

## "God Loves a Cheerful Giver"

Malachi 3:7-12; II Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-15

### Introduction

We've been talking about things that God loves. He loves the nations. He loves His children. He even loves those whom He disciplines. Today we come to a topic that some would rather not talk about. I met a man who'd quit going to church because, as he put it, "*all they ever talked about was wanting my money.*" I don't think that was true, but it gave him an excuse to get away from God.

The Bible has a great deal to say about money and our relationship to it. We can't be faithful Christians if we don't understand the dangers, blessings and opportunities presented to us through our money.

The attraction to wealth and man's natural tendency toward greed make for some of the most intriguing stories in the Bible. From Lot to Achan to Ahab to Judas to Ananias and Sapphira, man's lust for money has led to drama in the pages of Scripture.

And the warnings of God abound.

- Pro. 11:28 – *He who trusts in his riches will fall.*
- Pro. 23:4,5 – *Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes upon it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.*

- Matthew 6:24 – *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*
- Luke 6:24 - *But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your reward in full.*
- I Timothy 6:9 – *But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

God's has an answer for the temptations that can so easily plague us in this area. God's answer is that we are to give. God loves a cheerful giver. And He loves a responsive, knowledgeable giver. Today we want to see why and how, as Christians, we should give to the Lord.

[Malachi 3:7-12; II Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-15]

A careful study of the scriptures will show us there are a number of reasons that Christians should be joyful, generous givers.

1. We have so much to be thankful for.

God gave the most precious gift of all time to His people – Jesus Christ. Through faith in Him you have every spiritual blessing and the riches of His grace. You give to God out of thankfulness for the gift of salvation and life you have received from Him.

2. We are so dependent on Him.

Everything you have – jobs, homes, families, possessions, finances, - everything, comes from His hand. When you give you are indicating to God that you are aware of that and that you depend on him for all your future needs being met.

3. Our hearts need to be directed.

God doesn't say that you will give where your heart is. He says that your heart will go where your treasure goes. You are to give to God because through that giving God directs your hearts and minds toward things that are really important – like the building of His church, winning the lost, and seeing his kingdom come.

Now the Bible not only tells you the reasons to give, it also specifically tells you *how* to give. Two principles:

- I. We are to give with the right motives.
- II. We are to give in the right way.

(Like worship, both attitude and the way we worship are important.)

**We are to give with the right motives.**

Just like with any issue of obedience, God is examining not only what we do but how we do it. So the key to giving in the kingdom of God is that we start by giving our hearts to God.

It's been too easy in our day and down through the ages since the beginning of time for man to buy whatever he wants, whatever he considers valuable. But the ability to buy "the good things in life" has never worked in God's economy.

In Micah 6:6-8.

*6 With what shall I come to the LORD  
And bow myself before the God on high?  
Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings,  
With yearling calves?  
7 Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams,  
In ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts,  
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
8 He has told you, O man, what is good;  
And what does the LORD require of you  
But to do justice, to love kindness,*

*And to walk humbly with your God?*

What God wants first and foremost is your heart, your very life. Only when your heart is given to God will you be able to give in a way that pleases him. If your heart is given to Him you will find a couple of other things will follow.

First, you will give cheerfully. When collecting a special offering for the saints, Paul told the Corinthians to do “just as they purposed in their heart, not grudgingly nor under compulsion, for *God loves a cheerful giver.*”

This is the very reason Jesus was so condemning of the giving of the Pharisees. They tithed and gave very meticulously, but their hearts were not given to God. “Woe to you Pharisees who pay the tithe of mint and rue and herbs yet disregard . . . the love of God.” The cheerful giver is one who finds joy in giving because he loves God and his heart is filled with thanksgiving to the Almighty. So if your heart is given to God you will give cheerfully.

Secondly, you will give generously and sacrificially. Paul pointed to the churches in Macedonia as examples of this attitude. In II Cor. 8 we read: *For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*

It's not very often you read about someone begging to give and to give until it hurts. But it's not that surprising when we consider that the Father gave His only Son to die for us. We are called to be like Him. The less a hold the world has on us the more likely we are to give in a way that makes no

sense to those whose goals are shaped by their bottom line.

You see, the primary principle for giving is that we give ourselves to God because when we've done that, all that we have, all that we are is the Lord's. It's all available to Him. We've laid it at the cross of Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone does not give up all his possession, he cannot be My disciple."

That's why when the rich man asked Jesus how he could gain eternal life, Jesus told him to sell all his possession and give it to the poor. Jesus knew that for that young man, just a simple rule about what percentage to give would never change his heart. Jesus didn't want his money. He wanted his heart. And it became very evident that he didn't have it, for that young man went away. But if He has our hearts, we won't walk away. We will give both cheerfully and sacrificially.

So that's the first principal for giving. We are to give with the right motive. That motive is love.

### **We are to give in the right way.**

God, in his infinite wisdom did not leave obedience to our own heart desires. Some want to claim today that for the Christian a right heart is all we need, then we will do the right thing. But the question is what is the right thing? That is the purpose of the law of God. It shows us the standard of holiness so that we might know what is to govern our heart. This is true in every area of the Christian life. We are to have hearts given to Christ, but these hearts express that love for Christ through obedience to His Word. (John 14:21)

So it is in this area of giving. God has set the tithe as the standard to direct our hearts. Some today would argue that the OT rule was the tithe and the NT rule is generosity and the conscience. But it

is a huge mistake to think these two are mutually exclusive. Time and again in the OT we see God's people voluntarily and sacrificially giving to God's work. In times when the people were walking with God in obedience it was love of God and desire to give that dictated how much the people gave, because merely giving a tenth was assumed.

One great example of this is Exodus 35 & 36.

- building program for the tabernacle
- needed \$
- Lord told Moses to take a contribution from whoever had a willing heart
- People could give whatever they wanted – gold, silver, bronze, fabric, animals or skill.
- Morning after morning people came. Pile grew and grew. People kept coming. Needs met.
- Finally a commandment – “Quit giving, we have enough.” Bible says the people had to be restrained from bringing more \$.

What was the issue? Did the people feel compelled to give? Did they have so much money they didn't know what to do with it? No! The people's hearts were moved out of a love for God – so they willing came and they sacrificially gave.

You see, the tithing principle is not intended to dictate how much a man should give – love for God, particular needs and the means and blessings from God do that. What the tithe does is set a boundary for the heart. It constrains man in the days of struggle. It shows him the minimum that God requires of his people. There is great freedom in how much we give. But like every freedom is has boundaries. And the boundary in giving is a tenth of all we make. That, at least should be brought into the storehouse of the church to run the ministries He has given her.

The issue is not does the church need the money. We don't need the money. God doesn't need the money. God has provided abundantly for the church. We are talking about giving a lot of money to our daughter church now – because they need it and we have it. So, the motivation to tithe is not need driven. It's drive by a love for God that understands he has directed us as to *how we are to give*.

The mistake some make is assuming that the passages in Corinthians that talk about generosity and freedom to give are addressing a new principle. They are not. The context for those passages is a special offering above and beyond the tithe. So what if there are other things outside of the local church that you want to give to? You should do it. Missionaries, Christian ministries, students going on short term trips, Christian schools, campus groups etc. But you should do it above and beyond your tithe. (By the way, some of you have asked how you could begin giving regularly to our mission in Sudan. There are forms in the back now that make it very easy for you to do. (Read note on card about tithe first.)

So then these two principles should guide us in our giving. We are to give with the right motive and we are to give in the right way.

Now before I close, let me just remind you of a couple of things that may help you as you consider applications for your own life.

1. Most important is being right with God.

You need to know Christ before any of this will make sense.

2. Giving to God is a matter of faith. It requires you to believe God and his promises. God has promised to provide for you if you are His child.

And He gives extra promises to those who will obey him in giving. Here are two well-known examples.

*Luke 6:38* “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

*Malachi 3:10* “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test 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 a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will you vine in the field cast its grapes.

When you tithe and give generously, God promises to watch over your life and act on your behalf to rebuke the devourer. God will take care of you. He will meet your needs.

3. If you are having trouble giving biblically, it may be a wakeup call to get your finances in order. God calls us to be good stewards of all that he has entrusted to us. If you are spending more than you make, have accumulated significant debt, are not able to save anything, or if receive regular calls from collection agencies, it is time to do something about your money problems. There are some great resources available that can walk you through steps to finding financial freedom. If you need some help, please speak with our deacons. They will be happy to help you.

Money is one of the greatest troublers in a materialistic society. I’m sure some of you are struggling. Giving is not designed to be an extra burden added to you by God, but a means of great help and joy. May you find the blessings and benefits of being a cheerful giver.