

# THE GRACE OF GIVING

by Charles C. Ryrie

Without apology the New Testament places a great deal of emphasis on the subject of giving. There are commands, practical suggestions, warnings, examples, and exhortations concerning this important matter. Everywhere in the Scriptures miserliness, greed, and avarice are denounced; and generosity, hospitality, and charity extolled. The same word that is used for our fellowship with the Lord is also used in relation to the fellowship of the collection of money (2 Cor. 8:4), emphasizing the high spiritual character of giving. Further, this grace of giving is a spiritual gift (Rom. 12:8) accessible to all believers to have and to use. It is a gift which all can exercise, whatever be the individual's financial status, and it is one of high order among the believer's total privileges and responsibilities.

What should be one's guide in grace giving? Perhaps the New Testament passage which sets forth most succinctly the basic principles of giving is 1 Corinthians 16:2: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." In this single verse there are laid down four principles of giving.

*add #1* (1) Giving is a personal matter--"let every one of you." Like most of the commands concerning Church life in the New Testament the matter of giving is a personal thing, in which every believer sustains a direct and individual relationship to God as if he were the only Christian in the world. When you or I fail to give, the entire Church

is weakened, for like the proverbial chain, the Church is no better than its weakest member. It is a peculiarity of conduct under grace that in most things we are left to determine our individual responsibility before the Lord. Though it might be convenient at times to have corporate commands in the life of the Church, individual commands engender individual responsibility.

(2) Giving is to be proportionate—"as God hath prospered him."

No hard and fast rule concerning the amount is to be found among New Testament principles of giving. This is in sharp contrast to the Old Testament regulations, which required that a tenth of all be given to the Levites (Lev. 27:30-33), who in turn tithed what they received and gave it to the priests. In addition, the Jews understood that a second tithe (a tenth of the remaining nine-tenths) was to be set apart and consumed in a sacred meal in Jerusalem (those living too far from Jerusalem could bring money, Deut. 12:5, 6, 11, 18). Further, every third year another tithe was taken for the Levites, strangers, fatherless, and widows (Deut. 14:28-29). Thus the proportion was clearly specified, and every Israelite was obligated to bring to the Lord approximately 22% of his yearly income. In contrast the New Testament merely says, "as God hath prospered him." This may mean 8%, 12%, 20%, 50%, or even more, depending on the individual case. It may also mean variation in proportion, for there is no reason to believe that the proportion suitable for this year will be satisfactory for next year. <sup>add # 2</sup> Each time the Christian gives he is to reflect on God's blessing in his life and determine what proportion in return he will give to God.

(3) Giving is to be in private deposit—"lay by him in store."

Contrary to the usual belief, the Christian is not told to turn his gift into the Church treasury each Sunday. The word in store means to gather and lay up, to heap up, or treasure; and the reflexive pronoun to himself indicates that it is to be kept in private, not public, deposit. The picture clearly set forth in this phrase is of a private gift fund into which the believer places his proportionately determined gifts and out of which he distributes to specific cases. This does not mean that either the giving into such a fund or the paying out from such a fund is spasmodic. Neither does this mean that regular giving or even pledging is contrary to the New Testament principles of giving (cf. 2 Cor. 8:10-11, where a pledge was made). But it does mean that there should be, however small, an ever-ready supply of money available to give out as the Spirit directs, either regularly or occasionally.

(4) Giving should be periodic—"on the first day of the week."

It has already been suggested that this is not an erratic business. The laying by in private store should be done on Sunday. Sunday is the God-appointed day to keep accounts, determine proportions, and lay by in store. The Scriptures do not say much about what the Christian should or should not do on the Lord's Day except that he should assemble with other believers (Heb. 10:25) and do his giving (1 Cor. 16:2). Though one need not become legalistic about this matter of caring for one's financial matters on Sunday, one must not treat it lightly either. Here is a God-given exhortation which might well be heeded. The writer has himself made a practice in the past few years, whenever possible, of setting aside on Sunday the proportion of his income which will go to the Lord's work, and, strange as it may seem, doing it on the Lord's Day seems to

bring an added blessing. One of my students tried this last year and testified to the blessing it brought to his family; for, gathered together as a family group on Sunday afternoon thinking and praying together about their giving to the Lord, their spiritual ties were strengthened. If God has suggested it, it is certainly worth trying.

But, someone may say, why go to all this trouble? Why not just tithe? The word tithe is found in the New Testament only eight times (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12; Heb. 7:5-6, 8-9). In the references in the Gospels it is used in connection with that which the Pharisees were doing in fulfilling their obligation to the Mosaic law. In the references in Hebrews it is used to prove the inferiority of the tribe of Levi, to whom the tithe was given. There is no passage of Scripture that enjoins, either by direct command or example, the tithe upon the believer in this age. It is apparent that the tithe was part of the Mosaic law (Lev. 27:30-33) and an important factor in the economy of Israel. The law was never given to Gentiles and is expressly done away for the Christian (Rom. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:7-13; Heb. 7:11-12). Further, it would be impossible today to tithe as commanded in the Old Testament, for where is the priesthood to whom tithes could be paid? Neither are the words of Malachi 3 for the Christian, for what believer claims to be a son of Jacob, to whom the passage is addressed (v. 6)? Material blessing is never promised today as a reward for faithfulness in any area of living including giving. Spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3) and the meeting of material needs (Phil. 4:19) is that which God promises. Being prospered materially is no sign of deep godliness or faithful tithing, and contrariwise poverty is no indication of being out of God's will (cf. Paul's own case in Phil. 4:12).

But, it may be asked, since tithing was practiced before the law, does that not make irrelevant all that has been said above and leave tithing as a proper principle of giving? Since Abraham and Jacob both tithed, and since their acts antedated the law, does that not relieve tithing of its legal aspects and make it a valid principle to follow today? The answer would be yes if there were no other guides for giving in the New Testament. Since there are such standards in the New Testament, who go back to two isolated examples in the Old Testament to find the principles for giving? The fact that something was done before the law which was later incorporated into the law does not make that thing a good example for today, especially if the New Testament gives <sup>further</sup> guidance on the matter. Not even the most ardent tither would say that the Sabbath should be observed today because it was observed before the law (Ex. 16:23-26), and yet that is the very <sup>reasoning used in promoting</sup> ~~reason advanced~~ <sup>for</sup> tithing. The New Testament teaches us about a new day of worship, and it also gives us new directions for giving. To tithe today on the basis of the examples of those who did it before the law would mean that only 10% of one's income would go to the Lord and possibly only occasionally (as in the example of Abraham); to tithe on the basis of the law would mean that 22% would be given to the Lord as payment of a debt due Him, and it would also mean that it should be given to support Judaism; to give on the basis of the principles of the New Testament might mean any percent, given because 100 % already belongs to Him. The Lord's work will never lack support <sup>if we</sup> ~~if we~~ preach and practice New Testament principles of giving.

Proportionate giving is not starting with a tithe and then doing what more we can when we can. Proportionate giving is as God hath

prospered. If someone felt after prayer that his proportion should be around 10%, the writer would suggest that he give 9% or 11% just to keep his thought out of the 10% rut. A man who is giving 9% or 11% will find himself much more sensitive to the Lord's changing his proportion than the Christian who gives 10%.

This is in no way a doctrine of lawlessness. Though we are not under the law, we are in-lawed to Christ, and this assures proper conduct in all areas of life including that of giving. When I say, as I do, "I do not tithe," I am not saying, "I do not give." Every Christian owes 100% of what he is and what he has to God, and I for one have willingly given all to Him. The question, then, is not only how much do I give, but also how much do I spend on myself. Proportionate giving alone can furnish the right answer to this problem. <sup>ALL#3</sup> This important subject involves basic principles, motives, and resultant actions. We give because He gave, not because He commanded; we give because we want to, not because we have to; if in turn He blesses materially, we praise Him, if not, we still praise Him. This is grace giving.

Add #1  
(1) Giving is incumbent on each person--"let every one of you." Grace does not make giving optional; it is the privilege and responsibility of every Christian. Therefore, when you or I fail to give, the entire Church is weakened, for like the proverbial chain, the Church is no better than its weakest member. Nevertheless, giving is a personal matter in which every believer sustains a direct and individual responsibility to the Lord as if he were the only Christian in the world. What you give is your personal business as long as you are giving and ~~making~~ doing it in conference with Him before all things are naked and open.  
whom

(2)

Add on p 1/ 2

# 2  
When prosperity comes, as it has for many Christians, it should be used to give more, not necessarily to buy more,

Add p.6

# 3  
... to this problem. Delete sentence beginning "This important subject ... Add "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may <sup>lay</sup> hold on eternal life" (I Tim. 7 6:17-19). W

We give because He gave, ... continue to end.