



**Worship – Part 39**  
**Acts of Worship – Part 27**  
**Worshipping God with Our Treasure – Part 11**  
**GCSP – 03/01/2008**

The first rule of successful marketing is to give the customer what they want. If it's bigger burgers then make bigger burgers. Do they want more varieties of designer coffee? The menu at Starbucks is more varied than most restaurants. Do they want ten cup holders in their minivan? Give them twenty. Companies must be quick on their feet and adjust their product offerings as the desires of the consumer changes if they want to be competitive in today's marketplace.

Unfortunately, this same consumer mindset has invaded the church (as do almost all of the world's practices). You say the church service is too long? Then we'll shorten it (one pastor has guaranteed his sermons will never last more than seven minutes). Is the church too formal? Then feel free to attend in your sweats. Is church too boring? We have a live band, comedy skits, and a laser light show.

And if the message is too confrontational, too judgmental, too exclusive, too scary, too unbelievable, too hard to understand, or too much anything else for your taste, you can easily find a church that has already bowed to your desires. Churches all over this country are more than happy to make you comfortable; to conform to the practices and wisdom of this world.

Churches today have adopted the slogan, "Tastes great and less filling"; Christianity light, as one pastor puts it. And thousands upon thousands of people who attend these churches think they are on their way to heaven, but tragically they have been deceived by this consumer driven gospel message and are actually on their way to hell.

God's message is not designed to be palatable to the world. As a matter of fact, God's message is not meant to be palatable to Christians. God's ways are not man's ways and thus His principles and His concepts are going to buck up against your ideas and your mindset. You even read about Jesus' own disciples scratching their heads trying to make the words of Christ fit into their limited and finite paradigms. Jesus was hard to understand; not from the sense of what He was saying being difficult, but from the sense of His ideas being counter to human logic.

As I have said several times over the last few weeks, God does not operate by human logic. And all too often the church valiantly makes an attempt to spiritualize human logic. When this happens, God will inevitably be crowded out of the equation and the church will find itself operating with a consumer friendly mindset.

Take the concept of faith for example. The kind of faith the Bible calls for is much too radical and irresponsible for most Christians. The term blind faith is almost condemned by the church today, but when you take the time to think about it from a biblical perspective is there truly any other kind? True faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen according to the Bible. True faith is believing and following God's Word when it doesn't make human sense, not when we can make it mesh with human sense.

Beloved, God's Word is to be read, studied, believed, and obeyed. But most Christians only casually read, rarely study, only believe what fits in with their personal philosophy, and only obey what is convenient at the time.

I am in the midst of preaching on the topic of what God's Word says about giving. It is a topic that has been abused by many preachers over the years, it is a topic that is greatly misunderstood, and it is a topic that causes more people to criticize the pastor and the church

than just about any other. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, it is no coincidence that three people who were on our mailing list for the weekly sermon on tape asked to be removed from the list shortly after I started this series. In general, people despise being told what to do with their money.

Tonight it is my plan to complete this series. I will obviously leave the Holy Spirit the room and the prerogative to adjustment my plans as He sees fit, but I am hopeful to put a bow on this topic tonight.

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

### **Hebrews 11:1-6**

Let's Pray.

There is obviously a whole sermon series that could be preached on this passage and on the topic of biblical faith, but that will have to wait for another time. Tonight I simply wanted to set the table for the completion of our current series by injecting the topic of genuine, biblical, faith into our minds as we wrap things up.

Humanly speaking the dead cannot communicate, but God tells us that through radical faith that defies human logic, Abel still speaks today. Humanly speaking a person cannot just disappear, but through radical faith Enoch did just that. And apart from this kind of radical, logic defying faith, God says we cannot please Him. It is my desire that I please Him not only with my giving but with all of my life. I trust this is also your desire tonight.

We have covered the Old Testament tithe and hopefully shown you that tithing is not commanded for the church today, even though there may be some wisdom in using the tithe as a basis, or yardstick, for your giving. We have also looked at seven divine principles for giving in the New Testament, which are:

1. Each According to His Ability
2. Giving Regularly, Systematically, and Proportionally
3. Responding Immediately
4. Giving Based on Faith Promises
5. Giving Willingly
6. Avoiding Embarrassment
7. Planning Ahead for Emergency Giving

If you would like more detail I recommend that you grab the last two or three tapes so you can study the Scriptures that back up these divine principles.

We were primarily in **2 Corinthians 8-9** last week for the majority of these principles and I would like for you to turn there again. We will skip around a bit to support divine principle number eight, which is:

8. Being Accountable

When it comes to the worship of giving, many Christians have good intentions. Like the Corinthian believers we may initially respond with a great measure of enthusiasm, but also like the Corinthians, it may be easy to forget our commitments. Paul took several steps to make sure the Corinthians followed through with their commitments.

### **2 Corinthians 8:6**

Paul sent Titus to help them. The very presence of Titus would be a vivid reminder to fulfill their promises.

### **2 Corinthians 8:10-11**

Paul obviously wrote them a personal letter to remind them and he encourages them to follow through with their generous commitment.

### **2 Corinthians 9:3**

Paul sends a whole contingency of fellow believers to encourage the Corinthians to be completely prepared to follow through with their vow.

### **2 Corinthians 9:4**

Paul finally alerts them to the fact that he will also be visiting soon – possibly with some of the Macedonian believers who followed the example of the Corinthians in making the commitment to give, but who also had already followed through with their commitment even though they were living in deep poverty.

Accountability is the divine principle that Paul is teaching here. He shows us the obvious fact that humans can simply forget what they have set out to do, and he implies that we can at times allow our circumstances and desires to overshadow the needs of others. We need to be held accountable when we make financial commitments to God's work. We are already accountable to God when we make a commitment, but if that is not enough then call on a brother or sister in Christ to help hold you to that commitment.

The next divine principle is one that may help those who currently find themselves in a position where financially it is difficult if not impossible to give much at all.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Acts 9**.

### **Acts 9:36-39**

#### 9. Giving What We Have to Give

Tabitha may or may not have had the means to give in a financial way to the church in Joppa, but we see in this passage that she used her talents and abilities to provide clothing for the other believers.

Each of us has a unique set of skills and abilities and spiritual gifts that the Lord has blessed us with. Since we have been created to glorify God with our whole being, and since the Bible is abundantly clear that we are to use our gifts and talents to the benefit of others, we have a way to give even when finances are tight.

Sometimes our financial condition is self-inflicted and we must suffer the consequences for such actions. We must then study our Bibles, repent of any disobedience, seek out wise counsel from fellow Christians who have exhibited an understanding of biblical stewardship, and take the necessary steps to correct our ways.

But sometimes our financial condition is beyond our control as was the case with the Jerusalem church during the time setting from 2 Corinthians. Be careful to not deceive yourself in this regard; most of the financial struggles of American Christians falls into the first category of being self-inflicted, not in this second category of being beyond their control. We have been blessed beyond measure in this country and the only excuse most Christians can claim is ignorance of God's principles for handling money or disobedience of God's principles.

Regardless of the reason, the good news is that God allows us to start again. You can't change the past and you can't correct the past overnight. You can only start over again now. If you have genuinely repented of any past sins and if you are making the effort to learn and obey God now, nobody has the right to hold your past over you, nobody has the right to bring up your past failures, and you don't even have the right to feel guilty about it. Start again.

And during this transition do like Tabitha and give what it is you have to give. Chop wood for a neighbor or a shut-in; make clothes if you have that skill, give of your time by writing notes of encouragement, visiting those who need a friend, praying for others, or whatever else you have the ability to do. The principle is to give what you have to give. Be faithful with what you have and God will add to that the ability to give financially as you are obedient to his Word.

Turn again with me in your Bibles to **2 Corinthians 8-9**.

#### 10. Supporting Your Local Church

Your giving does not have to be exclusive to your church but the model is for your church to be the primary recipient of your giving.

#### **2 Corinthians 8:1; 18-19; 23**

We are directed to give to the poor in Scripture, we are directed to support the pastors of the church in Scripture, and we are directed to maintain the church in Scripture. There are obviously many other worthy ministries that could not go on without the support of Christians and I am not saying that you should not support these ministries, but the first priority of your giving is your local church.

After you are confident that you are being obedient to God's call of supporting your local church, then you are free to distribute God's wealth to other deserving ministries.

Before you determine to give outside the church, consider the following questions to serve as a general guideline:

- To what extent are you supporting those who are ministering to you and your family?
- What percentage of your income are you actually giving to your local church? As we have already discussed, the tithe is not commanded in the New Testament but it is a model we find in the Old Testament. Israel was to give 10% for the support of their spiritual leaders. If you consider using this biblical model today, then you may want to use a minimum of 10% as a guideline before you give to other ministries outside the church.
- What do you know about the other ministries you give to? What kind of accountability do they have in place for the funds they receive? What kind of reputation does the organization and the leaders have in the Christian community?

We need to be careful and discerning. Most of the outside ministries I support are ministries to teach me. I can support that by a Scripture we looked at last week – **Galatians 6:6**. "**The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches.**" I also give to individual missionaries as is modeled for us throughout the Bible, but the overwhelming bulk of my giving is to this church, which is modeled for us in the Book of Acts, especially chapters 1-6.

This leads us to divine principle number eleven:

#### 11. Recognizing Our Obligations

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Romans 15**.

### **Romans 15:25-27**

Even though the Book of Romans is found prior to 1 & 2 Corinthians in your Bibles it was written after. Corinth falls into the region called Achaia so we can rightfully assume that they did indeed follow through with their commitment of giving.

Yes, we are to give willingly, and yes, we are to give based upon our own heart decision, but we also have an obligation to give. And while these two concepts may seem to contradict each other they actually fall in line with many other principles of Scripture.

We are obligated to present ourselves to God because of His glorious gift of salvation, but at the same time we are to voluntarily present ourselves to God, responding freely to His mercy, love and grace.

There is no contradiction. Giving is a blessed obligation, not an oppressive burden.

Lastly, I want to warn you to be careful to not be subjective in your giving; meaning basing your giving on your internal emotions.

### 12. Avoid Subjectivity in Your Giving

If you have not immersed yourself in God's Word your understanding of the promptings of the Holy Spirit will be minimal at best. Be careful to confirm any inner promptings with the Word of God. The Holy Spirit will never prompt you to do anything that contradicts God's written Word. If you do find a contradiction then you can rest assured that that inner prompting was not of the Spirit. Always evaluate the direction you feel led to go by Scripture. This applies to all areas of your life, including your giving.

You cannot trust your emotions, you cannot trust your heart, and you cannot even trust your past experiences; you can only trust God's Word.

So let me try to summarize in our last few moments together this evening.

#### The amount you give is voluntary.

All of the New Testament passages show us the importance of giving and when taken as whole we can clearly see that giving is indeed a command of Scripture, but nowhere are we told how much to give. The amount you give is based on your heart attitude before the Lord. I would challenge you to visually picture yourself standing before the throne asking Him how much you should give. Don't go before Him with spreadsheets and calculations and reports, but instead go before Him with an open mind and a willing and obedient heart.

#### To what extent do you desire to be blessed by God?

Scripture is clear that we will be blessed financially and materially in correlation to the amount that we trust God with in our giving. We have all heard the phrase that you cannot out give God and the Bible confirms this.

Several parables that our Lord taught tell us that if we are faithful in the little things we will be blessed with greater things; and in these parables the little things always refer to money and material possessions. As you are found to be faithful in the use of money and material possessions God will supply you with more to continue to be faithful with. And beloved, God's Word does not put a cap on how much He can and will bless His faithful servants with as they are found to be faithful stewards of His infinite riches. So how much do you want to be blessed?

Fulfill your commitments.

Be careful in making vows to God, but when you are led by the Holy Spirit to do so, be sure to complete what you begin.

Give proportionally.

If you have very little then your giving will be very little. If you have much then your giving should be much. Whether you have determined to give 1%, 10%, or 50%, your giving needs to be proportionate to what God has blessed you with.

Give as an expression of love for God.

A willing and lavish gift is what the Father desires from all of us. As I said before, God does not need your money but He commands you to give anyway for your own benefit. When you reach the point of giving with joy and love you have found the key.

Give as an example for others.

The Corinthians were an example for the other churches when they first began to give. In Acts 4, Barnabas gave and the entire church was encouraged. When the needs of the church are being met without a constant plea for funds, and when the church can respond immediately to needs because funds are always available, I don't know about you but I am greatly encouraged and thankful to the Lord for His abundant blessing and provision.

The generous Christian never needs to fear not having enough. God has promised to provide for your needs as you are faithful to His Word.

It is a sin to worry and it is a sin to not trust in the Lord, so repent of any past sins, begin immediately to follow God's Word for handling your finances, give generously and willingly, and be expectant of His abundant blessing. Worship the Lord with your treasure and you will never be disappointed.

Let's pray.