

Road to Fullness – Conclusion of the Series

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22 September 2019

1. CHRISTIAN CENTRE MEMBERSHIP AND GRACE GIVING

2 Cor. 8:7 *"But just as you excel in everything - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and your love for us - see also that you excel in this grace of giving,"*

Sadly, many churches are perceived to be money-making corporations. At Christian Centre we have earnestly sought God on what our approach to money should be, and how we should ensure that we excel in giving whilst not compromising our value of grace and spiritual freedom.

The power of the gospel

Through faith in the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit believers are born again and become children of God and citizens of his kingdom.

Citizens and members of the church of Jesus Christ

Eph 2:19-22 *"That is why you are no longer foreigners and outsiders but citizens together with God's people and members of God's family. You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone. In him all the parts of the building fit together and grow into a holy temple in the Lord. Through him you, also, are being built in the Spirit together with others into a place where God lives,"*

Ecclesia - Part of a community of believers called together for a specific purpose

We are delighted to have you as part of our community of Christ followers. It is our desire to fulfil God's mission and see his kingdom operate on earth. We are on mission together. The following mission statement articulates our God-given mandate: "We are a diverse people united in Christ; deployed everywhere, advancing God's kingdom by living the way Jesus showed us to live and influencing others to do the same."

Provision for the Vision

We believe God will provide for the vision he has given us. Each member has a part to play in God's great plan. We invite you to freely and generously contribute your gifts, skills, time, resources and finances towards God's kingdom mission assigned to us as a church community.

Victorious kingdom financial living

As a church leadership we commit ourselves to help teach, disciple and mentor our members to live a victorious kingdom life. It is our desire to see you prosper in every area of your life.

How much must I give to our church?

According to God's principles of New Testament giving, you give as much as you can!

No collection drives, but yes, we have needs

In our church, we do not use pressure or gimmicks to get people to give. We want your giving to be a matter between you and God, based on your response to the love he showed you at the cross. If you believe in the work of our church, then give generously as God has prospered you, out of love for him.

But don't assume that because we don't apply pressure, we don't have needs. We believe it is legitimate to inform the church family of needs so that they can give wisely. And indeed we do have needs: to meet our monthly ministry budget; to facilitate the vision God has given us; to preach the gospel; to fund initiatives to help transform our city; to maintain and develop the property God has given us; and to acquire necessary equipment.

We believe that by helping God's people to get their hearts right before him and by teaching what his Word says about money and giving, the needs of the church will be met. Indeed, as we all respond to God's grace by giving generously, all our needs will be met.

2. AIM TO TITHE OR TAKE AIM AT THE TITHE?

A tithe was thought to be the basic minimum for Christian giving. The "offering" was regarded as a voluntary gift above and beyond the tithe. This is still regarded by many Christians and churches as the pattern for New Testament giving.

Old Testament Tithes

Tithing is certainly a biblical concept. Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, the king-priest of Salem (Jerusalem) after his victory over the Mesopotamian kings (Gen 14:20). Under Mosaic law, the Israelites were to give a tithe of their crops and herds to the Lord (Lev 30-32).

Deuteronomy 14 provides more details on Mosaic law tithing. Here we discover that there were two annual tithes and a third tithe to be offered every three years:

These three tithes would amount to somewhere between 20 to 23% of their gross income annually.

The required tithes were in addition to other religious obligations mandated by Mosaic law including the giving of first fruits, first born animals, redemption money for a first born child, offerings required for the release of vows, the annual half-shekel temple tax, annual wood-gathering and free will offerings. The sum of religious obligations levied on the people by the various Old Testament codes was frankly enormous.

Does tithing apply to New Covenant believers?

This Old Testament tithe is not what most churches have in mind when they advocate tithing.

New Testament Giving

Significantly, the tithe is never mentioned in the New Testament as a pattern for Christian giving. Rather, the New Testament pattern is proportionate giving - which may be more, or less than a tithe.

Paul sets out three guidelines of New Covenant giving in 1 Cor 16:1-4:

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me."

First, giving should be regular ("on the first day of the week"), not occasional or in a haphazard manner. Giving should be a part of the believer's regular lifestyle of worship.

Second, giving should be proportionate to your circumstances. The poor may have less to give after deducting living expenses. The wealthy will have more to share. The amount given is not as important as the heart attitude of the worshiper. Jesus deemed the giving by the widow who offered two copper coins to be much more than the rich who gave "out of their surplus" while she gave "out of her poverty", Luke 21:4.

Third, giving should not be in response to pressure.

Not only was tithing *not* taught by Jesus or his apostles, but it is focused on fulfilling an obligation rather than responding from the heart. As such it can hinder a person by making them think they have done all that is required of them by God. New Covenant giving on the other hand, is an act of worship from the heart. The amount given should be in proportion to how one has prospered. That could be 5%, 10%, 15% or more. God is pleased when our giving reflects our love for him regardless of the percentage or amount.

3. GENEROUS GRACE GIVING IS THE NEW TESTAMENT STANDARD

When we say "grace" many people, unfortunately, connect it with a hang-loose, undisciplined lifestyle. But that is not grace! Nor is grace the point of balance between legalism and licentiousness. Rather, grace totally opposes both legalism and licentiousness, which in fact, are two sides of the same coin.

Legalism and licentiousness both operate on the principle of the flesh. Legalism is an attempt to earn standing with God through human effort and leads to pride or condemnation, depending on how well you perform. Licentiousness casts off all restraint and lives to gratify the flesh.

God's grace is neither. It is his unmerited favour based on Christ's sacrifice. The motivating power in grace is the indwelling Spirit of God. When we operate under grace we respond

out of love and gratitude to God. This depends on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to conform our lives to God's standard and Christ's example.

With this basic understanding of grace, let us look at some of the things that grace giving is not and then some of the things that it is.

Grace giving is not:

- **Random and irresponsible.** It does not mean that you give every now and then, hit and miss. Rather, it is planned and systematic (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 9:7).
- **Based on feelings.** Being under grace does not mean living by feelings. Living under grace means walking by faith and in obedience in response to God's love, empowered by his Spirit. There are many commands under grace. For example, "*You shall love your neighbour as you love yourself,*" Mark 12:31 ESV.
- **Usually less than the requirement of the law.** God's grace should motivate us to excel far beyond the minimum of the law (1 Cor 15:10).
- **Giving God the leftovers.** God deserves the best, not what is just convenient. If we love God with our entire heart, soul, mind and strength, then we won't simply give him what is left over once the bills are paid. He deserves first place.
- In summary, grace giving is not sloppy, irresponsible, haphazard giving whenever we have the urge.

Grace giving is based on:

- **God's example in Christ** (2 Cor 8:9). Surely you are glad, more likely relieved, that God did not just give a tenth. Rather he gave it all. In heaven the Lord Jesus Christ was infinitely rich. He dwelt in heaven's unimaginable splendour, far apart from the sin and corruption of this world. But he gave it all up, laid aside all his privileges, and took on human flesh. He could have chosen to be born on earth as a prince in palatial splendour. Instead he was born and lived in poverty. And he impoverished himself to the maximum by taking upon himself the sin of the human race so that we might become his righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). Grace giving looks to the nail-pierced hands of the Lord Jesus, who gave his life so that we might be rescued from the wrath of God. It asks, "Lord, you gave all for me, what can I give back to you?"
- **The concept of stewardship.** "*You are not your own, for you have been bought with a price ...*" (1 Cor 6:19-20). All that we are and have belongs to God, not just a tenth. I am merely the steward of his resources. As a good steward, I use the owner's resources to further his work (see Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 11:27-30 as examples).
- **Inner motivation, not outward compulsion** (2 Cor 8:3-5; 9:7). Motive and attitude are crucial. It is better to give a small amount based on a loving response to God's grace than to give a large amount based on outward pressure or pride. Note the attitude of

the Macedonian believers: they had an abundance of joy (2 Cor 8:2), they gave of their own accord (8:3), they begged with much entreaty for the privilege of sharing in the relief of the saints (8:4), first they gave themselves to the Lord (8:5), they had both readiness and desire (8:10-12, 9:2), and they gave cheerfully, not grudgingly or under compulsion (9:7).

We should not ask ourselves, "How much do I have to give?" but "How much can I give?" We should not wait for someone to pressure us with a need - we should look for needs that we can meet (8:4). Christians ought to give based upon inner motivation, not as a result of outward pressure.

- **A new relationship with the Holy Spirit, not the old dispensation of the law.** According to Romans 8:14, "*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God*". Galatians 5:18 tells us, "*... if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*". The context of both verses shows that Paul is talking about the Holy Spirit leading the believer into righteous, godly living. In Galatians, such righteous living is spelled out in the context, partly, of sharing financial resources (Gal 6:6-10).

It is easier in some ways to follow a set of rules. Just give your 10% and that takes care of the matter. But God wants us to be led by the Holy Spirit. That may be kind of scary! The Holy Spirit might want me to give 35% or who knows how much? The point is, I'm not living by rules, but in a relationship with the living God.

- **How much God has prospered you.** "*As he may prosper*", 1 Cor 16:2; "*in the proportion that [they] had means*," Acts 11:29, and "*according to their means... and beyond their means, of their own accord*", 2 Cor 8:3, 11, 12. Generally, the early believers gave according to their ability, and in some cases beyond their ability. Sometimes you should give sacrificially, but the general principle is, give as God has prospered you.

When God entrusts us with more money, instead of spending it on more stuff that we have to protect from moths, rust and thieves, we should ask, "Lord, how do you want this money to be used in your kingdom?" As God gives you more, you should increase the percentage you give, not just the amount. If you have enough to live on comfortably, then invest the rest where God pays guaranteed, eternal dividends.

But here's the catch: we need to start giving where we're at, and not put it off until someday when we're rich. The Macedonians gave amidst their own great affliction, despite deep poverty (2 Cor 8:2). Jesus commended the poor widow who gave all she had to live on, but he was not impressed with the large gifts of the rich because they had so much left over (Mark 12:41-44).

CONCLUSION

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