

What the Bible Says About Tithing and Christian Giving

Peter Ditzel

At a time when giving is reaching all-time lows in the church, ignorance about what is real Christian giving is reaching all-time highs. Surely, this is no coincidence. Not only does this article expose the misinformation we are fed in this area that can actually warp our thinking, but it sheds light on the true, biblical teaching about giving. I sincerely hope that all readers will give prayerful consideration to all this article has to say.

Has anyone ever told you to tithe by giving one-tenth of your income to the church? Or perhaps someone has told you to give to a particular ministry so that God will prosper you. Maybe you were even made to feel that you needed to make up for your sins by giving.

But have you ever stopped to wonder which, if any, of these approaches to giving is the right one for Christians? In this article, we will examine each of these ways of looking at giving to determine whether it is biblical. We will also see whether there is another approach to giving—one that is less popularly promoted. Because it is so commonly taught, we will devote the first section of this article to tithing.

The Tithe

If you tithe, or have been told that you should tithe, you are in the company of many other Christians. Tithing is a common practice in the church, and it is a doctrine that is frequently taught from the pulpit, sometimes quite vigorously. There are even entire websites devoted to the practice of tithing. Usually what is meant in Christian churches by tithing is the paying (or, as some say, giving) of one-tenth of one's income to the church. Some say that the tithe should be one-tenth of one's gross income (before any deductions, including taxes), and others say we should tithe on our net income. By net, what is usually meant in this case is after taxes are taken out. Some few might teach that we should tithe on only that money that is left after we have paid our bills. We will not get into these differences of opinion over how to tithe, but will limit ourselves to determining whether the Bible says that Christians are to tithe. Some of this may sound a little dry, but I hope you will continue reading because it will serve as a background to the eye-opening material later in this article.

Copyright © 2004-2009 wordofhisgrace.org

Permission is granted to reproduce this article only if reproduced in full with no alterations and keeping the copyright statement and this permission statement intact.

giving.pdf
Minor revision 5 Jan. 2015

The fact that tithing is found in the Bible is undeniable. Tithing is frequently mentioned in the Bible. The word is found as early as the time of Abraham, as mentioned in Genesis. Before examining its occurrence in Abraham's life, however, we will first look at the law of tithing as God gave it to the Israelites under Moses.

The Law of the Tithe

Leviticus 27:30-34: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord. And if a man will at all redeem aught of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord. He shall not search whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it: and if he change it at all, then both it and the change thereof shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed. These are the commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai."

Numbers 18:21-24: "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance."

A law for the Jews: Notice certain facts that we learn from these Scriptures. As stated in the verse that immediately follows the tithe instruction in Leviticus 27, "These are the commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai" (Leviticus 27:34). God gave this law of the tithe through Moses to the Israelites (the Jews) at Sinai. Nothing here says anything about God commanding anyone other than the Israelites to tithe.

The tithe given to the Levites: The passage quoted above from Numbers 18 tells us who received the tithe. The tribe of Levi, the Levites, among whom were the priests and those who cared for the

tabernacle (and, later, the temple in Jerusalem), were to receive the tithe (but see also below). As God explains, of all the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi was to have no inheritance of land when the Israelites entered the promised land. Instead, they were to be sustained by the other tribes giving them the tithe. This is confirmed in Hebrews 7:5: "And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham."

For an agricultural society: These passages tell us something else that is important. In Leviticus 27, the tithe is called "the tithe of the land," "the seed of the land," "the fruit of the tree," and "the tithe of the herd, or of the flock." The Israelites' society was agrarian. Most people were involved in farming (raising crops and livestock), and the economy centered on this. The tithing laws God gave were tailored to such an agrarian economy. The Israelites were to tithe their increase (Deuteronomy 14:22, 28; 26:12; 2 Chronicles 31:5). Increase to a farmer in ancient times was an easily figured, tangible thing. When a farmer planted grain, his increase was his harvest minus the seed he had planted to create that harvest. In the case of livestock, the increase was the calves or kids born that year. But when someone works for an employer for 40 hours a week and gets a paycheck, the question must be asked, What is the increase? Many people, after taxes, commuting expenses, housing, food, clothing, and other expenses, have little (and sometimes nothing) they could call an increase. That is why there is such a controversy among tithing churches about what the tithe should be figured on. The problem arises because the tithing law was not meant for any other society but ancient Israel.

Confusion when taken out of historical context: Still more confusion arises when, despite the Scriptures quoted above about the Levites receiving the tithe, other Scriptures can be found that say that the poor are to share the tithe (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) and even the tithers themselves are to eat the tithe: "Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always" (Deuteronomy 14:22-26). A number of theories have arisen to explain this. The most common ones say that there were at least two, and perhaps even three, tithes. One tithe is an annual one-tenth tax that went to support

the Levites. Another tithe was an annual tithe of the increase that all of the Israelites ate during the annual feast days (especially the Feast of Tabernacles). Another tithe was only every three years when the tithe of the increase was given to the Levites, strangers, orphans, and widows. What, then, should all of this mean to Christians? Are they to observe three tithes? And to whom are they to give these tithes? Let's look at some of the ways people today try to apply the Old Testament tithing laws.

Abraham's Tithe

Tithing proponents point to the tenth that Abraham gave to Melchizedek. This account is found in Genesis 14:16-20:

And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. 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 gave him tithes of all.

Tithing proponents say that this is an example of tithing before Moses. They then say that because tithing predates Moses, that it continued past the doing away of the Mosaic law when Christ came. But is this incident between Abraham and Melchizedek an example of true tithing?

Please notice these points essential to this topic: 1) There is no mention of Abraham being under a compulsion to tithe. He freely gave the tenth to Melchizedek. No tithing commandment is ever cited. 2) This was a one-time event. The Bible never says that Abraham tithed before this incident, and it never says that he tithed after it. 3) Related to the previous point, Abraham tithed only the spoils of war. He did not tithe the increase of his flocks or a tenth of all he had. This was a one-time, voluntary giving of a tithe of the spoils of war. 4) Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham was graciously given before Abraham gave the tithe. Despite the rhetoric from some pulpits that tithers are blessed and non-tithers are cursed, Melchizedek did not

bless Abraham for tithing. So we see that Abraham's tithing to Melchizedek was a one-time, voluntary event. It was unrelated to tithing as it was detailed under the law of Moses. The promoters of tithing contradict themselves by admitting that the law of Moses was done away at the death and resurrection of Jesus while trying to impose on Christians tithing rules from the law of Moses. They do so with the lame excuse that Abraham tithed. But as we have seen, Abraham's tithe had nothing to do with tithing as it was taught by Moses and as it is taught today. Conclusion: Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek does not even remotely support the notion that Christians are to tithe.

Jacob's Tithe

Another pre-Mosaic mention of a tithe is in the account of Jacob's life. In Genesis 28, we read that Jacob was on his way to find a wife in Padanaram. He stopped overnight in a place that was originally called Luz. He used some stones from the place as his pillows (ouch!) and has a dream of a ladder reaching up to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it (this is a picture of the mediatorial role of the Messiah, see John 1:51). He also hears God repeat the promises He had given to Abraham and Isaac. When he wakes up, he is awed and afraid, and he considers that the place is "none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (verse 17). So he takes a stone and sets it up for a pillar, pours oil on it, and names the place Bethel, which means "house of God." Then, in verses 20-22, we read, "And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

Interestingly, this account is often not mentioned by the proponents of tithing. Likely they see that rather than being evidence for their cause, it is clear evidence against it. Here's why.

If God had instituted tithing at any time prior to this incident, Jacob would be obligated to tithe. He would be sinning if he did not tithe. But notice that Jacob says, IF God does such and such, THEN, "of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Not only is the initiative to tithe coming from Jacob, and not from God, but Jacob is even setting stipulations. If God does something, then Jacob will tithe. From this, we see that Jacob was obviously not already under an

obligation to tithe. If he had been, what he says here would have been extremely wicked. Instead of proving that there was a tithing law at this time, this incident proves just the opposite. It proves that Jacob, just as Abraham, was under no compulsion to tithe. By the way, there is no record that Jacob ever followed through with this and actually tithed.

The New Testament and Tithing

Jesus and the Pharisees. In only three places do the Gospels record Jesus as mentioning tithing. Two of these places are records in two of the Gospels of the same incident. In Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42, Jesus blasts the religious legalists of His day for missing the weightier matters of the law: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Yes, Jesus said that they should also have been tithing. But to whom was He speaking, and when? Jesus was speaking to the Jews who were still under the law before His crucifixion and resurrection.

In Luke 18:9-12, Jesus gives the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee prays by telling God of his good works, including giving tithes of all he possessed (Luke 18:12). This does not justify him. The publican, however, is justified because he confessed his sinfulness and begged for mercy.

While Jesus does not condemn tithing in these Scriptures, He does liken tithing in the absence of judgment, mercy, and faith to straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel (Matthew 23:24). It is also something that obviously does not justify. What must be stressed concerning these Scriptures is that they are the only times that Jesus mentions tithing. Jesus never tells His disciples to tithe, and He never established tithing for Christians.

Hebrews 7: Another place where tithing is mentioned in the New Testament is in Hebrews 7. Here we read again of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek. In verse 3, we read that Melchizedek was "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." The author makes this point because he wants to show that Melchizedek was greater than any of the Levitical priests, or even Abraham, because they were mortal men but Melchizedek has no "beginning of days, nor end of life." The reason

this is important is because it makes Melchizedek's priesthood greater than the Levitical/Aaronic priesthood. In fact, the Melchizedek priesthood supersedes the Levitical priesthood: "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (verses 11-12). This change in the law has far more ramifications than I can go into in this article. Suffice it to say that Hebrews 7:12 proves that those who say "because God does not change therefore the law does not change" are wrong. Hebrews 7:12 clearly says that the law has changed. And it also says that the priesthood has changed. Does this mean that the Melchizedek priesthood should receive tithes from Christians?

Certainly, Melchizedek received Abraham's tithe of the spoils of war. But, as already explained, this was a one-time event. There is no biblical command that Christians are to pay tithes to the Melchizedek priesthood. Anyway, Jesus Christ and all Christians are the Melchizedek priesthood (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17, 21; 1 Peter 2:5-9). We would only be paying tithes to ourselves. Hebrews 7 contains no evidence to support the idea that Christians must tithe. The author's point is to show the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Levitical priesthood.

Silence: Have you ever heard complete silence? Of course not, because there is nothing to hear. That is the way the rest of the New Testament is on the subject of tithing. Complete silence. Paul, although he has much to say about giving (as we shall see), says nothing about tithing. Although he chastens his readers for many sins and exhorts them to avoid others, he never once mentions non-tithing as a sin. The same holds true for the other New Testament writers. Certainly, Christians have the freedom to tithe if they like, but tithing is not a part of the New Covenant, and Christians are under no obligation to tithe. Therefore, preachers should not preach tithing, and churches should not discipline or judge others for not tithing. Old Testament tithing laws are not what God intends should motivate Christians to give. Christian giving is something far more wonderful than a legal obligation.

Christian Giving

Some people think that Christian giving is the New Covenant equivalent of Old Testament tithing, but this is not correct. Why?

Because tithing and giving are not related. As we saw in the first part of this article, the ancient Jews had to tithe by law. Tithing was not giving; it was paying, much as we pay our taxes. The Israelites no more thought of tithing as giving a gift than we think of income tax as giving a gift. It is something we have to pay by law. As we have seen, Christians are not obliged to tithe. Christians are under the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant, and the law of the tithe is not part of the New Covenant. There were, however, gifts in the Old Testament. For example, we read of freewill offerings (see Leviticus 22). But even with these, the law tightly prescribed when and how they were to be given. In this part of this article, we are going to look at how Christians are to give, especially at what should motivate us. First, let's look at what should not motivate us.

The Three Common But Wrong Motivators

I think I am not in any danger of exaggeration when I say that most churches and other ministries try to get people to donate using wrong, unChristian motivators. I am not saying that these churches and ministries know that these motivators are unChristian, but they are unChristian nonetheless. This problem is so serious that it has literally warped many Christians' thinking on the subject of giving. That's right, we are crooked in our thinking on this subject. Only the truth from the Bible can untwist us. So, with the hope that exposing error and revealing the truth will straighten us out on this subject, let's take a quick look at three errors and then see what real Christian giving is.

1) *Tithing*: This has been covered in depth in the first part of this article. When Christians believe that they must truly tithe, they are acting on the wrong motivation. As already explained, tithing has nothing to do with Christian giving. Tithing is something even the carnal Israelites who were not born again could do when they watched their p's and q's. On the other hand, real Christian giving is something only born again Christians can do. If someone has been telling you to tithe, don't believe it. If you have been telling people to tithe, stop.

2) *Give to Get*: No doubt you have heard it before: Donate and be blessed. You will be blessed for your giving. You cannot out give God, so the more you give, the more you will get. When you give, you will receive showers of blessings. As with many errors, there is, as we will see, an element of truth in this. Unfortunately, the way in which this is presented is usually a complete distortion of the biblical teaching. Many people are looking for what is often termed "a financial miracle," so they turn to the religious version of the get rich quick scheme.

Notice what popular televangelist Benny Hinn has said: "How do you get a financial miracle? By giving! That activates our faith! That gets our faith loose!... Every time I put my tithe in...or an offering, I say, 'Thank you for my harvest.' Audibly, I say it. Audibly. 'Thank you for my harvest'" (TBN's April 1990 Praise-A-Thon, as quoted in *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn*, G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman [Saint Louis: Personal Freedom Outreach, 1995] 147). Is this Christian? Does it reflect the freedom we have in Christ, or does it bind us? Does it motivate us to give unselfishly, or does it incite greed?

Hinn is typical of those who espouse this doctrine: "Make a pledge, make a gift. Because that's the only way you're going to get your miracle.... As you give, the miracle will begin. All right, so get to the phones and get busy" (TBN's April 1990 Praise-A-Thon, as quoted in *Confusing* 146). In this case, the motive for giving is not love; it is not God-centered. It is selfish.

There are myriad others who are of essentially the same school as Hinn. They tell us that it is harvest time for our miracle, but we must first sow the seed for that miracle by donating to their ministry. They tell us that if we place Christ first (by giving to their ministry), we should be prepared to inherit a fortune. But it is they who are inheriting an earthly fortune while they distort our thinking about Christian giving. As Jude says, "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear" (Jude 12).

Other ministries stress nonfinancial miracles in return for giving. They might suggest miraculous healing, or even little health benefits such as losing our headaches or backaches disappearing. Some tell us to look for other types of miracles. I know of one ministry that goes so far as to suggest that, after tithing, we may find that irritating co-workers are transferred or problems in our home's plumbing will go away! Where are such things found in the Bible? Nowhere!

These false teachings might be amusing if they were not so tragic. Millions are taken in by them. I am intimately acquainted with an elderly couple in their 80s. They have been completely sucked in by the promises of miracles in return for money. There is no talking them out of this way of thinking. Saying anything to the contrary would only incite an argument. They give so they can get a miracle today. It doesn't come, so they give more and expect a miracle tomorrow. But it, too, doesn't come. Although they have been deceived into thinking

that what they believe is from the Bible, in reality they have turned from the Scriptures to false teachers who promise them miracles in return for their money. Please don't misunderstand me. The tragedy is not that these people are sacrificing to give. It is that they are sacrificing for the wrong reason.

I must add here that there are some highly respected Christian writers and radio personalities who promote the idea that giving to God is an investment that will yield a good financial return. They make people think that financial troubles stem from failing to tithe or not giving enough. They say that the first step to financial success is tithing or generous giving. But as Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, authors of a book about religious addiction, explain, "God is not a financial investment opportunity. He isn't a 'good bet' to place your money on. What kind of faith would guarantee a return on money invested? That would not be faith; that would be a bank account" (*Toxic Faith*, Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton [Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1991] 62).

As an example of real faith and giving, Arterburn and Felton tell of a Christian physician in Bangalore, India. After his children were raised, he went back to school and obtained a degree in psychiatry so he could help the many mentally ill people in his area. While others in his field drove expensive sports cars, he drove a broken down vehicle and lived in a small house that had no hot running water. On Sundays, he held church services in a lean-to shack made of scrap boards and raw lumber. The authors write, "The faithful walked, limped, and dragged themselves to that mat-covered room to worship.... It was poverty at its most extreme. The people listened to the sermon, sang, prayed, and had communion. Then they did an astonishing thing. They gave their money. Having almost nothing, they gave very little, but the percentage of their earnings that went to God was extraordinarily high." (*Toxic Faith*, 61). These people were not giving because of some Old Testament law or because they thought they would get a financial return or because they needed to repay God for His grace by giving. They were giving because they wanted to, because they saw their church as the light in a dark world. These people, and Christians like them, give because they love God, because they put their money where their hearts are.

Here we see a physician and his congregation who were giving their all to God. Yet they lived in poverty most of us can only try to imagine. Why? Because they were not giving enough? Of course not! The answer lies in God's sovereignty and His blessing His people with what

He knows they need, not depending on their works. And, as the authors explain, these people "seem to prove that when all you have left is God, you get as much of God as you possibly can. The comforts of wealth often rob people of dependency on God" (*Toxic Faith*, 62). Accounts such as this ought to make the purveyors of the "give to get" and "God as a financial investment" gospels pull their books off the market, cancel their programs, and hide their faces in shame.

Before going on, I want to address a common misunderstanding of what the Bible means when it says that God will meet our needs. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:24-33).

Some people take the last part of this passage out of context and use it to support the false idea that Jesus has promised us wealth if we seek the kingdom of God first (usually defined by these people as generously supporting their ministry). But the context reveals that Jesus was saying something quite different. He tells us that we cannot serve two masters: God and mammon (material wealth or possessions). We will love the one and hate (disregard) or despise (think slightly of) the other. Obviously, we should love God. Therefore, we should disregard or think slightly of material possessions. And Jesus goes on to say just that. We should take no thought for the things of this life—food and clothing (and, obviously, the money that buys these things). God will provide these necessities for those who are seeking His kingdom first. But this is where most of us in our

affluent society misunderstand. Jesus is not saying God will provide a large house, nice car, extensive wardrobe, and home theater. What Jesus is saying is that God will provide what we need to sustain our lives—necessities (some food in our bellies and clothes on our backs)—while we dedicate our lives to the priority of all Christians of seeking the kingdom. And what is seeking the kingdom of God? It is doing what Christ tells us as Christians to do: believe, love one another, and spread the Gospel. Jesus is not calling us to a life of health and wealth, but to a life of self-sacrifice.

The apostle Paul wrote, "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 [spiritually] rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to be born in a stable as a human. He dedicated His life to teach the poor and ignorant masses, and eventually He gave His life to pay for their sins and your sins. And He left "us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Are we following those steps?

Now please do not think that by saying these things, I am trying to create feelings of guilt in you. Quite the reverse, I want you to remember the depth of God's grace and desire that others should know it too. I am just trying to stir some thought and, perhaps, remind some of you of your first love and get you back onto the "strait" and "narrow" (Matthew 7:14). Those who try to manipulate by laying guilt on people are doing something quite different.

3) Giving to get rid of sins or pay for grace: Have you ever been made to feel that you can pay for your sins or buy your way into God's favor by giving to a certain ministry? In the early 16th century, Martin Luther fought against the Roman Catholic church's practice of selling indulgences to spring people out of purgatory. Yet variations on this practice continue in ministries that call themselves Protestant, Baptist, Evangelical, or Fundamentalist. Apparently, it is easy for many ministries to succumb to the temptation to imply to their donors that a person's giving reflects his standing before God. If we give, we gain favor with God. If we don't, we may fall from grace. But anyone who knows the definition of grace—that it is something freely given—knows that this cannot be. We cannot earn what is freely given.

It can be amazing how carelessly people in responsible positions in Christian organizations can treat grace. I have heard ministers speak of coming late to church as if it were the next thing to the unpardonable sin. One minister cited in a book on spiritual abuse

clearly stated from the pulpit that a drop in weekly church attendance meant the church had fallen from grace! (*The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen [Minneapolis: Bethany, 1991] 65). In reality, the minister had fallen from grace in his mind; he had forgotten that grace does not depend on our performance. But it is perhaps in the area of asking for money that the temptation becomes greatest. For example: The organization needs money. The leadership needs to motivate people to give. Guilt is a powerful motivator. The leadership makes people feel their sins for not contributing enough. So they say things like, "I don't know how anyone who is saved can give so little," or "Surely, if the Holy Spirit were living in you, you would be giving more." Or, and perhaps this is the king of all money manipulators among Christian groups, "God did so much for you. Won't you pay Him back even a little by sending your contribution today?" Yikes! Run when you hear that one. You can never repay God. How can you repay what is freely given? While God may want you to do good works, He does not want you to do them thinking you are paying Him back. By trying to put a burden of repayment or trying to lay our sins back on us for not giving, manipulators are trying to pull your strings and make you dance to their tune. This is how cults operate, and, unfortunately, it is also a trait in too many Christian churches and parachurch organizations. But Jesus came to freely remove our guilt. God's motivator is love, not guilt or repayment of debt.

This is not to say that our conscience cannot play a role in our deciding to give. Jesus uses the word "compassion" to describe the difference between the Samaritan and the others who passed by when they saw the man lying half dead in the road (Luke 10:30-35). But words such as guilt, conscience, and compassion are abstract, and we can have trouble getting a handle on them. The Greek word translated "compassion" that Jesus uses in Luke 10:33 literally means to be moved in one's inwards. In other words, the Samaritan's inner most being was moved with pity when he saw the man lying in the road.

Now suppose the Samaritan had an urgent appointment and had convinced himself that he should pass by without helping. I think we can safely say that his conscience would have bothered him. And this would have been right. His conscience should have bothered him. James says, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). If the Samaritan had passed by the man in need, he would have been guilty of violating what he knew to be right; he would have been guilty of violating his conscience. So our compassion is our desire to do what is right, and our conscience tells

us that this action is right. But what about guilt? Guilt is outside of us. If we do something wrong—such as not doing what we know to be right—we are guilty. It is a verdict that God brings against us. If the Samaritan had passed the man by despite his knowing that he should have stopped, he would have been guilty of not doing what he knew was right. If he then turned back to help the man, he would have been doing the right thing. But this would not get rid of his guilt before God.

For example, if I rob a bank, I am guilty before the law of robbing the bank. If I then have such pangs of conscience that I bring the money back, I have done what is right, but that does not get rid of my guilt. I am still guilty of having robbed the bank. I can now confess my guilt before the judge and beg for mercy. And the judge may pardon me or give me a shorter sentence. But I don't deserve it. I am still guilty of having robbed the bank.

So, if the Samaritan had first violated what he knew to be right and passed by the man in need, then turned back and helped him, what could he do about his guilt of first passing the man by? He could call upon the Judge of us all and plead the blood of Jesus Christ his Savior as the payment for his sin. No amount of good works will make up for his sin. He would need grace alone, by faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

What has all this to do with the way people try to get us to donate? There is nothing wrong with appealing to our compassion and conscience. The Bible is full of appeals of this sort. It is not wrong for a ministry to tell us of their need. It is not wrong for a ministry to tell us that if they had more money they could do more good. It is not wrong for a ministry to say that lack of funds is keeping the Gospel from reaching more people. It is not wrong for a ministry to remind us what our priorities are as Christians. What is wrong is when a ministry implies that we are guilty for not having given before, and we can alleviate our guilt by giving now. Or that we can gain remission for any sins by works such as giving. Or that continued giving will keep us in right standing before God. Or that we can pay God back for His grace. Only the blood that Jesus Christ freely shed for our sins can remove our guilt, and that free gift can never be repaid.

Real Christian Giving

We have seen that the Christian's motive for giving should not be legal obligation, getting wealth or health, or trying to pay for our sins or God's grace. Giving—really giving without being forced by law or giving

to get or giving as a payment—is an expression of love. But what characterizes this pure giving?

Voluntarily, freely, and cheerfully: In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul instructs the Corinthian church about the giving of a gift for the needy brethren in Jerusalem. In verse 7, he writes, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." Notice that this is not a legal obligation because it is not "of necessity." It is not to be a fixed amount of one's income set by the law or by the church, but every man was to give "as he purposeth in his heart"; that is, each person is to give as he or she has decided. Also, it was to be given freely, "not grudgingly," and it was to be given cheerfully, "for God loveth a cheerful giver." This is quite different from tithing, giving to get, and giving out of a feeling of repaying a debt.

Before we leave 2 Corinthians 9, let's examine verse 6, for it is often used by the followers of the give to get philosophy to support their teaching. In 2 Corinthians 9:6, Paul states, "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." Remember that earlier I said that there is an element of truth to the idea that we will be blessed for giving. This Scripture shows that truth. So do other passages, such as Jesus' words in Luke 6:38: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." But notice what Jesus says just a few verses earlier: "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35). If we give, God will reward us. Perhaps He will do so in this life or perhaps He will do so in the next. Also, even if it is in this life, our reward may not be an abundance of riches, but, for example, more opportunities to serve God.

Remember that Jesus said that he who is faithful with few responsibilities will be given more. You didn't know that Jesus said this? This is what He is saying in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. When God gives us something—whether it be money, property, abilities, etc., He expects us to use it. With all that we have comes the responsibility to use it for good. As can be seen in the parable, those who do well with their responsibilities will be given more. In Luke 19:12-27, the rewards are called cities. Now, if you were given a city, I believe you would very quickly feel the

responsibility. And, as Christians, God has given us cities, towns, villages, and countryside. In fact, He has given us the entire earth in which to spread the Gospel and to do good in His name. Going back to Matthew 25, notice that the parable of the talents is immediately followed by the parable of the sheep and goats. The sheep, God's elect, are distinguished by their feeding and clothing the poor (the food and clothing both represent spiritual and physical sustenance), visiting prisoners, etc. The fact that these poor people are likened to Jesus Christ means that some of them were elect, so that ministering to them was ministering to Jesus. The King rewards the sheep. The goats, on the other hand, ignore the needs of others, live to themselves, and are given everlasting punishment.

So, are we to give in order to get? No! Jesus says, "But when thou doest alms [give to the poor], let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3). We are to give to help others, not ourselves. When we give to others, it is as if we are giving to Jesus Christ. Our motives are to be pure. Yes, God will reward us, but getting must not be our motive.

How much to give: If tithing is not for Christians, how are we to know how much to give? In Mark 12:43-44, Jesus observed a widow who gave all she had. He did not say she was stupid to do so or criticize her in any way. In Mark 10:21, Jesus told a rich man (see verse 22) to sell all he had, give the money to the poor, and then take up his cross and follow Jesus. Is the Bible saying that only poor widows and rich men should be willing to give up all? Let's find out.

Notice, now, this contrast with the widow and what Christ told the rich man. According to Barna Research, Ltd., the average donor in 2000 contributed a mean of \$649 to churches and \$176 to religious organizations other than churches. That is a total of \$825. Notice these figures: "In 1916, Protestants were giving 2.9% of their incomes to their churches. In 1933, the depth of the Great Depression, it was 3.2%. In 1955, just after affluence began spreading through our culture, it was still 3.2%. By 2001, when Americans were over 480% richer, after taxes and inflation, than in the Great Depression, Protestants were giving 2.7% of their incomes to their churches" (<http://www.emptytomb.org/research.html>). Now, I am not saying that we should return to an Old Testament idea of worrying about percentages. But anyway you figure it, 2.7 percent, or \$825 a year, is a lot less than giving all. \$825 a year is under \$16 a week. That is about an hour's wage for the average worker in the United States. So,

the average American Christian donor works one hour a week for the Lord and 39 hours for the things of this world.

In November 2008, a crowd of shoppers waiting to get into a Wal-Mart store in New York for a "Black Friday sale" broke down the door of the store and trampled an employee to death ("Wal-Mart worker dies in Black Friday stampede" — <http://www.newsday.com/news/local/nassau/ny-limart1129,0,167903.story>). People often stand outside for hours in long lines, even during inclement weather, to get into stores during sales or to get tickets for games or concerts. When was the last time you heard of people standing in line for hours to hear the Gospel? Or being trampled in a stampede to serve the poor? Does this sound ridiculous? In Mark 2:2-4, we read of so many people trying to get into the house where Jesus was that friends carrying an invalid had to get onto the roof, make a hole in it, and lower the man through it to Jesus. Matthew 13:2 mentions that so many people were trying to get near Jesus that He had to get into a boat and speak to them from there. Several other incidents of crowds pressing around Jesus are mentioned in the Gospels. And at least twice, multitudes of people followed Jesus into the wilderness without even being concerned that they had taken no food with them (Matthew 14:13-21; 15:29-38). Jesus didn't criticize them; He miraculously fed them. In fact, I can think of no time that Jesus criticized someone for giving up too much for His sake.

What am I saying? Am I saying that we should sell all we have and give everything away? No, how much we give is an individual decision (2 Corinthians 9:7), and I am not going to suggest what that should be. Everyone's circumstances are different. And we must remember that providing for our family comes first (1 Timothy 5:8). But does providing for our family mean that they (or you) must have the latest designer clothes, the best home entertainment system, weekly trips to the beautician, a new carpet? Do you need the jet ski? What about the snowmobile? Only you can decide. What I am saying is that we must examine our lives and prayerfully evaluate our priorities. Those of us who believe we truly cannot spare the money may be able to donate our time.

If we are Christians, and I assume we are, then let's get out of our 21st century affluent lethargy and get more radical for the Gospel. Let's realize that our past motivations for giving have probably been wrong, and that they have likely caused us to give in a legalist or selfish frame of mind. We need to pray that God will rid us of these errors and will motivate us to selflessly give with a generous spirit. We may have a long road ahead of us before we reach that point, but we

can start right now. I am not saying to start with guilt—Jesus has taken our guilt away, but let us start with a desire for the spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Where to give: I would like to discuss the question of where we should give. Just as our motivations for giving have been warped by wrong teachings on the subject, so have our ideas about where to give. Sometimes we are afraid to give because we think the money will be misused. And some churches teach that we should give only to the local church. But the Bible gives us different criteria.

1). Give to who faithfully teaches you God's Word. Paul explains this in Galatians 6:6: "Let him that is taught in the word communicate ["share"—NKJV] unto him that teacheth in all good things." The Greek word translated "communicate" in the King James Version has an interesting meaning. It means to have shares with someone, to do something in common with him. In Galatians 6:6, it means that someone shares the Word of God with you, and you share what you have of your physical substance with him so that you are sustaining one another and having a common part in the teaching of God's Word.

A few people say that those who teach God's Word should never receive money because Paul worked to support himself (Acts 18:3). But this is a misunderstanding of what Paul himself says. Paul may have had to work at a trade for his living, but he also chastened churches when they did nothing to contribute to his support. Look at 1 Corinthians 9: "Have we [Paul and Barnabas] not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" (verses 4-6). In other words, Paul is asking, "Don't Barnabas and I have as much right as the other apostles to eat and drink and to support a wife or sister on your contributions? Or do only Barnabas and I have no right to stop working for a living?" Apparently, from what Paul was saying, the other apostles were supported by those they served. Paul was trying to make the Corinthian Christians that he and Barnabas served realize that he and Barnabas should also be supported for their service toward them.

In verse 7, Paul writes, "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" Everyone gets paid for what he does. A soldier does not pay his own

way when he goes to war. Farmers enjoy the fruit of their labor. Those who labor in the Word should be paid for it.

Paul next cites Deuteronomy 25:4 and explains it from a New Testament perspective: "Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (1 Corinthians 9:8-10). In the Old Testament, God said that the ox that is used to thresh the grain should be allowed to eat of that grain; he has earned it. Paul applies this to humans. Those who work should receive gain from it. Paul and Barnabas were laboring in the Word among the Corinthians, but the Corinthians were, in effect, muzzling them by not sharing their worldly goods with them.

Verse 11 is pivotal: "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" The New American Standard Bible renders this very well: "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" It is a give and take. Those who sow spiritual things should receive material things in return. In verse 12, Paul says that he had not exercised his right to receive support from the Corinthians because he was concerned he would offend them away from the Gospel. But he tells them of his right, and he does so to their shame. In verse 13, Paul explains that the Temple priests in the Old Testament made their living by eating the offerings that were brought to the altar. "Even so," Paul continues in verse 14, "hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Although Paul mentions the Old Testament priests, he is not suggesting tithing. He is simply using the priests as an example of the basic principle that we should receive a reward for the work we do.

Interestingly, the Philippian church had a different attitude toward Paul. They helped to support him, at least sometimes. In Philippians 4:10, Paul tells them, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity." Paul was happy that the Philippian brethren had revived their interest in his welfare. He says this even though he has learned how to be content in any circumstance, even when needy and hungry (verses 11-16). Notice in verse 17, Paul says that his joy over their gift is not because he had received something, but because he knew that God would profit the Philippians because of

it: "Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account."

While Paul may have considered it his lot to suffer the wrong of not being supported by those to whom he preached and to be rewarded by God for his suffering this neglect, he ordered that other laborers in the Word should be supported: "Let the elders that rule well [*kalōs proestōtes*—"honorably stand in front" or "do a good job of presiding"; "rule" is a poor translation as the Greek does not mean to exercise control or dominate and it does not refer to an "ecclesiastical office"] be counted worthy of double honour [*diplēs timēs*—"double" may be taken as simply meaning "more"; "honor" is a good translation of , *timēs*, but the context that follows shows that physical sustenance, likely including money, is what is intended] especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (1 Timothy 5:17-18). And Paul is not alone in his opinion. Jesus, when sending His disciples out on a missionary journey, instructed them not to take money or extra clothing with them, for they should expect their needs to be met: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat" (Matthew 10:9-10).

So, while we are supposed to see to the physical needs of those who provide for our spiritual needs, many of these assumptions common today are not found in the Bible: 1) that there is a class of people, the "clergy," who are the ones who speak, teach, lead, counsel, etc., while everyone else passively receives these services; and 2) that those who so serve are to be paid a salary. It is beyond the scope of this article to expand on point 1, but I will say something about point 2. It should be obvious from what we have just read from Paul that he was not receiving a set salary. Also, If those laboring in the church were receiving set salaries, there would have been no need for Paul to say what he did about elders in 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

In John 10:11-14, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." In the New Testament, the English words shepherd and pastor are both used to translate the

Greek word *poimēn*. In Ephesians 4:11, for example, it would be less confusing if, instead of "pastors," the translation said "shepherds." It gives us a better idea that the "shepherds" are to care for God's "flock" as a shepherd cares for his sheep. But, as we read in John 10, Jesus is the true shepherd of His church.

Nevertheless, Jesus has set some as undershepherds. But in John 10, He specifically warns against hirelings. "Hireling" is from the word *misthōtos*. It means "wage worker." In Mark 1:20, we read that Zebedee had hired servants or hirelings. Jesus says in John 10 that such wage workers care about their salary, not the flock. When danger comes, they flee. This is the temptation of the pastor who is the employee or hireling of his church. I can't say that every salaried pastor will succumb to the temptation, but many do. In fact, I believe this is a major factor behind the ineffectualness of the church today. It is my own experience that if you take at a typical local assembly that is apostatizing and investigate the causes, you will usually find a hireling pastor who is retreating from every step Satan takes into the church. At the same time, he will usually avoid the truth as best he can and even attack as "prideful," "divisive," or "unloving" those who bring the truth to his attention. He is a hireling of the church and, as such, he is under enormous pressure to give the church what it wants, even if it is not biblical.

The Bible depicts the servants in the church as looking to God for their needs. They are His servants and slaves, but not hirelings. They are never described as wage workers under the church. George Müller tells why he gave up his salary from the church where he served: "The whole system tends to the bondage of the servant of Christ. One must be unusually faithful and intrepid if he feels no temptation to keep back or in some degree modify his message in order to please men, when he remembers that the very parties, most open to rebuke and most liable to offence, are perhaps the main contributors toward his salary." He was no hireling. (*George Muller of Bristol*, A. T. Pierson, [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, reprint] 70).

In summary, then, what Jesus and Paul teach on this subject is not restricted to only the local church. True, Paul's reference to the elders refers to the elders of one's local church. But support should be based on faithfulness to the Scriptures, not locality. In some places, there is no one who is faithfully teaching from the Scriptures. Paul and Barnabus were not members of the churches that should have supported them. They merited support because they were faithfully preaching and teaching God's Word. Bringing the Gospel to someone is

the greatest gift one can give. Therefore, supporting the sound preaching of the Gospel and teaching of Scripture is the best way financially to show love to our brethren and to our neighbor.

2). Give based on faithfulness, not results. Besides legalism, giving to get, and giving to get rid of sins or pay for grace, there is another wrong way that Christians have come to think about giving. I mention it here because it fits the context of giving to support the preaching of the Gospel. This fallacy is one that modern Christians have picked up from the world around them. It concerns results. Often, Christians will donate only to ministries or churches that produce big, visible results. It is as if the investment mindset has crept into Christian giving. You might be shocked to learn (at least I was) that there are now businesses that "help Christians put together a sound donation portfolio of ministries that produce results." Just as Wall Street investors want to put their money behind obvious winners, Christians have come to feel that they should give only to those ministries that appear to produce the biggest bang for the buck. Ministries are judged by how many Bibles they distributed, how many hungry they fed, how many people came forward in their crusades, etc. Churches are judged by how many thousands they are bringing into their massive structures. Even our modern emphasis on financial efficiency is results oriented. When we look at what percent of a ministry's income is spent on fundraising and administrative expenses, for example, as opposed to the work we expect them to be doing, we are really saying that we expect to get as many results per dollar as possible. But what are those results?

Are such results the criteria the Bible tells us to look for? No. The Bible shows us that we should evaluate Christian ministries by their faithfulness to God's Word. As we have already read in many Scriptures above, God tells us to be faithful to His Word and to support the preaching of His Word. The results are up to God. Often, those ministries that are most faithful to His Word are among the smallest because God, in His good will, has sovereignly determined that this is the way it should be in this age. Also, the visible results of faithfulness to God may not show for many years. We must remember that God has His timetable, and we should not try to impose our schedules and expectations on Him. When we attempt to judge God's work with such human criteria, we can cut ourselves out of having a part in ministries that God judges faithful.

To look at this another way, many even obvious cults are very successful by worldly standards, are financially sound, attract large

numbers of people, and do "good works." But it should be evident that Christians are not to support them. Just because we think a ministry is producing solid results, or because it claims to be doing so, does not necessarily mean that God is blessing that ministry or that we should support it. God does not judge by the outward appearances that men usually use. Instead, He looks on the heart: "For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7b). Because sin so easily clouds our judgment, we must be sure to be led by the guidelines God gives us; we must look to faithfulness to His Word, the Bible.

It is common to misunderstand Jesus' words when He said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20), as meaning "by their results." But in the verses that immediately follow, Jesus tells those who in His name have "done many wonderful works" that He never knew them: "depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23). Why did He not know them? Because they did not know Him through His Word. The "fruits" that we are to use as criteria in examining a ministry are their words, their faithfulness to the Bible. The contrast is between those who are faithful and those who are "false prophets" and "ravening wolves" (verse 15). It is between those who build their lives and ministries upon the rock and those who build them upon the sand (verses 24-27).

3). Give to needy brethren. Are there both poor people and affluent people in your church? There should not be. The Bible clearly instructs us to care for our needy brethren. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 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?" (1 John 3:16-17). And, in 1 Timothy 6:17-18, Paul writes, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate." (Remember that "communicate" in the language of the King James Version means to share.) The end result should be that the poor do not remain poor.

Of course, I am not saying that poor people who can work but refuse to should be allowed to syphon off the resources of those who work hard to make a living. Paul addresses this problem: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which

walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread" (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). Sadly, however, a Rush Limbaugh conservatism has crept into the church that has allowed us to conveniently dismiss all poor people, even other Christians, as lazy and shiftless and undeserving of our help. Such thinking should not have a place among God's people. Other factors besides an unwillingness to work can cause people to be poor.

The idea that Christians should readily share with those in need, especially their brethren, is found throughout the New Testament. Earlier in this article, we saw God's people represented as sheep feeding and clothing the poor (Matthew 25:35-45). We have also seen that Jesus told the rich, young ruler to sell all he had and give the proceeds to the poor (Mark 10:21). Luke quotes John the Baptist as saying, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11). If you have excess beyond your needs, share it with others. In Luke 12:33-34, Jesus instructs, "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." How often have we read such statements and not realized their radical nature? As we go about our daily business, how do we "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive"? (Acts 20:35).

It is interesting that when Paul, Barnabus, and Titus went to Jerusalem, James, Peter, and John did not interfere with the work they were doing among the Gentiles, except to tell them, as Paul says, "that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do" (Galatians 2:10). Paul gives us further instruction in Galatians 6:10: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Now let us try to read Acts 2:44-45 without bringing into our minds modern concepts of capitalism and communism, which are completely foreign to the context of Acts: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." Now, if you have read this far, you might not be surprised to learn that the Greek word translated "common" in this verse is related to the Greek word translated "communicate" in Galatians 6:6 and 1 Timothy 6:18 discussed earlier in this article. It means, "belonging to several." In

other words, they shared what they had with each other so that no one was in need.

This is explained in more detail in Acts 4:32, 34-35: "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.... Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." No one forced anyone to give his possessions to someone else (modern socialism), and no one said there was no such thing as private property (modern communism). This was all done voluntarily, as each person was led by the Spirit to share with his brethren in need.

Some are critical of this sharing in the early church and say that it led to poverty in the Jerusalem church. But the Bible says that the need in Jerusalem arose because of a drought (Acts 11:28-30). And, more importantly, the Bible does not criticize these Christians for sharing. So, how dare we criticize them and, by so doing, judge the Bible? Is not the Bible supposed to be our standard for belief and practice? Of course! Then we had better start doing what it says.

3). Give to our neighbor. And who is our neighbor? Jesus answered this way: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:30-37).

Of course, if the man who helped the man in need was his neighbor, then the man in need was the helper's neighbor. That answers the

question. The person we come across who is in need is our neighbor and, therefore, the person we are to love as ourselves (see Luke 10:27; Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Leviticus 19:18). Earlier, I quoted Galatians 6:10, which says, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Our first priority in caring for others is to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ. But we are also to help those in need whom God puts in our path. By the way, when we help our neighbor, we are to do it in the name of Christ. That is, at the very least, we should make certain that our neighbor understands that we are not helping because we are "good people," but because we are Christians. As we have opportunity (and we should try to create that opportunity) we should tell our neighbor the Gospel. Also remember, as I have mentioned, supporting ministries that faithfully preach the Gospel is also a way to help our neighbor.

Conclusion

What have we learned? We have learned that false teaching has wounded many Christians' view of giving. They either see giving as legalistic tithing, or as a way to get, or as a way to alleviate guilt. Also, many are afraid to give except to ministries producing concrete results as judged by man's standards. And we have learned that God instead wants us to give to those who faithfully teach Truth, and to the poor in the church, and to our neighbor in need; and we are to do so voluntarily, freely, and cheerfully. We are to give as we determine according to our ability. Our ability may be more than our old patterns of thinking allowed, especially when we consider the luxuries we in our society heap upon ourselves with the excuse that we "need them."

To get over our old ways of thinking about giving, we will need to seek God's help in prayer. But we will also need to start breaking out of our old patterns of thinking by giving in the ways the Bible instructs. This breaking out of the old patterns can be very freeing (I always think of Ebenezer Scrooge at the end of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*), which, after all, is what the Truth always does: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).