

How Much Shall I Give?

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1. Scriptural Principles for Giving. 2. Their Practical Application.

“How much shall I give?” is a question that is often asked by sincere believers. It is a question that deserves a sincere, Bible-based answer. What we shall attempt to do in this paper is give a Bible-based answer.

Our purpose is not to cover the whole council of God on “stewardship.” Christian stewardship includes the whole Christian and his whole relation to God. St. Paul tells us: “What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s” 1 Corinthians 6: 19, 20. To be a good steward we have to recognize that we belong to God in every respect. We belong to God by virtue of creation - God made us; and we belong to God in a special sense by virtue of our redemption - God freed us from Satan and sin with the sacrifice of His Son. We also belong to God by virtue of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit: by turning us from unbelief the Holy Spirit set us apart from the godless world and brought us to God by faith. As a result of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. God even lives in us, making us His very own house.

Along with our body and spirit, everything else that we own also belongs to God, no matter how hard we work for it. “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts” Haggai 2:8. “But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth” Deuteronomy 8:18.

No matter how we Christians figure it, we and ours belong to God. We wouldn’t want it any other way. He is the first owner; we are merely second in command, or stewards of all our property. Since, as St. Paul says: “It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” 1 Cor. 4:2, we will want to be faithful to God and use our body, our spirit, our life, our talents, our minds, our speech, our possessions and resources, and our time in whatever way God chooses and shows to us in His Holy Word.

Our special concern today is faithfulness to God in our “giving.” “What is God’s way?” we ask. To arrive at an answer, we shall consider two things: (1) Scriptural principles for giving; (2) Their practical application to our lives.

1. Scriptural Principles For Giving:

The question to be answered here is: What is God’s plan for my giving? The first recorded offering to the Lord is found in Genesis 4: 3,4 - “And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering.” In Genesis 8:20 we read: “ And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” Thus Scripture suggests that offerings were brought to the Lord from the very beginning of time.

God, however, did not record His plan for giving until Exodus 20: 24. After leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt, He gathered them at Mount Sinai and said: “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen; in all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” These sacrifices were offered directly to the Lord, burnt on an, altar, They were to express complete devotion to God and thanksgiving.

It is instructive to read those directives God gave the Children of Israel before they entered the Promised Land. In Exodus 22: 29, 30 He tells them: “Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy

sheep...” In Exodus 23: 19 we read: “The first of the first-fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord Thy God.” In Exodus 25 God also commanded offerings for the construction of the tabernacle: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the Children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them: gold and silver, and brass...” and so forth. When the priesthood of Aaron and his sons was established in Exodus 28, a part of the sacrificial offerings were then designated for the support of the priesthood (Exodus 29: 26-34) and for the support of the temple work (Exodus 30: 11-]6)

This was His initial plan for giving. Its recorded order suggests a two-fold intention: 1. to be a practical confession and acknowledgement that the whole land, that all possessions in general belong to Him, and that it was God alone who blessed; and 2. , to be a means of worship and supporting His kingdom work. Included in these plans was a provision for tithing (giving 10 percent of ones possessions) for the support of the priests and the temple work (Numbers 18:21). Perhaps a more complete list of offerings is described in Deuteronomy 12:6, “And thither shall ye bring Your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks.” This list includes (1) sacrifices intended for the altar, (2) tithes and heave offerings for the support of the priests and temple work, (3) sacrifices offered in remembrance of a vow and freewill offerings, and (4) the first-born of the flocks and herds.

As we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we see a marked change in God’s plan for giving. Sacrificial offerings which were once a shadow of Christ (pointing the people to Christ’s coming and His work) are no longer needed. Christ is here. His work of redemption is completed. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us: “Wherefore He (Christ) is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people’s: for this He did once when He offered up Himself” 7:25-27.

Moreover, there are no commands for giving in the New Testament similar to the Old Testament tithe. In the Old Testament God dealt with His people as with children. God deals with His New Testament believers as with mature Christians. He gives them no laws saying: Give this much or that much. Rather he gives guidelines and asks us to determine the amount.

Although Jesus has much to say about the use of earthly goods (the widow’s mite, Mark 12: 41-44; the parable of the talents, Matthew 25: 14-30), God’s plan for New Testament giving is also clearly set forth by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. A brief study of these sections should help us determine God’s plan for our giving-today.

In 1 Corinthians 16 St. Paul speaks about an offering he is gathering from the churches in Galatia and Macedonia for the believers at Jerusalem who were suffering from famine. He begins: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.” The Corinthians wanted some guidelines on “how to give.” So do we. Here St. Paul outlines a plan for them that is regular and proportionate. Paul says: “Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”

Several points may be gleaned from this verse. First, our offerings are to be regular, “upon the first day of the week.” The first day of the week is Sunday when the early Christians worshiped. Giving and worship go hand in hand. For the sake of order and proper worship, St. Paul suggests that Christians put their giving on a regular basis by giving at every Sunday service they attend.

Secondly, St. Paul says, “Let everyone of you do it.” Paul suggest that everyone participate in this God-pleasing work. Remember that Paul is speaking to repentant and believing hearts who knew what the Apostles meant when they said: “We love Him because He first loved us” I John 4:19.

In the third place Paul says: “Let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.” Speaking to willing Christians, Paul says: “Give as God has given to you.” He suggests making the measure of God’s blessings to us determine the size of our return—gift to Him (Proportionate Giving). Lay that portion

aside, Paul says, reserve it or an offering to the Lord. From this we would imply that our offering is to be set aside first, before we spend our income on other things. Solomon, too, suggests this in Proverbs 3:9 when he says: “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.”

A look at portions of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 should also help us. Here Paul gives a more complete picture by adding other considerations that would guide the Corinthians and that will help the present-day Christian with His God-pleasing giving. Read 2 Corinthians 8: 1-15 and Chapter 9.

The first thing to note is that Paul calls giving a “Grace,” not once but eight times in these two chapters. He begins Chapter 8: “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches” NIV. Explaining that they “first gave their own selves to the Lord” and then “unto us by the will of God” verse 5, Paul encourages the Corinthians: “See that ye abound in this race also.” Giving is not something that we produce. God produces genuine Christian giving as a fruit of His saving grace at work in the hearts and lives of His redeemed children. (Those who may have hoped that this paper would solve all their congregational stewardship problems will kindly and Biblically put aside all notions. You don’t get fruit from a branch that is not attached to the Vine: John 15. Your goal should be changed hearts from which alone acceptable giving can come. An apple tree doesn’t become an apple tree because someone likes apples, but because it is an apple tree.)

The second thing we want to note is that giving is voluntary - a cheerful response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul reports that the Macedonian Christians, although poor, “were willing of themselves” 2 Cor. 8: 3. To the Corinthians he then says: “If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted...” To this willingness Paul adds cheerfulness in 2 Corinthians 9:7, saying, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” To please God and glorify God - that is our one aim in life.

The third thing to note from this section is that our offerings are to be generous. While the New Testament says nothing about tithing, Paul does say: “prove the sincerity of your love” 8:8, and “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” 9:6. Christians love the Lord because He first loved them. They also love their fellow man because he has a soul for whom Christ died. Their love will express itself in giving a generous portion of their God-given bounty for the Lord’s work. (Prof. Schuetze always cautioned us, however, that we are not to judge the measure of a person’s love for the Lord by the size of his offering.) Here, too, we note that the Lord promises to bless the generous giver, but this is never our motive for giving.

Before proceeding to section two of our paper; let us summarize the scriptural principles for giving as we have stated them:

1. Giving to the Lord is not something new, sacrifices were offered to the Lord from the beginning of time.
2. When God gave Moses the plan for the tabernacle and instituted the priesthood, He also gave Moses plans for supporting the priesthood and the temple-work through the offerings of the people.
3. God’s Old Testament plan included sacrifices, tithes, freewill offerings, and giving of the firstborn animals.
4. God’s New Testament Plan for giving treats Christians as mature believers, giving them principles or guidelines for giving.
5. God’s New Testament plan is for everyone to give regularly.
6. We are to give as God has prospered us (Proportionate, Firstfruit Giving).
7. Giving is a God-given Grace.
8. Giving is a voluntary, cheerful response to the Gospel.
9. Giving is a generous response to the Gospel.

2. The Application Of These Principles

Now we need to apply these principles to our giving. The question we want to answer is: How much shall I give? This is the hard part and where many go astray. Some simply say: Everyone should give 10 percent. Others would have you divide the church budget by the number of communicant members or family units in the congregation and this amount would be your fair-share (say \$300 per year). But God does not tell us this is His plan for New Testament giving. Nor would such answers be an application of the principles just discussed in section 1.

Instead of fixing arbitrary numbers or figures, God wants us to sit down and do some prayerful and serious planning of our own. He wants us to look to Christ and what He has given us (eternal life!), then to look to ourselves and what we have received (eternal life plus material blessings!), and finally He wants to look to others and their needs (their greatest need - the Gospel!). With these three things weighing heavily on our hearts and minds, we are to prayerfully determine what portion of our income we are going to return to the Lord each week. But what about the “size of the gift” you ask? Scripture answers: This is determined by (1) your measure of love for your Lord and (2) by the measure that “God hath prospered you.” The needs that the Lord puts before you may also be a guide for responsible, intelligent giving.

Here let us talk more specifically about “Proportionate Giving,” or giving as the Lord has blessed us. In their recent book, *The Shepherd Under Christ*, Professors Schuetze and Habeck of our Seminary in Mequon suggest:

Two factors are involved when measuring the prosperity God grants. One is the size of income, the other consists of the financial responsibilities God imposes on the individual. A smaller income with fewer responsibilities may result in a greater prosperity than a larger income with heavy financial responsibilities. All of this needs to be taken into account when Scripture says, “as God hath prospered him.”.. the chief failing of many Christians in prosperous America is that then do not recognize how greatly the Lord has prospered them materially because of the high standard of living which they look upon as “necessary.

The New Testament leaves no room for compulsory tithing as a principle for determining how much to give. It nowhere encourages the use of the tithe but does criticize those who use it self righteously (Mt. 23:23; Lk. 18:12). Although a Christian is free to use the tithe as a guide for himself, ten percent for some Christians may be giving well “beyond their power” while for others it represents far less than is possible according to the prosperity the Lord gives. In the place of the tithe, the New Testament presents a twofold measure for determining one’s gifts the measure of a Christian’s love and the measure of his prosperity. The latter is determine by his income as it relates to his God given responsibilities.¹

By this time, one thing should be evident. The responsibility for determining “How Much?” rests with you, the individual Christian, and the Lord. You, not your church board or your pastor, have been given the blessed privilege of kneeling before the Lord’s throne of grace as you determine the “size” of your gift, the portion of your income you will “give back” to the Lord.

The thing you and I are to look for and encourage in one another as fellow Christians is a voluntary, cheerful, loving attitude. Whether our gifts represent 20 percent, or 10 or 8 or 4 percent of our incomes, God desires that our gifts represent serious, prayerful, Christian planning, of the proper proportions, given with regularity. They are to be the “firstfruits” and not the leftovers, not the change in the pocket, nor the last thing we think about before leaving for church. His plan suggest taking His portion out of our paycheck first, perhaps by giving a planned percentage, and then setting it aside for the Lord, before we supply ourselves with our material needs such as food, clothes, medicines, appliances, homes, before we spend for recreation, and before we place a regular portion in savings. This means that some of you may have to rearrange your priorities in life.

¹ Page 253, *The Shepherd under Christ*, 1974, NWPH, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

This kind of giving, giving as the Lord has prospered, proportionate giving, takes giving out of the category of matching my neighbor in the pew, of settling for “what we did last year,” or giving what is left over after the bills are paid. It’s putting the Lord FIRST as He has done with us. It’s asking the Lord to bless what remains (and He does!). It’s letting the poor do as much and more than the rich in the eyes of the Lord (Cf. the widow’s mite, Mark. 12: 41-44), working hardship on no one. This will not result in equal giving, but in equitable proportionate giving. St. Paul himself said: “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that. there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack” (2 Corinthians 8: 13-15.) This will keep us all following the suggestion: “let’s all give a dollar and get the church on its feet again.”²

Yes, the sincere Christian deserves a sincere, Bible-based answer to the question: How Much Shall I Give? He deserves to know that we are not under the yoke of the Law. We are under grace and liberty. We walk in the Spirit. The love of Christ constrains us. His love alone can cause the grace of giving to abound in our midst.

² Page 18, Christian Stewardship in the Light of Scripture, Pastor D. E. Kock, a paper delivered at the Northern Wisconsin District Convention, August, 1968.