to be an act of worship to God and an expression of love for others. As we have seen previously in this course, worship involves sacrifice, and true love gives sacrificially (see John 3:16). The early Church clearly grasped this truth. Therefore, when deciding what to give, we should determine a figure with which we feel comfortable – then go beyond it!

**WILLING/JOYFUL** – “**Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**” **2 Corinthians 9:7**

Again, our giving is to speak of grace not law, and of wholehearted love for God and others. If we are reluctant, something is wrong that needs to be put right. We should always be able to rejoice in the privilege we have to give, be it much or little (see **2 Corinthians 8:12**).

With these general principles in place, we can move on to look at particular types of giving.



# TITHES

“Tithe” means “tenth”. The first biblical record of tithing is in **Genesis 14:17-20**, where Abraham (then called Abram) tithes to the priest and king, Melchizedek (who, interestingly in the light of our earlier subject, offered him bread and wine). In **Genesis 28:20-22**, we see Jacob vowing to tithe. Tithing was subsequently included in the Law of Moses (see, for example, **Leviticus 27:30-33**).

Some think that tithing has no relevance for Christians under the New Covenant. While it is true that tithing is not specifically commanded in the New Testament, there are several reasons why we should not reject it. For example:

1. Though tithing was included in the Mosaic Law, we have seen that it did not originate there, but rather with Abraham. We can, therefore, assume that tithing (like marriage and one day of rest in seven) is a principle that, though later embodied in the Law, is of a more enduring nature.
2. **Hebrews 7:1-10** specifically references Abraham’s tithe to Melchizedek to emphasize the fact that it was of greater significance than tithing to the Levitical priesthood.
3. We are elsewhere in Scripture exhorted to follow the example of Abraham, the father of the faithful (see, for example, **Galatians 3:6-9**). Why would we not follow his example in this faith-filled act of devotion?
4. Perhaps most significantly for us, Jesus affirmed the practice of tithing when, in rebuking the legalistic and hypocritical Pharisees, He said:

“...For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, **without neglecting the others.**”  
**Matthew 23:23**

5. We have already seen that in the New Testament we are directed to give systematically and in proportion to our income. On what basis would we assume that, living in the good of the New Covenant with its far greater blessings, we would give proportionately less than under the Old Covenant?

For all these reasons, we teach the principle of tithing, and strongly encourage its practice.

## THE USE OF THE TITHE

In the Old Testament, the tithe supported the Levites, the religious leaders of the people. They were thereby freed from regular work to concentrate on religious duties (see **Numbers 18:21**). The principle of financially supporting those who minister to the people of God flows into the New Testament:

“...the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” **1 Corinthians 9:14**

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor [here referring to financial reward], especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” **1 Timothy 5:17**



Tithes are, therefore, usually used for people: the support of the ministries of the church and visiting speakers, wages for support staff, gifts to overseas workers, help for the needy in the church, and so on.

## PRACTICING TITHING

The following two questions often arise when people are considering tithing:

*“Do I calculate the tithe on my gross income or my net income?”*

*“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”* **Proverbs 3:9-10**

The tithe is to be a tenth of your income, not a tenth of what’s left of your income! Though most of us have tax automatically deducted from our salary, our heart should still be that the Lord receives first. The tithe should, therefore, be calculated before tax.

*“Do I have to give all of the tithe to the church, or can I divide it between different recipients, e.g., the church, a Christian TV ministry, a charity, and people I know who are in need?”*

*“Bring the **whole** tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.”*  
**Malachi 3:10a (NIV 1984)**

The tithe is for the local spiritual ‘house’, or community, to which you belong. Other desired giving would constitute offerings.

## OFFERINGS

God does not limit us to one tenth – that is just the starting point. What we give beyond the tithe constitutes offerings. Whereas tithes are primarily for people, offerings are usually applied towards outgoings for, e.g., evangelism, buildings, utilities, special projects, etc. This distinction is, however, a guideline rather than a strict rule. For example, we may from time to time take up an offering for the poor.

That very example leads us to a third type of giving required by the Lord and identified in Scripture.

## GIVING TO THE POOR

*“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord”* **Proverbs 19:17a**

God’s heart for the poor and needy is clear throughout Scripture. He directs us to identify with – and manifest – His heart to them in practical ways. We each have an individual responsibility in this regard, and as a church, we are committed to giving to the poor, both in our congregation and beyond.



## THE FINANCE TEST

“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.” **2 Corinthians 8:8 (NIV 1984)**

We mentioned at the beginning of this section that our approach to money reveals our hearts. Some Christians become offended when challenged in the area of giving, but Paul had no qualms about it being a basis on which to judge real love for God and His people.

However, God is also willing to put Himself to the test in this area:

“‘Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.’” **Malachi 3:10b (NIV 1984)**

The principle of the blessing that flows from this obedience to God is also clear in the New Testament:

“give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”  
**Luke 6:38** (see also **2 Corinthians 9:6**)

Receiving is not to be our motivation for giving. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (**Acts 20:35**), but as we give, we will surely be blessed – so that we can, in turn, bless others and glorify God:

“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... 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. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” **2 Corinthians 9:8, 10-11**

## RECOMMENDED READING:

[The Covenant Meal](#) by David Matthew

[Money Possessions, and Eternity](#) by Randy Alcorn



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