



Giving to the Church

Psalm 50:7-15; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

1. God doesn't need our money (Psalm 50:7-13)

2. God wants us to give ... with proper motives (Psalm 50:14-15; 2 Cor. 9:6-8)

3. Some Practical Considerations

As you know, up until this point in the life of Rock Valley Bible Church, we have not taken an offering of any kind. There are several reasons why we haven't done so yet. Many of you have regularly attended Kishwaukee Bible Church in the past, have given to the ministry there in DeKalb, and have continued to do so while we have begun to meet up here. Indeed, our ministry here in Rockford is under the umbrella of the ministry in DeKalb. We are an outreach of the church in DeKalb. Our oversight comes from the elders in DeKalb. Our financial support comes from DeKalb.

Up until this point, I haven't really felt the need for us to begin taking an offering here in Rockford. But the time has come when I believe that it is appropriate for us to begin taking an offering to support the work of the church here in Rockford. But I didn't want to begin taking an offering until I had the opportunity to teach on a proper, Biblical perspective of giving to the church. Thus, in our series on the church, we arrive at the topic, "Giving to the Church."

In our country today, there is a stigma with religious leaders asking for money. Many religious leaders on television have given the church of Jesus Christ a horrible reputation as much of their air time is spent on requesting people to send them money to support the ministry. We have seen religious leaders fall due to great financial scandal in their organizations. On several occasions, I have had been ridiculed by those outside the church as being like those on TV, who say, "What do you do, Steve, do you put your hands in the air and say, 'Give me your money and God will bless you!'"

As a result, religious leaders in general have been the object of ridicule. For instance, the story is told of a little boy who swallowed a coin. The frantic mother cried to her husband, "George, quick call the doctor! Johnny just swallowed a coin." The father replied, "I think we ought to send for the minister. He can get money out of anybody."

But don't think that this is anything new. Peter warned of the false prophets who "in their greed will exploit you with false words" (2 Peter 2:3). He said that these false prophets have hearts "trained in greed" (2 Peter 2:14). Paul was accused of being greedy while he was with the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:5), an accusation, which he forcefully denied. Jude warns of those who will "flatter people for the sake of gaining an advantage" (Jude 16). The stigma of greedy, religious leaders isn't a new phenomenon.

There have always been ear ticklers who are ready and willing to satisfy the religious desires of others for the sake of money (2 Tim. 4:3). In Judges 17, we are told of a Levite being bought by the family of Micah to be their personal priest. The false prophets of Israel prophesied, "Peace, Peace, but there is no peace" (Jer. 8:11). Jeremiah renounced, "From the least even to the greatest, everyone is greedy for gain; From the prophet even to the priest, everyone practices deceit" (Jer. 8:10).

For that reason, we must be very careful in how we handle this whole matter of giving to the church. Tonight, I simply want to look at a few principles that relate to this whole matter of giving. We will by no means be exhaustive.

Let's start where we need to begin.... with God.

1. God doesn't need our money (Psalm 50:7-13)

Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 50 and enter with me into God's courtroom. Israel is on trial. God is both the Judge (verse 6b) and the prosecuting attorney. We will pick up the prosecution's argument beginning with **verse 7**, "Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God."

God is going to speak **against** Israel, who thought that their religiosity was going to save them. They thought that God needed the sacrifices that they offered to Him.

Verse 8, "I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, And your burnt offerings are continually before Me."

God first admits that they were a religious people. Your sacrifices are "continually before Me." They were correct in their external obedience to the LORD to offer to Him the continual sacrifices which He required. Their repeated offerings according to the Law were correct and commendable. Their religious activity wasn't their problem.

As we shall see, their problem was that they thought that God needed their sacrifices to thrive. Their theology was simply that of the pagan gods all around them, who supposedly thrived on the sacrifices offered to them. They naturally thought that God needed them and their

sacrifices. But He doesn't. God is not like this.

So God says in **verse 9**, "I shall take no young bull out of your house, Nor male goats out of your folds.

Essentially, God is saying, "I will not accept your sacrifices. If you think that I need your sacrifices, I don't want them. I won't have them. Take them back" Then He puts forth his reasons in **verses 10-13**, "For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all it contains. Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, Or drink the blood of male goats?"

My youngest child learned a new word this week. Her new word is "Mine!!!" I know that many of you who have children remember well when your children learned this word. I know that many of you parents were quick to correct the bad theology of our little children, who grab a toy from another child and say, "Mine!" I know that many of you taught your children, "No, it's not yours. It is all of ours. You need to learn to share."

Yet, I ask you, how is your own theology? Whatever you may call your possessions, they are really God's possession. Who do you think owns your house? If you have or are buying a house, somebody else called it "mine" before you lived there (unless you built your house). When your body lies in the grave, somebody after you will call it "mine" (unless you live a very old house). Even your house isn't "mine." But what about other things? What about your car, your truck, your clothes, your books, your sports memorabilia, your furniture, your computer, your stereo, your couch, your bed, ...? Do you really consider these things your possession or God's possession? You children, what about your dolls, your toys, or your LEGO's? Do you think that they are your possession?

They are God's possession. It may look like they are yours, but they are not. They are God's. It is summed up nicely in verse 12: "The world is Mine, and all it contains" God owns it all. It has been said in many different ways elsewhere....

Moses said it this way, "to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it."

(Deut. 10:14; see also Ex. 9:29; 19:5).

Ethan, the Ezrahite wrote, "The heavens are Thine, the earth also is Thine; The world and all it contains, Thou hast founded them" (Psalm 89:11).

David simply said "The earth is the LORD's and all it contains" (Psalm 24:1).

As a side note, this is why God cannot break the eighth commandment, which says, "Thou shalt not steal." You cannot be a thief if you own it all anyway!

We need to remember the words of the hymn ...

We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be,
All that we have is Thine, alone,
A trust, O LORD, from Thee.

We only give to God what he has first given to us. David expresses this thought nicely when he had received offerings to build the temple. He prayed, "Both **riches and honor come from Thee**, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. ... Who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For **all things come from Thee, and from Thy hand we have given Thee**. ... O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build Thee a house for Thy holy name, **it is from Thy hand, and all is Thine**" (1 Chron. 29:12,14,16).

With respect to giving to the church, we need to realize that God is not a beggar, who needs what you have to accomplish His work on this earth. The beggar asks, because he has no resources to meet his need. But God has all resources at His disposal and will accomplish His plan upon the earth whether we give from our resources or not. As God said, "My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10). When Jesus came into Jerusalem and the religious leaders scolded Him for receiving the praise of the people, He responded, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" (Luke 19:40). God will accomplish His purposes using His own resources.

He illustrates this in verse 12, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you." God wouldn't tell us, because he can satisfy His hunger by Himself, thank you. Whenever you say, "I'm hungry," who do say this to? You say it to those who can satisfy your hunger. Little children don't tell their siblings that they are hungry, because they cannot help them. They tell mom or dad, "I'm hungry." Whenever your child says this, he (or she) is really saying, "I'm telling you that I'm hungry, because I know that you can solve the problem for me. Where's the food?" But God doesn't need us to satisfy His hunger.

We need to be convinced that God doesn't need our money. He is entirely self-sufficient. He doesn't need us in any way! "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:24-25).

So, when you give to the church, you need to realize that it isn't to help God accomplish His purpose. You don't give because God needs what you are giving. Suppose all of the churches in Rockford folded and had no financial resources at their disposal, would this stop God's purposes in Rockford to continue? Absolutely not. He could certainly raise up others to accomplish His work.

As much as I am pressing home the point to you that God doesn't need our money, **don't think that God has closed hands** and doesn't

want to receive from you. God is not One who gives and gives and gives and gives and never delights when we give back to Him.

For instance, last week, after school one day, on her own, my daughter was doing an art project by herself in the basement. She came to visit me in my office and gave me a home-made envelope, made out of paper. On the outside of it, it says, "Just for you dad!" She gave it to me and said, "Here daddy, open it up." So, I opened it up, and there was a paper skate-boarding doll with a skateboard ramp, which she had cut out of paper and colored. It was a special art project that she had made just for me.

Now, let me ask you. "Is this something that I need? Is this something that is going to sustain me? Or help me? Or contribute to the financial effort of our home?" Not at all. Yet, "Do I want to receive gifts like this?" Absolutely! In fact, it made my day last week. I have kept it on my desk as a treasure.

The reason I delight is because of my daughter's motives in giving it. She was simply saying, "Dad, I love you and I want you to feel special." It was a spontaneous display of affection for me.

Now suppose my daughter came to me last week and gave me a \$20 bill and said, "Dad, I know that it costs you money to take care of me. I know that you spend money on clothes and food for me. I know that you spend money on some of the toys that I have. I simply wanted to pay you back, because you need it." What would I do with the \$20 bill? I would give it right back to her and say, "You don't need to pay me for living in my house." I don't need \$20 from you.

Often, when we give to the work of the Lord, we are handing God a \$20 bill, thinking that God needs it to accomplish His purposes. That's the very thing Israel was doing. So God was refusing their offering (verse 9), "I shall take no young bull out of your house, Nor male goats out of your folds.

God was saying, "Those sacrifices that you are offering? I don't want them! ... But there is something that you can give Me...." Look at verse 14, "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving." the same thing is repeated in verse 23, "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me;"

The little envelope that my daughter gave me is a picture of what God wants us to give. We give God envelopes that have "just for you dad!" written on them, when we "offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving."

Much of it comes down to our motives in giving. Does God need us to give to Him? No. Does God want us to give to Him? Yes, ... if our motives are proper.

This brings us to our second point this evening. Though God doesn't need our money, ...
2. God wants us to give ... with proper motives (Psalm 50:14-15; 2 Cor. 9:6-8)

Tonight, I want to give you a few motives that must be present in our giving. We should give ...

1. Thankfully (Psalm 50:14-15)

Look at verses 14 and 15, "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; And call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."

The motive here is the key. Israel's problem was that they were sacrificing out of a sense of obligation. Externally, they were doing all of the right things (see verse 8), but apparently, their attitude was wrong. Verse 12 seems to indicate to us that they were sacrificing to sustain God. They didn't understand why to sacrifice to God. But God says, "Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving."

John Piper says it well, "every sacrifice must be a sacrifice of thanksgiving because the real giver in every act of my giving is God. If I have something to give it is because it belongs to God and he put it in my hands. If I have a WILL to give it is because God put it there (1 Chronicles 29:14,18; Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 13:21; 2 Corinthians 8:1). Our giving is really God's giving to us. Therefore ALL giving must be a sacrifice of gratitude. If we don't see this, how can we but insult God?" (Sermon preached on 10/15/89 at Bethlehem Baptist Church).

God delights when we give out of gratitude. God disapproves when we give out of duty (as the Israelites were doing).

The remainder of verses 14 and 15 are merely descriptions of the those who worship God with thankful and dependant hearts. "call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me" (verse 15). The thankful person is the one who realizes his continual dependence upon the LORD for all things.

We should give thankfully. Furthermore, we should give, ...
2. Generously (2 Cor. 9:6)

There is a New Testament passage which gives us several more proper motives for giving. Turn to 2 Corinthians, chapter 9. In this chapter, Paul is requesting the Corinthians to give financially to the "support of the saints" (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1). He is raising money to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem, not funding the church. He says in verse 6, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully."

The picture here in this passage is that of a sower, with seed in his bag. If he distributes only a little seed, there will be a little harvest. If he distributes much seed, there will be a large harvest. The corn-fields we have here in Rockford don't flourish with a little seed. They need bushels and bushels and bushels of corn to be placed in the ground that the harvest in the fall will be much. To have a big harvest, you need to be generous with your seed.

Paul uses this illustration to urge the Corinthians to be generous with their gifts. This isn't anything new, the Proverbs speak again and again of how blessings are upon the righteous man who is generous. Here are a few of them ...

Prov. 22:9 - "He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor."

Prov. 21:26 - "All day long [the sluggard] is craving, while the righteous gives and does not hold back."

Prov. 19:17 - "He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD."

Prov. 28:27 - "He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses."

Prov. 11:25 - "The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered."

We should give thankfully, generously, and ...

3. Purposefully (2 Cor. 9:7)

Look at verse 7, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart."

Literally, this means, "chosen beforehand." The picture of giving here is that of a well-planned out exercise. It has been thought about, deliberated, discussed, and reasoned ahead of time. The choice of what to give has been made at home in one's right mind. It has been "purposed in his heart." In other words, your giving to the church needs to be a willful and deliberate act.

As such, at Rock Valley Bible Church, we aren't going to have great appeals given for money. I don't ever want you to come to church and be persuaded through some emotional appeal to give to this or that cause without consciously thinking about it at home with your family.

We should give thankfully, generously, purposefully, and ...

4. Joyfully (2 Cor. 9:7b)

Look at the last half of verse 7, "... not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver."

Paul says that our giving isn't to be done from any negative motive. You shouldn't give because of obligation, guilt, pressure or constraint. You shouldn't give because you are forced to give or coerced to give. We shouldn't even give because it is our **duty** to give.

In preparing for this message, I looked back at some notes that I had taken from a tape I listened to. On this tape, this man continued to pound the message of how it is our duty to give! He explained our duty. He described our duty. Then he pressed the people to live up to their duty with respect to giving. But, this isn't the heart of the apostle Paul.

It is not because you are a member of Rock Valley Bible Church, that you are compelled out of duty to give to this ministry. It isn't even because God says, "you have to give 10% to the church," that you give. We are to give "not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver." A sense of duty often creates an attitude of resentment. But **you should give out of joy** to the work of the Lord. It should be your delight, not your duty to give.

You might say, "Steve, I have difficulty in giving to the Lord thankfully and generously and purposefully and joyfully. ... I feel reluctant in my giving. ... I have a difficult time being generous." May I simply say that you need to believe the promises of God.

The reason we can give thankfully, generously, purposefully, and joyfully ...

... isn't because we are naturally like this.

... isn't because we are generous of heart.

... it is because we have a gracious God who has promised to give us an abundance for every good deed, which, in the context is the good deed of giving.

Look at verse 8, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." In some ways, this sentence is difficult to understand, because of all of the superlatives in it (i.e. the "all's"; the "every's"; the "abundance's"). If you take all of these out, here is what Paul is saying, (i.e. the simple sentence), ... "God is able to ... grace ... you, that ... you may have ... for every good deed."

In other words, suppose there is an opportunity out there for a good deed. (In this case, giving to the poor brethren in Jerusalem). Perhaps you might be overwhelmed with the demands this would require. You say (in your unbelief), "I don't think that I can do this good deed. ... It's too much for me. ... I do not have the resources for it." Paul says, "God is able to ... grace ... you, [i.e. to give you grace, to give you the ability, to give you the faith], that ... you may have ... for every good deed." But more than that, "God is able to make all grace about to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."

God has prepared good works for us to walk in (Eph. 2:10). Our resources to fulfill all of these good deeds are not found in ourselves! This is great news! We don't need to drum it up on ourselves, we can look to Him who is able to provide it for us. But God doesn't only provide the resources, but **He "abounds" in His provision to us.**

John Piper (as he always does) says that our giving will be entirely determined by how we view God. He wrote, "What makes the difference then between the sparing giver and the bountiful giver is their relation to God. For one he is an incessantly demanding, draining Taker. For the other he is an inexhaustible Giver. ... The one feels that if God is draining me, then what joy can I have if I don't drain the world. If life is being sucked out by a demanding God then I must suck in whatever pleasure I can from this world -- O, moral pleasures to be sure, nothing terrible. God IS a demander. But our basic disposition is still one of taking, keeping, sparing -- because God is always taking, always

demanding. He is the great Taker. ... But for the other person described in this text the flow goes all in the other direction. God is the great Giver, Fountain, Father, flowing in with ever replenishing blessing and grace and hope. And so what this person feels when he looks at the needs of the world is a free, internal impulse to give, to share. This impulse is called love or grace. Love is simply vertical grace bent outward to other people. ... And so THE big issue for our lives this morning how we see God. What do we feel him to be when we look up into his face?" (from a sermon preached on 3/20/88).

When you think of giving to the church, do you think of God as a drain, sucking up all of our resources? Or, do you think of God, as a fountain, every refreshing what we may give away?

Let me finish up with ...

3. Some Practical Considerations

I want to answer two questions this evening. ...

1. How much should we give?

There is a teaching in the church, which is very wide-spread, which says, "God requires for you to tithe your income. That is, God requires for you to give 10% of your income to the work of the LORD." Let me simply say that I do not believe that you are required to give 10% of your income to the work of the LORD. I do not believe that you need to tithe today. **I don't believe that it is your duty to tithe.**

Tithe is a word that simply means, "tenth." In the law, when regulations are given concerning "the tithe," it might be best compared to our modern day, "tax." They taxed the tithe (i.e. 10% of the income). The tithe was a law given to Israel to financially support the Levites in their work of the tabernacle, which included the festivals and sacrifices. The tithe was an obligation for every member of the Israelite community to support the religious activity of the nation.

There were actually three tithes demanded of the Israelite.

1. The tithe for the Levites (Numbers 18:21-32).

This was 10%, of each person's yearly income which would be given to support the Levites in their work. "And to the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting" (Numbers 18:21).

2. The tithe for the Festivals (Deut. 14:22-27).

This tithe was to be used during the yearly feasts in Jerusalem. You were to use this tithe to purchase your food to "eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice" (Deut. 14:26).

It is difficult to understand exactly what was required here. Obviously, you cannot eat 10% of your yearly income at three feasts throughout the year. Some have said that the remainder that you don't use should go to the Levites (Deut. 14:27), while others have said that this tithe is called a "tithe" because of its association with presenting your tithe to the Levites. However, you weren't to consume any of the tithe for the Levites -- it was to go to support the Levites entirely.

3. The tithe for the Needy (Deut. 14:28-29).

This tithe was to be collected every third year. Presumably, a tenth of your income for the Levite, the alien, the orphan and the widow who live in your town. This would calculate into an average of a little over 3% per year.

Jewish tradition interpreted these three tithes as three separate divisions of their income. Josephus said that there were three tithes (Antiquities IV, [viii.8, 22]) Furthermore, Tobit, in the Apocrypha spoke of these three tithes as well. (Tobit 1:7-8).

Depending upon how you would interpret the tithe for the Festivals, **your mandatory tithe was between 13%-23% of your income.**

Additionally, there were other required demands upon the Israelite living under the Theocracy....

The farmers were prohibited from harvesting all of the grain in their fields. They were to leave the corners of their fields and vineyards for the needy and stranger in their midst (Leviticus 19:9-10).

Every seventh year, the Israelite was prohibited from planting and harvesting in their fields, vineyards, and olive groves so that the needy might be able to eat. (Ex. 23:10,11). A seventh of your overall income would add another 14% of your income.

On top of these expenses would be the expenses incurred in bringing your sacrifices to the priests to atone for your sin (as prescribed in the book of Moses).

Furthermore, there are also statements in the Law which exhort the people to give over and above these previous demands. Particularly, these are called, "freewill offerings." **These freewill offerings were not required** (according to the Law), but were opportunities to give above and beyond that which was required.

- "You shall celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give just as the LORD your God blesses you" (Deut. 16:10).
- "Every man shall give as he is able according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you" (Deut. 16:17).

Additionally, throughout the history of Israel, there were other offerings given to support the buildings of the tabernacle (Ex. 25) and the Temple (1 Chron. 16). This type of thing certainly happened with communities needed buildings for their synagogues to meet in.

So, when you hear it said that the Law prescribed that 10% was to be given to the work of the Lord, it simply isn't true. **Moses required much more than 10%.**

I am amazed that those who would advocate that you need to give God a tenth of all your income because Israel did, don't really look into what exactly Israel was required to give and what Israel had opportunity to give beyond. The "tithe" was a form of taxation to keep the temple sacrifices fully funded and supported. It wasn't an option for the Israelite, any more than taxes are an option for us today.

If those who advocated "tithing" to the church because of the example of the Law advocated giving "the whole tithe" (i.e. Mal. 3:10), I would be more sympathetic to their cause, because then, they would be consistent in their teaching. But, I haven't heard anyone advocate this type of teaching. They always stop at 10% as "the tithe."

One man correctly said, "The expression 'Give God the tithe' is not only wrong, but in a very literal sense is belittling God. You do not insult your banker by offering to 'give' him the interest you owe him, nor do you 'give' your grocer the amount of his bill. Yet neither is more of a debt than the tithe we owe to God." (quoted by Ray Stedman in Bibliotheca Sacra, 107:335, July 1950). Remember, **the tithe was a mandatory obligation!**

So, then, how much should we give?

I'm not going to tell you, because the Bible nowhere places an amount in which you are required to give. So, I'm not going to ever press you to give to this church. It simply won't happen. As your pastor, this is freeing. I am not a CEO of a non-for-profit organization, who is seeking to secure your funds for operation of this church. I am a pastor who is concerned with **strengthening your faith.**

My task is to teach you in the things of the LORD and allow the LORD to work on your heart to live pleasing to Him. Fundamentally, I am seeking to teach you the principles of the Bible and giving you a few examples by way of application to help you think rightly about things. I am not a list generator, who is going to encourage you to keep a list of commands that I have come up with (or that the Bible tells us to do). Lists (or percentages to give) simply create external righteousness. The dangers of lists are that people will easily let their hearts slip while maintaining their "duty" of religious rules to keep.

Yesterday, in Men's Equippers, we looked at Matthew 15, where the Pharisees had external righteousness with cold hearts. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees by quoting Isaiah, who said, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me" (Matthew 15:8). In these verses Jesus was teaching that it isn't the externals that matter. It is the internals. The Bible always speaks about our actions as an overflow of our hearts.

Bottom line, it doesn't matter how much you give to the church. What matters is your heart. But a heart that hungers and thirsts after righteousness will express itself in its giving.

Beginning next week, you will have a weekly opportunity to give to the ministry of Rock Valley Bible Church. We will take up an offering each week. In order to encourage the principles of giving I mentioned above, we will simply have an offering box for you to contribute to the ministry. It will simply be a box in the back of this room. There is nothing wrong or unspiritual about having an offering plate that is passed. Please don't look down upon other churches that pass a plate. This is simply the way that we are choosing to do it.

I didn't want to start an offering this week, because I wanted you all to go home and discuss with your spouse how much you would like to give to the ministry here and come with your giving as the Lord directs you.

So, how much should we give?

Let me put it this way. Compared to the saints of the old covenant, what we have so far surpasses what they had. You remember Paul's perspective. "If the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it." (2 Cor. 3:9-10).

If those in the ministry of condemnation were required to give their tithes and offerings, how much more ought we to? We have been given the indescribable gift (2 Cor. 9:15) of the Lord Jesus Christ! How can we but respond by giving out of gratitude to God.

How much does God want us to give?

You really want an answer? Let me be honest with you. **He wants you to give it all.** This is the cost of following Him! "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33).

Obviously this doesn't mean that we give it all away. Otherwise, we would be caught in a conundrum. As soon as somebody gives away all of his possessions, somebody else has them. The one with the possessions now need to give it all away, so they give it to another person, who finds himself as needing to give them all away. It's like hot potato -- whoever is stuck with the potato at the end loses. You hope that when you die, you don't own anything.

Rather, Jesus is speaking that all we have is at the LORD's disposal. Our bodies are to be wholly devoted to the LORD, "you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). So are our possessions. You need to pray and ask the LORD's direction on how He would have you allocate your resources for His glory.

2. To whom should we give?

The Bible is very clear on who you ought to give to.

1. You should give to support the work of the LORD.

Just as the tithe of the Old Covenant was given to support the work of the LORD in the temple, so also in the New Testament we are to support those doing the work of the Lord (i.e. the church). The great principle is found in 1 Cor. 9:13-14. "Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel."

Notice that Paul is appealing to the Old Covenant example, in pattern, not in quantity. The Levites were supported in their work. With the gospel, it is the same way. The work should support them. When Jesus sent his disciples out, he said, "The worker is worthy of his support" (Matthew 10:10).

Paul said the same thing elsewhere, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'the laborer is worthy of his wages.'" (1 Tim. 5:17,18).

Those who labor in the church for the sake of the gospel should be supported by those to whom they minister (i.e. the church). Paul said earlier in 1 Corinthians 9, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" (verse 11). Elsewhere, Paul said, "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches" (Gal. 6:6).

2. You should give to the needy.

Just as the people of the Old Covenant were required to give to the alien, the widow, and the orphan, so should we. I have been instructed this week concerning the giving of the church.

Paul was consumed with helping the poor. After Paul was converted, he went up to Jerusalem to speak with Peter, James and John to verify that his gospel message was the same as theirs. He said in Galatians 2 that they gave him the right hand of fellowship, "They only asked us to remember the poor -- the very thing I also was eager to do" (Gal. 2:10).

Paul was eager to see the needs of the poor met. These weren't simply words for him. You remember in Acts 20, in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, He said, "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

The statements we have looked at concerning giving in 2 Corinthians 9, were focussed around his efforts to raise funds to help the poor in Jerusalem. He pressed hard for the churches to collect funds to help the poor in Jerusalem who were persecuted in their faith. It was a concentrated effort of many churches. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem" (1 Cor. 15:1-3).

I must confess that as I prepared to preach this message, the needy weren't on my heart. But, seeing how much God was concerned for the alien, the widow, and the orphan in the Law and how much Paul was likewise concerned for those in the church who were facing financial difficulties has given me a passion to see this done.

I confess, at Kishwaukee Bible Church, we have been slow to distribute our benevolent fund monies. Perhaps rightly so, because all of us are filthy rich. Perhaps rightly so, because we need to make sure that we are meeting real needs in our people. In Jerusalem, the believers were facing great persecution and difficulties for their faith.

But listen, from what I have seen in the Scriptures this week, we need to see to it that Rock Valley Bible Church is above reproach in helping the truly needy. Perhaps that is overseas, in the Philippines. Perhaps it is on the West side of Rockford -- to needy believers there. I don't know. I have simply observed this week that Paul spoke more about giving to the needy

than giving to the regular work of the church. "They only asked us to remember the poor -- the very thing I also was eager to do" (Gal. 2:10).

We need to be about helping the needy. The needy begin here at home. The needy are the orphans, who need great help (James 1:27). The needy are the widows, "who have been left alone" (i.e. without family - 1 Tim. 5:5). The needy are those without resources.

As we close this evening, let me ask you one final question.

Jesus said in several places, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13; Matt. 6:24). Jesus says that you need to make a choice. You cannot serve both God and money. Notice that Jesus doesn't use comparison words like "more" or "as much as." He doesn't say that you need to love God "more" than mammon. Nor does Jesus say that you need to love God "as much as" mammon. He is demanding a choice -- either God or mammon. You cannot serve both.

Suppose you died tonight and we looked at your checkbook. Suppose we looked at all of the transactions you made these past few days, weeks, months and years. What would we find? Would we find there a testimony of one who was storing up for himself riches in heaven ... or would we find there a testimony of a life that served mammon.

Jesus said, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21). We might say it like this, "where your checkbook is, there will your heart be also." Hearts are difficult to discern, but treasures are indicators to what the heart is like.

May God give us hearts to give to His kingdom and glory with motives that are pleasing to Him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 18, 2001 by Steve Brandon.
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