

1Breaking the poverty spirit

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Giving comes from vision

People can give for many reasons – salving their conscience, making themselves look good, religious legalism and so on. But true Biblical giving can only come out of an understanding of the kingdom of God. Our motivation for giving is laid out by Jesus: “*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matt. 6:33). In this verse, Jesus gives a clear definition of God’s purposes for our lives on earth – we are here to seek the establishment of His kingdom. It is very significant that Jesus makes this statement in the context of teaching on finance. He has instructed His disciples not to lay up treasures on earth (6:20). He has told them they cannot serve God and money (verse 24), and He has urged them to stop worrying about how they will have their needs met (verses 25-32). Jesus has money in mind! The essence of verse 33, therefore, is that we are to give everything we have to God and He will take care of the rest. No one more completely modelled this way of life than Jesus Himself. This means that the key to be motivated to give and to come into God’s provision for all you need is seeing His kingdom call on your life and moving out in it. The rest is His responsibility. Out of this, we can state these truths:

§ If we do not have an understanding of God’s purposes on earth and how we fit into them, we will never have a motivation for giving. If we do not see that God has a purpose for our lives and that He commands us to put all our priorities at His disposal, we will never understand God’s claim on our finances or any other part of our lives.

§ If we are not submitted to God in the area of finance, we are not submitted to God in any other area. When Jesus said in Matt. 25:23 that he who was faithful with a few things would be put in charge of many, the “few things” represented money and the “many” represented our eternal inheritance in Christ – to rule and to reign in this life and the next. How vital it is to settle the issue of finance in our lives!

Why do we tithe?

God established the tithe for two main reasons:

§ To enable us to acknowledge that He is the rightful owner of everything we have, and that all our wealth and prosperity comes from Him. The giving of the firstfruits of our labour (Deut. 26:10) – the *first* ten per cent, before any other expenditures have been made, whether payroll deductions (for taxes represent services we purchase for ourselves from the government) or anything else – symbolizes our commitment to this reality.

§ To enable us to recognize the validity of the service performed by those set aside and released from other work in order to serve God’s family. This service of God’s house was supported by Abraham and Jacob long before the days of Moses, and it is commanded long after that in the New Testament. Paul says that those who preach the Gospel should get their living from the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:13-14).

Confronting the poverty spirit

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul deals with the crucial impact our attitude or mentality toward money has upon our giving. But in this, he gives some keys as to how not just our giving, but our finances in general, can be set free from the curse and come under the lordship of Christ.

He sets the stage by reminding the Corinthians of the attitude of Christ, who “*though He was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich*” (2 Cor. 8:9). This establishes the first significant point: ***God is a giver***. God is a giver because He has no needs. He lives in an infinite abundance and loves nothing more than to give generously. We became rich because of what Christ gave to us. Put another way, whatever we have is a gift from God: “*What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not?*” (1 Cor. 4:7). Translated into financial terms, *the material wealth we have is not ours to possess but to steward*. We are here as managers of wealth God has entrusted to us for a season, and we will at some point have to give account to him for our management of his property. Jesus compared us to tenants looking after a vineyard – if we do not tend it properly on behalf of the owner, he will throw us out and rent it to other tenants instead (Matt. 21:33-41). Jesus also compared us to managers serving the absent master’s household, who will have to give account on the master’s return (Luke 12:42-48). ***When God brings people into His kingdom, His desire is that they become like Him***. Good managers will handle their master’s finances the same way the master would – not by hoarding, but by giving, not by selfishness, but by generosity, not by accumulating, but by investing, not by focussing on enriching themselves but on how they can use resource to further the kingdom. As long as we do this, God Himself will give us more seed to sow than what we have given: “*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 very good work*” (2 Cor. 9:8). To “abound” means to overflow, to have enough for our own needs and then lots left over for kingdom purposes, whether that means tithes or offerings, or an investment into a business opportunity which will serve to glorify God in the community as it is managed to His honour and standards. That is why wherever the Gospel goes, it brings prosperity to the business life of nations. God is not speaking just about offerings, but about our whole handling of finance. God wants a people who live in an *assurance of supply*. We are to become like Christ, who gave everything in order to enrich us – yet in returning to the Father wound up with as much as He ever began with in the infinite resources of God.

Fallen human nature, on the other hand, operates out of a *mentality of need*. It defines us as people who never have enough. Even though God clearly told Adam and Eve that they had all they needed, they did not believe it. The serpent suggested to Eve that she needed to take action to get, by whatever means necessary, what she thought she needed to make up for what she apparently did not have. This establishes a second point: ***fallen men are takers***. No matter how much we have (certainly in comparison with those in poorer nations), rarely are we content with our present situation. A poverty spirit or mentality of need is never satisfied. John D. Rockefeller was the richest man in the United States, yet when asked what was the best million he had ever made, gave the answer: “The next million”.

God wants a people who have moved from a *mentality of need* to an *assurance of supply*. Writing to the Philippians about a time of relative lack of finances in his life, Paul was careful to

add this comment: *“Not that I speak from want”* (Phil. 4:11) – that is, “Not that I speak out of a poverty spirit or mentality of need”. In verse 12, he says he has found the secret of living through both abundance and need, and in verse 13 he reveals this secret: *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”* When we keep our eyes fixed on the Provider, then all else falls into place. Thus Paul can promise the Philippians: *“My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus”* (verse 13). Paul never thought of himself as poor. Lack of finances became an opportunity to find satisfaction in what he had and to witness once more the never-failing provision of God.

We can never learn to steward our finances the way God wants us to unless we have crossed this great divide between the poverty mentality and the assurance of God’s supply. People who think they are poor (regardless of their actual income) will never have a healthy, Biblical attitude toward money. They will be tightfisted and stingy. They will dwell in self-pity. They will be continuously fearful of financial disaster. They will underestimate what they have and overestimate what others have, and then be envious of those they think have more. They will feel the world owes them, and will be ungrateful to God for what He has given. Whatever they receive is never enough. They will never be able to give generously and will always be thinking of what they are having to do without because of what they have given. That is why Paul says, *“Every 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).

Thus understood, Paul’s dealings with the Corinthians here give us not just a *basis for giving* but a *basis for living*. Our whole attitude toward finances, not just tithes and offerings, needs to be set free from the poverty curse and placed squarely on the shoulders of the all-sufficient Christ. Thus we should try to avoid use of the words “I cannot afford it”. Why? Because when we use these words, we are usually showing our thinking to be based on a poverty mentality. We are actually saying, “I don’t have enough”, and (as we breathe a few deep sighs of self-pity), “I likely never will have enough”. Instead, we should look first at what God has graciously provided for us. Then we can speak of how we are going to utilize the resources the Lord *has* given to us rather than think wistfully or enviously of what He *has not*. If we feel there is a genuine need in our lives, we should express a trust toward God that He will supply it. Before complaining to others about our finances, we should advertise our need to the Lord – and listen to His reply. If it is appropriate to ask others to pray for our needs, or even to approach others for financial help, we should do so with a healthy attitude, rather than one of self-pity or bitterness toward God, or one expressing a self-pitying demand that others help us because we see them, not God, as our supply.

The fact remains, however, that we all have limited financial resources. It is certainly right to ask for prayer when we are in need, to be open to financial counselling, and even to accept financial help when appropriate. The important point is our attitude. I need to see that all my resources come from God. God is my employer, and God is my supply. As my “banker”, God – because He is God – has an infinite amount of credit available. Some faith teachers have misunderstood this to mean that limitless amounts of money are therefore available to us, and all we have to do is to order up what we want. This sets us up for disappointment toward God and envy toward others when we do not receive the abundance we have asked for. But we need to factor something else into this equation. God has a plan for our lives. He sees what it will cost

for us to do everything He has called us to do. And He is ready and able to foot the entire bill. But God's will is different for each person. So is the degree to which He releases finance. Jesus clearly taught that some receive one talent, some two and some five (Matt. 25:14-30). Do not be drawn into comparisons between how much someone else has and how much you have. Rejoice in the abundance God has given to your friend. And for those who have abundance, know that God requires a more severe accounting from you for what He has entrusted to you not to possess, but to steward for His glory and kingdom. God has set different tasks before each person, and those tasks require different resources. He expects a far greater material harvest from the one with five talents than the one with only one. The bottom line is this: God's desire is to provide financially for whatever it takes for an individual to do His will in their lives.

Whoever I am, therefore, I can look on my finances as the *sufficiency which God has released for me to steward as I live in His never-failing supply*, rather than *that which I need to scrape and scrimp and scrounge in order to keep my head above water*.

Here are four practical points about finance to keep in mind:

§ We are always stewards, never owners. God Himself determines what He entrusts to us and will require an accounting when we return it to Him.

§ A poverty spirit ("I never have enough") puts a wall of unbelief and ingratitude around our finances. It warps our picture of God and prevents Him from releasing His supply into our lives.

§ We must destroy the fantasy we have lived in since the fall – that unlimited possessions bring true happiness – and we must remind ourselves that true riches are not material at all: "*what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*" (2 Cor. 4:18).

§ We must understand that because the love of money is a root of all evil things (1 Tim. 6:10), God may well entrust us with more finance only as our character is strengthened, thus reducing the risk that we will be drawn aside from Christ by an overabundance of wealth. Jesus was speaking of finance when He said that he who is faithful in a few things will be entrusted with many things (Matt. 25:21,23).

Applications regarding the tithe

1. *The tithe is permanent, not temporary.* One of the most common misconceptions about the tithe is that it originated in the Mosaic law, and is therefore now abolished along with that law (although in truth the Mosaic law is not abolished, but fulfilled in Christ). But the tithe did not originate with the Mosaic law at all. It is connected rather with Abraham, who is the *father of faith for all believers in Christ* (Rom. 4:11-13). Malachi prophesied a restoration of the tithe in the coming day of the Lord. Not only that, but the tithe is endorsed by the Lord Jesus Himself (Matt. 23:23). There is no evidence in the Bible that the tithe has been abolished for New Testament believers. But even if we did take the position that the tithe was no longer applicable, we would have to admit that the new covenant requirements on our finances, if anything, must be *more profoundly all-encompassing* than under the old covenant. Why is it that arguments that the tithe is not applicable today always seem to be justifying the idea of giving *less*, rather than *more* than believers did under the law of Moses? If the tithe is abolished, then at the least all

believers should be giving *a minimum of* ten per cent, and preferably more, before even coming to offerings and gifts to the poor.

2. *The tithe originated with Christ, not Moses.* In fact, we could argue that the tithe originated with Christ Himself. It was Melchizedek to whom Abraham, the father of believers in Christ (Rom. 4:11-12, John 8:58), tithed. And the New Testament defines Melchizedek in the following terms: king of righteousness, king of peace, without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God (Heb. 7:2-3). It is clear that Melchizedek cannot be a human figure. He must be either an angel, like those who appeared to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Gideon and other Old Testament figures, or, far more likely in light of the description given to him, a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ Himself. It is written that three angels appeared to Abraham (Gen. 18:1-33), yet one of them is identified as the Lord. Were the other two Christ and the Spirit? Or was the “Lord” really Christ Himself, as God the Father would not appear in visible bodily form? It is interesting that it was also after a visitation of angels and of the Lord that Jacob paid the tithe (Gen. 28:10-22). Was this also Christ and his angels? Melchizedek, then, the king of righteousness and of peace, is surely Christ Himself. It is true that under the Mosaic covenant, detailed regulations were given for the application of the tithe in the national life of Israel. The application or use may be somewhat different under the new covenant (in that literal priests and Levites do not exist), in the same way its use was different in the days *before* Moses. But whatever be the application, it cannot be considered abolished under the new covenant, because it was not instituted under the old, but rather was timeless in nature and related from the beginning to Christ and to faith. This is confirmed by Malachi’s prophetic sayings linking the new covenant in Christ not with the *abolition* of tithing, but with its *restoration*.

3. *The tithe is thus linked with the power of an endless life.* If Melchizedek is indeed Christ, then from the beginning the tithe was meant to be presented to One who held within Him the power of endless life. Under the new covenant, though our tithe is presented literally to the leaders or deacons of the church, in reality it is presented to Christ Himself, and is only stewarded by the church leadership. Under the old covenant, the people presented their tithe to the Levites, and the Levites in turn presented their tithe to the priests. The procedure followed was probably identical to that with the presentation of the firstfruits (Deut. 26:1-11), where the priests took the offerings and presented them before the Lord Himself. The ultimate result was that God responded by giving His blessing to His people (Deut. 26:15). If we present our tithe to Christ, then Christ, as our High Priest, in turn presents it to the Father, and the Father will respond with blessing. Jesus is our High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:11), and the passage ends by telling us that He comes before the Father on our behalf to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25). It is not hard for us to do anything which has life involved in it. To tithe should not be hard when we see that it releases the endless life and power of God into our lives and our finances.

All of God’s purposes on earth are based on the concept of giving. God is a giver. God gave us the whole creation to us to steward and enjoy. Even though we abused His trust in this, He gave His Son to us to restore us to relationship with Him. Now He calls us to follow in His footsteps. It is through the giving of our time and resources that His kingdom is extended. It is interesting to note that every time of revival or renewal in the Old Testament was accompanied by an

increase of giving or restoration of tithing -- under Moses (Ex. 35:4-36:7), David (1 Chron. 29:1-9), Solomon (2 Chron. 7:4-5), Joash (2 Chron. 24:1-14), Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29-31) and Josiah (2 Chron. 34:8-13, 35:7-9). Malachi (3:7) prophesied a future turning to God which would be accompanied by the restoration of tithing. Jesus taught and modelled this, leaving His profession, home and financial security, accumulating nothing for Himself in spite of the enormous amounts that must have flowed through His ministry, and leaving this world with no possessions but His clothes, and even those were taken from Him in the humiliation of His death. Christians, like Jesus, are to be givers, not takers, but without a revelation of this in our hearts, our giving will be grudging and joyless, leaving us feeling we are being forced to give up what we need and what rightfully belongs to us. Furthermore, if we do not understand that God is the greatest giver, we will have no faith to believe that He can continually fill our supply to overflowing, and that even as we give, He is committed to more than replacing what we have given.

If God's people had a right attitude toward finance, there would be no more material problems in His kingdom, as His supernatural supply would be released abundantly into the church -- and the world would come us looking for help! By God's grace that day will come.