

CHRISTIAN GIVING ACCORDING TO THE EVERLASTING COVENANT OF GRACE

By Elder Bobby Poe

In the Everlasting Covenant of Grace as in the Covenant of the Law as given to Israel, there is a prominent place devoted to giving. The purpose for tithing under the Law Covenant was for the support of the Levite (the priest), the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. (Deut. 14:28-29). It is very similar under the Covenant of Grace, where giving is for the support of the ministry, widows, the fatherless, and the poor. (1 Cor. 9:7-11; Rom. 15:26; Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:9; James 1:27; Matt. 25:34-40; 1 John 3: 17).

The question may be raised, why did God give a definite standard under the law (the tithe or 10%) for the purpose of supporting the Levites, strangers, widows, and the fatherless, and did not specify such a standard under the Covenant of Grace? Could it be because our needs would be less? I think not. Jesus says in Matt. 26:11, "For ye have the poor always with you..." There will always be a need for the support of the ministry. There will always be widows and orphans. It seems to me the difference can be found in the kinds of people each covenant governed. The Law Covenant ruled both believers and unbelievers, and a definite standard was needed. The Covenant of Grace rules over believers only, and love is its motivator. Love will carry God's child further into obedience than the rule of law required. This was demonstrated early in the book of Acts as the young church began to carry out the mandate of Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:32). "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." Continuing in Acts 4: 33-37, one can readily see the power of the grace of God which governed the lives of the believers.

The design of the Covenant of Grace is to gain rule over the believer by winning his heart. (Prov. 4:23) "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." When God has won the sinner by winning his heart, He then is able to control every area of his life- his family life, his professional or business life (both employee and employer), his social life, his recreation, his church life, and even his pocket book. Man will never be perfect in this earthly life because he is still hindered by the "old man" or the flesh; but God's child does yield obedience to God from the heart.

The most magnificent motivation to giving is the Christian's correct view of Christ. Having been brought by the Holy Spirit to understand the tremendous gift of Christ when Christ gave His all to save him, the Christian is motivated to give of himself in the service of Christ, and this includes giving of his money or income. (2 Cor. 8:9) "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

GIVING IS A GRACE:

Generosity is one proof of the grace of God. (2 Cor. 8:1-3) "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves..." Also see 2 Cor. 8:7 "Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also." The grace of God received into one's heart will make him a generous person.

GIVING IS A PROOF OF ONES LOVE:

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(2 Cor. 8:8, 24) “I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love... Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.” (1 John 3:17) “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” Love will go far in carrying out the revealed will of God. Love to God and to one's neighbor stands out in Scripture as the hinge upon which everything else swings.

The above Scriptures reveal that for giving to be acceptable unto God, the state of the heart and the focus of the giving is of the utmost importance.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE HEART:

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(2 Cor. 9:7) “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 8:12) “For if there be first a willing mind...” That which one gives should first come forth from the heart. There should be the free consent of the heart, not with grief because he is giving what he wants for himself, nor because he is pressured by what others will think or say. The heart should be cheerful and delighted in what is given.

THE FOCUS OF GIVING IS UNTO GOD:

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Giving is an act of obedience, and obedience is always done first unto God and with a view to pleasing God. If we are giving to the preacher or poor widow or orphan and they do not please us, we might withhold from giving as we should; but if we are giving as unto the Lord our hearts will be generous. God always and forever deserves our best. He has never let one of His children down. Man, whom we support with our giving, may let us down, but God has never turned His back on His child. For our giving to be consistent, our focus must be unto the Lord.

GIVING IS AN ACT OF FAITH:

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When one gives, he is trusting God to bless the balance of his income to be sufficient for his needs, and that which he gives to be sufficient for those whom he helps. (2 Cor. 8:15) “As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.” (2 Cor. 9:10) “Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness...” (Matt. 6:33) “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” God can multiply one's income to stretch far or he can cause it to shrink, as if it has taken wings and vanished.

HONESTY IN GIVING IS THE ONLY POLICY:

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After Barnabas and others had given so generously in Acts 4:34-37, Ananias and Sapphira feigned to do the same. They only gave a part of the price of the possession which they had sold, but lied and said it was the full price. In Acts 5:3 Peter said, “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” Ananias and Sapphira both lost their lives, not because they didn't give all from the sale of their possession, but because they lied. This

happened only once in Scripture, but God doesn't need to keep repeating His word to get His message across to His obedient child. Once is enough. The attitude, desire, and will of the believer is very important under the Covenant of Grace. Hypocrisy is a definite "no." Deceit and lying are extremely dangerous. God looks upon the heart.

GOD IS TO COME FIRST IN ALL THINGS:

The first priority in the life of God's child should be his family. (1 Tim. 5:8) "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." The first institution which God established was the family. When one serves his family according to the Scriptures, he is serving God, and putting God first. When one neglects his family by failing to obey what the Scriptures say is his duty, he is disobeying God and putting something before obedience to God. The Jews in Mark 7: 9-13 has thwarted their responsibility to honor their father and mother by saying they had pledged their wealth to the Temple treasury by calling it "Corban." They did this in order to shirk their responsibility toward their parents. Jesus rebuked them for their actions.

When God has prospered one to have more than the needs (not luxury) of his family; is there an example of Scripture to follow? I believe Abraham is that example. My reasons for using Abraham are as follows:

There are many types and representative characters in the Old Testament. In Genesis there are eleven chapters devoted to all that happened before Abraham came on the scene. Then the next 13 chapters are devoted to the life of this one man. This man is a very important person in the revelation which God has given us. I believe Abraham represents the child of God who walks by faith and not by sight. The Jews had great respect for Abraham, who was called the father of the Jews. Many Jews were trusting in their works to save them, but Paul shows that Abraham was not justified by his works. (Rom. 4:3) "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness..." It was not Abraham's faith which was counted for righteousness, but the object of his faith, Jesus Christ. (Gal. 3:16) "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Since God has devoted so much space in the Scriptures to this one person, Abraham, the student of Scripture should be made to wonder why. Abraham is not only prominent in the Old Testament, but also in the New. I believe the reason is found in Rom. 4:11. "That he [Abraham] might be the father of all them that believe..." The Scripture makes it plain: not only is Abraham the father of Jewish believers, but of the Gentiles also. Abraham is a type or representative of the child of God walking by faith and not by sight. The Old Testament children of God and also the New Testament children of God all walked by faith. Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38; 2 Cor. 5:7.

If all of God's children are to walk by faith and not by sight, and if God has plainly given to us a person who represents such a child of God, would we not want to study his life to see how he walked and lived? It seems to me that since Abraham is a representative character of one who walks by faith and not by sight it should not seem incredible that a child of God, who has studied Abraham's life and had been blessed in material things, would want to follow his example in giving. To me such behavior should be commendable. When God's child has been blessed to prosper and out of a loving and willing heart gives one-tenth, using Abraham as his example, that is not being legalistic, but is acting out of

obedience of faith. Legalism is doing something to appear righteous before men and God. The focus of legalism is self. The focus of the obedience of faith is God. Obedience of faith is done out of love for God and for God's glory. Abraham was never under the law as given to Moses. That came over 400 years after Abraham. See Gal. 3:17. Abraham's life was not lived according to law, but was lived according to the obedience of faith.

In Genesis 14, when Abraham received the news that his nephew, Lot, had been captured by the kings who had defeated the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, he took 318 servants and pursued them. Abraham and his servants defeated the armies which had taken Lot and others captive. He delivered the people and all the goods which had he taken. Upon his return Melchizedek met Abraham and blessed him. (Gen. 14:19-20) "And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he[Abraham] gave him tithes of all." God had blessed Abraham greatly. God had made Abraham prosper. Abraham gave freely, willingly, and generously, not because he was under law to give, but because he had a willing heart. 1 Cor. 16:2 says, "upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him." When God has prospered a person and the grace of God has made his heart generous, and he delights to give, I believe he is to be commended for following Abraham's example. Abraham's example does not limit God's child who has been blessed to prosper in material things; he may give much, much more than the tithe which Abraham gave. Many of the saints of God have done so. Remember Barnabas' outstanding example. Love will carry God's "born again" child far beyond the rule of law.

In the Covenant of Grace there is no commandment requiring every church member to give the same percentage of his income. In the church there will be the poor, who barely have enough to cover their family needs. Others will be more prosperous and can give like Barnabas did in Acts 4:36-37. See 2 Cor. 8:14-14: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. 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..."

When we give our money, we only return a small portion of that which God has already given to us. (Deut. 8:18) "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth..." (1 Chron. 29:14) "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."