

Introduction: Between two Friends

It was a conversation that changed my financial future. I had heard about the importance of giving to the work of the Lord, but it wasn't until a close friend of mine laid out the specifics of how and why Christians are to give that I made the dedication, the determination to give the Lord at least ten percent of whatever money he might entrust to me. At the time I was in college so 10% of almost nothing wasn't that big of a commitment. While I was in seminary, it got a little more difficult because graduate school doesn't come cheap. Once I graduated from seminary and had my first fulltime call it got even more difficult. We had kids, took on a mortgage, and began trying to save. And when we moved to Lynchburg the dedication, I made back in college met its most difficult challenges. Not because there was a lack of money but rather because more than ever there were increased financial responsibilities in my life. And as I think back over the eighteen years since that conversation in college, I realize if I had not followed his counsel, I would have a lot more money right now.

There are times when you hear sermons on giving and the motivation comes down to give some money now to get more money later. If you give to the Lord, then you will get unexpected checks in the mail and refunds from the IRS. If you faithfully give then you will get that promotion, your car won't break down, your 401(k) will earn an extra 2% every year, and you will never pay retail price for anything. Give with your right hand and receive with your left.

Christian giving is not to be motivated out of a love for more money. Give it all up just to get a little more. We should not give as some sort of investment scheme that will lead to greater stores of earthly wealth. Rather Christian giving is a tangible means by which we continually experience the blessing of obedience to God. We see that it is of far greater value than anything a few extra dollars will buy us on Amazon.

Christian giving is about trust. Not trust that God will give you more money but rather trust that God is the one who supplies for all your needs not your bank account. Objectively speaking you will have more money and goods if you choose not to sacrificially give to the Lord. Yet the one who trusts in his money will be a much poorer man than he who trusts in the Lord. And if you dedicate to Christian giving your financial future will be radically changed. For there is never enough money to satisfy your carvings for this world. Yet to those who trust the Lord will find that he will meet all of their need in Christ Jesus.

So, what I want to do this morning is give you ten points from God's Word about what it means to give as a Christian. And as we go through these points, I want to encourage you as a pastor and as a friend. Yes, tithing might mean less money in your bank account however it leads to a richer experience of God's faithful provision in your life.

1. Christian Giving Must be Based on the Work of Christ

The first and most important lesson about Christian giving is that it must be done in relation to the gospel. That is, giving must be based on trust in the work of Christ. Look at verse 9,

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9 ESV)

As the Apostle Paul is encouraging the Corinthian church in their call to give, he bases charge upon the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus possess all the wealth of creation, all physical and spiritual goodness belongs to him. He is the fullness of God himself. Pure and holy and full of life. However, the Lord’s love for his people motivated him to take upon himself the poverty this world. He left the fulness of heaven to experience the need of this world. And so, he was born to a family that was poor. He experienced what it was like to be hungry and tired and without a place to lay his head at night. Not only did he take on physical poverty but also spiritual poverty. For he went to the cross and experienced the greatest poverty ever known. He took upon himself the sin of the whole world. He who was without sin became sin. He who was full of the riches of life took on the poverty of death. And he who knew the height of abundance and blessing in his relationship with God the Father took on the depths of God’s wrath and judgment for sin. Jesus was rich but he took on poverty. Why? So that we might become rich. So that the wealth of his holiness and life could be given to us.

All blessings and graces that we receive from the Lord come not from ourselves, but from the grace given to us out of the bounty of Christ’s wealth. For there is no true and lasting wealth outside of Christ. No matter how much money we have on earth, spiritually all outside of Christ are all in abject poverty. And the only source of blessing and wealth is in the grace of Jesus Christ. Until you come to the Lord in faith you cannot experience the blessing of Christian giving. You must in faith turn to the Jesus and look to his poverty on the cross as your only source of wealth. That is, you must trust in his work alone for your forgiveness of sin, the canceling of debt, and your blessing in this life and the life to come.

It is so very easy in discussions on giving to misunderstand or even to miscommunicate. To say or to hear, “If I tithe then by my giving, I will earn blessing.” But we never earn blessing from God by our own work. It is only through the work and wealth of Christ that we are anything but spiritual paupers. And so Christian giving must flow not from a legalistic desire to fulfil the law of the tithe but rather from faith in the abundant grace of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

2. Christian Giving Must Follow the Example of Christ

Yet from verse 9 of our text we learn a second principle, namely that Christian giving must follow the example of Christ. You might be thinking to yourself, “I believe pastor Weber just implied that the tithe is not a binding law for Christians.” And you are correct I do not believe that the Old Testament tithing laws are how Christians are to relate to God financially. The law is death, the Spirit is life. But don’t rip up your tithe checks just yet.

For the example given to us upon the cross is much greater than giving a tithe. It is the giving of a whole life. The financial relationship between a Christian and the Lord is much more radical than 10%. It is 100%. God has the right to require of his redeemed people all that they have. For by the blood of Christ he has bought us. We belong to him. And if he calls us to give all to follow him, we must be willing to give all. We cannot content ourselves with giving in a

legalistic and limited fashion. The example of Christ is that we must surrender all that we have and all that we are to God because through the blood of Christ he has made us his own possession. We don't get to shelter our money from God because we fulfill the Old Testament tithe. Christian giving must follow the way of Christ. And Christ gave all.

3. Christian Giving Must be with Joy

Third, Christian giving must be done in joy. Look at verses 1- 2,

“We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.” (2 Corinthians 8:1–2 ESV)

As Paul is encouraging the church in Corinth to give, he points to the example of the Macedonian churches. The Macedonians churches were extremely poor. And for all accounts the Corinthians were relatively wealthy. Yet the Corinthian church had failed to fulfill its initial pledge of giving while the Macedonians had given above and beyond their means. Why? As Paul says, their generosity is was an overflow of their joy. Later in chapter 9 verse 7 Paul says continues this point saying,

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV)

Compulsion and legalism will not result in Christian giving. God does not need your money. He owns all the world and the fulness therein. Yet he desires his people to experience the joy of giving. To experience in their own hearts what Jesus has taught us, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Christian giving must be joyful, because it is an overflow of our trust in God.

4. Christian Giving Must be for the Poor

Fourth, Christian giving must be for the poor. The Lord teaching that we have about giving in large part is centered on the relief of the poor. That those who have would open up their wealth to share with others. As Paul says in verses 14-15,

your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.” (2 Corinthians 8:14–15 ESV)

As good stewards of God's resources we must be wise in the way that we seek to see poverty relieved in our city and in the world. There are ways of giving that can perpetuate patterns of poverty. However, we must not use that as an excuse to ignore the poor and the needy. But we must remember the words of the Lord Jesus Christ,

“truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40 ESV)

Christian giving must be for the poor.

5. Christian Giving Must be for the Church

Yet our giving is not only to the poor outside of the church but even more so to those in the church. As we read in Galatians 6:10,

“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10 ESV)

The collection spoken of in our passage for this morning is for the churches in Palestine. A period of economic struggle had hit the region and so Christians from one part of the world were collecting money to relieve Christians in another part of the world. When we give as Christians, we must give to help our brothers and sisters within the church. To see the needs of those without provided for.

6. Christian Giving Must be for the Gospel

Sixth, Christian giving must be aimed at the advancement of the gospel. We do not believe that the church should neglect the physical needs of the poor however, it is to the spiritual poverty of the world that the church has the greatest wealth to share. It is to the spread of the good news that Christ become poor that we might become rich. And the church needs her members to give that this might happen.

To have Sunday services and to maintain a building the church needs to be funded. To have a fulltime minister the church must give. To support local and international missions we must have the funds to send them.

There are many good organizations to which you might choose to give however when you give to gospel centered churches like Rivermont you are giving to the advancement of Christ’s kingdom both here in Lynchburg and around the world.

7. Christian Giving Must be in Submission

Seventh, Christian giving must be in submission. The pattern that we see in the New Testament is that funds collected were given to the elders of the church for their wise distribution. When Paul delivered the collection from Gentile churches, we read in Acts 11,

“So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” (Acts 11:29–30 ESV)

It is not a rare occurrence within churches that people will seek to control the decisions and the direction of a church through giving. This can be done in giving funds with conditions not approved of by the elders or by withholding funds when you do not like particular decisions made by the session.

Now we are not to give in blind submission in which we have no idea what the church is doing with the funds we entrust to them. Nor that a Christian is to give to a church that is not using their funds ethically or wisely. However, there must be a trust of the elders that you elected to watch over you to direct money in a gospel advancing manner.

8. Christian Giving must be in Proportion

Next, the Bible teaches us that giving is to be in proportion to the abundance that the Lord has given you. The tithe is proportional. The more you are given the more is required. But all are to give. As we read in verse

“For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” (2 Corinthians 8:12 ESV)

The Lord has called every Christian to give according to what he has. And while we do not relate to the Lord according to the tithe, it remains as a standard for proportional giving. That means that we who have received eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ should seek to reach giving at least 10% of the financial resources God has given us.

To some of you your financial obligations are such that me calling you to 10% of your income would be like you saying to me running a three-hour marathon is the standard God requires. It just isn't going to happen. And so my encouragement to you is to begin working to change your life-style so that you can give proportionately to the Lord. For there is sweet relief and satisfaction when we give as the Lord has directed.

9. Christian Giving must be with Planned Regularity

The ninth, if we would discipline ourselves to give then we must plan to give with regularity. In 1 Corinthians 16 we read,

“Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.” (1 Corinthians 16:1–2 ESV)

Paul is saying, “When you gather on Sunday each one is to put money into the treasury of the church so that when I come to collect your offering there will be a plenteous gift.”

It takes planning and regularity to give well. If you feel the Lord's call this morning to begin giving or to increase your giving it will only happen if you plan it. That means doing an annual budget that includes your giving. That means finding the check book, or signing up for online

giving, or getting the cash out. It is going to take effort. Yet when you give regularly, that is week in and week out, you will also know the freedom and the joy of seeing the Lord provide for all your needs even when you have less money.

Conclusion: Christian Giving Must be Worship

The final thing that we must understand about Christian giving is that it is worship. Jesus teaches us,

No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Luke 16:13 ESV)

And Paul says of the offering by the Philippian church,

the gifts you sent, [are] a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. (Philippians 4:18 ESV)

Giving to the Lord is worshipping the Lord. If it were merely about keeping the lights on and the salaries paid, we wouldn't include an offering during the worship service. Yet when we sacrificially give to the Lord it is a sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to the Lord. It is a tangible sign that we serve the Lord and not our money.

For we give not out of obligation or out of legalistic slavery but rather remembering the gospel. Remembering,

the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9 ESV)

For the sake of the poor, for the sake of the church, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of your worship will you not now dedicate practice the spiritual discipline of Christian giving?