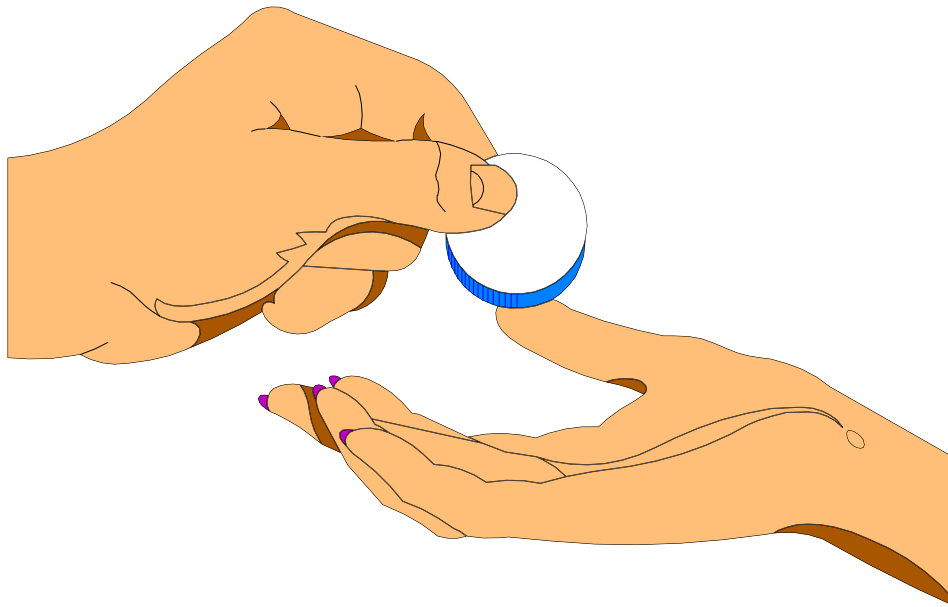


THE GRACE OF GIVING



*A short series on the matter of sacrificial giving
in the life of the believer*

by

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The Grace Of Giving - Chapter 1

"Its Biblical Basis"

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Now let's turn in our Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 8, and as I said, we're starting this morning a new series which will be a short series on 'The Grace of Giving', and this will be the first study 'Its Biblical Basis'. Now as many of you are aware we have a building project just across the street here, and I think it's important at times like this when there is an exercise needed among God's people, to realise our responsibilities from scripture. I make no apology for touching and dealing with this subject at such a time, for there could be no better time as this one to remind you of your responsibilities as an assembly. And if the offerings go up by 1000 pounds per week, I can guarantee you that I'll not be getting that thousand pounds - just in case any of you think that I'm wanting more money!

So verse 1 of chapter 8 in 2 Corinthians, Paul says: "Moreover, brethren, we do you to know of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia". Now just to fill you in, because some of these verses are quite difficult to read let alone understand - Paul is now exhorting the Corinthians to be liberal in their giving to needs that there are in the churches, and he is citing the example of the Macedonians, as to how they gave liberally to other's needs. Verse 2: "How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. 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 rich" - and we'll finish our reading just there at verse 9.

The grace of giving: its Biblical basis. Now, giving is a subject little preached on, and probably not in the top ten of requested sermon titles from the pew! Preachers don't deal with it too much, and congregations don't like it dealt with too much either. There, I think, are a number of reasons we could cite why Christians generally have hang-ups with regards to talking about money, especially from the pulpit. One hang-up could be that they don't want to seem that they're living or talking about things in a way contrary to the warnings of Scripture, which tell us that the love of money is the root of all evil, which tell us that we cannot serve God and mammon or money or material things - and therefore, because we know it is a sin to worship materials and finance, we shy away from talking about it at all. We don't want to be misunderstood as being mercenaries, begging for money, especially when we consider the charismatic movement in our world today - and if any of you have 'the God Channel', I would warn you to be careful what you watch, but many of those on the God Channel and such charismatic so-called Christian TV channels are always begging for money. It amounts to no more than financial fraud of their followers, disgraceful escapades of false prophets who are making a profit.

We are told to beware, Peter tells us of those who 'through covetousness shall with vain words make merchandise of you, whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not'. It was a charismatic teacher I am told, I wasn't at the meeting, who recently visited the Kings Hall - she's on the radio quite a lot - and for the first hour or so of her meeting she talked about nothing but money. What she had to sell, the money that they needed to raise in order to rent the building for that particular evening: money, money, money. Because of that many of us shy away from the subject. Neither do we want to transgress the principle that God has told us that His eye is upon the sparrow. God takes care of the little sparrow in the air, therefore God will take care of us. He clothes the lilies of the field more than Solomon in all his glory, therefore we are afraid that in looking for money and in talking about money, that in some way we are transgressing this principle that should be the principle of the disciple of Christ of total and utter dependence upon God alone by faith. Not going to others for our need, not looking to the Gentile world for our need, but going to God alone.

Certainly we don't want to be mercenary, we don't want to transgress the Scriptures that talk about love of money and the worship of mammon, and we don't want to be misunderstood as getting involved with begging for money like charismatic financial frauds. We don't want to look as if we're transgressing total dependence in faith upon God, and we certainly do not want to look as if we are charging for the gospel - and we must never ever get to the stage where we're asking for people to pay 10 pounds for a ticket to hear the gospel! Yet in all these things, which I have sympathy with, many of them, the Scriptures which no one could accuse of being mercenary or money-minded, are not afraid to lay financial responsibility squarely and fairly at the feet of God's people. If you read the Scriptures in even a casual reading you will see that that is so, and therefore we ought not to be afraid to talk about it. No one could accuse us from this pulpit of continually talking about money, but for the next four weeks or so we will be talking about such, because we have a need, and I believe it is scriptural that God's people should be aware of the need and be exercised by the Spirit of God through the word of God to meet that need - and that need should be met no other way.

Dr Adam Clarke once preached on 'Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely', from Revelation 22 and verse 17. At the conclusion he announced an offering, and afterwards a lady asked him: 'How can you reconcile the freeness of the water of life with the collection at the close?'. 'Oh madam', he answered, 'God gives the water without money, but you must pay for the waterworks, for the pipes, and for the pitchers which convey the water'. Isn't that the fact? The water of life is free, and praise God for that, and we must always guard that - but there is a need, and a responsibility upon God's people, not only to give to God in their stewardship with regards to time - and that is so, we could take a series on that alone, energies, the work that we must do, putting our shoulders to the plough, ploughing God's furrows in the world's field. But our responsibility is also upon our resources, and there are financial responsibilities - yes, requirements - of the disciple of Jesus Christ.

Now we're going to look at many verses over the next four weeks or so, but I think the most explicit teaching in the Scriptures is in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 where Paul instructs the Corinthian church regarding giving by citing the beautiful example of the Macedonian church's giving. He begins in verse 1, if you look at it, talking about the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia. So right away he links this word 'grace' with the giving of the Christian - and that's why I've titled this series 'The Grace of Giving'. If you look further down the verses he uses this phrase five times, in verse 4 he mentions the privilege - in the Authorised it says: 'Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift'. That word 'gift' is literally the word for grace 'charis'. He uses the word 'charon' in this verse as well. In verse 6 he uses the phrase 'this act of grace' - 'You', at the end of it, 'You the same grace', the margin says 'gift' again, but it's the word 'grace' also - the act of grace, 'charon' in Greek. Verse 7: 'Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also'. It is the word 'charity', the giving of grace. Verse 9, look at it: 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus', 'charon' again.

So in just these few verses Paul repeats this word 'grace' five times in the context of the believers giving financially to each other. So he's telling us giving is a matter of grace from beginning to end, and we'll see that right throughout the whole Scriptures this morning as we look at its biblical basis - but I want you to understand this: giving is not an obligation to the child of God alone. Yes, it is a responsibility, but it is meant to be a blessing! I wonder do we see it like that?

I'm not going to give you too much challenge or exhortation today, I just want to lay a foundation for the next couple of weeks in our studies. I want you to see that grace is the foundation of giving right throughout the whole Bible - now I know we separate Old and New Testaments, and say that the Old is law and the New is grace, and to a certain extent that is true - but grace giving has had a basis right from the very beginning, even in the Old Testament. I want you to see this, because to understand New Testament grace giving you need to understand the Old Testament grace giving, and there's a lot of confusion about today as to what God actually required of His children in the Old Testament, and indeed what He requires of us today. Most people think, 'Oh, the Old Testament Jews had to give a tithe, they had to give a tenth of their earnings - 10 percent - and therefore that's what God wants of us today, a tenth, 10 percent'. Maybe that's what you give of your earnings? Can I just say to you: that is a woeful misconception not only of grace giving, but of giving in the Old Testament, because God did not require a tenth of the ancient Jewish people - that is incorrect.

We shall see that this morning, in fact, actually when you study the Old Testament you find that there were multiple mandatory giving requirements in Israel which came to considerably more than just 10 percent. Let me show you these, because I know people are sceptical about some of the things I come off with at times, and you're well to be such because you've to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. But let us look at the first one, you don't have to turn to it, if you wish you can, Numbers 18 - we find there what is called the Lord's tithe, the Lord's tithe, or the Levite's tithe. It was in order to support the priestly ministry within the tabernacle and later within the temple. Now it's cited for you in Numbers 18, but one reading I want you to look at is Leviticus 27. Turn with me to that, Leviticus 27 verse 30: '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', the Lord's tithe, 'it is holy unto the LORD'.

So 10 percent of everything that you owned, all the people's produce of their animals, livestock, was given to the Levites to support them. They had to be fed, they had to be kept, they had to wear clothing, they had to have a place of at least some comfort to live in. This was supplied by a tithe, a tenth, from the people, which was called the Lord's tithe - and there was no option about it, this was not grace giving, this was law. A man who did not pay it was robbing God. I know there's a whole lot of people that rob the state, but they're not robbing God - they are sinning against God, but in the Old Testament to not give this tenth of a tax for the Levite was robbing God. Now let me show you this, turn with me to Malachi chapter 3 - I'm going to make your fingers work this morning...there's not too many pages turning...do you not know where Malachi is? Malachi chapter 3, at the end of your Old Testament, and this is what God says to His people in verse 8 of chapter 3: 'Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings' - it refers to the Lord's tithe: you're not giving what's mandatory.

Now mark this please: for an Old Testament child of God, an Israelite, it was mandatory to give the Lord's tithe - 10 percent, no bones about it. But you see, where many fall down is this: this was not the only tithe that they had to give. In fact, there is an additional initial 10 percent, which is a second tithe which was called the 'festival tithe' - you find that in Deuteronomy chapter 12. We'll not turn to it, but this tithe took effect, it was said prophetically, when Israel would get into the promised land - they were to celebrate the fact that God had delivered them from Egypt, the type of sin, and brought them into the promised land of Canaan. They were to join in a celebration which would become an annual celebration, feasting, family together, friends and servants would all join together in a feast to celebrate what the Lord had done. That was the festival tithe, necessary to pay for those annual religious feasts within the society of the Jews.

So the Lord's tithe that we mentioned first was to perpetuate the ministry of the Levite; and this second tithe, the festival tithe, was to build religious celebration and mutual community among the Jewish people. The two tithes together comprised...what? Twenty percent! Twenty percent already, and I say, a mandatory twenty percent upon God's people - that's quite an economic bite, you would say, isn't it? But there's more - you say 'Don't go on any further!' - there is more: there's the poor tithe, Deuteronomy 14 verse 28 and 29. It commands a third tithe to be given - now it was given only every three years, so it's not a tenth out of your wage every year, but a tenth out of your wage every three years, which comes to 3.3 percent per annum. So this adds another 3 percent, and it's self-explanatory: it's for the poor, it's a sort of welfare, a social tax in order to supply for those who can't look after themselves within the society.

Now, if you're adding up what does it come to now? 10, 10, 3 - 23 percent per year, every year. Now those are the mandatory tithes: one to fund the priesthood, two to fund national feasts, three to aid the poor - and you might say: 'Enough! I've hardly got anything left for myself!'. Well, there's more - Leviticus 19:9-10, people were also charged to refrain from harvesting the corner of their fields. You got the plough out at harvest time, and you took the - maybe it wasn't the plough, what is it? Whatever they cut down the wheat with anyway, I'll have to ask my father-in-law! They cut it down and they take it all into harvest, but they weren't allowed to harvest the corners of the field, they weren't allowed to pick grapes from the vineyard because they had to leave the gleaning for the poor. Those corners were left for the poor as well, and in addition to that mentioned in Leviticus 19 there are other taxes that were to be given from time to time, such as the tax of the third of a shekel - that came in later in Israel's history, which was to pay for the materials, the provisions for the temple offerings, you can read about that in Nehemiah 10.

So added to this Lord's tithe for the priests, added to the festival tithe for the celebrations, the poor tithe for a social welfare tax for the poor, is the temple tithe - the tithe and tax of a third of a shekel, for the things that would go into the temple - and then there's an additional poor tithe of the corners of the fields and the fruit of the fields that you're not allowed to pluck from. Why am I telling you all this? Well, here it is, the bottom line was this: God's people were required - now required - to give a bottom line of a minimum of 25 percent of their earnings per year, not a tenth! Several tenths...is that it? No! You say, 'What Bible are you reading?' - well, grace giving started in the Old Testament. That is what they were required to give, and then the Lord comes after this 25 percent and leaves it open, an option for men and women not to give what they have to give but to give from their heart, what they want to give! Grace giving - an offering that is not required.

We read in Numbers 18 of the firstfruit offerings, which an Israelite could give to God out of love for Him. In other words, he brought the firstfruit of his crops at the harvest time and he offered it to God, the firstfruits of his livestock were given to God. The beautiful thing about this was that he did this when he had not yet harvested the rest of the crop for himself. So he was giving to God, ultimately, before he knew whether he had enough for himself! He was giving the best to God before anybody else. Oh, I wonder do we do that with our earnings? Is God left with the leftovers? Is God left the lamb with the blemish, with the spot; the lamb that is crippled? That's not love giving, grace giving - he gave the best to God, now he didn't have to, but he wanted to, and he was trusting God by faith that God would supply his need whatever the rest of that need was. It was faith giving, and it was totally involuntary.

That wasn't all the grace giving there was in the Old Testament. There was what's called the freewill offering - offerings that God called for when he commanded Moses to build the tabernacle, and you can read about that in Exodus 25 verses 1 and 2. There's nothing specified within it except that it had to be voluntary, and it had to be from the heart. It wasn't mandatory, it wasn't required, but if you were going to do it you had to do it right. Now turn with me for a moment to Exodus 36, because I want to show you an astounding fact. Now we can be awful hard on the Israelites at times, can't we? Oh, we hammer them left, right and centre for wandering around in the wilderness - but here's a lesson that we can take from them even in the midst of

their sinful backsliding. Moses asks for these gifts that are not mandatory, that are freewill offerings, and in chapter 36 of Exodus, verse 5 we read: 'And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much!'

They had given the Lord's tithe, 10 percent; they had then given the festival tithe, another 10 percent; they had given a third tithe every three years, which came once a year to 3.3 percent; then many of them would have given grace giving and the firstfruits offering - and now God says: 'Well, I have a tabernacle here to build, and I need things for it, and I want you to make things out of the freewill of your heart, through love, voluntarily from your hearts'. The people were so liberal in their giving in the Old Testament that God had to tell Moses: 'Tell them to stop! There's too much!'. I've never had that problem, I must say.

When a heart overflows with grace giving, even an Old Testament heart - no matter what dispensation you want to put him in - a substantial amount of that love pours out to God in the giving of the income that we have financially. Now, we must move on because although grace giving started in the Old Testament, it really finds its fruition in the New. As we noted, we want to look now at the grace giving in the New Testament: Paul began his discussion of grace giving by holding this high example of the impoverished Macedonians abounding, astoundingly in their giving. Verses 1 and 2, these Macedonian were in verse 2 'in a great trial of affliction'; they were in 'deep poverty'. Now that word 'deep poverty' in verse 2 is the word in the Greek from which we derive our English word 'bathysphere' - now if you don't know what the bathysphere is, ships are used to probe the 'bathos', which is the very depths of the ocean that no man humanly speaking can scale. So that is what the bathysphere is - it's the depths of the sea - Paul is saying these people were in the depths of poverty, like the fathomless ocean beneath the surface.

The Greek scholar Alfred Plummer translates this: 'They give out of their deep-down-to-depth poverty' - now they were poor! Some of you maybe count yourself as poor, but if you cast your mind back 50, 60, 70, 80 years - we are not poor in comparison, relatively speaking. Look at two-thirds of the world - we are not poor, although we struggle, we all struggle - well, most of us do. But the fact of the matter is that these folks were down to depth poverty, 'bathos' poverty - they had hardly anything to give whatsoever. One author has said: 'Today we fancy ourselves poor if we have to think twice before going out to dinner'. He's an American, he says: 'The American way today is the credit card, buying things you do not need, with money you do not have, to impress people you do not like' - but it was not so with the Macedonian Christians.

Not only were they excruciatingly poor, but verse 2 tells us that they were in a great trial of affliction - the literal sense is that they were being squeezed by the difficulties of their life. Maybe you're thinking, 'Don't talk to me about giving, I hardly have two pennies to rub together' - neither did these believers, their situation was almost impossible in the grinding poverty that they experienced in their severe trials. But it was out of that circumstance that this incredible grace giving came, and Paul commends them for it. Out of extreme trial, severe poverty, they were overflowing with joy, Paul says, because they abounded unto the riches of their liberality. Even in the midst of such awful despair financially, there was grace giving. Do you know what principle that lays down for me? No one is too poor to give - no one. It's astounding - if you think this is hard to believe, you need to listen to Paul further of his description of them in verses 3 and 4. Look at it: 'For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves' - they gave beyond their means, they gave beyond how they really could, literally 'beyond' means 'contrary to their ability'. They weren't using commonsense here - and I know, and later we'll deal with this, that we have to give as the Lord has prospered us - but let that not be a cloak in any way for us to get out of the fact that the Scriptures lay down the fact that in our giving we need to be sacrificial. This is grace giving.

Chrysostom, one of the early Christians, marvelled at these Macedonians, and he said: 'They did the begging, not Paul'. They were saying: 'Come on Paul, have a heart, don't limit us in our giving'. Look at verse 4: 'Praying us', they were begging us, 'with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saint'. Now this is astounding: they hadn't really got it to give, but they're begging Paul not for money, but begging to give money! There's nothing more I hate than believers begging for money - but I haven't seen too many people today begging to give money beyond their means. This is the grace of giving, it has nothing to do with being well-off, it's not dictated by your ability, it's got to do with your willingness - your heart, your love for God and for Christ. That's all that can produce such giving - their amazing giving was simply the result that they had given themselves over to God.

If you miss this you miss absolutely everything: it's easy, when you have given everything over to God, to give to others because it's the natural reflex of the soul - when God owns you, the whole of you, He owns everything that you have. When He lays His finger on something for you to give, you give it! Paul says the reason why they were giving like this was in verse 5: 'they first give their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God'. Now listen, I know you're saved, but have you ever given your whole self over to God? Have you ever given your pocket over to God? Not like the man baptised, and kept his hand in the air with his wallet in it, so that it wouldn't go under the water.

I'll tell you, pockets are one of the hardest things to baptise these days! They just don't seem to go under the water! But you see, if you have actually given yourself - as baptism illustrates - the whole of yourself over to God, there'll be no problem. A young Norwegian named Peter Torgensson (sp?) was 17 years of age and his heart was so stirred by a challenging missionary message on giving, that he opened his wallet, and he poured out all his money into the offering bag - and as an afterthought he included a wee scrap of paper on which he wrote 'Og mit liv' (sp?), which translated says 'And my life'. He went later to be a fruitful missionary all his life in the land of China. But can we say that? 'All my life' - and if all your life is surrendered to the Lord - and I'll tell you this, and I'm no statistician, but I reckon that most believers in the West today, their lives are not entirely surrendered over to the Lord - but if it is, like the Macedonians, you will do the right thing because you've done it the right way, you've given your heart to God, and then you've given yourself to your fellow believers; which in turn results in giving the financial resources that you have. That is where grace giving must begin.

In Romans 12 verse 1, Paul says: 'I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God', the blessings God has given you. This is the grounds for your giving yourself: 'that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service'. In other words, he's saying the reason why you should give your whole selves to God is because of all the blessings that God has given to you. That's where grace giving begins, because the standard of grace giving is the greatest grace gift that has ever been given - and Paul comes to this in his great climax in verse 9. The reason why we ought to give so much of our whole selves and even our finances, is because we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This isn't a gospel text that we can just pluck out and preach out of context - people say 'You shouldn't preach on giving from the pulpit, be careful about giving from the pulpit' - Paul does no greater thing than take the very cross and blood of Christ and enshrine it as an example of how we should be giving financially. I tell you, if he can stamp it with the blood of Christ, we should not apologise in preaching it!

He says the very standard that should motivate our giving is the fact that Jesus, who could tread any galaxy He liked, came from the realms of heaven and took upon Himself the form of a servant and became poor. I don't have time to begin even, I couldn't even do it, to enter into the wonderful riches of our Lord Jesus Christ as He was there, pre-existent before He came into humanity, the Son of God eternally, the Word of God with God before the world began - nothing that was created was created without Him. Yet here He is stepping from eternity into time, clothing Himself in flesh, the poverty of that alone! Then going to the cross and becoming sin, He who was perfect and blameless - I'm pathetic even in describing it.

Paul is saying heaven's stewardship programme is this: the cross of Christ, and that's got to be the pattern for you. Not to give because the preacher begs that much that you'll give a tenner just to get him to shut up; not giving because you've been promised through the television that you'll be healed, or that you'll get a hundredfold back or a million or whatever, or that your prayers will be answered - here's the reason why we should give: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who was rich, but for our sakes became poor. That is what produced the grace giving in their lives: because of Jesus. Do you give in the measure that He was given for you?

Now in conclusion, can I ask us as an assembly, and I don't want to be too personal here: what is the condition of our giving? Let me just give you an example here: there are 200 members within the assembly here in the Iron Hall, on the membership roll that is. Now just say for one moment that half of them - that's 100, I'll help you along the way - are earning a minimum of 13,000 pounds a year, that's half of 200 earning 13,000 a year, which is quite a low wage in today's standards - you might think it's quite high for me, that might be so, but there's a lot more people earning more than you, but we'll go rock bottom just to start off with. Take 10% of that - that's 1300 pounds, isn't it? So if that's your giving for a year with a wage of 13,000 - that's only a tenth, mandatory giving, a third almost of Old Testament giving. Multiply that by the hundred that are actually giving, half, that comes to 130,000 pounds which should be coming in each year to the assembly. Now if you divide that by 52 - I hope I'm not leaving you behind here - that works out what we should be giving in every week: 2500 pounds per week. Some of you know what we are getting - do you know how much that works out a head? Divide the 2500 by 100 - 25 pounds per week, per head. Now I now that's a lot for some of you, but its pittance. It's strange that a tenner seem so big when you come into church, but when you're in a restaurant it seems nothing.

Now, my friends, I'm not getting the big stick out today, I'm just asking the question: where is our giving? Yet we're not adding to that the other hundred who should be giving. We're not adding to that the fact that many earn much more than that; we're not adding to that the fact that non-members give, that many of you aren't enrolled in the covenant scheme and could be giving absolutely more. How are we doing? Some of you know how we're doing! How are we not doing? Haggai said: 'Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house'. We need to face this fact.

A preacher once came to see a farmer, and asked him: 'If you had 200 pounds, would you give 100 pounds to the Lord?'. He said: 'I would'. 'If you had two cows would you give one cow to the Lord?'. He said: 'Of course I would, sure'. 'If you had two pigs, would you give one of them to the Lord?'. He says: 'Ah, now that's not fair, I have two pigs'. Isn't that the way we are with the Lord at times?

Ruth Bell-Graham, that's Billy's wife, said they were sitting in church and Franklin - who is now an evangelist taking after his father - was a little boy of five years of age. As the music was quietly playing, the offering plate reached their row - and out of the corner of her eye she saw Franklin dip his hand into the offering plate. Quick as a flash she grabbed the five-year-old's fist, and looking up at her with a grieved expression on his face the little boy said, loud enough for everybody to hear around him: 'I was only hiding my penny under that dollar'. Now let me say that some of us are very very keen that no one should know what we are giving - can I say: it suits us to be piously concerned about our offerings at times. It suits us to be anonymous, because it either covers over our miserliness, or the non-existence of our offerings! Here's a fact - I'm no Einstein - but I can work out the figures: there are some of you here today, and you haven't given to the Lord for over a year.

The story is told about a large assembly in New York. When the time came to take the offering, one man reached into his wallet and selected a five dollar bill and waited for the usher. He observed that the man

taking the offerings in the aisle was none other than a multimillionaire, very famous, in fact of national reputation. Willing to make a good impression, he exchanged the five dollar bill for a 100 dollar bill and placed it on the plate. What would you do, if next Sunday morning, if you're even at the Breaking of Bread, instead of a deacon taking the plate or the bag round, there was a nail pierced hand? Forget about millionaires, what about a nail pierced hand? And there was written on it your name, and underneath 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor'. That is the basis for grace giving - but the question is: does it, and will it make a difference to any of us?

Our Father, Thou art the God who sees the hearts of all men. Lord, this is a delicate subject because we are instructed not to let the right-hand know what the left-hand is doing, but Lord we know that Thou knowest all things, and You know if we love You enough, more than these moneys, to give and to sacrifice liberally. Lord, we know that the only way we will do that in a way that will last at the judgment seat is if we have given our hearts to Thee, if we are completely and utterly given over to God. Lord, our desire and our goal this morning is not to see the offering plate or box full, but to see men and women's lives given to the altar of God, and in response we will be like Moses having to tell the people: 'No more, no more, we have sufficient'. May the Saviour's dying love, as Paul has told us, be like this: that we love Him because He first loved us. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - November 2003

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The Grace Of Giving - Chapter 2

"Its Biblical Principles - Part 1"

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We're turning to 1 Corinthians 16 - and not to anticipate anything that we will be coming to in later weeks in our Bible Readings, and of course you know we're going through 1 Corinthians - but just to illustrate to you in the second study of 'The Grace of Giving', 'Its Biblical Principles'. We looked two Sundays ago, just before our missionary weekend, we looked at 'Its Biblical Basis', the Biblical basis for grace giving in both Old and New Testaments. Now we didn't derive too many principles out of that that particular morning, but we just wanted to lay down the scriptural foundation for the fact that both in the Old Testament and New Testament dispensations there is the precedence for giving - the saints giving to the work of God. But over the next two, or maybe more, weeks we want to look at the Biblical principles for grace giving, and of course that, where it's regarded to us, is found in the New Testament.

Verse 1 of chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians: 'Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye', so this is not just specific to the Corinthians, this order, but it is given to the churches also of Galatia. 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come'.

Now let me just say in introduction, I hope that all of us have got over any of the hangups we may have about talking on the subject of giving, or indeed mentioning the subject of money in a church capacity. I'm aware that some of you don't like money being mentioned from the pulpit, and I would have to say that I'm sympathetic with that because we never want to be misunderstood as begging, as being gold-diggers. We never want to be confused with charismatic false prophets in our day that seem to be in it only for the money. Neither do we want to have unbelievers make the mistake of thinking that in some way we can earn or buy our salvation by what we give. Although we don't want to be misunderstood in any of those ways - we don't want to be the author of confusion, for God is not, and God's word is not - let us not make the opposite mistake of ignoring this teaching which is very clear within the word of God, or indeed retracting some portion of Scripture from use in public ministry.

I would ask you the question: are we going to say that there are only certain passages of Scripture that we should preach on? Are we going to say less than the apostles said with regards to these particular Scriptures? Are we going to say less than our Lord Jesus said? It's very important that we remind ourselves continually, especially in public pulpit ministry, of those words found in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 that: 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man or woman of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works'. Unless that text is not true any more, I will continue to preach the whole counsel of God, which includes the subject of giving, and I will do it without apology.

Now perhaps it's the very personal and private nature of this subject that makes people uncomfortable. Well, the fact of the matter is that Paul was extremely personal as he dealt with the subject of giving, for in this verse, verse 2, he said: 'Let every one of you, let each of you, lay by him in store'. He didn't single out any particular group within the church, but he wanted everyone to know there are no exceptions - whether you're rich or poor, whether you're a master or a slave, it is incumbent upon every child of God within the assembly at Corinth to give to the Lord's work. Every Christian, he is saying, should have a personal system of regular giving.

As we look at the first two principles I believe are Biblical with regards to grace giving this morning, I want to ask you at the very outset: do you have a personal system of regular giving to the Lord's work? If you do not have that, you clearly are in transgression of the word of God and the principles that are laid down for us as New Testament Christians. I'm not asking even 'Do you give?', I'm not concerned really with how much you give, but really what we're looking at this morning is: do you give regularly to the Lord's work, and do you have some kind of a systematic giving whereby you give proportionately to the earning that you have?

This is so important because, not just the apostle Paul, but the Lord Jesus Christ assumed that all His followers would have a plan of giving, regular giving. He did not say: 'if you give' on the Sermon on the Mount, but he said: 'When you give, do not do it like the Pharisees', of course, but 'when you give'. Now if we are going to give to the Lord we need to know how to give. Of course, the Holy Spirit has not left us hanging in the air with regards to this - but verse 2 specifically gives us two Holy Spirit principles, Biblical principles, of grace giving. Here they are: one, our giving should be regularly; and two, our giving should be proportionately.

So let's spend the time that remains looking at these two principles of grace giving. The first is very clear: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store' - our giving is to be regular. In converse, Paul is saying giving is not to be an erratic thing, it's not to be now and then, or when our spirit moves us; but he tells us that the Lord's Day is singled out as God's appointed day for keeping accounts, yes, even financially, with Him. It is the day not only that we give, but the day that we determine proportions to give to Him; it is the day, he says, that we lay by in store. It is God's given command to do it on the Lord's Day.

This is important to establish, because I think some people have misunderstood the issue of giving as to simply give to the Lord's work in response to emotional appeals from men. When the missionary gets up and shows you slides of the little black children in a foreign country starving to death, we are moved by compassion, our heartstrings are pulled, and we empty our pockets into the collection box. That is only right that we do so, or when the preacher stands up and tells you about a building fund or the need for a building, that we then get exercised to give - but Paul is saying that it should not be the case. We should not be giving to the Lord's work for specific plans or endeavours that are only up and coming and immediate, but we should have regular giving in our lives, and that regular giving should also be Spirit-controlled.

You would think to hear some people that it was the emotional impulsive giving that was Spirit-controlled: 'The Lord told me to give to this, to that, or the other' - and it may well be Spirit-controlled, but Paul is laying down categorically that regular giving is Spirit-controlled also. In fact, Spirit-controlled giving will be both regular and spontaneous - not either or. To illustrate that, can I cast your mind back to our studies on the Sermon on the Mount, and you'll remember that the Lord Jesus looked at three areas of Christian living and practice. He looked at prayer, He looked at fasting, He looked at giving of alms - do you remember that? He preached, by the way, on giving. But there was a fine line between hypocritical praying and spiritual praying; hypocritical fasting and spiritual fasting; and the same with giving. But do you remember when our Lord Jesus Christ addressed that, that we applied those truths in this sense: that there should be regular praying, fasting and giving in our lives - but the Lord is also legislating for the special efforts, the special events.

We wouldn't say we would only pray when we have a need, would we? Now, we pray regularly, and then we pray intensely at times when there is an intense need. The same with fasting, and giving is applied in the same way. So let us be very careful that our giving is not just spontaneous, not just responsive to emotional appeals, but that in those realms - yes, that our giving is such - but also that our giving is regular and systematic and planned. Lewis Berry-Schaeffer (sp?), the theologian and writer, said: 'Too many of our churches have been trained to respond only to the incessant human appeals, and this, like some medicine,

requires an ever-increasing dose to produce the desired effect'. The believer should not be pressed upon to give to the Lord's work. There is to be spontaneous giving, but all giving is to be Spirit-directed - and if you're directed by the Spirit, you will be giving regularly.

I was interested to read D.M. Steems (sp?), who used to read his congregation messages from various Christian workers and missionaries, and then he would instruct his people to withhold their gifts, not to give anything to these appeals - unless not to give would burden their souls. Now that is Holy Spirit-controlled giving! Where we're not directed by what we hear is a need, but directed by what the Lord leads us to give - but it is also regular giving. Yes, it should be responsive to need, it should be like the Macedonians that we read of several weeks ago, it should be like Mary at Bethany taking the gift that she had spontaneously and breaking the alabaster box and letting the perfume flow over the Lord's feet - but however spontaneous our giving is, let us make sure it is regular, let us make sure it is systematic, for only then will it be Biblical giving.

Now let me give you one of the reasons why it must be regular, it's very simple: it must be regular because giving is part of our worship to God. That is why the first day of the week is singled out here: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store' - and 'lay by him in store' was almost certainly done in these people's homes, privately by themselves, but the mention of the first day suggests that this laying by in store was in association with the assembly gathering - that they were laying by in store for the assembly, and of course Paul was coming to take this money as a collection.

Giving on the first day of the week ought to be every week because it is worship to the Lord - and I wonder do you see your giving as an offering of praise and thanks, adoration and worship to the Triune God, for it is! Maybe you don't believe me on this one - well, if you turn to Philippians chapter 4 for a moment, and we dealt with this many Sunday mornings ago, but just to refresh your memory. Paul talking again about giving and about finance, if we weren't to talk about finance we would have to take all these verses out of the Scriptures, verse 17: 'Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God'. He uses an Old Testament illustration and picture to show that our giving financially to the work of God is an act of worship that ascends to God as a sweet smelling savour in His sight.

Now, what I'm wanting to exhort all of us today is, to not miss out on the pleasure and the blessing of weekly worshipping the Lord by your giving - and if there's a week goes by and you do not give, you are missing out. Now I know what some of you're thinking, you're maybe sitting thinking: 'Well, some people, when they get their paycheque at the beginning of the month they lay aside what they're going to give to the Lord' - and that is commendable because you don't want anything else eating into your giving to the Lord - is that wrong or is that right? Well, we're not talking about the rights and wrongs here this morning, we're talking about what is best and the best principles that we find in the word of God. I would say what is better than doing that is to give every week on the first day of the week - not just taking your paycheque and separating your offering and then giving it in the first Sunday of the month, but rather seeing it as more than that - not just something to get rid of quickly before you eat into it, but as an opportunity every Lord's Day to offer to Him an expression of your worship financially.

Let me illustrate this personally to you: I used to take at the very beginning of the month the portion that was the Lord's, and that He laid upon my heart to give to Him, and I used to give it away as soon as I could get my hands on it on the first Sunday of the month. Several years ago this happened that coming up to Christmas, Barbara and myself had come home from the meeting, and we got into the house and had our cocoa and all the rest - and then Barbara realised that she couldn't find her handbag anywhere. Of course, as you men will know, all the money is in the wife's handbag, and we panicked right away! We looked

everywhere for this handbag, everywhere - and she went out to the car, it must have been two or three times in the freezing cold with a dressing gown on, poking under the seats, everywhere - we could not find this bag! You can believe this story, or you can disbelieve it, but this is the way it came to me: eventually I decided 'I'll go out' - and there's a very important point there! - 'I'll go out and look in the car for that handbag'. In the front seat someone, probably from this meeting, had given me a bag of books, and when I lifted the bag of books there was the handbag in which was all of the money in kind if you like, credit cards and so on, which was needed for Christmas. As soon as I saw that bag, what came into my heart - I'm not saying it was the audible voice of God, for it was not - was: 'David, you need to sort out your money and your giving to the Lord on a regular basis' - because the Lord had been speaking to me about this beforehand. But it was that little lesson that taught me that you need to sort this out, not just as something to get rid of at the start of the month, but something that you offer to God as a worship, as a devotion, as praise - and you're missing out on it if you don't do it on a weekly basis.

In Deuteronomy 16 verse 16 the children of Israel were told not to appear before the Lord empty-handed. Now that does not refer to money or finance, I know, what does it refer to? It refers to worship. But if giving financially is our worship to God, ought we to be before Him, even on a weekly basis, empty-handed where that is concerned? We are to bring our prayers to the Lord, we're to bring our praise, we're to bring our worship through the preaching of the word around the Lord's table, but we're also to bring it to Him financially - and let us never be empty-handed where that is concerned.

Here's the point I'm making: the Lord's guidance with regards to giving ought to be sought every week with regards to how much we give. Now you're saying: 'What are you trying to say?', well, this is what I'm saying: our giving could be more one week than the previous week, because we could come into money one week, or conversely our giving could be less one week than the week before depending on our ability to give. What Paul's point here, I believe, is that it's not simply a calculated percentage cut up and collected that God wants, but there is to be more thought, there is to be spiritual devotion in it. The poet put it: 'High-heaven rejects the lore of nicely calculated less or more'.

So although our giving is to be regular and systematic, we must guard against it being cold, calculated and just simply a cut of what we earn. It is to be offered spiritually to the Lord, led by His grace, but always worshipfully. Certainly this subject of giving is too important to be haphazard or impulsive or cold or calculated. Now as we end this principle, first of all, that we should give regularly, let us not first of all misunderstand that in some way this is just getting rid at the start of the month of what God has given us, but it is weekly considering what we should give to the Lord - and that will be teased out a little bit later in this second principle. It is to be nonetheless done systematically and planned, not just spontaneous giving to the needs that we know of or that we hear of that tug upon our hearts, but planned, systematic before the Lord.

Let me read to you quote, in closing of this principle, from George Mueller the great man of God in the faith. He asked the question of believers in writing: 'Are you giving systematically to the Lord's work? Or are you leaving it to feeling, to impression made upon you through particular circumstances or striking appeals? If we do not give from principle, systematically, we shall find that our one brief life is gone before we are aware of it, and that in return we have done little for that adorable One who bought us with His precious blood, and to whom belongs all that we have and are'. Imagine if we didn't pray until we felt like praying - can I tell you something? I wouldn't pray very much!

The second principle after giving regularly is giving proportionately. Verse 2, look at this statement: 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no collections or gatherings when I come'. Our giving is to be proportionate, now this does not primarily mean proportionate to the need that there is, but it means proportionate to the ability that we have - and the sense here is that God, although it's in italics the sense is there, God hath prospered us. It is God who has given us

the wherewithal to give to others. So Paul is saying and thinking: 'God providentially has given us certain abilities to give, and the higher providentially and proportionately He has given us, the higher proportion and ability we should have to give to others'.

I want you please to note that there's no percentage mentioned here, there's no goal mentioned here - and although two weeks ago we looked at the tithe, you will never find in the New Testament the tithe mentioned except where the Lord Jesus castigates the Pharisees over their religiosity in Matthew 23 and says: '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'. Paul the apostle, more than any writer in the New Testament addresses the issue of stewardship and the grace of giving - and he had prime opportunity, if anybody had, to tell the believers to tithe if they should tithe, but he didn't do it! Because it is grace giving, grace giving from your heart - rather the amount is to be determined not by percentages, but by considering what is proportionate to what God has given to me. That's why it's necessary, even on a weekly basis, to analyse your giving to the Lord - because from week to week your income can change.

Now let me give a warning here, because what I'm saying is not in contradiction to giving sacrificially - all our giving to the Lord should be sacrificial, there is no doubt about that. Although we are not reciting percentages of any kind, even though the Old Testament saints give a minimum of 23 percent or 22, thereabouts, in taxes to the nation and added on were the voluntary tithes after that, and the love offerings and everything else - and it could come to nearly 35 percent, although that was the Old Testament law, we are saying there is no stipulated amount for the child of God to give, but our giving is to be sacrificial. Listen to what C.S. Lewis said: 'If our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements etc, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own in the world, we are probably giving away too little. If our charity does not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say that they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do, and cannot do, because our charitable expenditure excludes them'.

Now, I've laid that down first of all to say that I'm not saying giving is not to be sacrificial - we ought to feel the pinch, but what I am saying from this portion of God's word is that it is nevertheless to be proportionate to our individual circumstances. We've got to take into consideration the bills to be paid, the children to be fed, the petrol to go in the tank, and all the rest of it. In fact, what I think is being laid down here is that there are some, even in the church at Corinth, who could not give a tithe if a tithe was required of them because they were slaves and they maybe didn't have a tithe to give. In fact, there's no reason to believe that one sum a year, for any of us, is satisfactory for the next year. There are two aspects of proportional giving that the Lord wants us to see here, and it's this: if God in His providence gives you more, you ought to give more to God. But equally so, if God allows you to have less, the only reasonable assumption in the light of this scriptural principle is that you are at liberty, not forced to, but at liberty to give less according to your need. So there is not a carte blanche, categorically, black and white standard given here - grace giving is to be proportionate as God gives us and to the need that we have in distributing our wealth.

Now here's a principle if ever there was one in giving, and it is this: God judges our giving, not so much upon what we give to Him, but what we keep back for ourselves. There's a principle! The bills have to be paid, food and clothing are necessary, but that is not what we're talking about - using our resources for those things - but other luxuries that are unnecessary, and the giving to the Lord's work is suffering. Now here's the balance - I love, don't you, the biblical balance that we always find in the New Testament: when you're getting more from God, you ought to give more to God. It's not a rigid law, God gives us what we have in order to return to Him what we can - and here's the challenge to us today: why is it that the poorest among us are the best givers?

That is not a general rule, and don't say: 'How does he know how much you're giving to this that and the other?' - you only need to count the offering to know how much you're giving, and to know that a whole lot of people mustn't be giving regularly at all. You don't need to be Einstein or a prophet to know that! My friends, why is it that whenever something has to be done people complain: 'Oh, but it's putting such a strain on the poor' - it shouldn't be the strain on the poor, it should be the strain on the rich where giving is concerning! For when God gives us more, we ought to give more to Him! I say to you wealthy folk within the assembly, and I know, I'm sure, that some of you do give even sacrificially - but can I ask you: do you give proportionately to your prosperity? There is a difference, isn't there?

When the Lord Jesus saw the widow giving her two mites into the exchequer, it wasn't the amount that mattered, was it? It was the fact of what she had left behind for herself - there was nothing! Now lest I may have been misunderstood in our first study of being too hard on the poor, and telling us that the Macedonians gave out of their deep poverty money that they didn't really have, let me just redress that balance by turning to a passage that has helped me in understanding these principles on giving. Second Corinthians chapter 8 - this shows you how it's not a law how much you give - 2 Corinthians 8 verse 11: 'Now therefore perform the doing of it', the giving, 'that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not'. Now let me paraphrase that for you, what Paul is saying to them is: there is a need here, and it is good that it is in your heart to help out with this need, but I want you to give out of what you have, not what you haven't. You can't give out of what you haven't, verse 13: 'For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened' - I'm not wanting you to go into debt to give to God's work, but what should happen is, as he says in verse 14, there should be equality. Those who earn more should be giving more, those who earn less should be giving less than the wealthy, so that the need is met right across the board.

God is not wanting you to give till you don't have enough money to do the necessary things in life, and we must be very careful because Paul told Timothy in chapter 5 of his first epistle verse 8: 'But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel'. The burden of giving should not rest, as it does often, upon the poor, but upon the wealthier of the assembly. The sad fact is that I suspect that it is the poor and the pensioners that carry this place along.

It was a blunt but effective announcement that the coloured preacher made as he announced the collection for his Sunday services. Standing before the collection plate he declared: 'My dear brothers and sisters, there are some folks in this church who give according to their means and some who give according to their meanness'. He said: 'Let's not have any of the second class here this morning', and the number of the first class was more than usual that particular morning.

There are two principles: giving regularly, yes spontaneous, but regular - systematic, planned before God. Not just getting it out of the way at the start of a month, but on a weekly basis looking - and if you get a 1000 pounds return from the taxman, that part of that 1000 pounds goes to the Lord. You've extra to give that month - but if you've bills to pay, that you don't get into some kind of law, but yet in all of that that you give sacrificially to the Lord's work as He has prospered. It's to be proportionate to our means, not our meanness!

I wonder, dear friends, is it possible that you have reached a dead end in your Christian experience? Maybe you're at a sticking point, a cul-de-sac, you're not developing spiritually, you're perplexed, you don't know what's wrong. You've analysed your life with regards to sin, you attend church regularly, you enjoy the fellowship of Christians, you read your Bible often and pray regularly - but could the problem be that you are not giving the way that God has told us to give in His word. God simply does not have that part of you! He wants all of us!

Are you giving regularly? Some of you young people haven't even started to give! Are you giving systematically? Are you giving proportionately? Let me read you quite a humorous, but a poignant poem that I read - it's an American one, and you'll excuse the American dollar within it. It's called 'The Dollar to God', and it explains very definitely much of the problem within the church of Jesus Christ. It goes like this:

'Three thousand for my brand-new car,
Five thousand for a piece of sod
Ten thousand I paid to begin a house
A dollar I gave to God!

A tidy sum to entertain
My friends in chatter
And when the world goes crazy mad
I ask the Lord what's the matter
--a dollar I gave to God!

Yet there is one big question
For the answer I still search
With things so bad in this old world
What's holding back my church?'

What are you giving to God? The Corinthians were such a gifted group who excelled commendably in things spiritual other than giving. Yet Paul knew that despite all their excellencies, they would never become all they could and should be in Christ until they had learned the grace of giving - it was necessary! The abiding spiritual fact today is the same: that there is no way to grow into spiritual maturity without committing one's giving to God. God can have our money and not our hearts - that's not what we want - but He cannot have our hearts without having all our money, why? Because the Lord Jesus Christ said: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'.

Those are the first two principles, and we'll continue on next week, God willing, with more.

Our Father, we thank Thee that Thy word tells us that God loveth a cheerful giver. Father, this is the essence of grace giving, for Paul told us: 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor; that we through His poverty might be made rich'. Father, we know that He set His face as a flint to go to Jerusalem, we know that for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross. Although it was such an agony that we can never ever understand or estimate, there was joy in it for the Christ of God to give His life as a sacrifice to God, a sweet smelling savour. Lord, may our giving, from His example, be the same - even in this financial realm, that our offerings week by week would be worship to Thy heart, in praise and thanks to God to render to Thee all that we are and all that we have. Lord, if there are any here today who have never entered into the joy of not just spontaneous but planned, systematic, regular giving, that the joy of the Lord would be shed abroad in their hearts through this exercise - that the work of God would go on, and Lord we would say that we would be able to earn more and get more that we might give more to Thy work. For we ask these things, asking Thy blessing upon us now in the Saviour's name, Amen.

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The Grace Of Giving - Chapter 3

"Its Biblical Principles - Part 2"

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Now if you have your Bible with you, I want you to turn with me first of all - we have three texts to read from - but first of all to Luke's gospel chapter 6. If you're visiting with us, or perhaps you haven't been out in the last couple of weeks, this is our third study on Sunday mornings on the subject of 'The Grace of Giving'. We've been looking at the responsibilities of the child of God with regards to stewardship, financially speaking specifically. In the first week we looked at the Biblical basis for grace giving, and we began looking right at the beginning of the Old Testament, right back to the book of Exodus, right through as to how Old Testament saints gave. Then we looked at how that was reciprocated in many respects in the New Testament. Then last week - we took a break for Missionary Sunday - but last week we looked at the first two of the Biblical principles with regards to grace giving, and we're going to look at three more today - hopefully the last three, at least as far as I can summarise them for these two weeks. Next week, or not next week, the week after next when I come back God willing, we'll finalise this series with a challenge with regards to our own use of money, and indeed our own stewardship with regards to the work of God.

Our first reading is found in Luke 6 and verse 38, and these of course are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, He said: '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'. If you want to put a marker into that verse I'm sure it will be beneficial later on, and then Matthew chapter 6 - and of course we spent many weeks studying the Sermon on the Mount, but we want to just interject here in the midst of it where the Lord speaks about almsgiving. Matthew 6, and we'll read verses 1 to 4 - the Lord says, again His own words: 'Take heed that ye do not your alms', or your charitable giving, 'before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly'.

Then one final reading, 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and just one verse again - but remember we spent some time in the first week of our study on this portion, looking at it in great detail, but verse 7 is the only one we want to look at this morning: '[We are to give] Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver'.

Let's just bow in a word of prayer and ask the Lord's blessing, and ask for a real sense of His presence, that He may deal with all of us in regards to our giving towards the Lord. Let us pray: Our Father in heaven, we thank Thee that we read in scripture these wonderful truths, that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Our Father, we thank Thee that love was displayed from Thy heart in the fact that You gave the most prized possession that You had. Our Father, no matter how much we give in our lives, even if we give our bodies to be burned, even if it is done in love, we will never know the full extent of the love of God, the love of Thy great heart for us. But yet, our Father, our lives are to be a reflection of that love as we have entered into the wonder of it, and as it has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit - therefore our lives should show forth, and rebound, and echo a response of Your love to others. So our Father, we just

pray that as we read the word of God that You will bless us, that You will speak to us in a way that we will respond; and that we will analyse our own hearts with regards to the possessions that You have given us, the finances, the wealth - and even like those in Macedonia, that out of our poverty, if that is our situation, that we would even give out of our deep debts of poverty. For we remember that He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. So Lord, speak to us now we pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.

I'm led to believe that the feminine admirers of a certain conductor named Arthur Neitzich (sp?) - now, you can give me the proper pronunciation of that if you're classical music fan - but they besieged him so many times that he would give them a lock of his hair. It seemed that he kept cutting his hair over and over again, and responding to these requests, and putting these locks in envelopes and sending them all over the place - so much so that in greatest humour, one of his friends said to him: 'At this rate, my friend, you will soon be bald!'. 'Not I!', expressed Arthur, 'But my dog will!'.

Now the matter of grace giving is not just about giving - anyone can give. But we have seen in recent weeks that it has a little bit to do with how much you give, but it's more than that - it's not just that you give, and you give so much, but it's how you give in general to the work of the Lord. For that reason we spent last week and, God willing, this week looking at the principles that are laid down within scripture about how we ought to give. The Holy Spirit has taken great pains to leave us with a record of how we ought to give, and only when our giving is according to the word of God will our giving be the best giving. Only then will it have the greatest effectiveness in the church of Jesus Christ and in the work of the gospel, and only when our giving is according to these biblical principles will the blessing for us be the greatest, and indeed a blessing for those to whom we give.

Now as we're going to see today, not only are we affected by giving, not only are others affected, but the very heart of Almighty God is affected by our giving and the nature of how we give to His work. Now from 1 Corinthians chapter 16, if you want to recall it please do look it up just now, we saw the first two principles - let's remind ourselves of that before we go on any further. Chapter 16 verse 2: 'Upon the first day of the week', we saw that our giving was to be principally a regular thing, we were to give regularly, 'let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him'. Our giving not only was to be regularly, but proportionately - not to the need necessarily, but to our ability, to how God in His providential dealings in our lives has financed us to give to others - how much He has given to us, and we give proportionately out of that whether we are rich or whether we are poor, according to our ability where that is concerned.

Now what we're going to look at this morning from the three texts that we have already read is how, not only our giving us to be regular and proportionate, but we are to give first of all - Luke 6 tells us - bountifully. We are to give liberally, if you like. Then secondly we will see from Matthew 6 that we are to give privately. Then from the third portion of Scripture, 2 Corinthians 9, we are to give, the Bible says, cheerfully.

So let's look at the first of these, really the third principle that we have looked at in these last two weeks. We are to give bountifully - let's look at the verse again, chapter 6 of Luke verse 38: 'Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down', you've to give liberally - it's almost speaking, I think, of grain being pressed down so that you can get the greatest volume, capacity and density and so on - 'shaken together', so there's no spaces, but all those little bits of grain fill up the spaces. In other words, give as much as you can give, 'running over', if it be a liquid, 'into your bosom'. Now in Palestinian days that's where people measured the grain, into the long skirts. You would have turned them up like that, and they would have just poured the grain into your bosom. The Lord is saying: 'Pour in as much as you can, pressed down, shaken together, running over...for with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again'.

We are to give bountifully, now let me just sound a note of caution: that does not mean that if we give more we will have more favour with God. Do not misunderstand what we have been saying in these weeks of studying about financial giving, and I'm at pains to make this clear because I'm afraid that perhaps there could be some person among us here that's not a Christian, and you think in some shape or form that by giving financially you can earn credit with God. Many dear Roman Catholic people believe this, that by giving penance, or even doing good works of all sorts, but particularly financially, they think that they can earn or buy a type of salvation with God - that's not what the Lord Jesus is saying here! Nor is it a health and wealth gospel, that we find in many charismatic and pentecostal circles today, that if you give as much as you can God's going to give you a hundredfold back and you're going to be greatly wealthy, you'll drive big Cadillacs and have big ranches, and you'll be like an oil baron in a Christian sense because of your giving - that is not what the Lord Jesus is saying in this portion. It is not a prosperity gospel, that we all ought to be rich, just as we all ought not to be healthy as we saw last Monday night - it is not in the will of God that all of us should be healed, neither is it in the will of God that all of us should be rich.

We miss out this point when we think that way, and it is what we found last week: that it is God's providential dealings in our lives that enables us to give proportionately. Now an inference from that is: God gives to us that we might give to others. God is not giving to us that we might make ourselves rich, but God - if He gives us more - is doing so that we might give more to the work of God. Now in the light of those cautions, let me just say that what the Lord is saying here - and we must never deny this fact - is that there is a law of the harvest when it comes to giving, especially when we give bountifully to the work of the Lord.

Let me show you this from the third portion that we read in 2 Corinthians chapter 9, let's look at it again, and verse 6: 'But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully'. It is so with sin, that what we sow we reap, but it is so also with righteousness. Now admittedly we could generalise this in the sense of these blessings that we accrue when we give bountifully to be spiritual ones. In fact, we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ already, but it is more blessed - our Saviour said - to give than to receive. So we do receive spiritual blessings, but there seems to be an indication that yes, and many of us have found, that when we do give financially we get a blessing back, at times financially.

Even just looking at this in the spiritual realm, what would you rather have? It is more blessed to give than to receive, and you will receive a spiritual blessing by giving bountifully - would you rather have a spiritual blessing or have a bigger bank account? That is a choice that we as Christians have to make: would you rather have inner contentment of knowing that your life is firmly in the will of God, or would you rather have a new holiday or two or three holidays a year? But let me also say, that although there are spiritual blessings, many have found that by giving liberally they are often given back in abundance from God - not to squander on themselves, but to give again to the work of God with a greater capacity. One old preacher put it like this: 'What I have I shovel into God's stores, and He shovels back to me - the difference is that God's shovel is bigger than mine'. That's just, if you like, in a sort of modern day paraphrase, what the Lord Jesus is saying: 'For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again'. If you are liberal towards others, others will be liberal towards you - but better than that, God will be liberal towards you!

So I wonder this morning: do you give, in your giving, bountifully, liberally? The poet put it like this:

'Somehow not only for Christmas, but all the long year through,
The joy that you give to others, is the joy that comes back to you.
The more you spend in blessing the poor, and the lonely and sad,
The more of your heart's possessions return to make you glad'.

John Bunyan, the great puritan, called it 'giving's boomerang effect'. 'There was a man', he said, 'though some did count him mad, the more he cast away the more he had!'. Now I'm a great fan of reading biblical biographies, but also of Christian biographies in recent Christian history. We learn so much from them, we see these men in the Bible, like men as we are, of like passions; sinners, yet men whom God worked through. But equally so in Christian history we see it as well, and we learn that great men of God found that when they gave liberally God gave back to them bountifully. The great preacher, C.H. Spurgeon, on one occasion made a trip to Bristol, and he was intending preaching in three of the largest Baptist chapels there. He hoped, from this preaching trip, to accrue 300 pounds which he needed immediately for his orphanage at home in London. The story goes that he got the money, and he retired to bed on the last night of his visit, and he records that he heard a voice, which - to him - was the voice of the Lord, saying these words: 'Give those 300 pounds to George Mueller'. He responded very quickly: 'But Lord, I need it for my dear children in London', and again the words came: 'Give that 300 pounds to Mr Mueller'. And it was only when he said: 'Yes Lord, I will', that sleep came to him. The following morning he went to George Mueller's orphanage, and found Mr Mueller prostrate on his knees with his Bible open before him, praying. The famous preacher, Spurgeon, placed a hand on Mueller's shoulder and said: 'George, God has told me to give you these 300 pounds'. 'Oh', said George Mueller, 'Dear Spurgeon, I have been asking the Lord for that very sum!' - and these two prayerful men rejoiced together. Spurgeon returned to London, and on his desk he found a letter awaiting him; he opened it and found it contained 300 guineas - some of you can remember that...I'm only joking! Then he cried with joy: 'The Lord has returned 300 pounds with 300 shillings interest!'

Now this is not a watertight rule, but you will find, and will have found if you give bountifully, that many many times the Lord gives into your hand even more liberally than you have given! It is the law of the harvest: if you want to be rich, give; if you want to be poor, grasp. If you want to be needy, hoard; if you want abundance, scatter - because God has said: 'I am Jehovah-Jireh, God Thy Provider, and I am no man's debtor'. Oh, if we could remember this in our giving: that if we gave bountifully we would receive bountiful spiritual, and yes even at times temporal, blessings.

That is the first principle, or the third if you like over these last two weeks. Then there is the fourth - not only are we to give bountifully, but we are to give privately. If you turn to Matthew, to the second reading, Matthew chapter 6 - I'm not going to go into this in too much detail because we spent some time on it several months, or maybe it's even years ago now, and you can get the tape in the tape room. But this verse is often commonly quoted by folk - it's verse 3 of chapter 6: 'But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth'. He said in the previous verse: 'Don't sound a trumpet'. You see, what used to happen was these religious men - Jesus called them hypocrites, Pharisees and Scribes - when they were going to do a charitable deed there was a man walked in front of them with a trumpet. There was a great procession, they blew a fanfare as they walked, they wanted to attract a crowd so that people would witness what they were going to do in religious action.

The Lord Jesus says that is not how you have to give, but you have to give privately. C.H. Spurgeon who I mentioned earlier said: 'To stand with a penny in one hand, and a trumpet in the other, is the posture of hypocrisy'. We must make sure that our giving is not, as Jesus said, to be seen of men. The poet put it well:

I did a favour yesterday,
A kindly little deed,
And then I called to all the world
To stop and look and heed.

They stopped and looked and flattered me
In words I could not trust.
And when the world had gone away,
My good deed turned to dust'.

Jesus is saying that if you are giving to have this praise of men, the pat on the back of men, to be seen of the audience of the crowd - you have your reward! In other words, what you're giving will not come back to you in an eternal day, but your account is closed - nothing will go forward to heaven for a blessing to you in reward. If that is why you're giving, to be seen of men, you have your receipt in full today. The word 'hypocrite' is, in Greek, simply the word 'actor'. What Jesus is saying is: if you're an actor in your giving, you will get actor's wages - what is actor's wages? It is the applause of the crowd, nothing more and nothing less.

So what is the Lord Jesus saying here? Is He saying that it is wrong to give openly all the time? Now this is very important, because there are so many misunderstandings with many Scriptures as we know, but particularly with this one with regards to giving. I hear people time and time again saying to me: 'You're not to let the right hand know what the left hand is doing' - and therefore no-one should ever know, under any circumstances, what you give to the Lord's work. Can I say, categorically, that is not biblical! It is not biblical! Because, when we go to the book of Acts, we find that Barnabas had given his income from the sale of his land - Acts chapter 4 - and it is recorded there that the whole church knew about this, and he gave it to them for their finances. We read also that when the members of the church laid their money at the apostles' feet it was not done in secret, everyone knew about it. The difference where this was concerned was that their motive was not to be seen of men, the manner in which they gave was not blowing a trumpet that others would see them and that they would have the applause of humanity. The contrast to this can be seen in Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5 - they tried to use their gift to make people think that they were more spiritual than they really were - but their sin was not in a public confession of what they were giving, but the problem was their motive was to be seen of others even though they were robbing the Holy Spirit back.

So the Lord is not saying that it is always wrong to give when people know you're giving, or even know what you're giving, the Lord is saying: 'You must guard your motives at all times with your giving, and if it is possible do it in private, in secret, because that's the best way to guard your motives'. It doesn't refer to giving to the assembly for the various causes, for in 2 Corinthians 7 verses 1 to 5 - we don't have time to look at - Paul boasted of the Macedonian collection to the Corinthians. He mentioned it! In chapter 8 he says of the Corinthian collection to the Macedonians that it had to be liberal, he mentions the liberality of it, even the actual amount of it. He's not referring now to the individual, he's referring to the responsibility of the church.

So what is the Lord saying? He's saying - this is His main point: beware, for you can preserve your anonymity from other people, yet the bottom line is that your motives can be wrong. Your motives, no-one in the world might know what you're doing in your giving, but your motives may be wrong! Look at verse 3: 'let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth'. Now, does it say - maybe you've got a different version than me - does it say: 'let not thy left hand know what another man's right hand does', is that what it says? Or 'let not another man's left hand know what thy right hand doeth'? It says your left hand knowing what your right hand does! It's not talking about what other people know about your giving, it's talking about what you know about it! It almost is saying: 'Keep your giving secret to yourself' - in other words, don't be taking any pride in it! Even if no-one else knows, you can give yourself a secret pat on the back inside, can't you? 'Well done, that was good'.

So the question is not the Lord saying that it hasn't to be known abroad, and we believe that that is part of it, but His main point is saying that even though no-one might know what you're doing when you're signing that cheque, your heart might be thinking: 'What a great Christian I am, what a great giver!'. What is important is not what the hand is writing, but what the heart is thinking! Do you see it? In other words, not only are we to keep our giving as far as possible from others, but it ought to be secret from ourselves. We ought to not be self-conscious of giving, because that self-consciousness will rapidly deteriorate into self-righteousness - as one biblical scholar said: 'It is possible to turn an act of mercy into an act of vanity', and that's what these Pharisees were doing!

Now can I say: people have a field day with the Sermon on the Mount, but this command cannot be obeyed literally. How can you not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, unless you keep your eyes closed when you're writing the cheque or putting your hand into the wallet - maybe it would be better if some of you did keep your eyes closed when you did that, we'd get more. But the point is: you're to guard your giving, not only from the praise of men, but from self-commendation - it's got to do with the attitude of the heart. The answer therefore, what the Lord is saying is: you ought to give secretly, and when you give you ought to forget about it! Don't summon to your mind what you gave to the Lord last week, and think that that in some kind of way overflows over into this week, and think - gloating over it - 'What a great fellow or girl I am for what I have given!' The Lord is saying, in all these realms in the Sermon on the Mount, it's all about motive: do good until it's an unconscious habit in your life that you're doing it, and you don't even know that you're doing it! When you do it like that, it will not be brought to your attention - you'll not be saying: 'Oh, look at me Lord. I must agree with You, I'm such a great fellow in what I'm giving'. When the Lord comes to you and says: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant', we will not say: 'Yes, Lord, I am wonderful, aren't I? I did give so much!' - but we will be like those that the Lord spoke of, when He said: 'When ye saw me hungered, ye fed me; when ye saw me thirsty, you give me a drink; insomuch as ye have done it unto the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me'. What did they say? 'When did we see Thee in hunger, when did we see Thee thirsty and naked' - they had done good and they didn't even know they had done it, because they had even done it secretly to themselves!

Oswald Chambers says: 'Get into the habit of having such a relationship to God that you do good without knowing you do it'. The problem with many of us is that you don't know the good giving that you're doing, simply because you're not doing it at all. Give bountiful, give privately - not just to others, but privately to yourself - and thirdly and finally, give cheerfully. Second Corinthians chapter 9 verse 7, let's read it once again: 'Every man give according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver'.

That great American writer, Mark Twain, on one occasion asked his neighbour to borrow a book, and his unobliging neighbour said: 'I never lend books, but you're welcome to read it here if you want'. Later when the neighbour requested the use of Twain's lawnmower, he told him: 'Certainly, but you'll have to use it here if you want!' You see, if you give grudgingly, if you give grudgingly it has the potential of restricting the effect of your giving on you - you're not getting the full extent of your blessing that you could have. It says 'God loves a cheerful giver', the Greek word could be translated 'an hilarious giver' - a person who scatters hilariously their finances, of course proportionately, but it's suggesting the joy which leaps over all restraints in your giving. Not giving out of a sense of duty or prestige, but giving because you have to because your heart's so full of joy in the Lord that you just can't help it!

Did not the Lord say - remember He said it - 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'? You see, you can be motivated, you can be the best giver in this fellowship, and yet motivated by a wrong motive. It could be a sense of duty: 'I have to give this' - I hope we got rid of the thought of giving a tithe in the last study, but whatever your amount is you might feel: 'I have to give that', or 'I have to give a little bit more', or 'I have to give out of a sense of duty'. That is a wrong motive with regards to grace giving - it's like the man in Glasgow who bailed drunks out of prison on a Sunday so that they wouldn't lose their job on Monday - a great charitable act that was, only he insisted that they gave half a crown back to him in their next wage. With all his giving to these people, he didn't give himself. We saw in our first week that the Macedonians gave themselves first, and then there was no problem in what they were giving, they could do it joyfully because the Lord owned them, so the Lord owned their pocket.

You could be giving out of a motive of prestige, we mentioned that in Matthew 6 - glory to be thanked and praised of men - or are you giving because your Christlike heart can do nothing else, you can't help it! You

have to give to the Lord, for He has given so much to you! I'm sure you've heard that expression: 'You're worth your weight in gold' - I'm forever hearing it! But during a long imprisonment the Duke of Brittany made a vow that if he ever got out and got liberty, he would give to the church of Notre Dame his weight in gold - I don't know, perhaps that's where we get the expression from. When he was released he placed himself on the scales, literally, and he was clad in his war armour. He had the opposite scales piled with gold until it attained his literal weight with all his armour on! The opposite of that was Don Carlos, the son of Philip the Second of Spain, for when he lay ill he vowed to give, on his recovery, his weight in gold to the Virgin Mary. When he was restored to full health and strength, the Prince placed himself on one side of the scale - but he wasn't in his armour, he was clad in damask and in fur.

You see, when love gives, it does not count the cost. It doesn't limit the giving, because love giving, grace giving is cheerful, hilarious giving! There are three kinds of givers: there are the flints - not the Flintstones - the flints; the sponges; and the honeycombs. To get anything out of a flint you must use a hammer, and you've to hammer it and hammer it and hammer it, and then all you get is chips and sparks - and it gives away nothing if it can help it, it's a painful giving, and it has a lot of display for when they finally let go of what they believe is theirs they want everybody to know about it! Are you like the flint? Then there's the sponge, you have to squeeze them - it's good-natured, mind you, but it yields to pressure, and it must be pressurised. The more it's pressed the more it gives, and the more it gives the more it's blessed and the more useful it becomes. Are you a sponge? You have to be pressed, you have to be pushed - listen: Paul is talking not about flints or sponges, but about honeycomb. Honeycomb takes delight in giving without being asked at all, it just overflows with sweetness! That is the way the child of God is to give - why? Because we are told: 'Freely have ye received, therefore freely give'!

I'm led to believe that John Wesley, the great Methodist preacher, when he bestowed a gift or rendered anyone a service, he lifted his hat as though he were receiving instead of conferring some kind of obligation that was his - it was such a blessing that he lifted his heart! We're not going to do this one, but a pastor in America got his congregation, when the offering plate was going round, whenever they gave - if they gave cheerfully - to whistle a tune as the plate went round. The whole place erupted because everybody was ashamed, they were all sponges, they had to be pressed. The fact of the matter is: we should be whistling, we should be singing in our hearts as we're giving - that's what the Lord is saying: 'The Lord loves a cheerful giver'.

Now why is this the fact? It's because He gave like this! Is that not it? Did we not read in 2 Corinthians 9 two weeks ago that He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich? We're to give like God, Paul is saying! God gives us regularly, does He not? He does give us proportionately, proportionately to His riches - what does Paul say in Philippians? 'My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus' - that is infinite! Does He not give us bountifully? Such a verse says the same: 'Seeing therefore He has given His only Son for us, how shall He not with Him also freely give us' - what? - 'all things'!

I say this cautiously: but did not the Lord Jesus Christ give Himself cheerfully for us? Oh yes, the cross, we cannot plumb the depths of all the agony and afflictions of our Saviour - but let us never forget that the Bible says we are to look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down on the right hand of the throne of God. It was for joy, and even in His obedience to the Heavenly Father in going to Calvary, He set His face as a flint for the joy!

Do we give like God? I know we could never. Answer the question that this poet asks as we close:

'Do you give as you would if an angel awaited your gift at the door?
Give as you would if tomorrow found you when giving was o'er?
Give as you would to the Master if you met His loving look?
Give as you would of your substance if His hand the offering took?'

Does your giving equate with grace giving? Is your giving regular? Is it proportionate? Is it bountiful? Is it private? And is it cheerful? For it blesses the heart of God - not just the giver and the given, but the very heart of Almighty God! He loves you, a special love, for the cheerful giver. I wonder are you enjoying that love today? Sometimes we don't like to talk about money, but the fact of the matter is: God has given us whatever we have - do you acknowledge that? Therefore we are responsible as stewards to give to Him, and to give to the work of the gospel. The question is: are we doing it according to these principles? Not our own, or somebody else's, but according to the guidelines that He has given to us - and we will not know the blessings of this realm until we do.

Father, we do look upon this subject grudgingly at times, and too often our giving reflects that. Forgive us for not seeing the great blessing that there is in giving to God, and our Father help us, we pray, to plunder the depths and realise the blessings that there are because our Saviour has told us it is more blessed to give than to receive - and how we have received so many blessings, we can't even count them! Lord, how many blessings have we received in giving? May we be a people known before God as those who are chiefly blessed, not as recipients, but as givers. We thank Thee most of all that we have a great example, the ultimate example in our Saviour who loved us and give Himself for us. In His name we pray, Amen.

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The Grace Of Giving - Chapter 4

"The Biblical Challenge Of Giving"

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Now we are embarking on our fourth study on 'The Grace of Giving', and this should be our final study of a four-week series looking at this very important subject of the Biblical basis, the Biblical principles, and this morning the Biblical challenge of the grace of giving. So please do note that this morning's message is a Biblical or practical challenge with regards to the grace of giving. Now as such there is no text for our reading this morning, because we're going to be looking at a number of Scriptures - but if you want, some people are very traditional and they like to have a portion of Scripture open before them before we even start, so I'm going to pander to your traditionalism! Turn with me to Mark chapter 10, we're not going to look at it straight away, but we will be looking at it and various other Scriptures right throughout our message this morning.

After you turn to that we'll just bow in a quiet word of prayer and ask the Lord's blessing, and ask the Lord that our hearts should be opened because we've been looking at a great deal of Biblical theory and principles with regards to this subject, but if we learn it all in our heads and it doesn't affect our lives or even change our stewardship before the Lord it really has been a waste of time. That's the bottom line: if we're hearers only of the word and not doers of the same, it will profit of us and profit the work of the Lord nothing. So let us come before the Lord with open hearts and just ask that even this morning, if not hitherto, that He will touch our hearts today and we will be different.

Let us pray: Our Father, we come before Thee now, and we seek Thy face. Lord, we want to hear Thy word, we don't want to hear just the voice of a man, we want to hear the voice of Almighty God; we want to know that the Lord, the God of all heaven, is speaking to us individually, into our experiences and into our lives. Lord, we thank Thee that we have a personal Saviour in the Lord Jesus, and we thank Thee for the many stories that we have about Him, and the teachings that He has left with us by His Spirit in the Gospels. Lord, we just pray that as we look at what He has had to say with regards to our stewardship before Thee that, Lord, we will be moved in obedience to follow the example that He has taught us. Help us, Lord, change us, move us, mould us, if necessary melt us, break us; but we pray that we will be different from our meeting with Thee through Thy word today. For Christ's sake we pray, Amen.

One of the most important ingredients to true spirituality is seldom ever preached on or indeed written about in many of the writings, periodicals and paperbacks that you find on Christian bookshelves in Christian shops today. We are prone to paint the image of spirituality in colours of deep Bible knowledge, how much of the Scriptures you read, how much of it you've memorised, or how much doctrine you know; or perhaps in the colours of lengthy prayers whether in private or public, and perhaps in public the opposite is the truth! Or maybe it's prominence in the Lord's work, depending on what a high status you've reached or how much blessing you've experienced in your career, as it were, for the work of the Lord - we tend to think that that is the measure of a man or a woman's spirituality. The fact of the matter is: one of the most prominent and important ingredients is often ignored, and we will see today - if we haven't already in our studies - that our love for God may be proved by something as common and as every day as our use of money.

Yes, you heard me right, how we use our finances is a tremendous way of demonstrating the reality of our love for God. In some ways, I think, it proves our love for God more conclusively than anything else,

because it is such a personal subject, it is such a thing that we prize and even hold closely to our breasts. If I was to ask the question: if your love for God was measured by your love for money, or your stewardship of money before the Lord, how much would we all discern, and how much would God discern that you love Him?

An artist was once asked to paint a picture representing a decaying church. To the astonishment of many, instead of putting on the canvas an old tottering ruin of a building, the artist painted the exact opposite - a great stately edifice of modern grandeur. Through the portals could be seen richly carved pulpit and pews, magnificent organ and beautiful stained-glass windows, but it was at one point that the artist's conception left with what most understood as to be a decaying church. He made his heart known, when suspended from a nail at the back wall of the church there was a square, wooden, ordinary box - and on that box was painted the label: 'Collection for Foreign Missions'. But here was the punchline: over the little slot where the money should be contributed there was a huge cobweb that had been there for weeks. That was his impression of a decaying church, a church perhaps that through materials and resources has everything going for it, the church perhaps that has more people on the pews than others, yet this item of sacrificial stewardship and giving of grace before the Lord and to the Lord's work is relegated to almost unimportance.

Now let me show you this morning that John the apostle links money and the love of God. If you turn with me to 1 John, I know you've got your finger in Mark 10 - keep it there - but first of all to 1 John chapter 3 till I show you this, because you may be doubtful at me making this marriage, if you like, between money and the love of God. First John 3 verse 17, John says: 'But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of mercy or compassion', or we could translate it heart, 'who shutteth up his heart from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him'. How dwelleth - not stewardship, not even the grace of giving, but how dwelleth the love of God in him? If he doesn't practically give to those who are in need, John is saying that that there's an absence of giving in his life, there's an absence of the love of God!

In fact the verse that is preceded by one of this verse says that 'we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren', and as we do such that is the ultimate proof of our love for God in our love for them. Now of course, most Christians will never have the opportunity of doing this today - laying down their lives in an act of martyrdom, probably we in the West may never see it, who knows, we might in days that are to come - but most of us will never be asked to sacrifice our very lives. So we need to ask ourselves today: how does the believer in our context, in ordinary everyday life circumstances, show that he loves his brother and therefore loves God? The answer is absolutely plain: by giving. That is how the word of God is telling us we show our love for others, and ultimately we display and demonstrate our love for God.

Now what we're going to see today is, very simply, that there are two factors that will regulate our giving to God and to the work of God. They're simply these: one, how much we love money; two, how much we love God. I know they cancel one another out, but they're so important, they will undercut everything that I say from the word of God today - please note it: what will regulate your giving before the Lord is: one, how much you love your money and everything that money buys for you, your possessions, your materials, your luxuries, your affluence; and two, how much you love, really love, God.

So let me ask you the first question: how much do you love money? I mean, it's an honest question, in fact as we look at the New Testament it's a question that is right throughout it. In fact the Scriptures are full of repeated warnings, I would have to say many were from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. I was, I would have to say, shocked a little when I realised that in a calculation of everything that the Lord said about money within the Gospels, He said more about money than He said about heaven! He said more about money than He said about hell, He said more about money than He said about sexual immorality, than He said about violence - in fact, He speaks on finance perhaps more than any other subject, because He realised the dangers of the love of money in the life.

You remember after the rich young ruler turned away sorrowing from the Lord Jesus because he loved his money and possessions too much, do you remember that the Lord Jesus told His disciples - we're in Mark 10 now and verse 25 - 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God'. You have to beware of money, because money can be dangerous; love of money, in fact, can be fatal. Now thankfully, praise God, in verse 27 the Lord Jesus adds a final line: 'And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible'. Even God can deliver a man from the love of money to bring him into the kingdom of God, but when you are well endowed financially and materially it can actually be an obstacle or a handicap not only in getting to God in salvation, but also to becoming truly a spiritual person.

Now added to that is the opposite view which I adhere to, and that means that because of that: if you are spiritual and have money, you're extremely spiritual, because it's a hard thing to carry a full cup. It's hard to have these materials, to use them for God, to be spiritual - it's hard not to allow them to corrupt you, your love for your brother and your love for God. So we're not castigating money, what we're talking about here is the love of money and how it can be dangerous and become a spiritual handicap if we depend on our wellbeing financially, rather than depending on God by faith.

Now you remember in the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus spoke on the subject of money. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 6 and verses 19 and 20, I'll read these well-known words to you: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal'. Now a little later in verse 24 He warned them: '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 money' - 'mammon' is just a personification of money. The Lord Jesus is very clear: be very careful that you do not lay up treasures on the earth, now that does not mean you do not have treasures on the earth; but what He is saying is: 'Be careful what you invest those treasures that you have on earth in. Invest them in heaven's inheritance rather than earthly possessions'.

Do you remember that to the man grabbing for an inheritance the Lord Jesus said very clearly: 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth'. Our life is about more than money, our life is about more than our car, or our house, or our pension, or our holidays, or our clothes, or our technological gadgets. Then you remember that the Saviour related the story of the rich farmer, the man who built bigger barns because his business was going so well, only to find tragically that that very night his soul was required of him and he died. He ended that story in this solemn pronouncement: 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God'.

The Lord Jesus is saying beware of money because at times it can be prohibitive to you being rich toward God. Being rich toward God is not - mark - someone who does not have money, it's easy to have faith when there's nothing coming in; but being rich toward God especially is someone who uses their earthly goods for the kingdom of heaven. Do you see it? Not just someone who has given themselves, but someone who has given their riches, laying up treasures in heaven - but the key to liberation from the great power of materialism and affluence that we have in the West today is not what many have done in going into exodus, and going to some commune and living off the fruit of the ground, just putting the bare minimum of clothes on your back, not dealing in money and commerce - nothing like that. It's not taking some kind of vow of poverty, and going into a life of monasticism, but what the word of God is telling us - the Lord Jesus, Paul the apostle, all of the testimony of all the writers of Scripture is: the way to be liberated from the power of materialism, money and affluence is through the grace of giving - that's the way!

The great apostle said in 1 Timothy 1:4-7: 'Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness', and if godliness is intrinsic to the grace of giving my question to all of us this morning is: how have you disciplined yourself unto godliness in the grace of giving? What are you doing at this moment in time to analyse and recognise some of the fundamentals of how you love money, or how you love God?

Now let me bring before you today some of the things we must recognise if we are not to love money, and rather to love God, and in loving God give of our money. Here's the first point: God owns everything that you own. It's very simple, but how many of us really understand this: that God owns everything that you own? In 1 Corinthians 10 verse 26, where Paul was talking about the subject of stewardship, he quoted Psalm 24 and verse 1 which says: 'The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof', or everything in it. He's establishing the fundamental principle that God owns everything, that means He owns your possessions as well as nature's possessions. 'The whole earth is mine', the Lord said in Exodus 19; He says again in Job 41: 'Everything under heaven belongs to me'.

Do we recognise this? This means that we are not owners of what we have, but rather we are managers - or if you want to use the biblical word, we are stewards of what God has lent us. We are stewards of the things that God has given to us. Now let me use a biblical illustration to make this clear to you. You remember the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. Joseph was a slave, Joseph became a steward when he entered into Potiphar's house. Potiphar placed him over his household in charge - now as a slave in charge, and as a steward, he didn't own anything in Potiphar's household, he was still a slave. He couldn't say: 'That's mine, that belongs to me', but the fact of the matter is: as a steward he managed everything that Potiphar owned on his behalf. He used his own volition, he used his wisdom and his commonsense as if that money was his own money, but it wasn't his own money.

Now let me go a step further, because the management and stewardship of Potiphar's goods meant that Joseph could use those things for his own means - to an extent he could enjoy Potiphar's wealth, but Joseph's main responsibility was to use those riches for Potiphar's interests. Have you got it? That is exactly what we are to do with God. God wants us to enjoy, even use as necessary the things that He has allowed us to have, but as stewards we are to remember that those things belong to God, and primarily we ought to be using them for God's kingdom.

Let's think about this practically: that means that the house that you live in is not your house, it is God's house. Do you think like that? The car that you drove to church in - maybe you walked, but most likely you came in the car - that is God's car, not your car. The grass that you mow once a month - if you're like me, in fact once in a blue moon if you're like me! - it's God's grass. The trees in your garden are God's trees, the clothes that you're wearing this morning and you maybe take great pride in, and those hanging up at home in your wardrobe, they are God's! It's all God's - the food in your cupboard belongs to God, the books on your shelf belong to God, the furniture in your home belongs to God - in fact, everything that you have and use and enjoy belongs to God, we don't own anything, God owns everything and we are only His managers.

Now it's very easy in our Western materialistic, affluent society to lose sight of this biblical principle: that it's all God's! If you think about it for moment, for most of us the house that you call 'my house' was called 'my house' by somebody else 20 years ago. One day it'll be called 'my house' maybe 20 years from now when somebody else is living in it. Or a piece of land that you think is your land, someone else called it 'my land' on one occasion - because we are only temporary stewards, we own nothing on this earth, one day we will pass away and we will take nothing with us just as we brought nothing into this world when we were born.

Now I know that the good people of the Iron Hall probably believe in theory this principle that God owns everything, but here's the crux of the matter: your giving to the work of the Lord would reflect if you

genuinely believe this. So the question is not: 'How much of my money should I give to God?', rather the real question is: 'How much of God's money should I keep for myself?'. There's the first thing to remember: God owns everything.

Here's the second thing, and this is really soul-shaking: your stewardship reflects your spiritual trustworthiness. Have you got that? Your stewardship financially before God reflects your spiritual trustworthiness. Turn with me to Luke chapter 16 because I want to ground everything fundamentally in the Scriptures to show that I'm not making any of this up, in fact the Lord Jesus is telling us this. I think that this is one of the most startling insights into the way that God's kingdom works, and the Lord Jesus Himself reveals it to us in verses 10 to 13 of Luke 16. He says: 'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?'

Now if you note again verse 11: 'If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon', or riches, 'who will commit to your trust the true riches?'. In other words, if I can paraphrase it into our context: 'If your giving does not reflect that you are loving God, and loving your brethren, and loving a lost world, do you think God is going to give you spiritual trustworthiness?'. Now let me just pause for a moment, because perhaps there are some believers in our gathering today thinking: 'Why is God not working through me any more?', or 'Why won't God use me the way I long to be used? I feel that God is perhaps finished with me'. Well, could it be that in this seemingly minor area of stewardship before God you have not been faithful, and God is not going to trust you with spiritual riches if you can't be faithful in something as small as this.

Here is the idea: think of the owner of an engineering company, and he has no sons to take on the business, and there's an employee that he's had his eye on for some time who he wants to take over. Of course, he wants to find out if that employee is trustworthy, if he can handle the business and make a profit, so he gives him part of the business to manage for a season. He wants to see if he can secure business and oversee new projects and ventures, to see if this man can make it profitable in a day that is yet to be. So he puts him in the position and he watches very closely how the employee runs that part of the business for many months, and he's not really concerned about how much money he's making, but he wants to determine his trustworthiness, his abilities with regards to running the thing. Because if he doesn't prove that he's trustworthy in the small part of the company, the owner is not going to trust him with the whole thing! But if he can prove that he's faithful with that, the owner will entrust him with true riches one day: the ownership of the whole sham-bang.

Now please see this, the Lord is saying - and what a challenge this is to all of our hearts - if we're not faithful with the use of our own personal finances, and certainly that includes our money to the giving of Christ's kingdom, the Bible says that God will determine that we are untrustworthy to handle true spiritual riches. I just wonder is that why some of us are not experiencing the real abundant blessing of God in our lives? Is that why you're stuck in a rut? Is that why God seems to bless everybody else but you? It's not the amount of money that God is concerned with, it's the amount of His money that you're keeping for your own pleasure! Yet you're forfeiting spiritual pleasure for things that will not endure!

I hope you can see now that our use of money is one of the best ways of evaluating our relationship with Christ, and our spiritual trustworthiness. You see, if you love Christ with all your heart, he is saying, your giving will reflect that. If you love Christ and the work of His kingdom more than anything else, your giving will show it! If you're truly submitted to the Lordship of Christ it will affect your pocket. That's why someone has said that your cheque book tells more about you than almost anything else - is that too mercenary for some of you? It's not too mercenary for the Lord Jesus: that is the thermometer and the spiritual standard that He used on many an occasion. Let me ask you: if, after you're dead, you were so

famous that there was a biographer given the exercise and project of writing your life story, and he was given your cheque book with all the stubs of what you spent money on, and he was given your bank statements, and he went through it all - what would he conclude about what kind of Christian you were? What conclusion would he come to? What would it reveal about your walk with Christ? Would there be tangible evidence in your giving, in the use of your finances - not just what you give, what you keep, what you spend, what you enjoy - that you were a trustworthy Christian who was spiritually blessed?

Now do not misunderstand what David Legge is saying. He is not saying that if you give it makes you spiritual. It does not. It doesn't save your soul. It doesn't commend you to God in any extent, because it is by grace we are saved through faith, that not of ourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works - even the work of giving. Giving does not make you spiritual, but here's the point: if you are spiritual you will give.

So where are we? These two practical challenges that we've had this morning, that everything that we own belongs to God, and the question is not how much of our money we give to God, but how much of God's money we give back to Him - where are we? What about our spiritual trustworthiness? How faithful are we in this elementary basic childlike principle that should be learned by every Christian just after conversion? Where do we stand with regards to this? Could it be that our lack of blessing in our lives could be pinpointed to this problem? How is our grace giving, as we summarise everything that we've learnt over these weeks? How is our grace giving in comparison to the Old Testament saints, some of which gave an extent of a calculation of about 34 or 35 percent?

Where does our grace giving measure up in New Testament giving principles laid down: regularly upon the first day of the week, systematically that they laid by them in store, proportionately that they looked at their earnings whether positively increasing or negatively decreasing, and gave as the Lord had prospered them in His sovereignty - for the Lord is the Giver. How does our giving measure when we see that the Lord tells us to give bountifully, pressed down, shaken, and as we give it will be given in more abundance to us spiritually, and even at times materially? How does our giving figure privately? Do we give not just for the gratification that others might see and praise us, but our own pat on the back - where is it when it comes to our giving? Do we commend ourselves before God? What about that hilarious principle: 'God loveth a cheerful, a hilarious giver', not a grudging person, not a person who gives out of duty - but like the honey that just oozes that sweetness without even being able to help it.

Can I just say as I conclude this series: no one, when they stand at the judgment seat of Christ before the Lord Jesus who hasn't money in His hands but nail prints, the one who was rich yet for our sake became poor that we through His poverty might be made rich - no Christian will there regret that they had been abundantly exercised with the grace of giving on that day, because at that moment their eternal recompense will be received! The big issue, you see, is whether you as a Christian are living for down here or up there.

Some years ago there was a celebrated artist in Paris called Ari Schaeffer, and on one occasion he wished to introduce a beggar into a certain picture that he was painting. On that same day Baron Rothschild, the famous banker and one of the richest men in the world, who was a particular friend of the artist, happened to call in. He came to the studio on that day, the very time that the artist needed a beggar to model for his portrait. So Baron Rothschild said: 'Well, can you wait till tomorrow?', he said: 'Well, I suppose so'. Rothschild said: 'Tomorrow I will address myself up as a beggar, I'll make an excellent model'. So Schaeffer said: 'Very well', and the next day, even though it was a strange proposal, the rich banker appeared dressed up as a beggar, and a very sorry-looking beggar at that. While the artist was engaged in painting him, another friend came into the studio, and he was a kind and generous-hearted man. As he looked at the model beggar he was touched by the wretchedness of his appearance, and as he passed by him he slipped a Louis D'or (sp?) - which was a French coin - into his hand. The pretended beggar took the coin and put it into his pocket.

Now if you can come into the future with me ten years, this gentleman who had given that piece of money, in the post received an order from the bank of Rothschild for 10,000 francs. Enclosed was a letter that read as follows: 'Sir, you one day gave a Louis D'or to Baron Rothschild in the studio of Ari Scheaffer, and he has invested and made good use of it. Today he sends the capital you entrusted to him, together with the interest it gained'. What does that tell us? No one, no one will regret investing in heaven. The question is: where do you invest? Jesus said: 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'.

Our Father, we acknowledge today that as our Creator we are Thy creatures, and the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof - and that includes us and our families, and our homes, our possessions, our resources, our careers, everything that we are and have. Lord, we would just give thanks to Thee today for what we have. As we compare it relatively speaking to those in the world that have so little, we do give thanks. But Lord, as we look to Thee as our Redeemer God through the Lord Jesus Christ, we're told that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price, we are a purchased people, and we can't just live the way we want to live. Lord, we would have to say that that means we can't just spend the way we want to spend. Even as we come up to a season which is supposedly to remember the birth of Thy Son, there will be an obscene amount of spending - and our Father, we pray that as the children of God, that we will stand different, that we will not invest in our livelihoods down here on earth, but spiritually that we will invest in heaven even with our finances - that on that day, and even on this day, we would be trusted with spiritual things and spiritual blessings. Lord, may You write on our hearts all that we have learned in these weeks, and may it make our walk and our stewardship before Thee different from this day forward, through the name of the One who was rich, but became poor for us we pray, the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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Appendix A:

"The Conditions and Confidence of God's Provision For Us"

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by Pastor David Legge
Philippians 4:14-23

I'm taking up this final study in Philippians under the title 'The Conditions and Confidence of God's Provision For Us' as believers. Now I would guess that there's hardly a Christian here this morning, or indeed anywhere in the whole of the world, who is not in some kind of need - whatever that particular need might be. It may be material need, it may be a mental need or spiritual need, but it's a need of some kind. Praise God, as believers, New Testament Christians, the need that there has been to meet our sinfulness and our guilt before God has been utterly completed and finished and finalised, final redemption has been met for us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ - and we praise God and worship Him for that. We have already been doing that today around the Lord's Table, the fact that the exceeding greatness of His grace has met our need in our awful depravity and sinfulness, in the person and redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ - but yet, after we are saved and are converted and become Christians, our need doesn't finish there. We don't just have everything on a plate while we wait in the Christian life, but we're still subject to trials, to testings, temptations, and we often still need guidance, we need to hear the voice of God day by day in our lives. At times when we face challenges and difficulties, we need fresh courage from the hand and strength of God.

Regardless of whatever our need may be, Paul tells us in this text which is so famous and so often is framed on our walls - and I have a painting in the house with this on it - but how often is it really entered into by our hearts: that our God, yes He has conditions to have our needs supplied, but if those conditions are met, that we can have the confidence that whatever our particular need is, God can and will meet that need. Maybe it's a physical need that you have here today, or a social, relational need, or an intellectual need in your mind, or spiritual need in your heart, soul and spirit - every need, God says to us, and it is God's word, that need will be met.

But it would be remiss of us not to note today, as we look at this so oft-quoted and claimed text, to see that there are certain conditions upon which this promise is fulfilled from God to us. Maybe the reason why you aren't experiencing the joy, the contentment, the peace, the freedom and the liberty and release that you can know from God providing for your every need, it's maybe because you're not fulfilling the conditions of this verse. We learn the conditions by looking at the context, where we find it - you'll remember from our reading, chapter 4, we looked at verses 14, 15 and 16 - he's talking about how the Philippian Christians had met his need financially. In other words, when Paul was in need they filled the gap financially for the apostle. Now Paul is coming to them and saying: 'Because you by your sacrificial giving met my need, I am absolutely confident that God will meet your need'.

I hope you see the connection here: because these Philippians met Paul's need, he could tell them: 'Now God is going to meet your need'. So we're beginning to see the foundation of the conditions of how we can know this confidence and God's provision, even in our own individual lives. Here's the first condition - condition number one: it must be a need that is created by meeting another person's need. God will provide our every

need when our need has come because we are sacrificially giving to the Lord. Now it mightn't be directly related, but as long as we are sacrificially giving to the Lord and His work we can be sure that God will meet our need. Listen to what J.H. Pickford said, he puts it in words that I couldn't put it, so I'll just quote it to you - he asks the question: 'What grounds have we to lay hold of this promise to supply our needs, if we have refused to supply the needs of God's work and we have had the means? With what confidence can we pray for the Lord to honour us with substance, if we have not honoured Him with substance that He has already given? This is the ageless principle in the economy of God: what we withhold withers, what we lay aside is spoiled, but what we release returns - if we fill full another's needs, God will fill full our needs'.

Please don't miss this, and we may only get through these conditions this morning and have to look next week at the promise, but it's vitally important if we're to enter into the joy and fullness and the release of this promise that we understand that it's not just willy-nilly given carte blanche to everybody who just prays it in the prayer meeting. There are conditions, and the first condition is this: you should have a need in your life because it has been created by giving to someone else's need, by filling another's need. In other words, their need was not created by extravagance. They weren't spending left, right and centre and that's why they were in need. It wasn't a need created by slothfulness - in other words, they weren't deciding: 'I'll just sit on my backside and not go out to work, and I'll take all the dole money that the society and government will give to me, and God will provide my need'. If you're doing that, God forgive you, that is presumption of the highest order and testing God! It's not a need given by overambition or unwise investments, or foolish and unnecessary spending, but the claim that we have upon this promise - verse 19 - is solely legitimate when it is because we have poured our resources into someone else's need, and only then can we know God's provision to our need - the gap that has been left by our sacrifice for others.

Don't ever take up verses like this and say: 'Well, here we are, this is an easy way to live, isn't it? Let's live like George Mueller', and not see that George Mueller and men of God like George Mueller, and lesser men, have known this promise fulfilled - but they have also known in their life a sacrificial secret giving to others needs, even out of their own poverty. That's what the Philippians did - we remember it in the Acts - God will meet our need when it is a need that is created when we've met the needs of others. This isn't a ticket to carefree ease, it's not some kind of - as some scholars said - an 'open sesame' to slothful plenty. There's a principle here: that God will provide for you when you meet the needs of others.

Now we'll tease that out a little bit more, and there's a second condition that outflows from that, and it's this: God's promises to meet human needs are always for a purpose. God will not supply your need to live it up, to get more comfortable, but God provides your need for a purpose - and God's purpose is never ever to relieve an individual of his responsibility, but rather He gives us a responsibility in stewardship. That's what the whole word and concept means, that when God gives us something, He gives us with the gift a responsibility to discharge that gift as He has ordained. Do you see it? It's not only has the gap and the poverty been made by giving to another, but the implication is that after we have given to the other, and the space and the emptiness is left, that when God provides the need that is there that that need is also provided to give on again and again and again!

Is that not what Paul meant when he said in 2 Corinthians 9:8: 'And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work'? Paul again is commending another church that gave to him, and he's saying: 'God is going to make you abound' - in other words, what you have given to me, He's going to give you much more back, but the reason why He's giving you that back is so that you can abound more and more in good works, doing the same as you've already done. So you see that this promise has the first condition that the need that you have ought to be some need in your life that has been created by meeting another's need, but secondly: when your need is met, it is met for a purpose, that you might abound more and more in doing good to others. It's not: 'I've done my good turn, and God has supplied my need again, and that's it'.

Here's the third condition: it has to be a gift, it has to be a gift. Now let me say that this is very contemporary, and as you know I have not engineered this this morning, because we've been going through this book of Philippians for many weeks now, and we're coming up very soon to a building project that, God willing, will be realised in the weeks that lie ahead. We will be looking to God through His people to supply the financial need necessary. God will supply that need, but I believe that it has to be a gift from God's people. In other words, we'll not be having jumble sales or church raffles, because to buy a ticket in a church raffle or daffodil tea or whatever you want to call it, or to get a bargain at a jumble sale, it's not a gift - it's not a gift! It's a financial transaction for which you have exchanged money for a commodity, whether it be food or clothing or something else. It's not giving sacrificially to God, it's an exchange, it's a business deal if you like. One author, and I think he's right, said: 'This is a depraved and a disgraceful form of church finance which robs the church giving of its significance. It prostitutes stewardship, it degrades ethics, it robs people of the inestimable privilege and God of the perfume of Christian devotion, because it cannot become an odour of sweet smell or a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God'.

Look at verse 18: 'I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God'. Now I do not adhere to the health and wealth doctrine within the church. I believe that God is no man's debtor, and I believe that if you're giving you will abound in your reception to give even more - but let me tell you this: it has to be a gift. One thing that the health and wealth movement does is it robs of the believer the inestimable privilege of giving sacrificially and worshipping the Lord through your financial devotion to God, and it not only robs the Christian of that privilege of stewardship but it robs the God of heaven of the sweet smelling odour and savour of giving to Him financially. Now if you're getting something back in return it can't be seen as a gift, can it? That scholar that I quoted said: 'A return to basic New Testament stewardship would produce one of the greatest revivals of spiritual life ever known in the church', and I believe him!

The first condition: it has to be a need that has been created by meeting another person's need like the Philippians. Secondly: the human need, when it is met, has been met for a purpose - to continue doing good for others. Number three: it has to be a gift - there can't be something in it for you, and you shouldn't just give to the Lord because you know He's going to give you back an awful lot more. Number four, and this is important also: it is personal benevolence. It's personal benevolence, rather than an institutional benevolence. You see, if we were to suddenly set up an Iron Hall Social Office, where you would come and give whatever need that you had, and allow the agencies - whether they be big denominational ones - to distribute your benevolence, you lose the effect of personal contact with the need and the needy one. You're not personally supplying the need, and you're not coming personally in contact with the one who has the need, and there's a tremendous ministry, there's a great thrill not only in the heart of God as a sweet smelling savour, but in the heart of the giver for it is more blessed to give than to receive, and also in the heart of the receiver to know that their brethren care enough for them to meet their need.

I hope I haven't given you too many conditions, but they're what I find within this passage. It has to be a need that is created by giving to the need of another; it has to be a need that has been given into your lap in order for the purpose of helping other people; it should be a gift; and it should be by personal benevolence. Let me say this to all of us as we enter into the great financial challenges of the days that lie ahead of us: Hudson Taylor, a man of God, one of the pioneer missionaries to China who knew God supernaturally providing for him all along his life, said this: 'When God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will not lack for God's supply'.

Now if we take it individually to each of us, and we want to know how we can enter into the fulfilment of this verse: do God's work! And if you're not doing any work for God, and if you're not seeking God's supply for His work, and if you're not doing God's work in God's way, and not doing it for the glory of God, you

will not know God's supply. Maybe that's why you're in poverty today, and I'm not just talking about financial poverty, I'm talking about all of those material, physical and spiritual needs - that could be the reason! But what a blessing if, like the Philippians, you fill Paul's cup to overflowing, out of your own poverty you meet his need sacrificially, you can then depend on - as you put your cup out to God - that He will fill it to overflowing!

Now let's begin dissecting this verse that we may learn. Once those conditions are fulfilled you can know many things, four of which I'm going to share with you. One: the source of the supply. Two: the surety of the supply. Three: the sufficiency of the supply. And four: the standard of the supply - and Leeman Strauss, I borrowed those titles from him. The first is the source of the supply, and it's just found in the first three words of verse 19: 'But my God shall supply all your need' - there is the source of it! All earthly wealth, there's nothing intrinsically evil in it, it is the love of money that is the root of all evil - but we must remember that it is transient, it is temporary, and the wealth and fashion of this world - as John says in 1 John 2:17 - 'it passeth away'. It disappears, and therefore to put our faith in financial terms and the monetary societies of this world is fatal, for depressions will come - and it can wipe out, overnight, our fortunes. Thieves can break in, as the Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount, and steal our entire life savings away. Time even deteriorates the wonderful edifices and buildings that we have erected to man's pride and strength. But isn't it wonderful to know the source where our supply is coming from and where our need is met - and it is none other than Almighty God! It is the God of heaven, the God of the universe from whom no one and nothing can impoverish Him and take His wealth away from Him. He is the one who accumulated, He created the wealth in every mine, He created the cattle on thousand hills, and because He is the one who has accumulated all the wealth that there is in existence, He is the God who allocates it, and He is the source of that supply.

Riches are safe with Him, and that's why the Lord Jesus told us not to build up treasures on the earth but in heaven. Now, therefore it's important to realise where we ought to go to get whatever supply we need, whatever is our specific lack, it is to God. That's the importance of knowing the source, and because it is God - and it's not just the God in heaven, or a God, but isn't it wonderful to be able to say like Paul: 'My God' - my God! My God...surely doesn't that reveal His proximity to us in our need, that He is nearby, near to our need, He knows our need, He knows how our need can be met. He is more than just a distant impersonal Deity, but He's actually in the very depths of our experience - He is our personal heavenly Father who takes note of the little sparrow that falls, who clothes the lily of the field, and He is in our midst - He is available to be the supply and the source of that supply. When we can't see our way in life, you can say: 'I don't know what the direction is, but my God knows!'. When you don't know where the money is coming from to pay the bills, you can say: 'I don't know, but my God knows, He is my support!'. You don't know how you're going to get through this sickness, the ailment, the trial in your home with your children and all the rest - whatever the need is, isn't it wonderful to be able to turn to a source that is heavenly and say: 'My God! I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore'.

In Psalm 121 and Psalm 122 he said: 'As a servant looks to the hand of his master, so I look to you O God. As a maid looks to the hand of her mistress, I will look to God for my need'. Who is this God? Ephesians 1, turn with me for a moment, our brother Hugh quoted from this passage in the Breaking of Bread service - but let's just see who this God is, and I want to take time over these things because they really thrilled my heart this morning, even as I'm preaching, and I believe they'll do you good too if you let them into your heart. Verse 19, this is the God of the risen Christ, the God who has exceeding greatness of power to us who

believe, 'according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead'. My God, who is He? He is the God who raised Christ from the grave! Go on: 'and set him at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come'. He's the God of the risen Christ, and He's the God of the ascended Christ!

My friend, if you just for one moment consider that this is the God who does the impossible, the God that raises the dead, the God that exalts a human being - and He is the Christ of course, but remember that it is human flesh that sits at the right hand of God! Should you not ask the question: 'Well, if He can do all that, can He not meet my need? Can He not help me?'. Think of how He's the great intercessor, He's not just risen and exalted and ascended, but He's at the right hand of God, and the Bible says He is there for us as our advocate, as our representative, our friend. He's the one who hears our petitions and presents them to God; He is the one who dispenses the need that we have from the throne of God; He is there with our Father! That gives me great help today, because He is there we have the right of constant intervention with God, and efficient aid from the hand of God. He is the Great High Priest touched with the feelings of our infirmities, because He was tested in all points like as we are yet without sin - and because of that we can come with boldness unto the throne of grace to find mercy and help in time of our need.

What a great intercessor, such a friend as that - could the need that you have ever fail to come? I love Robert Murray M'Cheyne, and one thing that he said, I stuck it in my Bible, is this: 'If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear one million enemies - yet distant makes no difference, He is praying for me and He is the God of heaven'. We don't have time to go through the book of Revelation, but what do we know about heaven? Well we know it needs no sun, we know that it's walls are of jewels, and its pavements are of gold, and the glorious new Jerusalem has countless streets that stretch right throughout it 1,500 miles north, south, east and west - and then moves as high up as it goes long in its area. It goes to mid-heaven, for the length and breadth and height of it are equal - and we're asking ourselves: 'Now this is the supply for my need, and if this is the kind of place God can create and build, can He meet my need?'. We have so little faith at times, don't we? This is a source of our supply: 'My God'!

Secondly is the surety of that supply: 'My God shall supply all your need'. Now if anything should cast all the doubts and fears out of our minds, it should be that word 'shall'. He's saying there's never an occasion when this will fail, as long as we've fulfilled the conditions of course. We should never fear that God will never honour us whenever we honour Him. The reason why Paul was so sure is because he was aware of the source, and when you get a grasp of the source you can know the assurance of it because you know that this God is the one who supplies your need and He cannot fail to do so because of who He is. When others fail to come to your rescue, my God shall. When the well runs dry, when the barrel is empty, when you cannot, my God shall. When there seems to be no way of reaching your needs at all, humanly speaking, what a blessing to know even when you can't see it, but by faith my God shall!

It is this law that when you give you will receive from the Lord, it's a constant law of the word of God and in His world. Jesus said: 'Give, and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over shall be given into your bosom. For with what measure ye meet it shall be measured to you again'. It's not health and wealth, but it is this: God is no man's debtor! If you lend your boat for a whole afternoon to the Christ of God that He might make a floating pulpit out of it, by the end of the night your boat will be filled with fish. If you lend your Upper Room to the Lord Jesus Christ at His disposal for a Passover meal, not too long will transpire until that whole room is filled by the pentecostal power of the Holy Ghost - in fact the whole house is shaken! He will not only satisfy hunger if you place in His hands the barley loaves and the fish, but He will add 12 baskets full on top of it all!

This is the surety of supply, and what a supply it is! It is God's return to us! You remember when the good Samaritan was leaving the village inn on the morning after the memorable rescue of the wounded traveller, what did he say to the host? 'Take care of him, and what thou spendest more, when I come I will repay'. You have to give cheerfully of course, and we've covered all that, let's move on swiftly and we may have time. There is the sufficiency of His supply. There's the source: my God; the surety: He shall; the sufficiency: all your need.

His experience, Paul said in these verses: 'I have received full payment' - verse 18: 'I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus'. Now we don't know how much Epaphroditus sent from the church at Philippi, but he is able to cry: 'I am amply supplied'. Now have you ever seen such a paradox and seeming contradiction as this: this little man, bow-legged they say and with a big nose and bald, sitting in this prison absolutely poor, impoverished, not a penny to his name, chained to a Roman soldier at the behest and will of a Roman tyrant, almost perhaps persuaded at the beginning that he was going to his death, inevitably would under Nero - yet he said: 'I am amply supplied'.

He said not so long ago in chapter 3: 'I have suffered the loss of all things'. He said in Corinthians that he was hated, persecuted, an outcast to Judaism. He awaited trial many times, on occasions he hung by a thread, by the capricious will of Roman tyrants and governors. He was a man who, he said, bore in his body the dying marks of the Lord Jesus with scars and beatings and scourgings and shipwrecks, privations of every kind - and only a few days before he received, it could have been a couple of pence from this church in Philippi, maybe a bit of clothing or a barley roll - I don't know, but I'm sure it wasn't thousands or millions! Was he mad in the head? Had the damp in the cell rotted his brains out, that he could say: 'I am amply supplied'? No! He measured his wealth in a higher sense than this world can understand.

He said in 1 Timothy 1:14: 'the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus'. He had a hope of which he could boast. Listen to this hope: 'I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'. What a hope! What a love he had! He could say: 'So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have, and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?'. What a love! What a victory he experienced! He could say: 'Nay, in all these things - I am killed almost every day, like a lamb sent to the slaughter, but in all these things I am more than conqueror through Him that loved me'. In His many sacrifices he could say: 'Nay, in all these things, but even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering in the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you' - and in his sufferings he was so little disturbed, because he could say: 'I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me, however I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race, complete the task the Lord has given me: the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace'. Because he fulfilled God's will for his life, God filled his life full of His supply.

That is the sufficiency of the supply, and then fourthly and finally the standard of the supply: according to His riches in glory. Now I'm not able to tell you what that means. His riches in glory - I know it includes the vast wealth that there is in the universe, I know it's a great deal to do with the gospel that we've entered into, but all that I could tell you this morning is just a mere drop in the bucket of God's riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Here of course it means financial and physical needs, but we read in other places where Paul says that he knew the riches of God's goodness. He says in Romans that he knows the riches of the wisdom of God; he says in Ephesians 1:7 he knew the riches of the grace of God; Ephesians 3:16 the riches of God's glory - and the standard of what God gives us is not out of His riches, the way you and I would do - 'Here's a tenner or 20 pounds' - but He gives you according to His riches, to the standard and extent of it. That's the standard of the supply.

What are His riches? I'll tell you what they are: in Him, in Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and we are complete in Him. If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Isn't that wonderful? Ask yourself, dear child in need, if He give up His Son, will He not meet my need? Imagine going into a jewellers and buying a diamond ring for the wife, costing you thousands, almost bankrupt, and then you say: 'Could I have a wee brown paper bag to wrap that up in please?', and they say: 'No, no, we can't afford that'. He gave His only Son, do you not think that He could meet any need, every need, when He has given to that extent He is able to do exceeding abundantly more than we ask or think! Christ is God's answer to our need, He's been the answer to every question we've asked going through this Philippian epistle, hasn't He? To desire, to satisfaction in life, and now the provision and the supply and the standard of that supply is according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus, for in Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden, and it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. In that divine human person there is everything that any of us need!

He filleth all in all, Paul said. He is the compliment for our need, or you could say He's the completeness for our need. Whatever our deficiency is, the greater it is, the greater His supply and the larger the extent of it. But do you know what is needed? What is needed that we, as we often do, don't go through life as if we can meet the demands of our life, and we can supply our needs? But rather that we reckon these promises as our own, we avail ourselves of all of the treasures that are prepared for us in the person of our risen, exalted and glorified Lord. The reason why we don't often enter into this truth is because we limit the exchequer of the Holy One of God.

Let me tell you a story as I close. There was a man, and this story was told by Dr Richard Newton, of an old and poverty stricken Red Indian in the States, who many years ago made his way into the Western settlement in search of food to keep him from starving. A bright coloured ribbon was seen around his neck from which there hung a little small dirty pouch or money purse. On being asked what it was, the illiterate Indian said: 'I think it's a charm that was given to me in my younger days, and he opened it'. The man that took it out saw a bit of worn paper, crumpled and torn, and when it was read it was found on inspection to be a regular discharge from the federal army. The signature that was on it was none other than George Washington himself. What it was was entitling that Red Indian, who had fought in the war, to a pension for the rest of his life. Here was a man with a promise duly signed, sealed and delivered, and if it had been presented into the right source and hand and place it would have secured him ample provision for all of his life - yet he wandered around the desert hungry, helpless, forlorn, and begging bread to keep him from starving.

Is that not like us at times? When there's a heavenly Father spoken of in this benediction: 'Now unto God and our Father', a Father who has His eye on His children, and a Father whose hand is outstretched to provide their relief, whatever that may be. D. L. Moody, the great evangelist, preached on verse 19 on one occasion better than me. His outline was this, he called his sermon: 'God's Cheque'. He said: "My God", that is the name of the firm on the cheque, 'My God'. 'Shall supply', that is the promise to pay. 'All your need', that is the amount to be paid. 'His riches', that is the deposit in the account against which the cheque is drawn. 'In glory', that is the address of the bank. 'By Christ Jesus', that is the signature that appears on the cheque. This cheque needs but one thing to make it a practical and valuable thing, and that is the endorsement of your faith on the reverse side' - and then, whatever your need, God will abundantly supply it.

We have finished Philippians, and may God receive the glory due in verses 20 and 22 and 23. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen

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