

The Fellowship Files (12) – Giving & the Christian

The Bible has much to say concerning the stewardship of our resources. We are to be mindful of God when it comes to our things and our desires for them (Matthew 6:19-34). Giving is a non-negotiable of the Christian life. In this chapter, our primary concern is with monetary giving.

The New Testament teaches that we are to give based on the grace in our lives. It does not give us a rigid set of percentages or things like that. Still, it is useful to look at the concept of tithing (giving a tenth) as seen in the Old Testament.

Genesis 14:18-20 – principle of thankfulness

- Abraham gives a tenth to the priest Melchizedek in light of the victory he had just experienced. Abraham is giving as a response to God (cf. Hebrews 7:1-4).
- However, it is not suggested here or mentioned anywhere else that *we* are to give a tenth because of some victory.
- It is not mentioned anywhere at all that we give a tenth to stir God to give us a victory or to spur Him to some action on our behalf.
- Compare Abraham's response to the King of Salem vs. the King of Sodom (vs.21-24).
- It is about a grateful heart for what God has already done, and in Christ, we have been given the blessing of Abraham, blessed with all spiritual blessings, etc...

Genesis 28:13-15, 20-22 – principle of stewardship

- Jacob recognizes that all he has been blessed with has been given by God.
- God owns it, we use it, and we give some directly for God's use.
- It is not a transfer of wealth, as if we give God a tenth of what is ours, it is an acknowledgement of who is the actual owner, not that we have produced, but that God has given us these gifts.
- We worship with what we have been given, for it is all from God. God entrusts us with all He has given us, and we recognize the giver and His control by giving.

Leviticus 27:30 – principle of purpose

- Tithing became part of the Law, like a tax, so as to provide income for the priests and for the routine functioning of the nation of Israel.
- This text in chapter 27 is very specific about what items are to be given.
- Numbers 18:21-32 / 2 Chronicles 31:4-18 confirm that part of the purpose of the tithe was to support the spiritual leadership. (cf. Luke 10:7 / 1 Corinthians 9:11-14 / Galatians 6:6 / 1 Timothy 5:17-18). The Levites were also given cities (Numbers 35:1-8).

Deuteronomy 14:22-29 – principle of provision

- There was a yearly trip to make the tithe and they ate part of it (joyful feast).
- You learn to fear God by learning to trust Him.
- A portion goes to Levites.

- Those who had too much to carry could bring cash to be converted later.
- A special offering every three years as benevolence for the marginalized.
- Blessing from God for obedience (giving to God by giving to people).
- God provides for His people through His people.

Now we will examine a couple of the key texts on giving in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 16 (1-4) – There are many ways we can and are supposed to show our love for God, but one of the hardest ways for many is to learn to love God (and His people and His work) with our wallet. There seem to be so many pronouncements about giving, and how much are we supposed to give, and people who manipulate others into giving by telling them of some supposedly promised reward, it can be hard to really know what we are supposed to do, if anything. We can become so cynical or perhaps so complacent that we fail to really investigate what God’s Word has to say about it.

So let’s investigate for a moment. If you were a journalist asking the Apostle Paul about giving you would likely use the time tested method of asking: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Our text answers all these simple, but important questions. For the Christian, this text is foundational to the subject of stewardship.

In fact, the Corinthian were investigating. “*Now concerning*” refers to questions that they had asked Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1, 8:1, 12:1). This “collection” is also mentioned in Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 8:1, Acts 11:29, 24:17. Some might think that because Paul addresses a specific need (a gift for Jerusalem) that this was only a temporal, local requirement. However, the rest of the NT argues against that (cf. Galatians 2:10) and this text teaches us some important principles regarding offerings in the church. It is to be a regular part of our worship.

Who is supposed to give? *each of you* (vs.2) – it is personal, we all have a responsibility to do give. A household may give a combined gift, based on whether there are one or more sources of income. If a young Christian has a part-time job, they should contribute from that. Parents should teach their children the principles of giving from their earliest years. Youngsters should be instructed as to how to budget their income (be it an allowance, paper route, etc.). Even the retired person on a fixed income should not exempt themselves from this. Every Christian with an income should express their devotion to God in the grace of giving (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-7).

Of course, a few rich people can raise the necessary amounts the church needs but this misses other important aims. When everyone gives this promotes fellowship, and it is a true picture of the power of the gospel, with everyone sharing in gratitude, and increasing the ability of our gifts to help others. In our giving we remember that we are part of the same body, and each part supplies the needs of the other. As we give, we become agents for God to bless others, and we cause them to glorify God and to give thanks to Him and to pray for us. Cheerful giving is one of the concrete ways in which the transforming work of God can be seen in our lives. We live in a world where greed is the rule and the church is held in contempt. Yet there is one truth they cannot deny. Christians give the most to charity year after year. In this we see the life changing work of the Holy Spirit. You have much freedom in your giving, but you do have an obligation. Every believer is supposed to be a giver.

What are you supposed to give? *put something aside and store it up* (vs.2). There are three basic ways we give, by serving, supporting, and sacrifice for the work of the Lord. It is usually put this way; that we give of our time, our talent, and our treasure. Here Paul is specifically referring to treasure, and that could mean other things we have such as goods, housing, land, food, and such. In this case, Paul is defining it as monetary giving. All of those other things, our time, our talent, and the other items we own and could give; these are all important, but they do not justify our neglect of giving financially to the work of God, the needs of people (Romans 12:13 / 2 Corinthians 8-9 / James 1:27 / 1 John 3:16-17), the living of the ministers (1 Corinthians 9:14 / Galatians 6:6 / 1 Timothy 5:17-18), and the advancement of the kingdom (Philippians 4:10-20). Amongst all our other giving, we are to put aside money to be given.

When are you supposed to give? *On the first day of every week* (vs.2). The early Christians assembled together at first daily (Acts 2:46), and then weekly (Acts 20:7). Paul explicitly says that giving was to be regular, systematic, week after week. We give according to plan more than according to whim. This was to be a continuous commitment, a spiritual discipline, not a one time, haphazard thing. We can give instantly, but we must give regularly. Sometimes it is necessary and right to make a special appeal and to have a special offering, but we would have less special appeals for special offerings if we made a regular practice out of regular giving. Paul told them that they need to become practiced at giving.

Giving “as the Lord leads” may be fine, but this doesn’t always mean we are to wait for that moment and “let Him lead us”. We can do that once in a while, or if we feel a strong urge to give, but this is about how He has already led, proportionate to our income. This is not so much about how you are feeling right then as much as it is about what you have determined before, not impulse giving, but planned giving. Make it a holy habit. Special giving is good, but we are not supposed to wait on special giving and neglect to do regular giving. Every Sunday it is to be done, but if you get paid once a month and want to give a lump sum equal to 4 weeks, then that is fine. The element of worship is not the act of “dropping a check into the plate”; rather, it is the act of setting it aside and giving it. That is the act of worship.

Where are you supposed to give? *the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do* (vs.1). To the church, and to approved leaders who give wisely to agreed upon places (vs.3-4). Paul indicates that trustworthy messengers should be chosen to carry the offering to Jerusalem, and if necessary, he would personally accompany the messengers. God’s ministers need to set safeguards over their own hearts, we need to be very circumspect in the way we handle God’s money.

Now why had Paul requested a collection for the needs of the Christians in Jerusalem, when there were also poor Christians elsewhere? There were certain factors that made the saints in Jerusalem, which prior to 70 AD was the center of the Christian church, poorer than the other churches. First they had suffered systematic persecution and discrimination more directly and more quickly than the Christians elsewhere. Their property was plundered, and many were put into prison.

Notice that while Paul wants the money to be collected together, he does not mention pooling all of our money together in total. The Jerusalem church originally had all things in common, they

sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. One reason they did this was that they were under heavy persecution and would be losing all their possessions anyway. There was also a famine in the land.

While this common pooling of resources showed their love for one another, after a couple of decades, it probably had a devastating long-term impact. All their property, investments, everything they might have derived income from was gone. None of the other churches did this, and the fact it is recorded as an historical oddity shows that it was not continued.

Under the Mosaic system, there was a treasury in the Temple (1 Chronicles 9:26, 28:1ff / Malachi 3:10). In Jesus' day, the outer court within the temple was also called the "treasury" (Mark 12:41 / Luke 21:1 / John 8:20), because it contained chests around the walls for Jewish contributions. Some were for the required gifts, and the others were for voluntary gifts.

The local church is the modern day place of worship, the antitype of the Temple, and the church also has a "treasury" to facilitate its financial operations. Look at vs.2 – store it up, this word means to treasure it, to amass a reserve, and that obviously doesn't mean to hoard it for yourself. It is the same word as in Matthew 6:19-20, where we have a sort of play on words; do not treasure for yourself treasures on earth. We are to store it as treasure for heaven, and we do that by giving to the church. It is erroneous to suggest that Paul was merely urging people to save something "at home," or put it aside in a "special place", as this would have defeated the Apostle's purpose in not wanting to have to contact each Christian individually when he came.

The notion that one can simply free-lance our contributions, with no obligation to the local church, is not a biblical notion. Wherever else we may give, our weekly contribution to the local congregation should be unwavering. You can give to your heart's content to those organizations you deem worthy, but this doesn't lessen your obligation to your local church.

Why are we supposed to give? *for the saints* (vs.1): *so that there will be no collecting when I come* (vs.2). Paul mentions the needs of the saints in Jerusalem here, but in looking at the whole of the Bible we see that we are to give, as we said earlier, to the work of God, for the needs of people, the living of the ministers, and the advancement of the kingdom. Your giving stirs up more giving (2 Corinthians 8:4, 9:2).

Another vital truth we need to understand is that giving is an act of worship, and it leads to more worship. 2 Corinthians 9:11-14 – the word for "service" (vs.12) is where we get the word liturgy from. In the Old Testament, sacrifices to the Lord were designated as "gifts" (Numbers 18:11 / cf. Hebrews 5:1). When the wise men came to worship the baby Jesus, they presented gifts (Matthew 2:11). The term "fellowship" in Acts 2:42 included the act of giving (cf. Romans 15:26 / 2 Corinthians 9:13). When the Philippians gave their money for the support of Paul, God viewed it as "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God." (Philippians 4:18). Hebrews 13:16 admonishes us to "share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God".

How (much) are we supposed to give? *as he may prosper* (vs.2). You will notice that Paul doesn't give a percentage or say exactly how much. This doesn't mean he is giving us an "out" by saying, "well, I am not prospering right now, so I won't give". No, he is speaking about being

proportionate. In keeping with the idea of setting something aside, he is saying as you have prospered, and as you have purposed. Each Christian is to give “as he may prosper” or “according to his ability” (Acts 11:29). This is proportional giving.

Amazingly, some in the early church gave even beyond their ability (2 Corinthians 8:3), and they were commended for it. Those who have more should give more (both in amount and percentage). When the more prosperous generously give of their abundance, to compensate for the deficit of the poorer folk, the type of “equality” that God desires among his people will prevail (see 2 Corinthians 8:12-15). The willingness of Christians to freely give is often an indication of the state of the spiritual health of a church. Now, sadly, it is the case that many Christians do not even come close to giving as the Lord enables them, and ultimately they end up impoverishing not only the church, but ultimately themselves. Instead, let us be guided by 2 Corinthians 9:7, remembering that as we do so we are laying up treasure in heaven.

Gratitude is spiritual warfare, and thanksgiving is spiritual worship. We must be renewed in our minds about this because it is our natural tendency to become complacent about what we have. We tend to adjust to the level of happiness or prosperity we have. We grow to expect it, to not even notice it. And then we want more. That’s why it’s so hard for people to come down in standard of living. It’s easy to move from a small apartment to a big house, but it seems so awful to do the reverse. Few people have a problem going from an old beat up car to a brand new luxury model, but we couldn’t stand to go the other direction.

This is the way it has always been. Adam and Eve had the whole Garden of Eden but it wasn’t enough when the devil brought a desire for more; we think it’s our right to have it right now. Satan also tempted Jesus in the same way. As fellow heirs of the Kingdom with Christ, we will have all the riches of glory one day. But for now God gives us increase, not simply so we can increase our standard of living, but so we can increase our standard of giving.

Of course, if we are careless with our money we will not prosper as good as we could, but this is why we are to set it aside, first, to make sure we get that accomplished. Indeed, the first thing we should do in getting our financial house in order is to get our giving straight, it will force us to examine things. We should take stock of just where our money is going. You can’t say that you have no money to give to God when you spent money on six lattes this week. Now you can buy six lattes and not be sinning, of course, but you should set aside the money for the church first and see if you have enough left for those lattes, or whatever the case may be.

Think about what Paul is saying about disciplined liberty in this passage. We regularly give requests to God for money sought; we should also regularly give reasons to God for money spent. It is okay to have things, but make sure the work of God is getting something too, set aside, stored up, treasured. If you had a treasure lying around the first thing you would do is to make sure it gets in a safe place, so get your giving to God set in a safe place, set it aside before all other spending, then you won’t have to make sorry excuses.

Make giving a part of your life, and be proactive by setting aside an amount to give before you spend it. Give in proportion to your income and resources (2 Corinthians 8:3, 12; 9:6-11), both when you have plenty (1 Timothy 6:17-19), and also when you have little (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

Give where there is careful handling and distribution (1 Corinthians 16:3). Change your lifestyle from “debt living” to “grace giving” (Ephesians 4:28). Paul has told us the “who, what, when, where, why and how” of giving. Everyone is supposed to give, money, every week, to the local church, because it helps others and is a form of worship, whereby we give out of gratitude to God, for the work of God, the needs of people, the living of the ministers, and the advancement of the kingdom. We give because God has given. See that you excel also in this grace.

2 Corinthians 9 (1-15) – Here in this passage the specific ministering Paul has in mind is the financial support of the Jerusalem saints, which he wrote of in 2 Corinthians 8. Paul says he knows he doesn’t have to even mention it, but because he wants to give them some admonition, exhortation, and motivation about giving, he does mention it. He takes it easy on them,, in a sense, saying he knew that they were ready to give and already doing good in this area, but he still wanted to lay out a framework to remind them of why we are to give, the reasons and results of our giving, and he wants to tie it all together, for them, and for us. It is as if Paul is telling them, “Just in case you forget, let me remind you, let me refocus your priorities”. We remember all our hurts while we seem to forget all out helps.

Paul is sending some men to pick up the collection so that he (and they) will not be embarrassed. Paul wanted the collection business to be done by the time her arrived so it wouldn’t seem like he needed to manipulate them when he got there. He wanted them to give of a generous attitude, not out of compulsion, so he let them know ahead of time.

10 Reasons to Keep Giving

1. Vs.2 – Your example inspires others to give – 2 Corinthians 8:4 – the Macedonians to give in spite of their manifest poverty. They counted sacrificial giving as a blessing.
2. Vs.6 – God will bless you
3. Vs.7 – God delights because you want to give
4. Vs.8 – God will make you a blessing
5. Vs.9-10 – It increases your harvest / godliness (1 Timothy 4:8)
6. Vs.11 – It will cause others to give thanks to God
7. Vs.12 – It supplies the needs of others
8. Vs.13 – It will glorify God
9. Vs.14 – Others will pray for you (it builds fellowship)
10. Vs.15 – It honors Jesus Christ & God’s plan (this is the number one reason, His gift is beyond description, but our giving is a reflection)

“Unspeakable” gift – The Gospel is the reason to give. You have been given it and your giving helps others to be given it. Gospel saturated social works point people to the saving grace found in Jesus Christ. When we support the local preaching of the Gospel, and send missionaries who go forth with the Gospel, we spread the unspeakable gift by our giving.

This whole chapter is about the fact that all of our giving should be based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You see you don’t *have* to give, God gave...and now, based upon His mercy we are encouraged to give our all (Romans 12:1-2). The old saying rings true, you can give without loving (1 Corinthians 13:3), but you can’t love without giving. Thank God for Jesus.