

GROW IN GRACE NEWSLETTER

Volume 35, No. 31, August 4, 2009 / Southside Baptist Church & Christian School / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen." (2 Peter 3:18)

MONEY: One out of Every Seven Verses!

In nearly half the parables Jesus told and one out of every seven verses in the New Testament deals with the subject of money. Perhaps that is why the early Church placed such a high priority on giving. In Acts 2:45 we read that they "sold their possessions and goods, and divided among all, as anyone had need." The early Church looked out for one another and invested financially in what God was doing. **However, one looks in vain for any of God's servant leadership calling upon saints to make 'pledges' or to send 'seed money' or to make 'faith vows'... so that God will prosper us.**

In these increasingly tough economic times, we would be wise to turn to the Word of God on the subject of money and generosity— not in order to meet a budget, but so as to grow as disciples of the LORD JESUS CHRIST! LET US HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD: Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21) Jesus said, "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own" (Luke 16:11-12). To God, the faithful giver is one who understands that he is not the owner, but the steward of his resources. Martin Luther once said that three conversions are necessary: the conversion of the heart, the mind, and the purse (or wallet).

Biblical Principles on Giving: Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

Our motive in giving is important. "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" -2 Corinthians 9:7

The word for "cheerful" in this verse could also be translated "hilarious." We should give hilariously, joyfully— not out of mere duty or guilt. As Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

"With what confidence can we ask the Lord for more substance if we have not honored Him with the substance we've already been given? **What we selfishly withhold, withers, but what we generously scatter, gathers!**"

* **"Give and it will be given to you.** A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." -Luke 6:38

* **"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." --Proverbs 3:9-10

* **"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."**--Philippians 4:19

NOTE: Philippians 4:19 does not say, "God will supply all our "greeds" or even our "wants" or "desires." That is because God knows that for some, too much materially could hurt them spiritually. The writer of Proverbs 30:9, insightfully describes the relationship of one's material status to one's walk with the Lord: **"Give me neither poverty or riches,** feed me with the food you prescribed for me, lest I deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of the Lord."

The context of Philippians 4:19 is significant. At the time Paul penned those words, the Philippian believers had just helped Paul in his hour of need. They believed that love should not just be in word, but also in deed. So, they had given Paul a financially sacrificial gift. As a result, they had a need. Their need was not created by bad stewardship or an unwillingness to work, nor by extravagance or foolish spending. Instead, it came from a heartfelt desire to assist a fellow brother in Christ in his work for the Lord.

Because their hearts were right, Paul assured them— and all believers— that God would indeed supply their needs. God would not be their debtor.

Sometimes we may say, "I can't afford to give!" In reality, you can't afford not to give. David said that he would not give to the Lord that which cost him nothing (2 Samuel 24:24). Generosity is not measured by the size of the gift itself, but by its size in comparison to what is possessed. **The widow who gave two mites** to the temple treasury gave more than the many rich people who gave large sums because, as Jesus said, "They put in out of their surplus, but one, out of her poverty, put in all she owned" (Mark 12:44). Some might say, "If I had a million dollars, I would give more to the Lord." But that is not necessarily true. It is all relative. The person who has a million could easily say, "If I just had ten million . . ."

The question God would have for us is this: **What am I doing with what God has given to me? Am I being faithful with that?**

When we read that God promises to meet our needs— that does not mean that we can strike a bargain with God, in which as we give to God, He must give back to us in a multiplied way. That would be "giving to get." God will not honor that type of giving because it comes from an impure motive. **Instead, we should give because God has so graciously and generously given to us. As Christians, we have received the gift of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life.** Other's may have also received the healing of a marriage or the mending of a home. And you have received it from the Lord "free of charge." We should give because we have received.

Our Giving Reveals Our True Priorities

In the Old Testament, the Prophet Haggai addresses the needs of the people as they lamented about the fact that no matter how much they made, it was never enough. God then reveals to them that their real problem is not material but spiritual. They had experienced a spiritual breakdown. **While they had plenty of money for their own needs, they had nothing left for the work of God and the maintenance of His temple.** God said, "You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it" (Haggai 1:6). God reproves the people for thinking only about themselves and not about His work or the needs of others.

God goes on to tell these people, "What you brought home, I blew away. Why? Because of My house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house" (Haggai 1:9). The people's improper priorities, their selfishness, and their failure to seek to please God caused their lives to be out of balance, frustrating and unfulfilling.

The giving issue is but the outgrowth of a life that is right with God.

We need to discover the joy of giving--sacrificially, hilariously, regularly and quietly. **Remember, God is not asking us to give because He needs our resources. The whole world is at His disposal!** In essence, He is challenging us to make Him the focus of our loves, rather than our money and possessions. Then, as we express our love to God by freely giving him a portion of our resources, He will tangibly display His faithfulness to us in return.

Have we forgotten the true reality of life? We would like to think that our money belongs to us, and that we can pretty much do with it as we please. Yet, Scripture reminds us that God has given us the ability to produce wealth: **"But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth . . ."** (Deut. 8:18).

The Lord can and may bless you with riches. That does not mean that you have to be a millionaire. Being rich is somewhat relative— especially if you compare your wealth with a good portion of humanity in the rest of the world.

If God does bless us materially, the Bible says that He requires three things: "Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them" (1 Timothy 6:17-18/NLB).

1. Do not be arrogant or place your ultimate hope in wealth. As the passage says, your wealth will soon be gone. You can't take it with you after you die!

2. Use your money for good. You are not an owner, but a steward of your money. For that reason, you should do good with what God has given you. Along these lines, Paul told the believers in Phillipi that their financial gift to him would result in a reward for them, "fruit that abounded to [their] account" (Philippians 4:17). Then he went on to promise that God would supply all their need. From this we see that when you invest your money into the work of the Kingdom of God, you are actually laying up for yourselves treasure in Heaven.

3. Enjoy what God has given you. God richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. We should not feel guilty about the blessings God has given us.

SOME Principles for Giving— Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-3

Giving is a universal practice. Paul writes, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches in Galatia, so you must do also . . ." (v. 1).

This was not just something that the Corinthians had to do. Everywhere Paul went, wherever he founded a church, he taught them to give, because giving is an essential part of the Christian life. We need to freely give as we have freely received. After all, He has freely given us His unconditional pardon and the transformation of our lives and families— things we would never have been able to buy with any amount of money.

Giving should be done regularly. Paul writes, "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside . . ." (v. 2). This is one of the first indications we have in the epistles that the Christians (by this time) had begun to gather regularly to worship, pray and give on the first day of the week, Sunday. But we see that this was done on a consistent basis.

Giving is a personal act. Paul says, "Let each one of you lay something aside . . ." (v.2). He does not leave anyone out. Even children should be taught to give. It may be only a few pennies, a nickel, or a dime, but they should be taught the importance of giving at an early age.

We should be prepared to give. Paul says to "lay something aside and store it up" (v. 2). We should set aside money for the work of the Kingdom out of every paycheck. Some may say,

"But that is legalism!" Is it legalistic to say a prayer of thanks over a meal? Is it legalistic to set Sunday apart as the Lord's day in which you will go with your family to church? Is it legalistic to discipline yourself to read your Bible on a regular basis? That's not legalism; that's good planning, obedience and wise stewardship. It represents a life that has been dedicated to God.

Should I practice tithing in this New Testament Era? (Malachi 3:8-11) I won't debate the point with anyone. But actually, shouldn't our focus be— in light of the amazing **GENEROSITY OF GOD** I want to give myself wholly to God as reasonable worship, (Romans 12:1-2), and I want to give as much as possible for the advancement of the gospel to the ends of the earth?

As to tithing and from Malachi, we see:

* If we fail to bring our tithes and offerings to God, we are actually robbing Him (v. 8). This reminds us again that giving is not an option in the believer's life.

* God makes a distinction between "tithes" and "offerings." The word "tithe" actually means "one-tenth." **In the Old Testament**, we read of several instances when it was given: Abraham presented a tithe to the priest-king of Jerusalem, Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20); and Jacob pledged to offer God a tithe of all of his possessions (Gen. 28:22). **In the New Testament**, Jesus mentioned it as well, though He warned that strict tithing must accompany concern for the more important demands of the law— namely those that dealt with just and merciful living (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42).

Here's Old Testament reality that most to not realize: Israel practiced both required giving and freewill offering. Within the required giving, three tithes were specified:

1) the Lord's tithe; 2) the festival tithe; and 3) the poor tithe, collected every third year for the needy. Israel's practice of tithing (not even including freewill offerings) totaled between 20% and 25%. **At that time, the Israelites' government and religious life were closely intertwined, indeed, Israel was both 'church and state.'** Today, we are all taxed heavily by our government, and Scripture teaches that we should obey the laws of the land, including the giving of taxes. **But our giving to the LORD is a separate matter.**

* **Should we still tithe today?** I think that's the wrong question! How about this: Living under grace and as those who are abundantly blessed, should I not want to so order my life as to **GIVE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE** unto the LORD? **Remember that in the Old Testament, God's standard was not merely 10%! The Old Testament saints gave TITHES, (plural!) and OFFERINGS, (plural)! A tithe might be a great place to start in submitting to the LORDSHIP of Christ out of hearts of gratitude, but it should not be the ending place! To get a vision of Old Testament saints in their giving unto the LORD, read 1 Chronicles 29:1-19!! King David, in worship to God, cried out: "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."**

"Try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field" (Malachi 3:10-11).

(Matthew 2:11 KJV) And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, **they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.**

(John 3:16 KJV) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

(2 Corinthians 8:2 KJV) How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

(2 Corinthians 8:12 KJV) 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.

(2 Corinthians 9:7 KJV) Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. (Article drawn from various sources)

Grace to all! / www.southsidegallatin.org / James Bell