

Giving God's Way

SCRIPTURE:

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21)

In 1987, Chet Atkins and Margaret Archer wrote a song that was sung by country star, Ray Stevens, which went in part: *"If He came back tomorrow, there's something I'd like to know. Would Jesus wear a Rolex on His television show?"*

That same year, a well-known religious personality told his TV audience that if they didn't give \$8 million to his fund-raising campaign, God would call him home. Folk singer Arlo Guthrie commented wisely on this when he said, *"I firmly believe we shouldn't negotiate with any terrorist on any level"* (both of above in *Newsweek* [5/4/87], p. 17).

TV religious hucksters have given a bad name to Christian giving. Because of such abuse, preachers may be afraid to deal with this important subject. But we need to be clear on what Scripture teaches about giving. So we ask the question, *"How much should we give?"* by saying that only giving a tenth is, in most cases, to fall short; rather, God wants us to give generously as He has prospered us.

In this week's lesson I want us to conclude our series by answering five other questions that will help us give God's way: (1) Who should give? (2) Why should we give? (3) How should we give? (4) To whom should we give? (5) What will happen when we give?

1. Who should give? All believers, but not unbelievers, should give to the Lord.

Giving is a privilege and responsibility for those who have received from God the gift of eternal life. But it is wrong for churches or other Christian ministries to appeal to unbelievers for funds. 3rd John 7 mentions Christian workers who *"went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles"*. Unbelievers cannot offer good works to God. It is wrong to give an unbeliever any basis for thinking that they can gain merit before God by giving or through any other good deed.

Unbelievers frequently gripe that the church is always after their money. They are right in one sense: God is after their money, because their hearts are bound up with their treasure, and God wants their hearts to be devoted to Him. The fact that they resent giving shows the condition of their hearts. But we need to make it clear that if a person has not given his heart to God in response to God's giving of His Son on the cross to pay the penalty for his sins (2nd Corinthians 8:5), then we do not want him to give to the Lord's work. Giving should be a thank offering to God, and a person outside of Christ cannot properly give such an offering (Hebrews 13:16).

Giving is for believers, and it should be done by all believers. Poor Christians as well as rich should give to the Lord (2nd Corinthians 8:2; Luke 21:1-4). That is one reason it is troublesome to be in debt, because you can't free to give generously when you owe creditors. But even if you can't give much, you aren't exempt from giving. Those who are supported in Christian ministry are not exempt either. In fact, they should set the example (Acts 20:35).

2. Why should we give? We should give because God has first given to us and we want to please Him.

In giving, motivation is crucial. There are many ...

A. WRONG MOTIVES FOR GIVING:

- (1) **Pride.** If you give to be honored by men for your great generosity, you are giving for the wrong reason. Giving is to be done in secret before God (Matthew 6:1-4). Naming buildings or putting up plaques in honor of donors violates this principle.
- (2) **Guilt.** We should not give because we feel guilty about having so much. If we're not being good stewards of what God has entrusted to us, then we should repent and give from the right motivation.
- (3) **Greed.** Luke 6:38, "*Give, and it will be given to you,*" is wrongly used to motivate people to give so that they will get what they want materially. Jesus is not promising that if you give, God will give you more in return. He is stating the principle that if you are a generous person, others will be generous toward you. But you may give and be impoverished because you gave.
- (4) **Pressure.** Responding to high-pressure tactics of Christian fund-raisers is another wrong motive. We are not to give "*under compulsion*" (2nd Corinthians 9:7).
- (5) **Gimmicks.** This is related both to greed and pressure. All sorts of gimmicks are used to get people to give: "*For your donation, I'll send you my latest book.*" I get fund-raising phone calls where I'm told I can charge it on my Credit Card! I've been told that if I will give, the names of my loved ones will be entered in a special book to be placed in the lobby of some new building! Or, the worst is, "*We'll send you a special prayer cloth, blessed by brother so-and-so.*" These are all worldly gimmicks, opposed to biblical giving.
- (6) **Power.** Money is power. Some people threaten to take their large gifts elsewhere if you don't do what they want. That may be how politics operates, but that isn't how God's church operates. It's wrong to show preference to the wealthy (James 2:1-9). It's sin to use your money to try to buy spiritual influence (Acts 8:18-24).

B. RIGHT MOTIVES FOR GIVING:

- (1) We give because God has given to us. This is the prime motive in grace giving. God has given us everything (James 1:17). He gave His Son to provide for our salvation. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). He "*richly supplies us with all things to enjoy*" (1st Timothy 6:17). Because He has given so abundantly to us, we should respond by giving generously back to Him.
- (2) We give because we want to please God. Out of response to God's grace in our lives, we will want to please God by pursuing various spiritual goals:
 - * We want God to be glorified. God is glorified when we give from the right motives and in the right way (2nd Corinthians 9:13). God's glory is the overarching goal of the Christian life.
 - * We want our hearts to be right before God. Jesus said, "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*" (Matthew 6:21). Your heart follows your treasure. If you want your heart to be concerned with the things of God, then you must invest in His work.
 - * We want God to be our Master. "*You cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matthew 6:24). Generous giving loosens your grasp on money.
 - * We want our lives to be used by God (2nd Corinthians 9:10). God could have chosen to work apart from us, but He did not. He could have used angels or loudspeakers from heaven to spread the gospel, but He chose to use us. And it takes money to further God's

work. If you don't give, God will use someone else and you'll miss the blessing of being used of God.

* We want to lay up treasures in heaven. Investments on earth are insecure and transitory. Investments in heaven are secure and eternal. There is no more sound investment than that of reaching people with the good news of Christ. God credits money which we give to further His kingdom as fruit to our account, and He will reward us for it someday (Matthew 6:4; 19-20; 1st Timothy 6:19).

* We want our faith to grow (2nd Corinthians 9:8-11). God will provide money for you to give if you will trust Him for it. If you are willing to be a channel for God's resources, He will give you money to give. But if you bottle it up and keep it for your own comforts, the flow will dry up. Ask God to give you money to give. Then make sure you give it! That is FAITH IN ACTION!!

* We want to be a compassionate person (1st John 3:17; James 2:15-16). In a day like ours, when we're hit with so many needs from all over the world, it's easy to close up your heart and not give at all. I know we can't respond to every poor person around the world, but we need to do all we can to show compassion in the name of Christ (Matthew 25:31-46).

* We want to be a worshiper of God. Giving is a sacrifice that pleases God (Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:16). King David knew the connection between giving and worship. He said, "*I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing*" (2nd Samuel 24:24). We should like to give enough that it pinches our lifestyle. If it's convenient, it's not worship. Worship is costly.

Thus, because God has given so abundantly to us, and because we want to please Him, we should be motivated to give cheerfully and generously to His work.

3. How should we give? We should give in accordance with biblical principles.

There are several basic principles of giving:

A. WE SHOULD GIVE IN A PRE-PLANNED, SYSTEMATIC WAY.

(1st Corinthians 16:2; 2nd Corinthians 9:7). "*As he may prosper*" implies that whenever we receive income, we should give. "*The first day of the week*" implies regular giving as an act of worship. "*Just as he has purposed*" implies advance planning, not giving on impulse. In response to God's grace, each household ought to sit down and determine a fixed amount they believe God wants them to give, and then follow through systematically. We should not wait until the offering plate is coming down the aisle and then think, "*Oh no! I haven't given for a while. I'd better drop something in.*"

How do we arrive at the percentage? Pray about it and start with something above ten percent. Then trust God by increasing the percentage each year, especially if you get a raise. Warning: You'll be tempted to spend the extra on yourself! Give it as the *first fruits*, off the top, and trust God to meet your other needs.

B. WE SHOULD GIVE IN SECRET TO THE LORD, NOT IN PUBLIC BEFORE MEN.

As has already mentioned, giving because of pride, power, or human recognition is wrong. Jesus says that we are to give in secret, but with the awareness that God is watching (Matthew 6:1-4). Every time you give, do it before the Lord.

C. WE SHOULD GIVE SACRIFICIALLY AT TIMES.

The norm is, “*as God has prospered*”. But at times God wants us to give more than we think we can afford (2nd Corinthians 8:2-3, “*beyond their ability*”). Perhaps you systematically give 15% of your income. An opportunity to give comes along and the Lord says, “*I want you to dip into your savings and give \$2,000*”. Or some extra money comes your way, and the Lord says, “*Instead of 15%, I want you to give it all.*”

I read of a church of 400 members in Thailand where every member tithes. In their case, tithing is sacrificial giving, because the members all make only the U.S. equivalent of 20 cents a week, plus their rice! But because they give sacrificially, they support their own preacher, they have sent two missionary families to other hard-to-reach areas, and they generously help other poor. One other fact: each member of this church has leprosy!

Thus, all believers are to give from biblical motives in line with biblical principles.

4. To whom should we give? We should give to destitute family members, to spiritual ministries, and to the needy.

We’re all inundated with so many requests for giving. How do we sort them out and determine which ones to give to and which ones to ignore? We can’t answer that question completely, but we can give some guidelines:

A. GIVE TO DESTITUTE FAMILY MEMBERS.

This is your first priority in giving, since to fail to do it makes you worse than an unbeliever (1st Timothy 5:8). “*Your own*” refers to your immediate family: children, aged parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters. This does not include a lazy, irresponsible family member who doesn’t work and who squanders money on alcohol and drugs (2nd Thessalonians 3:10). A “*widow indeed*” (1st Timothy 5:3-16) refers to a godly woman without any family members to look after her. The church must help these, but widows with families were to be cared for by their families. It is not right to deprive your own family of the necessities of life in order to give to others.

B. GIVE TO SPIRITUAL MINISTRIES.

Since the local church is God’s ordained means for evangelism and discipleship, this ought to be next in priority for giving after destitute family members are cared for. Those who labor at preaching the Word are worthy of financial remuneration (Galatians 6:6; 1st Timothy 5:17-18). The church is also to support workers sent out to evangelize and plant new churches in places where the gospel has not penetrated (3rd John 7; 1st Corinthians 9:3-14).

You need to be wise about giving to Christian organizations. Here are some questions you can ask to get maximum effectiveness from your giving:

- * What does the organization believe? Do you know and agree with their statement of faith, their objectives, program, and methods? Is it strategic in completing the Great Commission?
- * Financial questions: Is there an audited financial statement available? How much do they spend on program versus overhead? (More than 25% on administration and fund-raising is suspect.) Does your gift go where you intended? Is your gift tax-deductible? (This may

affect the amount you can give.) Does the organization have a standard of excellence along with freedom from waste and extravagance?

* What do you know about the people involved with the organization or the person you may support? Are they people of biblical conviction and integrity? Do they depend on the Lord for their ministry and support or do they use high-pressure appeals for money? Are they clear in their objectives? Are they accountable for their ministries?

C. GIVE TO NEEDY PERSONS.

We should give to help meet physical needs: food, shelter, medicine, etc. (Matthew 25:35-40; Luke 10:30-37; Romans 12:13; 15:26-27; 1st John 3:17-18). There is an order of priority here (Galatians 6:10): First, we help believers (locally and in other areas). Second, we help others (“*all men*”) as a part of our witness, offering assistance in the name of Christ.

Thus, the general priority for giving moves outward from your immediate family, to your extended family, to the local church (including needy saints), to the outreach of the church through missions (including helping needy unbelievers).

5. What will happen when we give? When we give, God will bless with His results.

We do not have space to be exhaustive, but let me mention five results:

A. You and your family will be blessed. God blesses faith and obedience which are at the heart of biblical giving. If you give, God promises to supply your needs (not your wants! — Philippians 4:17-19).

B. Others’ needs will be met (Philippians 4:16, 18; 2nd Corinthians 8:13-14; 9:12). God’s work and workers will not be hindered. The needs of the poor will be met.

C. God will be thanked and glorified (2nd Corinthians 9:11-13, 15). He will get the praise if we give in His way.

D. The Body of Christ will be united in prayer and fellowship (2nd Corinthians 9:14). Since our hearts follow our treasure, we will be concerned about, and will pray for, those to whom we give.

E. People will spend eternity with God because of our giving. How can we put a price tag on that? What could possibly be more important?

Conclusion

If believers will give from biblical motives, in line with biblical principles and priorities, God will bless with His results.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells the story of a farmer who reported happily to his wife that their best cow had given birth to twin calves, one red and one white. He said, “*You know, I think we should dedicate one of these calves to the Lord. We’ll bring them up together, and when the time comes we’ll sell one and keep the proceeds and we’ll sell the other and give the proceeds to the Lord’s work.*”

His wife asked him which one he was going to dedicate to the Lord’s work. “*There’s no need to bother with that now,*” he replied. “*We’ll treat them both the same and when the time comes we’ll do as I say.*” And off he went.

A few months later, the farmer came into the kitchen looking miserable and unhappy. When his wife asked what was wrong, he sadly said, “*I have some bad news. The Lord’s calf died.*” “*But,*” she said, “*you had*

not decided which one was to be the Lord's calf." "Oh, yes," he said, "I had always decided it was to be the white one and that's the one that died. The Lord's calf is dead."

Lloyd-Jones observes, *"It's always the Lord's calf that dies!"* (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [Eerdmans] 2:95-96). That story shows how easy it is to have good intentions about giving to the Lord's work, but also how easy it is not to follow through.

May I ask, *"How is your account in heaven?"* Are you storing up many treasures there, so that you are rich toward God? Or are you storing up treasures here on earth? If your account in heaven is meager, there's still time. Begin now, even today, to sit down as God's steward and get your financial house in order. Purpose to begin giving God's way. And don't let God's calf die!