



Worship – Part 37
Acts of Worship – Part 25
Worshipping God with Our Treasure – Part 9
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A well known pastor and popular Christian author had this to say in the introduction of one of his books:

"I have thought about writing another book on giving for some time now. I've avoided doing another book because I had convinced myself no one would buy it. Why? Because most people feel bad enough about what they don't give and what they spend. So why would they buy a book that's going to make them feel worse, or show them how to give away more of their money from which they are so reluctant to be separated?"

The author then concluded:

"I don't want to make you feel worse I want to make you feel better. But the path to feeling better is understanding what the Bible says about giving and spending."

I would add to that last statement that after you know and understand what the Bible says the path to feeling better is to do what the Bible says.

Giving is a topic most pastors either fear preaching or they relish the opportunity. The ones who fear preaching about giving actually fear that they will offend some in attendance and will thus be an excuse for them to not show up again next week. Those who relish the opportunity to preach about giving tend to lay a major guilt trip on their congregation; badgering them until the weekly offering increases.

Beloved, I relish the opportunity to preach about giving but not because I desire to see our offerings increase. I relish the opportunity because I know from the promises of God's Word and through personal experience that the more you know and understand, and the more you are obedient to God's Word in the worship of giving, the more you will be blessed beyond measure by God.

God owns everything. The Bible uses the expression that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. The Bible tells us that God owns all the gold and all the silver. And the Bible tells us that God is ready and willing to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing on your life in such abundance that you flat out cannot contain it all. This is why I relish the opportunity to preach about giving, because I know God's formula for blessing is obedience to His Word.

Turn with me in your Bibles to a verse we looked at last time in **Proverbs 3**.

Proverbs 3:9-10, says, "**Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.**"

Let's Pray.

This passage in Proverbs is the very essence of voluntary free-will offerings. It is generous, it is by faith, and it is of the very best we have to give. God promises in this passage and in countless other passages that if we will determine in our hearts and minds to give of our lives and our financial and material means to Him, He in turn will give back to us in abundance. If you have been in church for any length of time in your life you know this principle; but if you are like most Christians you do not live out this principle.

Exodus 35-36, which we also looked at last time, showed us an instance when Moses had to restrain the people from giving because they had given more than enough. I submit to you that if all of God's children understood and obeyed His principles for handling money and giving, all needs would be met and a surplus would remain in every church and ministry.

I spent the majority of the message last time working through the principles of the Old Testament tithe. The bottom line was:

- the tithe was commanded for the nation Israel
- there were actually three separate tithes
 - an annual 10% for the support of the Levites
 - an annual 10% for the support of the feasts and festivals
 - a tri-annual 10% for the support of widows, orphans and the destitute
- tithing was then actually an annual 23% tax base for the nation
- other mandatory offerings probably brought this annual tax base up to 25-28%

The Old Testament also speaks about voluntary free-will offerings, of which we did not study, outside of the passage in Proverbs we read again tonight and the passage in Exodus that I just referred to.

The question then remains, is tithing the standard of giving for the church today?

Jesus commended tithing while scolding the Pharisees for missing the mark with their attitude and motive in their giving; but I pointed out that prior to the Cross, the Jewish people were still living under the Law, so tithing was still necessary to support the priests, the feasts and festivals, the government, and the welfare state of the Jewish people.

When Jesus died on the Cross the old system was immediately done away with. And even though the Temple remained for another 33 years, the sacrificial system, one of the primary purposes of the Temple, was eliminated; and thus, the primary purpose for the priesthood was eliminated. Shortly after the Cross, specifically at the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to dwell in all true believers; the bodies of every believer became the new Temple of our Lord. Also after the Cross, the veil of the Temple was torn in two, signifying that all believers now have access to God; all of us are priests of God, a royal priesthood as Peter calls us in his first epistle. And the vast majority of the feasts and festivals were now null and void as well.

So the overwhelming majority of the purpose for the tithe was vanquished at the Cross, or shortly thereafter. The only mention of tithing after the Gospels is in **Hebrews 7** when the writer of Hebrews is relating the story of Melchizedek, which we briefly looked

at last time. Melchizedek was a king and a priest during the time of Abraham; before the law of the tithe was put in place for the nation of Israel.

The writer of Hebrews does not take this opportunity to command that we still tithe but there are some interesting thoughts in that passage that we will study later on. Tonight I am going to begin looking at God's specific plan for giving in the church age. In the process we will see how the tithe may or may not fit.

Let me start by reading a quote from pastor and author, Dr. Gene Getz:

"God outlines for Christians of all time a definite plan for giving. Though the New Testament approach is based on broad divine principles rather than on a detailed pattern as it was for Israel, it is nevertheless specific and comprehensive. Because it is based on principles, God's New Testament plan crosses all cultural and economic boundaries. It worked in Jerusalem, Antioch, Thessalonica, and Corinth, whether the church was composed primarily of Jewish believers or Gentile Christians, or a roughly equal mix. It worked wherever the church existed, throughout the Roman world. Therefore, it will work in an affluent society in the Western world or in a deprived community in a Third World country. It is...relevant any place in the world and at any moment in history."

So for the next few sermons, I will take us through the divine principles that God has left for us in His Word concerning the worship of giving. And let me state a few warnings up front:

First, there is an inherent danger that you will build some internal walls in your mind to the teaching of Scripture on this topic. Primarily because you have already determined how, what, and where you give

Secondly, there is a danger that you will struggle with your giving because the Bible does not simply tell you to give "x" amount. And just as most churches lack in teachers, workers, and volunteers because the needs are usually not specific enough, when we do not have specifics we many times do not act at all.

Throughout my ministry I have had people tell me that God owns everything and God does not have need of anything so there is no need for me to give anything. And logically speaking that is true but God does not operate on human logic. God commands us to give and if we choose not to give we are in violation of His Word – we sin. That faulty logic could just as easily be applied to almost every other command of Scripture. God is the one who saves people so there is no need for me to live my life according to God's Word in front of people and there is no reason for me to tell them about Jesus. Logically that is also true but God's Word commands us to live righteously and to witness to those around us. Humanly speaking you can justify breaking any of God's commands but in the end you would be wrong and living in sin.

The third danger is not getting a grasp on all of the principles of giving to see how they work in concert with one another. If you only hear the few principles tonight apart from the next week or two, and you then try to build your philosophy of giving based upon

that partial information, you will be deceived and will possibly be expecting the blessing of God's promises under false pretenses.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Acts 11**.

Acts 11:27-30

The first divine principle for giving is:

1. Each According to His Ability

This particular instance in the Book of **Acts** has nothing to do with regular weekly or monthly offerings to the church but it gives us the first divine principle for giving; and that is you are to give according to your ability to give.

Now before you use this principle to excuse yourself from worshipping God through giving we must answer the question, what determines your ability to give? What is currently hindering your ability to give? Is your ability to give hindered because of how you have managed the money God has given to you?

There are legitimate times in your life when your ability to give is hindered by God. The believers in Jerusalem were in the midst of a great famine. God did not expect them to give when they could not even take care of their own basic needs due to the famine; although in **2 Corinthians 8:14**, God says the time will come when they will be able to reciprocate by giving to others when they had a need. But at this particular moment in time, the Jerusalem believers were in essence hindered by divine circumstances in their ability to give.

But I will submit to you that most Christians in this country have self-hindered their ability to give. They have squandered a good portion of what God has provided on needless and wasteful desires of the flesh. Most Christians have never been in the habit of giving when times were good so they grab hold of a principle like this when times are not so good to ease their conscience when they give little or nothing.

We waste so much of God's bounty that we can almost always claim that we do not have the ability to give. When you find yourself in the position where you think you do not have the ability to give ask yourself some questions. The questions will be different for each of us but here are a few to help you formulate your own. And remember, these questions and ones like them are for the times when you are struggling with the ability to give.

- How often do I eat out? You will spend at least 2-4 times the money on a meal at a restaurant than you would on a meal prepared at home.
- How much money do I spend on things I don't need or on bad habits? The money you spend on a box of cookies, a case of beer, a carton of cigarettes, a new DVD, etc., hinders your ability to give. But how often do we refrain from buying these items when times are tough as opposed to refraining giving when times are tough?

Now do not get me wrong here; we are not called to a vow of poverty, we are not called to never spend money on eating out, or entertainment, or cookies, but you cannot claim this divine principle as your scapegoat for not giving when you have ignored God's principles for handling your money in the first place. And most Christians in this country do not have the ability to give because of their bad habits and their disobedience to God's Word in handling the money He gives them. And as I have told you before, I've been a member of this group at various times in my life. I have never completely stopped giving, but some months my giving has been woefully short of what it should be; because I did not follow God's principles and found myself in dire straits financially.

Turn with me to **2 Corinthians 8**.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

The Macedonian Christians were giving out of their poverty. Paul says they not only gave according to their ability they gave beyond their ability; and they begged Paul to let them give.

What was the key to the Macedonians desire to worship God through giving even when they were poor? They first gave themselves to the Lord and to the leaders of the church by the will of God (**v. 5**). Worshipping the Lord through giving starts with the giving of your heart and soul and mind to the Lord, and then the giving of your time to ministry and your submission to the authority that God puts in place in the church.

In another passage Jesus commends the widow who gave two mites (probably worth much less than a penny in our society) because she gave what she had. She didn't wait for better times before she gave; she didn't determine that if she gave now she wouldn't be able to pick up a box of cookies, a pack of cigarettes, or a six-pack on the way home that day. She gave what she had and Jesus has spread the fame of this woman's selfless act of worship throughout eternity by including it in His Word.

So generally speaking, all Christians can and should participate in the worship of giving. I challenge you to give something every time the opportunity presents itself even when times are tough. If a nickel is all you have to give, and it is given with a grateful heart, God will bless the worship and obedience of you giving that nickel. And as you are faithful to give according to your ability God will increase your ability – but that is another principle we will look at later.

The second divine principle for giving is:

2. Giving Regularly, Systematically, and Proportionally

Go back a few pages with me in your bibles to **1 Corinthians 16**.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Paul provides the church with the model of giving regularly as you prosper. This means that as we receive from the Lord, and anything you receive is from the Lord according to **James 1:17**, we are to set aside a portion of that increase to give back to Him.

In Bible times most workers were paid daily, so the practice of setting aside a portion of their increase each Sunday was very practical. In our society you may be paid weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or according to when you sell something if your compensation is based on commission. The principle is that as you receive from the Lord you are to regularly put aside a portion of that increase to give to the church.

This passage also implies giving systematically, meaning you have a system for your regular giving. You don't just deposit your paycheck, pay your bills, go shopping, and then on the weekend look to see if anything is left to give to God – remember the passage we looked at in Proverbs concerning **honoring the Lord with the first of all your produce?**

The Bible indicates that God does not want your leftovers; and by leftovers, I mean God does not want you to give as an afterthought. Giving in this manner shows you truly do not want to give in the first place.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Malachi 1**.

Malachi 1:6-10

God is condemning the priests of Israel in the context of this chapter, but again, as Scripture always does, we have a divine principle that we can apply to our offerings to God. The priests were able to keep some of the animals that are brought by the people as offerings for their own consumption and their own livelihood, but which animals and which portions of animals was precisely laid out in God's Law. The priests were not following this provision of God's Law.

The people bringing the offerings were also in the wrong for they were not bringing from the best of their flocks and herds, but instead were bringing animals that were of no use to them and would most likely be put down anyway.

So when these blind and lame and sick animals were brought to the priests as offerings to the Lord, the priests would sacrifice these animals, even if they were the ones allotted to them, and they would then keep for themselves the healthy animals, even if they were the ones allotted to be sacrificed completely to God.

Besides God telling them He would not accept these disgusting offerings, He laments that He would rather that one of His priests would have the guts and the fortitude to simply shut the gates of the Temple instead of just going through the motions of making offerings to Him.

When we choose to not give to the Lord systematically we are in essence guilty of the same sin of going through the motions in our offerings to God. Giving God our leftovers is the same as an Israelite bringing a lame goat to the Temple.

So you may ask the question, how does giving according to my means fit in with giving systematically? If I do not have any means how else can I give but to give what I have left? The answer to that again goes back to your heart concerning giving, your attitude concerning giving, and your willing obedience concerning giving and the handling of your finances. And only you and God know where you stand in that regard.

I go back to the same thing I said earlier. If you only have a nickel to give and you give that nickel with a heart of worship, then God will accept and be pleased with your offering, and He will increase your ability to give as you continue to be obedient to His Word.

Don't try to analyze it, don't try to figure out how God will give to you, just believe what His Word says and be obedient – leave the details to God.

So give regularly by setting aside a portion of what you receive every time you receive; give systematically by determining in advance that you will give off the top even if it is a meager amount in your own eyes, and lastly give proportionally, meaning giving a certain percentage of you increase – and this is where many will go back to the tithe.

Last time I hopefully showed you what the Old Testament tithe was and how it does not translate to the New Testament church, so please do not take what I am about to say as contradicting that. Let me state emphatically that tithing is not commanded for the church. I just want to close tonight with a few thoughts on the model of the tithe and how it could be the pathway to giving as God would have you to today.

Giving proportionally implies giving a percentage. The New Testament does not infer a specific percentage at all, so we must carefully consider what that percentage should be. Is there anything unique about 10% and how it relates to carrying out the support of God's church as Israel supported those who led them in worship? Is there anything special about 10% being devoted to corporate worship as Israel did to support their public worship in the feasts and festivals? Is there anything pertinent to 10% being given every third year to help meet the needs of those less fortunate than us as Israel did for the orphan, the widow, the stranger, and the needy?

Is the Old Testament tithe a model for the church to consider? But beloved, if you are in this camp, just remember the model is two separate tithes of 10% annually and a third 10% every third year.

Next time we will look at some arguments for the tithe, we will look at the Book of Hebrews to determine the significance of Melchizedek and if this account has any bearing on the church, and we will explore a few more divine principles for giving. And then probably the following week we will have all the information we need to build our philosophy of giving as God has determined in His Word. I trust you will be in your place so you have a well-rounded and complete view on this act of worship.

Let's pray.