

Christian Giving: Some Biblical Principles

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“May the Holy Spirit open your hearts wide with generosity for the sake of the Gospel, for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for the pleasure of our loving heavenly Father.”

Very often, people ask or wonder, “what are the basic Biblical principles for Christian giving?” As we seek God’s answer to that question and as we contemplate our own giving to the Lord’s Church in response to the clear teaching of His Word, perhaps it would be wise and helpful to review those principles here. First, let us read the Word of God itself, without comment:

Matthew 6:1-4 Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

2 Corinthians 8:9-15 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. I give *my* opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do *this*, but also to desire *to do it*. But now finish doing it also, so that just as *there was* the readiness to desire it, so *there may be* also the completion of it by your ability. For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what *a person* has, not according to what he does not have. For *this* is not for the ease of others *and* for your affliction, but by way of equality -- at this present time your abundance *being a supply* for their need, so that their abundance also may become *a supply* for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, “HE WHO *gathered* MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO *gathered* LITTLE HAD NO LACK.”

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for

God loves a cheerful giver.

In our review of these four New Testament passages, we find at least ten principles for Christian giving.

1. The Lord Jesus expects and requires us to give. Jesus said to His disciples, “*when* you give” not “*if* you give” (Matthew 6:2)! Hence, Christian giving is not optional, but rather essential. We often hear folks say: “in the Old Testament they *had* to give, but not in the New -- now we only give if we want to.” This is clearly not Jesus’ teaching. He expected all His followers to be givers. Christians *will* give. ***Are you giving?***

2. The Lord Jesus wants us to give for the right reasons. Jesus warned His disciples not to give for the sake of being admired by men. “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them,” He said (Matthew 6:1). When we give, we must be careful to examine our motives. We ought to give for the glory of God and the good of His people. We must desire His approval of our giving, rather than the praise and admiration of people. ***Are you giving for God’s praise or man’s?***

3. The Lord Jesus wants us to practice benevolent or charitable giving. Jesus said, “When you give to the poor...” (Matthew 6:2,3). Jesus is specifically teaching about “alms” in this passage: aid, charity, or benevolent offerings for the needy. ***Do you give amply enough to the Church that she can be generous in benevolent giving?***

4. The Lord Jesus reminds us that our giving is ultimately to the all-seeing heavenly Father. Jesus said, “When you give...your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:3-4). When we give, we are not simply adding to the Church budget, we are giving up a thank offering to the Father Himself. Thus, we must all give “as unto the Lord.” Our ultimate goal in giving is to please Him. ***Are you conscious of the fact that your giving is to the Lord and seen by the Lord?***

5. The Bible teaches that Christian giving is an act of worship. In connection with the previous point, we see this truth stressed in another way in Paul’s words “On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save” (1 Corinthians 16:2). Paul here teaches the Corinthians that their taking up of the collection is an act of worship which is to be a part of their regular Lord’s Day worship. When we put our money in the plate, we are worshiping Almighty God in accordance with His Word. Note well, Paul is speaking here of a “collection for the saints” – this is giving by the Church to the Church for the Church. ***Did you realize that giving is a part of worship? Is your worship in this area abundant or inhibited? Is giving to the Church a priority with you?***

6. The Bible teaches that Christian giving should be done in light of the incarnation. Many Christians argue about whether the tithe (10% of our income) is still the standard for our giving to the Church (disputants usually want to show that less than 10% is fine). Paul scuttles the whole debate in one verse. He says: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Christ’s self-giving is now

the standard for our giving! We begin from the base of the tithe and aim for emulation of His self-sacrifice. Our giving is to be inspired and instructed by Christ's inexpressible gift. In light of such a challenge, who could possibly satisfy himself with asking, "how little a percentage is acceptable for me to give?" ***Do you try to get by with giving as little as possible to the Lord, or do you give in view of the Lord's costly sacrifice?***

7. The Bible teaches that Christian giving should be done in accordance with our means. Paul is quite clear on this: "For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what *a person* has, not according to what he does not have" (2 Corinthians 8:12). Put another way Paul is saying that you should give in proportion to what God has given you. He said it this way in 1 Corinthians 16:2, "each one of you is to put aside and save, *as he may prosper*." This means at least two things: (1) since we are all supposed to give proportionately, those who have more money are expected to give more [we who are particularly blessed materially must remember this], and (2) the Lord never asks us to give what we do not have, or contribute beyond our means. ***Are you really giving in proportion to the material blessings that the Lord has given you?***

8. The Bible teaches that the liberality of God's blessings to us is connected to the liberality of our Christian giving. Though it may seem strange, both Jesus and Paul emphasize that there is a relation between our giving to the Lord and the Lord's giving to us. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:6 "Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." About this matter J.A. Beet once said: "They who in giving think, not how little they can give, as they would if self-enrichment were the aim, but of benefits to be conferred, will receive back on the same principle. As they do to others, so God will act to them." Jesus reminds us of this in Matthew 6:4, where He teaches that our reward in giving comes from our heavenly Father. As someone once said: "The desire to be generous and the means to be generous both come from God." ***Do you realize that the Lord has given you much, so that you can give much?***

9. The Bible teaches that Christian giving must be willing giving, free giving. We learn this in 2 Corinthians 9:7 "Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion." But doesn't this contradict what we learned under the first principle, that Christian giving is *not* optional? The answer is, of course, no. True Christian giving is both mandatory and voluntary. It is required by God, but always willingly given by the believer. ***Is your giving to the Church something you do wholeheartedly, or indifferently, or grudgingly?***

10. The Bible teaches that Christian giving ought to be cheerful giving. As Paul says "God loves a cheerful giver." This is a truly amazing assertion. Paul assures us here that the Lord takes a special delight in those who are joyful, energetic, merry givers. ***Is there joy in your heart as you give? Can you truly be characterized as a "cheerful giver?"***

We have not come close to reaching our potential for giving. Won't you pray that we will give as we ought? That we will give for the right motives? That we will give joyously? And that we will give extravagantly?