

COLLECTION COMMENTS

SUGGESTED STATEMENTS FOR THE CONTRIBUTION

By

Ed Mathews

2023

RATIONALE FOR WRITING “COLLECTION COMMENTS”

The collection is taken every Sunday. Giving is an essential part of our worship. Those who participate need to be prepared. The amount that is given rests with the giver (though the one presiding can certainly set the tone).

The following “collection comments” are written to help those who officiate in this segment of worship. The “comments” are designed to focus the minds of those who “lay by in store.”

“Collection comments” are short exhortations on giving back to God. Each one is roughly 130 words. They take less than ninety seconds to read. All of them are based on Scripture. They are reproduced in “large print” to facilitate easier use.

Some “collection comments” speak to the use of money. Others clarify the purpose of giving. Several warn the worshiper about the misuse of wealth. All of them enhance our understanding of the contribution. My sole objective in writing the “collection comments” is to aid brothers and sisters in this vital part of their worship to God.

We have all contributed. The following “comments” are intended to lift our understanding above perfunctory obedience. We need to review our participation in giving of our money. Above all, I want to renew our commitment to supporting the cause of Christ.

It is these concerns that moved me to write this little book. I need these reminders as much as anyone. I wrote them for me as well as for you. I share them because I assume you want to give in an acceptable manner.

Each “collection comment” will have references to Scripture. These references are included so the presider can look up the passages while preparing to officiate. But, during the worship service:

- . DO NOT READ THE UNDERLINED BOOK, CHAPTER, AND VERSE CITATIONS.
- . Be sure to read the “collection comments” slowly.
- . Emphasize key words and important questions.
- . Allow the “*Let us*” statements suggest topics for prayer.

In the following “comments,” my words are few. My ideas are simple. My thoughts are based on the Bible. My intentions are sincere. I share them hoping you find them helpful. May God receive all the praise.

Ed Mathews
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A TENTH OF EVERYTHING

Tithing was an ancient and widespread custom. It was practiced by nations long before Israel. For example, Abram gave “*a tenth of everything*,” Genesis 14:20.

Tithes were offerings to deity. They were usually given to support temple priests. The tithe eventually became part of the Mosaic Law, Leviticus 27:30.

But, six centuries before tithing was included in the Law of Moses, Lot was kidnapped. Abram successfully rescued his nephew. In the process, Abram took a large quantity of battlefield plunder, Genesis 14:16. The patriarch gave a tenth of his booty as a thank offering (for his victory).

God does not accept gifts that are illegally obtained. He hates robbery. Abram offered what was by custom his. He gladly shared his bounty with Melchizedek (priest of God Most High).

The Lord gives in love. We return a portion to Him as a sign of our gratitude. Our gifts do not earn our salvation. Christ purchased that for us. We give to say “*thank you*.”

Let us, then, give our thank offerings.

STORING UP WEALTH

God wants us to be happy. Hence, we must not store up wealth for ourselves. It is a meaningless futility to do so, Ecclesiastes 2:24-26.

. There Is Sorrow In Gathering Wealth. It is a painful grief to pursue riches. We plan and plot. We rise early and go to bed late. And, *“even in the night, our minds do not rest,”* Ecclesiastes 2:23.

. There Is Sorrow In Saving Wealth. What do we get for all our labor? Robbers want to steal it. Economic downturns take it away. We work a lifetime to amass a nest egg. And, by then, we are too old to enjoy it.

. There Is Sorrow In Leaving Wealth. If we are successful, we will eventually leave our money to someone else. Will our heirs be wise? Will they take care of our estate like we did? Ecclesiastes 2:18,19.

The Christian does not indulge in such folly. Our true joy is storing our treasures in heaven.

Let us choose the better way.

EVERYTHING IN COMMON

Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims. Some of them became followers of Christ. They had come for the Passover. They stayed for Pentecost (which occurred 50 days later). Likely, their supplies were getting thin.

So the early Church had “*all things in common*,” Acts 2:44. They pooled their resources. The saints shared their possessions with each other. They freely “opened their wallets.” No one was left out. The needs of everyone were met.

. They Had Spiritual Needs. The new converts received the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38. The power of God nurtured their hungry souls.

. They Had Physical Needs. The community of faith sold their possessions. They shared the proceeds with their needy brothers and sisters, Acts 2:45.

Though strangers, their new faith united them as a family. And, centuries later, we do the same. We give so that every believer is supplied with the basic essentials.

Let us give for the sake of our fellow Christians.

FREELY RECEIVE, FREELY GIVE

The disciples were sent to preach. They gave to those in need. For, when they supplied physical necessities, their audience assumed they were also interested in their spiritual concerns, cf. John 4:15.

We give freely because we have freely received, Matthew 10:8. We serve because we have been served.

- . What We Have Is Not Ours. Our possessions are “gifts from heaven.” We must not use them as “bargaining chips.” They are to be given away.

- . What We Have Is From God. Our spiritual gifts are given to us. They were not purchased. We did not earn them. They must not be kept for ourselves.

- . What We Have Must Be Distributed. Everything we receive from the Master is meant to earn a return for the Master, cf. Matthew 25:27.

The idea is quite clear. We are merely temporary managers of His possessions. The Lord gave them to us so that we could distribute them to others.

We are executors of a trust. We use His gifts to help the lost. What we possess belongs to God.

Let us freely give what we have freely received.

DO NOT PUT YOUR HOPE IN RICHES

Money comes and goes. Our retirement plan gains and loses. Our investment portfolio climbs and falls. The economy is “*uncertain*,” 1 Timothy 6:17. It is here today and gone tomorrow.

. Money Disappears. Those who desire to be rich often fail. Like desert grass, money disappears. Humans have no control over the whims of the stock market. Why toil a lifetime to end in poverty. Is that not useless?

. God Remains. When money goes, the Lord stays. Those who desire to be rich should make themselves rich toward the Almighty. Come what may, our Master will be there when we need Him. It is better to be an instrument of good rather than a fool headed for disaster.

A lover of money invests his future in shifting sand. Wealth becomes a snare.

The godly put their trust in the certainties of heaven. They give to God and to others. Why gain the whole world and lose our own soul? Matthew 16:26.

Let us pursue that which lasts.

GOD PROVIDES

The Lord richly provides us everything “*we need*,” I Timothy 6:17b. We should trust the Giver not the gift. For money is uncertain. The Giver is reliable. Indeed, “*every good and perfect gift is from above*,” James 1:17.

. Do Not Be Arrogant. The Christian has no reason to be haughty or boastful. His wealth is a present. Therefore, do not look down on the poor. God loves them, too.

. Do Not Trust Money. Wealth often disappears. It is foolish to assume our bank account is our hope, that our wallet is our security, cf. Job 31:24,25.

Wealth has a tendency to vanish. And, without a doubt, it is left behind at death.

Moreover, riches cannot satisfy the eternal longings of the soul. Heaven gives to those who put their trust in God. Do we not inherit our mansion above? Jesus paid for it.

But, most important, the storehouse of God has an endless supply. Count on it.

Let us give like we believe God provides.

DO GOOD

We are told to “*do good, be rich in good deeds, be generous, and willing to share,*” I Timothy 6:18. That inspired statement is chock full of important advice.

- . Do Good. We are to help others. Our wealth—regardless of how much or how little—is to benefit those in need. We must not grow weary in doing good works, Galatians 6:9.

- . Be Rich In Good Deeds. Stingy giving is an insult to God. We are to be affluent in benevolence. “*For with the measure we give, it will be measured to us again,*” Luke 6:38.

- . Be Generous. Poverty is everywhere. The Christian is charitable. It is the hallmark of a believer. We are to give more than a skimpy handout.

- . Be Willing To Share. A gift is good. A willing gift is better. God loves a “*cheerful giver,*” II Corinthians 9:7. A grumpy donor is a contradiction.

Let us give generously with a willing heart.

BE WISE

Jesus warns us to avoid trusting in wealth. He said, "*It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom,*" Matthew 19:23. Money is a blessing as well as a curse.

When we "*trust in riches,*" we "*will fall,*" Proverbs 11:28. It is inevitable. Wealth makes us a captive. We have an insatiable desire for more.

Eventually we go overboard. More is never satisfied with more. We have a small house. We want a larger one. We have a small car. We want a fancier one. There is no end to the desire for the "bigger and better." Soon my "wants" eclipse His "wishes."

The Lord asks us to be wise. He gives us wealth so that we can share it with others. This draws us closer to God and to our fellowman. Money becomes our servant instead of our master.

The Lord begs us to cultivate a benevolent spirit. Giving tames our greedy notions. God wants us to put others first.

Let us be wise in the use of our money.

LAY UP TREASURE

We are instructed to “*lay up treasure*,” I Timothy 6:19. Wealth given to the cause of Christ builds a solid foundation in heaven.

Jesus made a similar statement. “*Store up treasure in heaven*,” He said, “*where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break through and steal*,” Matthew 6:20.

Our best investment is sharing with those in need. When we pay forward, we do not lose our wealth. Rather, it is put in a safe place free from corrosion and criminals.

The Christian gives in order to receive. The world does not understand. It is the formula of God.

Existence as we know it will soon disappear. It will vanish, II Peter 3:10. Only what we have sent on ahead will survive. Our financial advisor does not operate on that premise. Only the Almighty does. What we give away is what we keep!

Let us lay up treasures in heaven.

TAKE HOLD OF LIFE

When we share with others, we not only “*lay up treasures in heaven*” but also “*take hold of life*,” 1 Timothy 6:19. “*Life that is truly life*” is characterized by helping those in need.

The cabin in the mountains sounds like fun. The cruise on a luxury liner is a dream come true. But these pale in comparison to the Christian life. Why? The one is fleeting. The other is forever.

The battle between this world and the next world never ends. We are pulled in one direction and jerked back in another direction. It is a constant struggle. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

How do we live in two worlds at the same time? How can we “thread the needle” between now and later? The answer lies in “*life that is truly life*.”

The choice is clear. The decision takes strength. The outcome rests in the balance! What will it be?

Let us take hold of life that is really life.

WHEN THE BROOK DRIES UP

Elijah was directed by God to go to the Kerith Raven. And, while there, “*the brook dried up*,” I Kings 17:7.

Life has those moments.

Elijah had obeyed the Lord. Yet, even though he was where God wanted him to be, he lost his source of water.

One would think that Jehovah might honor His obedient servant. Actually, He did (though the brook became dry).

No word of complaint is recorded. Elijah was given new instructions. He was to go to a foreign country and depend on a destitute widow, I Kings 17:9.

Has our brook dried up? Has our source of income vanished? Be of good cheer! The Lord has not abandoned us. Rather He will give new supplies from unlikely sources.

Our faith is often tested. In time, new directions will be issued. In the interim, keep trusting. God is with us. Our livelihood will not totally disappear.

Let us trust God when our brook runs dry.

ALL THE PEOPLE BROUGHT THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

The king of Judah decided to restore the temple, II Chronicles 24:4. Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, had vandalized the house of God, II Chronicles 24:7.

Restoration projects are expensive. It takes money to fix a broken building. Two means of collecting the funds were used. One failed. The other succeeded.

. The First Plan Failed. The priests were to gather the cash from three sources: poll taxes, personal vows, and private donations, II Kings 12:4,5. The process failed, II Kings 12:6. Why? It felt like a compulsory payment.

. The Second Plan Succeeded. A chest was built and placed at the entrance of the temple, II Chronicles 24:8. The people brought their contributions gladly, II Chronicles 24:10. The decision to give was given to the giver. It felt like a free will offering.

The lesson is obvious. Monetary contributions should be gifts to God rather than fees for human services.

Let us gladly bring our contributions to the Lord.

TRUE WISDOM ABOUT MONEY

The wealthy often think they are better than the poor. They assume they are endowed with superior wisdom. But that is simply not so.

Rich folks become arrogant. They assume financial skills are the epitome of being smart. The poor know better.

The Bible says, *"The wealthy are wise in their own eyes. Those who are poor see the truth," Proverbs 28:11.*

Better to have a snack with a good man than a feast with a fool!

Riches can buy some things the poor can only dream about. But *"wealth flies away," Proverbs 23:4,5.*

The Scriptures also say, *"Better is a poor man who is righteous than a rich man who is wicked," Proverbs 28:6.*

True wisdom is to be rich in righteousness, to give to God and share with our fellowman.

Let us rejoice in knowing the truth about money.

MONEY MANAGEMENT IN THE CHURCH

Perhaps, for the first time, special managers were put in charge of the temple storerooms, Nehemiah 12:44.

Heretofore, that responsibility belonged to the high priest, Nehemiah 13:4,5.

The change seemed small. But it was important. A committee of “*trustworthy men*” was appointed to the task (instead of relying on one person), Nehemiah 13:12,13. They were to collect and disburse the tithes.

Previously, Tobiah, a non-Jew, had been appointed treasurer. But he had withheld the pay of the temple employees. Things deteriorated quickly.

The church should take note of this example. Several trustworthy men should be appointed to handle the contributions. And, though trustworthy, their actions should be reviewed regularly by the leadership.

Churches that fail to guard the money of God are asking for trouble. An inadequate arrangement can lead to inappropriate behavior.

Let us manage the funds of the church wisely.

TRUE TREASURES

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.... But store up your treasures in heaven.... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” Matthew 6:19-21.

The idea is quite simple. Earthly treasures require constant maintenance. Nature, the economy, and thieves will try to take it away. And, if they do not get it, than death will finish the job!

But, if we lay up our treasures in heaven, they are secure. Heavenly wealth is different. No artwork. No cash. No stock. No real estate. Nothing earthly. No! Our treasures in heaven will be the *“unsearchable riches of Christ,” Ephesians 3:8*.

Security alone is a sufficient reason to pursue the one over the other. But the quality of the heavenly treasure seals the deal. Where our treasure is our mind will be. We cannot accumulate wealth here and be sure our mind is there.

Let us put our money where our mind is supposed to be.

LOVE GIVES ALL

The Song of Solomon is a love story. It is summarized in these words: *“Love is as strong as death, ...unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire.... Many waters cannot quench it; rivers cannot wash it away,”* Song of Solomon 8:6b,7a.

. Love Is Strong. It overcomes obstacles. God gave His Son to demonstrate His love for us.

. Love Is Tenacious. It does not surrender. Like the grave does not yield up the dead, so the Lord does not give up on us.

. Love Is Active. It is a roaring flame. It burns. It does not go out. It is not extinguished.

. Love Is Unquenchable. Floods cannot smother it. And, though we occasionally fail, God still loves us.

The true essence of Christianity is love. It is His love for us. And it is our love for Him.

“If we gave all our wealth to Him, it would be utterly scorned,” Song of Solomon 8:7b. For love cannot be bought. It is freely given. Indeed, His love for us was given with joy. And our love for Him should also be given cheerfully.

Let us give like we really enjoy loving God.

OMAR GAVE WHAT HE COULD

Omar was a little boy in Sudan. He attended a school operated by a missionary. However, due to chronic malnutrition, which affected his mental ability, he never learned to read and write.

Omar was a happy child. He was friendly with everyone. Unfortunately, Omar had to leave school. Yet he continued to accompany the missionary on his village evangelism trips.

Always smiling, Omar carried the Bible of his missionary friend. They were a great team. Omar served the Lord in the only way he knew how.

This friendship continued for several years. Then tragedy suddenly struck. Omar was playing with a group of boys at the edge of a river. A crocodile grabbed one of the youngsters. The other boys fled. Omar jumped in the water. He saved his friend. But he lost his life.

He gave what he could. Omar never owned a pair of shoes. He did not finish first grade. Nevertheless, when the roll is called up yonder, Omar will likely be there!

Poor and illiterate, Omar gave what little he had. Indeed, those who knew him said he gave all he could.

Let us do the same.

SHARE WITH THOSE IN NEED

The Bible is full of practical advice for daily living. Specifically, Paul said, “*Share with those in need,*” Ephesians 4:28.

. Christians Should Work. God expects His children to earn a living, I Thessalonians 4:11. We are to occupy ourselves in honest labor, II Thessalonians 3:12. Christianity has no room for idleness.

. Believers Should Share. A follower of Christ works in order to give to those in need, Romans 12:13. We do not get a job simply to amass wealth for our own enjoyment. No! We get a job in order to give to others, too.

There are some who cannot work. Their physical condition does not allow them to toil and strain. But, as much as possible, our hands should supply our needs and the necessities of the weak, Acts 20:35. For, “*The righteous give without sparing,*” Proverbs 21:26b.

It is better to be a laborer than a loiterer. The sluggard is a miserable parasite. While the employed are busy, the unemployed are busybodies, II Thessalonians 3:11.

Let us be occupied in honest labor in order to help those in need.

NO GOOD THING WILL HE WITHHOLD

The Lord takes care of His children. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk in His way, Psalm 84:11c.

. God Is Our Sun And Shield. Unaided by heaven, the world is dark and dangerous. Therefore, the Lord is like the sun to an upright person. He is a shield in the battle of life. God honors those who honestly try to be good in a bad place. *“He who did not spare His own Son...will He not also...graciously give us all things?”* Romans 8:32.

. Everyone Does Not Receive That Promise. Why? We are only good now and then. Or we do not understand what being good means. Due to erratic performance and false understanding, the majority of people miss out on His gracious blessing. To walk in the light and enjoy the protection of heaven, we must consistently do His will.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him,” I Corinthians 2:9. This hope keeps us strong when our endurance grows weak.

Let us give to Him who withholds nothing from us.

I SURRENDER ALL

We often sing the song “*All To Jesus I Surrender.*” It is usually sung as an invitation to accept the Lord. And well it should be.

But there are times when it used to prepare for the collection. And it serves that purpose equally as well.

ALL TO JESUS I SURRENDER. The song is a promise that is challenging to keep. For it announces, all to Him I freely give. I will ever love and trust Him. And, in His presence, daily live.

ALL TO JESUS I SURRENDER. Humbly at His feet I bow. Worldly pleasures all forsaken! Take me, Jesus! Take me now. The surrender is not a one-time thing. It is a complete resignation. It is a lifestyle.

ALL TO JESUS I SURRENDER. Lord, I give myself to You. Fill me with Your love and power. Let Your blessing fall on me. That blessing comes after we surrender. It is a call to be generous because He has been more than generous with us.

Let us renew our surrender to Him today—right now.

WILLING VOLUNTEERS

In the Book of Judges, Barak defeated a well-equipped Canaanite army, Judges 4:1-16. The Israelites were praised for their patriotism. They willingly offered themselves, Judges 5:2.

. Are We An Offering To God? We devote ourselves to many things: pleasure, politics, art, literature, science, family, and country. Fine! But our highest commitment should be to the Lord. We are called to serve others (though we are required to find the balance between all of our competing responsibilities).

. Do We Live For Ourselves? The only acceptable sacrifices are willing gifts. God allows us to make up our minds. He does not compel, force, or constrain. Thus, it is our fault if we fail to freely give a sufficient proportion to heaven. Christ died “*so that we may no longer live for ourselves,*” II Corinthians 5:15.

It is a mistake to assume we must be asked to give. For Jesus already supplied the motive. He is waiting for us to “*willingly volunteer.*” He expects us to give without prompting, prodding, or pleading.

The Lord is not merely satisfied with our gifts. He wants us, Proverbs 23:26. He wants us not our possessions, II Corinthians 12:14. For, if He gets us, does He not get our possessions, too?

Let us willingly volunteer ourselves to Him.

MORE THAN ENOUGH

God wanted Israel to build a tabernacle. The skilled craftsmen were set to start the task. The people of God were called upon “*to bring an offering,*” Exodus 25:2.

What a scene! They had just left slavery in Egypt. Upon their departure, the Egyptians had given them gifts for their journey, Exodus 12:35,36. It was those newly acquired possessions that became the offering that Israel gave to build the tent of God.

. The Call To Contribute Was A Blessing. The leadership did not know how the people would react. Would they give enough to do the work? Indeed, they did. Actually, they “*were restrained from bringing more...because there was already more than enough,*” Exodus 36:6b. A rare event! As Christians, we should emulate their example.

. The Call To Contribute Became A Burden. The leadership had to stop the flow of giving. Enough was enough. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. Usually, the collection comes up short. Renewed calls for giving are made. Eventually, the congregation has to settle for a second best. When this occurs, the saints become discouraged.

But, in the case of the tabernacle, the work was completed. Moses “*blessed*” the people for a job well done, Exodus 39:43.

Let us give more than enough so that we may also be blessed.

GIVING AND RECEIVING

One of the leading characteristics of a Christian is generosity. “Give,” Jesus said, “*and it will be given to you*,” Luke 6:38a. The financial principles of the kingdom are different. For, when we give, we receive in measures “*pressed down, shaken together, and running over*,” Luke 6:38b.

. What Do We Give. We can give our money, our time, or our possessions. We can also give our selves, our affection, and our service. Giving takes many forms. It never ceases tugging at our hearts.

. To Whom Do We Give. The recipients of our generosity can and should include a wide variety of folks: our relatives, our neighbors, our friends, and our fellowman have a claim on our kindness.

. Why Do We Give. We give because we have received, Matthew 10:8b. We give because God gave. He gave more than we ever will give. Such giving softens the heart and keeps selfishness at bay.

So how much should we give? An amount was never mentioned (though a guideline was stated). “*For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you*,” Christ suggested, Luke 6:38c. Skimpy gifts receive skimpy rewards! Abundant gifts garner abundant returns. So, now, the ball is “in our court.”

Let us give like we wish to receive.

EVERY GOOD GIFT

A person “*can only receive what is given to him from heaven,*” John 3:27. And what heaven gives is “*good,*” Psalm 85:12. For, “*every good and perfect gift*” comes from our Father above, James 1:17a.

God is changeless. He is not like the sun, moon, and stars. The heavenly bodies constantly vary: the length of day and night, the waxing and waning of the moon, and the different brightness of the stars. But, unlike nature, the Almighty does not fluctuate, James 1:17c. His gifts are always good.

In 1808, there was a performance of the “Creation” symphony. Haydn—the composer of the music—was there. He was old and feeble. He had been transported to the concert hall in a wheelchair. His presence brought the crowd to their feet in thunderous applause. During the tumultuous welcome, Haydn struggled to his feet. “*No! No! No!*” he said, “*not for me but for Him who gave us all good things.*”

How true! Our giving is not for us. It is not for the church. It is for God who has given us every good and perfect gift.

Let us honor our heavenly Benefactor.

SELL EVERYTHING YOU HAVE

A rich man came to Jesus. “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” he asked, Luke 18:18. The man was wealthy. He was morally upright, Luke 18:20,21. What more could he be? What more could he do?

Still he felt something was missing. Perhaps, that prompted his question. Perhaps, he realized, life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.

The Lord told him to “*sell everything*” he had, Luke 18:22. He might not have been required to sell his estate any more than Abraham had to kill Isaac, Genesis 22:1-12. But, he was tested nonetheless. And the rich man failed, Luke 18:23.

How can we blame him? Are we not caught up in the same predicament? The Lord tests us every Sunday. Will we trust Him more than we trust our earthly possessions?

Is that not one of the purposes of the weekly contribution? It is a test of our priorities—God or money? And, being surrounded by monetary issues every day, the tug-of-war never ceases.

The love of this world (and the stuff of this life) will not quit until we disavow our reliance on them, that is, until we “sell” all we have!

Let us acknowledge that God is the key to eternal life.

DISTRIBUTING THE CONTRIBUTION

King Hezekiah was attempting to revive the worship of Jehovah. In order to support the temple officials, he asked the people to contribute, II Chronicles 31:4. They gave “*a tithe of everything*” they owned, II Chronicles 31:5. Men were selected to distribute the contribution, II Chronicles 31:11-13.

. It Was Sacred Money. The tithes belonged to the Lord (though they were distributed to the priests). The act of giving was a pious act of worship. Therefore, the dispensing of the money was a sacred responsibility.

. It Was A Freewill Offering. The believers were obligated to give. They were responsible to support the ministries of the temple. Yet the timing of their gift was left to their discretion, II Chronicles 31:7. So we give what we must when we can.

. It Was Carefully Distributed. Wisdom was required to disburse the funds of God. Nothing wasted! Nothing perverted! May those who handle the collection in the church do so in a “*good and right and faithful*” way, II Chronicle 31:20.

Let us pray that the funds given today will be wisely used.

POVERTY AND WEALTH

God is in control. *“He brings death and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth. He humbles and He exalts,”* I Samuel 2:6,7.

The Almighty rescues the lost. He saves nations from calamity. Heaven graciously influences the hidden forces to bring joy. His deliverance is a foreshadowing of the ultimate salvation in Jesus Christ.

We look forward to our redemption. It is out there. God promised it. It is only a matter of time. Yet, meanwhile, we must suffer through the ups and downs of the present.

We stay the course because God has His hand on the helm. He will not let go. The world is not out of control. He is sovereign. Nothing is outside His power.

So whatever our lot, there is no need to despair. Whether we have much or suffer in want, the Lord knows. It is not a lost cause.

Therefore, we should give out of what we have been given. There will be more in the future. Trust Him. He cares.

Let us contribute in faith.

SCARIFICE OF THE WICKED

The Bible says, “*The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable (especially) when brought with evil intent,*” Proverbs 21:27.

When we come to the collection, it is a travesty to assume our money can bribe God to overlook our shortcomings. The Scriptures call such maneuvers an abomination. Indeed, “*the Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked,*” Proverbs 15:8a.

. The Attitude Of Jehovah Toward The Wicked. God is not happy with sinners. This is so not because they have some erroneous opinion or make some mistake. No! He despises the wicked because they refuse to follow His will. Sinners live in a state of determined disloyalty, Psalm 50:16-19. God will not accept the offering of an evildoer.

. The Attitude Of Jehovah Toward The Righteous. The righteous are not perfect. But they surrender to the Almighty. They give with genuine intent to honor the Lord, Philippians 3:12-16. God is pleased with those who sincerely try to do what He asks. He is delighted with their effort to be faithful stewards of His money.

Why, then, do we give? Our intentions are important. We cannot fool God. He knows our motive. We do, too. Evil reasons result in a sinner’s reward.

Let us offer the sacrifice of the righteous.

HE OFFERED THEM MONEY

Simon was a popular man. He practiced sorcery. Simon was called “*the Great Power*,” Acts 8:9,10. Notwithstanding, in the course of time, he was baptized, Acts 8:13.

Those who read the Book of Acts marvel at the power of the Gospel. Lives were changed. The lost was found. The triumph of truth was astounding. Yet, it is disappointing, when those who turn to the Lord, revert back to their old ways. Simon certainly did.

His conversion stirred great excitement. Yet, in no time, it ended in an unexpected and perplexing fall. For, “*when Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money*,” Acts 8:18. Apparently, he wanted to pursue his old practices.

In rapid succession from sorcery to belief, to baptism, and, finally, to bribery, Simon displayed the true nature of his heart. He did not let Christ cleanse his base cunning—using holy things for unholy purposes.

We must not do that either. We give money to honor the Lord. We offer our wealth to further the Gospel, to glorify God. The purpose of the collection has nothing to do with bribing heaven or dazzling fellow believers.

Let us give with a pure motive.

DO YOUR BEST

Israel had made their way through the desert. They were ready to enter the Promised Land. They were almost home.

Likewise, we are close to our destination. The Lord has brought us to the border of heaven. He has given us instructions on how to finish the journey. He feeds us spiritual food. Our eternal home is close at hand.

It pleased the Almighty to tell Israel about their future home. He instructed them to send spies to view the land. And they were “*to do their best*” to bring some of the produce of Canaan back with them, Numbers 13:20.

They saw its fruit. They tasted it. They knew that the best was yet to be. But a strong enemy stood in their way. The people became discouraged. They focused on their hardships instead of on His power.

We often do the same thing. “*Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for so that you may be fully rewarded,*” II John 8. May we do our best to bring our offerings as a token of our reliance on the Lord.

Let us give like we intend to go to heaven.

ROBBING GOD

After the exile, the Jews robbed God. How could that be? They had *“withheld their tithes and offerings,”* Malachi 3:8.

Under the Old Testament, the children of God were to give a tenth of their income to Jehovah, Leviticus 27:30,32. But, on numerous occasions, they neglected to give their tithe. In defrauding God, they were defrauding themselves, Malachi 3:9.

A father was trying to drive home that point to his son. The boy was reluctant to put money in the collection plate. “Son,” the dad said, *“let me tell you a story.”*

There was a good man walking down a road. He met a stranger. The stranger asked for money to buy some food. The generous man instantly got out his wallet.

“I have fifty dollars,” the charitable man said. *“I will give you five dollars. The remaining forty-five dollars will get me to my destination.”*

The stranger was not a beggar. He was a robber. He took all of the money.

“That is terrible!” the son said.

“Yes it is,” the father replied. *“But that is what we do when we withhold our tithes from God!”*

Let us not defraud the Almighty.

DO NOT GIVE LIKE THE WORLD GIVES

A father gave his son five dollars to put in the collection plate and two dollars to buy some ice cream. But the lad put the two dollars in the collection plate and kept the five dollars for his treat. The father asked for an explanation. *"God loves a cheerful giver,"* the boy replied.

The son did what many of us do. We think of ourselves first. We give the leftovers to the Lord. However, Jesus said, *"I do not give...as the world gives,"* John 14:27. What did He mean?

The world makes promises but fails to keep them. It uses empty words. It conveys hopes that never materialize. The words of Christ were not shallow wishes. He meant what He said. He did what He vowed to do. And so should we.

Christians give what they have determined to give. They put the Master ahead of themselves. God gets the *"first fruits."*

As the family was eating dinner, the little girl was caught giving her cat a piece of chicken. *"Please, honey, do not feed the cat,"* her parents said. After dinner, the little girl gathered up the scrapes and gave them to her furry friend. *"I planned to give you an offering,"* she explained, *"but you will have to settle for a collection."*

Let us not give like the world gives.

COLLECTING THE TITHE

Christ was a priest like Melchizedek and Aaron. Why “*was there still a need for another priest?*” Hebrews 7:11. Jesus was greater than His predecessors.

. Melchizedek Was Greater Than Aaron. Because Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek, he recognized the Melchizedek was greater than any of his offspring (which included Aaron). For, the one who receives a tithe is greater than he who gives the tithe, Hebrews 7:7.

. Jesus Is Greater Than Melchizedek. The priesthood of Christ was better than the priesthoods of Melchizedek and Aaron, Hebrews 8:6. For His priesthood is not limited to one city or one nation. It is universal. Moreover, it is not limited to a few years. It is eternal.

The priests, in former times, were to “*collect the tithes,*” Hebrews 7:5. Does not Christ, the greatest priest of all time, have a right to our free will offerings?

Therefore, in every way, Christ is superior to every priest that ever served. Is this not a motivation for us to be generous?

Let us give liberally to the greatest priest of all time.

WORK FOR WHAT ENDURES

Jesus had just fed the five thousand. The miracle led to a conversation about food for the body and food for the soul.

. An Error Exposed. The Lord cautioned us about working solely to satisfy the needs of the body. *“Do not work for food that spoils,”* He said, John 6:27a.

. An Effort Required. Instead of spending all of our energy providing for our body, we should nourish our spirit. As Jesus said, work *“for food that endures to eternal life,”* John 6:27b.

. A Motive Presented. Real soul food never spoils. It does not have a “best-used-by” date. No! The Bread of Life lasts. It remains. Regular food perishes. Where is our priority?

. The Promise Made. Jesus will give spiritual food to everyone who labors to attain it. The Son of Man will provide it, John 6:27c. All who struggle to get it will receive it.

The collection should be a tangible demonstration of our desire to obtain food that endures. It is our way of showing that we want eternal life. In effect, we are saying, *“Please, Lord, I want the food that lasts.”*

Let us show what eternal life means to us.

MESSAGE OF THE CLOUDS

It is common to associate clouds with an advancing storm. For, when things are tranquil, we say, "*There is not a cloud in the sky!*"

But that is not a biblical metaphor. To the believer, clouds are a message of hope! A cloud signifies the presence of God and a promise of blessing.

A cloud guided Israel to the Promised Land, Exodus 13:21. When the tabernacle was completed, a cloud filled the tent as a sign that God was there, Exodus 40:34,35. And, when Christ returns, He will appear in a cloud, 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.

As kids, we watched the clouds. It was fun observing their changing shapes and sizes. In ancient times, clouds were seen as omens of God.

The collection is like clouds. It indicates our attitude toward the Lord. A skimpy gift is a sign that God is not present. A generous offering shows that the Lord is remembered.

Let us give in a way that says God is here.

WHEN THE BUDGET LANGUISHES

The temple needed repair. The wear and tear of long-term use had taken its toll. But how was the money going to be gathered to restore the house of Jehovah?

. God Was Ignored. The money was to be collected. But the people did not respond. In effect, God was ignored, II Chronicles 24:4,5. So it is today. Churches have budgets. And, when the budget is not met, a plea is made to complete the fiscal plan. However, the church does not always respond.

. People Are Unresponsive. There are plenty of incentives. The budget has several worthwhile causes. Yet human causes not do no automatically translate into liberal contributions. We are constantly asked to give to legitimate needs. But, since we have already said “no,” it is easy to say “no” one more time.

. Renewal Is Needed. We are more likely to respond if the goodness of God is the reason for our giving. He has given us our daily bread, strength for the journey, and hope for eternal salvation. His generosity motivates our sharing. Christians should be asked to give to God (not to budgets).

Let us make the Lord our priority.

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

It is certainly a good policy to “*lay up*” treasure for a rainy day. But the “*laying up*” requires a plan. Where should we “*lay up*” our treasures?

. We Can Invest In Earth. We can put our wealth in this world. Even though we choose the best places to put our possessions, they will remain material riches. And, as earthly treasure, it can lose its value, be stolen, or lost. In other words, there is no guarantee it will be there when it is needed.

. We Can Deposit It In Heaven. We can also invest in the next world. Heaven is where God is. Therefore, to “*lay up*” treasure in heaven is to store it with Him. It is to entrust Him with our possessions. Where we put our treasure is where our heart will reside, Matthew 6:21. It will be safe with Him.

Our giving, then, is the barometer of our interest. Are we more concerned about this life or the next life? Are we investing more in time or in eternity?

Let us lay up riches in heaven.

BOAST IN GOD

It is allowable to take a measure of pride in our home, our achievement, and in our personal appearance. Heaven wants us to have a balanced self-esteem.

But there is a limit. We are to resist an exaggerated estimate of ourselves. We are to recognize who we really are without bragging about what we have become.

. There Is False Boasting. We are inclined to overvalue what is ours, Jeremiah 9:23. Our wisdom is limited. Our strength can only do so much. And our riches are unable to buy our way into heaven. Hence, at some point, we must rely on God.

. There Is True Confidence. *“Let him who boasts boast in the Lord,” II Corinthians 10:17*. For, when all is said and done, *“it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends,” II Corinthians 10:18*.

So why do I put my money in the collection? I give in order to demonstrate my reliance on the Lord.

Let us show how much He matters to us.

THE COLLECTION

Paul had just written the longest discussion on the resurrection in the Bible. And, upon concluding that topic, he said, *“Now about the collection,”* I Corinthians 16:1.

Practical obedience is in many ways as important as the grandest theological doctrine. The one is the bud. The other is the fruit of Christianity.

. It Was An Example. The apostle had proposed that those in Achaia were to be an example of benevolence to those in Macedonia. And they together were to be an example to those in Rome, II Corinthians 9:2; Romans 15:26.

. It Included Everyone. *“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income,”* I Corinthians 16:2. The collection was for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

. It Was Spiritual. Our weekly contribution can seem so materialistic. But, if the Gentiles share in the Jews spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their physical blessings, Romans 15:27.

We set aside very little time during our worship services for the collection. Yet, upon careful examination, it is just as important as anything else we do on the first day of the week. Indeed, it might be the most tangible means of giving ourselves to the cause of God!

Let us give to the Lord as He has given to us.

HE GAVE HIS LIFE

Jesus gave His life for you and me. His precious blood He shed.
He did that to ransom us from the dead. Since He gave His life
for us, what do we give to Him?

He left His throne. He came to earth to wander sad and lone.
He left it all for you and me. What have we left for Him?

He suffered much for sinners like me. He died a death as
painful as could be. He bore it all. What do I do for Him?

He brought a gift from heaven above. It was salvation—a
present of grace and love. He brought rich gifts to me. What
have I brought to Him?

I hold in my hand my gift in return. It is a token of my love I
send above. A token of thanks for His body and His blood!

It is so little for Him who did so much. I gave this money in
gratitude. I offer my life as a measure of my attitude.

Let us give our best to Him who gave His all to us.

LIKE CLOUDS WITHOUT RAIN

Clouds without rain are a pretense, Proverbs 25:14. They promise much but give little. So is the church member that makes empty pledges. Skimpy contributions come from stingy hearts.

God is disappointed by counterfeit promises. His frustration is like the farmer who sees the clouds and feels the wind but receives no rain. The Book of Jude used a similar metaphor to describe false teachers. They are “*autumn trees without fruit*,” Jude 12b.

Words are leaves. Deeds are the fruit. Do we make a big to-do about giving to God an empty gift? Are we deceptive clouds? Fruitless trees?

A little girl was given ten pennies. Instantly, she began giving them away. “*This one is for Jesus*,” she said. “*This one is for daddy. This one is for mommy. This one is for my brother.*” She continued until she came to her last coin. And, then, she said, “*This one is for Jesus.*” “*But you have already given one to Jesus*,” her mother said. “*Yes! The first one belonged to Him. This one is a gift!*”

Let us give our gifts to the Lord.

THE RICH WILL WEEP

Judgment is coming. Those who hoard their wealth will cry. The improper use of our money causes past, present, and future distress.

. It Has Caused Past Hurt. The rich have often withheld what is due their fellowman. The Lord hears the cries of those unfairly treated. Should the rich live in luxury while the poor languish in poverty? James 5:5.

. It Causes Present Distress. The rich suffer financial setbacks, James 5:2,3. Do they not see the retribution of God in such losses? Apparently not! But, regardless of how they view their misfortune, their treasures will disappear.

. It Will Cause Future Misery. A bad day is coming, James 5:1. It will not be a pleasure experience. Losing our treasures never is. Likewise, when Jesus returns, there will be much weeping and wailing.

The lesson is hard to miss. Selfishness will receive its just reward. Hence, the right use of our wealth is imperative.

Let us give in a way that avoids divine disapproval.

JESUS HAD A GENEALOGY

We usually skip the genealogies in Scripture. They are difficult to read and have no devotional value.

But, for many people, they establish identity, status, kinship, and inheritance. Notwithstanding, to a Bible translator, they are pure drudgery.

When Jo Shetler went to a head hunting tribe in the Philippines in 1962, she was forced to translate genealogical lists. *"Surely they have no value for evangelism,"* she sighed. Or did they?

Jo worked hard in the oppressive heat and humidity. Her health suffered. She refused to give up. Still, during the first six years among the Balangao people, there were only two conversions. The Balangao were not interested.

However, while working with her translation helper, Jo came to the genealogical list in Luke. Cano, her helper, became excited. *"Jesus has a genealogy!"* Cano said. *"His ancestry goes all the way back to God. What Jo has been saying is true!"*

In the next two years, the whole Balangao tribe accepted Christ. The life of Jo Shetler was not wasted. A genealogy made the difference. That is the way our contributions are. They do not seem worth much yet they make a huge difference.

Let us give leaving the benefits of our giving to God.

THEY SHARED EVERYTHING THEY HAD

What was the early Church like? We know it was few in number. It had no building. No hymnbooks. No New Testament. And no Sunday School classes.

“But they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. All the believers were together and had everything in common.”
Acts 2:42,44.

In other words, all the believers were one in heart and one in pocketbook. *“No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had, Acts 4:32.”*

The identity of the first Christians was based on a common faith and a community of ownership. All was for each and each was for all. Their union with God was the foundation for their union with one another.

In the infancy of the church, believers forgot themselves and focused on their brothers and sisters.

Self-sacrifice was the test of discipleship. It was the proof of membership. Giving to the welfare of the saints was the badge of belonging. When the joy of giving triumphs, the seal of love is complete. May that spirit of sharing find new life in the Body of Christ in our day.

Let us share what we have with each other and with God.

HOW MUCH MORE?

God is our Father. That great truth is the foundation of our faith. It is the reason why we pray.

. We Are Invited To Pray. Prayer is more than permissible. It is encouraged. We are to “ask,” to “seek,” and to “knock,” Matthew 7:7. And Jesus guarantees that God will respond. The Lord is aware of our needs. He is not reluctant to help. Rather, when we ask in faith for His gifts, we are made ready to receive them.

. We Are Confident In Prayer. We are sure He will respond because God is our Father. And fathers—even sinful fathers—know how to give gifts to their children. “*How much will our Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!*” Matthew 7:11. Is not the Almighty a better Father than the best of human parents? Absolutely! We can trust His grace.

The world does not like beggars. And asking can be humiliating. But “children” are dependent. So they ask their dad for assistance.

We are to depend on God. We are His children. There is no shame in asking Him. He wants to hear from us.

Let us give knowing we will receive “much more.”

BRING THE TITHE

The tithes were distributed differently during a three-year cycle. The gifts were distributed to those who could not provide for themselves. Israel was to be a loving, unselfish nation that mirrored the generosity of God.

- . Given To The Levites. The first year tithe of everything from the land—including grain from the fields, fruit from the trees, or animals from the pasture—belonged to those who served in the sanctuary , Deuteronomy 14:28:29a.

- . Enjoyed By The Aliens. The second year tithe was to be given to strangers from other countries. They were to eat and be happy. Does not the Almighty “*richly provide us with everything for our enjoyment?*” I Timothy 6:17.

- . Help The Poor. The third year tithe was given to the fatherless and the widows. They were allowed to “*eat and be satisfied,*” Deuteronomy 14:29b. James mentions the same idea. He calls it “*pure and undefiled religion,*” James 1:27.

When we give to all three—the clergy, the alien, and the poor—God will bless our generosity, Deuteronomy 14:29c.

Let us distribute our wealth as God intended.

SACRIFICE OF FOOLS

We are cautioned to be careful when we go to the house of God, Ecclesiastes 5:1. Remember what we are doing. And, by all means, be conscious of where we are going.

. Avoid Irreverent Attitudes. Regardless of the place—a stately cathedral or a grass hut—it is the assembly of the Lord. The thought of being in the presence of the Almighty should hush the mouth of every worshiper, Habakkuk 2:20; Zechariah 2:13. We do not gather to offer the sacrifice of fools, Proverbs 21:27. We give what is due His great name.

. Shun Insincere Promises. “*When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it,*” Ecclesiastes 5:4. Surely we want the Lord to keep His promises? And He wants us to keep ours. “*It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it,*” Ecclesiastes 5:5. Whatever we promise to give should be given. Broken promises come back to haunt the one who makes them.

True worshipers exercise restraint. They give to God what they pledge to return to Him. The collection has serious implications.

Is our contribution the gift of a fool? Or is it the expression of a true worshiper of God?

Let us keep our promises.

MEANINGLESS OFFERINGS

Jehovah said to “*stop bringing meaningless offerings,*” Isaiah 1:13a. In His frustration, God did not ask us to stop giving but to quit giving empty gifts. The Almighty wanted offerings that came from the heart.

It is an insult to engage in worship as if it is a formality. “*I cannot bear such evil assemblies,*” the Lord said, Isaiah 1:13c.

. It Reflects A Low Concept Of God. To assume that He will accept our thoughtlessness suggests that He does not notice or He does not care. Either view of the Master supports a casual attitude toward His commands.

. It Reflects A Low View Of Worship. Those who give sacrifices without genuine faith are labeled hypocrites, Matthew 23:27. Can we honor God with our lips “*while our hearts are far from Him?*” Isaiah 29:13.

. It Reflects A Low Attitude Toward Giving. Religious acts should have a sacred quality. It is a mockery to bow in pretended reverence. Does this not strip holy things of their holiness? The Lord is repulsed by such behavior, Isaiah 1:16b.

Our giving must begin with the heart. Then, and only then, are we ready to open our pocketbooks.

Let us give meaningful gifts.

GIVE AN ACCOUNT

A steward was entrusted with the wealth of his master. But he “wasted” it, Luke 16:1. Therefore, the master asked for an accounting, Luke 16:2.

The word “wasted” is the same term that described the prodigal son. He “squandered” his inheritance, Luke 15:13. Such mismanagement is due to carelessness.

. We Are Responsible. All of us have received a charge to manage. That charge includes money, investments, and property. The Lord expects us to make good use of what we have received from Him. No doubt He is shocked by the way we speak about it: “*our money*,” “*our property*,” and “*our possessions!*” Does not everything we have belong to God?

. We Are Managers. How do we spend His fortune? “*Give careful thought to your ways*,” Haggai advised. “*You have sown much but bring in little, ... you earn wages but put them into a purse with holes*,” Haggai 1:5,6. The Lord has given us much but we often return little to Him. Regardless of the amount we have been given, we will be required to submit an accounting.

The trust of heaven must not be abused. “*Oh, God, may I resist the abundance of comfort in order to serve You with an abundance of love.*”

Let us be faithful managers.

REDEEM YOUR TITHE

The Book of Leviticus ends with a short discussion of “*things devoted to God*.” What was already promised to the Lord could be “*redeemed*.” Redemption meant a delay in the payment of the tithe (though a 20% fee was added to the amount of a tardy payment), Leviticus 27:30,31.

What does this mean?

- . God Allowed Spontaneous Gifts. Under the influence of a special mercy received, an Israelite might devote a person, an animal, a house, or some land to God, Leviticus 27:2,9,14. This was over and above the mandatory tithes. In other words, when special favors were received, special gifts could be given.

- . Spontaneous Gifts Could Be Delayed. When adverse conditions arose and the payment of the spontaneous vow was hindered, the payment could be delayed. But it must not be abandoned. Late payments were permitted (but triggered a penalty). God was serious about humans keeping their vows.

Should we do anything less? When we decide to give our money, possessions, or ourselves to the Almighty, we must fulfill that vow.

Let us keep our promises.

NOTHING HIDDEN FROM GOD

The eyes of the Lord are “*open to all the ways of men,*” Jeremiah 32:19b. Yet that is often ignored. We spend our life hoping to conceal things from the Almighty. What futility!

. He Is Not Blind. Jehovah knows us. He perceives our thoughts. He is familiar with our ways. And, before a word is on our tongue, He knows it completely, Psalms 139:1-4. “*For the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind our thoughts,*” 1 Chronicles 28:9. Why play hide-and-seek with God?

. He Knows Our Secrets. Did not the Almighty read the thoughts of Abraham? Did He not see the secrets of David? Did He not know the plans of Herod to kill baby Jesus? Of course He did! The Lord is aware of our inmost thoughts. It is utterly laughable to think we can hide anything from Him.

. He Rewards Our Actions. Heaven honors our conduct by giving us rewards “*according to our deeds,*” Jeremiah 25:14. “*He knows the secrets of the heart,*” Psalms 44:21. Therefore, He “*will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it be good or bad,*” Ecclesiastes 12:14.

It is a great blessing to know that God sees our liberality. He rejoices in our faithful giving. And He rewards us accordingly.

Let us not disappoint Him.

IN THE NAME OF GOD

“Cursed is the cheat,” Malachi wrote. The careless worshipper defrauds the Lord. He bilks God out of His deserved offerings. He does not *“fear the name of the Lord,”* Malachi 1:14.

The fear of Jehovah leads one to take off his shoes, to bow in humble submission. This is essential to acceptable worship. How dare we think otherwise!

If this is ignored, the sinner has fallen into the final stage of selfishness, into a hypocrisy that does not recognize that it is hypocritical.

Cheating God is a sure sign of EMPTY WORSHIP. We are not to take the name of the Lord in vain. To brashly swindle God in our contribution is taking the Almighty with a grain of salt.

Cheating Him is also a sure sign of SPIRITUAL DECAY. When we cheapen the name of God, our sense of awe has evaporated. Reverence for Him is gone. Our soul is lost. Our future is bleak.

Let us give all that is due His great name.

COVETOUSNESS

We are warned to beware. *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed,” Luke 12:15a. For “life does not consist in the abundance of possessions,” Luke 12:15b.*

Many of us feed on the husks of carnal desire. We are frustrated because we long to have more (when we already have enough).

A man posted a sign in a vacant lot he owned. *“I WILL GIVE THIS LOT TO ANYONE WHO IS ALREADY SATISFIED,”* the sign said.

A wealthy businessman hastened to claim the property. He thought, *“I may as well have it. I am rich. I possess all I really need. So I surely qualify.”*

When the rich man claimed the lot, he was questioned. *“Are you really satisfied?” “I sure am!”* he said. *“If you are satisfied,”* the owner asked, *“why do you want the land?”*

The question revealed the covetousness of the rich man. He wanted more—not to share with others—but to keep for himself!

Let us be content with what we already possess.

WHAT CAN WE GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR OUR SOUL ?

Jesus had just mentioned His impending death. Then He clarified what is involved in living life. *“If anyone would follow Me,”* He said, *“he must deny himself,”* Mark 8:34. For *“what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”* Mark 8:37.

Everyone must answer that question. Eternal life depends on how we reply. What must we do to go to heaven?

- . Follow Christ. We are to go where He went, do what He did. We must serve others, love our enemies, and obey God. As much as possible, we should be like Jesus.

- . Deny Self. Complete surrender is demanded. *“None of self and all of Thee”* is the least we can do. His way trumps our way. We cannot deny self until we let go of our ambitions.

- . Do Right. Like the Lord, we must *“serve God only,”* Matthew 4:10. Whatever the world sees as gain, a Christian counts as loss, Philippians 3:7. We put the Almighty first.

- . Risk Everything. We are constantly presented with two choices: *“The easy way or the right way!”* The genuine disciple will always give up fun and fortune to follow the Master.

If the world is gained, not much is gained. If our soul is lost, everything is lost.

Let us give as a sign of what we think our soul is worth.

GIVE WHAT YOU WILL !

The prophet was at a loss regarding how God would judge the sins of Israel. He did not know what the Lord would do to those who gave so little to Him. Therefore, Hosea said to the Almighty: *"Give them what You will,"* Hosea 9:14.

- . They Had A Promising Start. Jehovah *"found"* His people in Egyptian slavery, Hosea 9:10a. He nurtured them. And they turned into a useful, fruit bearing plant.

- . They Became A Devastating Failure. The Lord made Israel a noble grape, yet they turned into *"a vile vine,"* Hosea 9:10c. God gave them a good start. But they chased after idols.

- . They Were Turned Away. The people of God continued to pursue their wicked ways. The Lord finally rejected those He had tenderly loved, Hosea 9:15.

- . They Received Terrible Punishment. God gave Israel what she deserved, Hosea 9:17. Since His people refused to give the Almighty His due, the Lord gave them what was their due!

Jehovah will not coddle disobedient children. He is willing to bless but He expects us to give to Him what is His.

What will God give us? The day of reckoning is coming. Have we laid up treasures in heaven?

Let us give the way we wish to receive.

ACCEPTABLE OFFERINGS

Every believer should pray: *“Save me from my guilt.”* The angels weep when we fall into deliberate sin.

. What Can A Sinner Do? When people recognize their error, they often try to give God a gift. However, there is no gift that we can give that will remove the sin of willful disobedience, Numbers 15:30,31; Hebrews 10:26,27. All we can do is offer Him *“a broken and contrite heart,”* Psalm 51:17.

. What Will God Accept? It is fair for Him to condemn our highhanded defiance, Psalm 51:4. But a deeply penitent heart acknowledges that God is holy. It implies a complete surrender to the Almighty. He alone can *“renew a steadfast spirit in us,”* Psalm 51:10.

The contribution that we give on Sunday does not buy us a ticket to heaven. Our contribution is our thanks to God for His forgiveness He provides in Jesus Christ, Romans 3:23,24; I John 1:7.

Therefore, the offering of a submissive heart—though often blind and blemished—is the acceptable gift we can give to God.

Let us bow in humility to thank Him for His forgiveness.

PLEASING GOD

God is happy when we share our wealth with others, Hebrews 13:16. That statement was intended to encourage those who help their brothers and sisters in need. *“They sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property. They knew they had better and lasting possessions,” Hebrews 10:34.*

These loving saints remembered those in prison as if they were fellow prisoners. They remembered those who were mistreated as if they had been mistreated, Hebrews 13:3.

. They Praised God. The Lord is pleased when His people worship His name, Hebrews 13:15. Such adoration is called *“a sacrifice of praise.”*

. They Did Good. The Lord is also pleased when we take care of each other. Such benevolence is called *“a sacrifice of good deeds.”*

With both actions, the Almighty is equally happy. The worship of God and charitable help given to our fellow saints makes Him rejoice. Both gestures honor the Lord.

Let us please our Father by helping each other.

GIVE AN OFFERING

After seventy years in the possession of pagans, David was bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. It was a day of celebration. The king directed his people to “*bring an offering*” to the Lord, I Chronicles 16:29.

Two things are suggested.

1. They Worshipped The Almighty. There were many things they could do. Most of it might be good. But, above all, they are to “*ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name*.” They might read the Scripture, pray for the sick, or faithfully attend worship. Yet all of that pales in comparison to honoring Him in whom they lived, moved, and had their being.

- . They Contributed To His Cause. God was happy when they brought their offerings. Their contributions supported the ministries of His assembly. Likewise, we worship God when we give. The collection is part of the homage due His name. It must be done in thankful reverence and deliberate intention. For giving our money is as sacred as the Supper of the Lord.

At the end of the ceremony, which brought the ark to Jerusalem, all the people said, “*Amen*,” I Chronicles 16:36b. And, in like manner, we should bring our money with shouts of “Amen” and “Praise the Lord.”

Let us celebrate by bringing our offerings to God.

CHEATING GOD

Malachi told Israel “*to bring the whole tithe,*” Malachi 3:10. Evidently, they were only giving a portion of it to the Lord. God is not honored in receiving the scrapes.

The negligence of Israel was supported by a lack of faith. “*It is futile to serve God,*” they said. “*What do we gain by carrying out His requirements,*” Malachi 3:14.

. They Were Robbing God. The people were swindling the Lord. They had turned away from Him, Malachi 3:7. Either they did not believe He owned everything or they deliberately withheld their tithes. Still they were thieves. We must give Him what belongs to Him, Mark 12:17.

. They Were Ignoring God. Israel was so self-centered they supposed that tithing did not apply to them. And the words “*it is more blessed to give than to receive*” did not either! How wrong could they be? They were advised to examine their ways, Lamentations 3:40.

We need to take God off of charity and put Him on the payroll!

Let us return to God what belongs to God.

HE GAVE HIS LIFE

The collection is our response to the cross. In other words, we give because He gave. It is an act of profound gratitude to generously return a portion of what we have received!

Jesus left the throne room of heaven to walk the lonely roads below. He left the joys of celestial glory to suffer our pain and woe.

HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US. WHAT ARE WE GIVING TO HIM?

He was rich but became poor so that we could become rich like Him. It was not fair but He did not care.

HE GAVE HIS LIFE. WHAT DO WE GIVE HIM?

Christ suffered more than words can tell. He did it gladly to rescue us from hell.

"I DID IT FOR YOU," HE SAID, "WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR ME?"

He bought us salvation full and free. His pardon and love He gave to you and me.

WHAT DO WE BRING TO HIM WHO BROUGHT EVERYTHING TO US?

Let us give like we genuinely appreciate His sacrifice.

THERE IS STILL HOPE

It happens to everyone. *“All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not,”* Ecclesiastes 9:2. In other words, we will all die.

But there is hope!

- . Everyone Is In The Hands Of God. The Lord sustains His world. His providence watches over us. No one is beyond the reach of His power. He is sovereign.

- . No One Knows The Future. Who can predict what will happen? *“No one knows whether love or hate is coming,”* Ecclesiastes 9:1. The future rests with the Almighty.

- . Everyone Is Full Of Evil. *“There is no one righteous, not even one,”* Romans 3:10. The human heart is the center of madness, Ecclesiastes 9:3b. Without Christ, the future is bleak.

- . All Of Us Can Have Hope. Thankfully, God rescued us. Hence, *“Anyone among the living has hope,”* Ecclesiastes 9:4. Salvation is available. Will we take hold of it?

We have a choice. Certain things are. Other things can be. *“It will go better with God-fearing people that are reverent before the Lord,”* Ecclesiastes 8:12.

Let our contribution demonstrate where our hope lies.

WILLINGLY OFFERED HIMSELF

Amasiah is mentioned one time in the Bible. He was a commander in the army of King Jehosaphat. Amasiah was a willing servant of the Lord, II Chronicles 17:16.

Though his life is summed up in one sentence, that sentence describes the true nature of a child of God.

. He Was An Example Of Obedience. Amasiah “*volunteered his service.*” He gladly did whatever was needed. He freely accepted responsibility. Amasiah was ready and happy to do the will of God. He was a shining example what we should be. And, in the matter of giving, Amasiah willingly offered himself.

. He Was The Epitome Of Service. We are acceptable to heaven in proportion to our cheerful willingness. It is good to do the right thing. It is absolutely essential to do it happily. What is the value of begrudging obedience? Each of us should give—not reluctantly or under compulsion—but with a cheerful heart, II Corinthians 9:7.

The offering plate was being passed. The husband asked his wife if she had change for a dollar. “*No!*” she whispered. “*Guess I’ll have to give the whole thing,*” he answered with a sigh.

Let us be a willing servant.

WRETCHNESS OF THINKING WE ARE RICH

When believers do all they are told to do, they should still call themselves “*unworthy servants*,” Luke 17:10. Unfortunately, that rarely happens. We are like those in the ancient city of Laodicea.

- . They Were Exceedingly Rich. The Laodiceans had money. The whole city was demolished by an earthquake in 62 AD. But, without state help, the local citizens rebuilt their town with their own money. Indeed, they were rich!

- . They Were Spiritually Indifferent. They were neither cold or hot toward God, Revelation 3:15a. If religion is worth anything, surely it is worth everything. Luke warmness is inexcusable. We are to love God with all our of heart, all of our soul, and all of our mind.

- . They Were Completely Blind. The Leodiceans did not see their wretched condition. Riches have a way of making us overlook our spiritual poverty, Revelation 3:17. It is common for us to fancy ourselves to be what we are not.

In the first century, Laodicea was the richest city in the Roman Empire. It was widely known for its banks, medical school, and textile industry.

They did not think they needed anything (including the Lord). And, like them, America is rich. Do we think we need the Almighty? And, if we do, how should we show it?

Let us give like we actually rely on heaven.

BRING AN OFFERING

We are called to praise the Lord. We are to sing about His glory, proclaim His greatness, and bring an offering to Him, Psalm 96:8.

In a nutshell, this is what we do every Sunday. It is the special privilege of a Christian to be part of this unique celebration.

In this segment of our worship, we bring our offerings. Though the time spent in doing so may be small, the importance of doing so is great.

Why? Here are a couple of reasons.

. It Helps Others. From the earliest days, the church gave to assist the needy. The apostle Paul spent a lot of time and energy collecting funds for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Acts 11:27-30; cf. I Corinthians 16:1.

. It Helps Us. Our offering is a demonstration of our faith. When we give, our worship becomes real. It is more than words. It is deeds. Our money is a tangible expression of what we say we believe.

If the Lord is in our heart, our love should show up in the collection plate.

Let us bring our offerings to God.

WE LOVE HIS CHURCH

We are the family of God, the children of the Almighty. We are the ones He saved through His only begotten Son. We love His church—the assembly of the saints. Dear is the darling in His arms, the bride He protects from all harms.

WE GIVE TO HONOR HIS NAME.

Our tears for her we shed. Our prayers for her are sure. Till our days on earth are done we will serve to keep her pure. Beyond all else, we prize her heavenly ways, her sweet fellowship, and her hymns of praise.

WE GIVE TO SUPPORT HER CAUSE.

The church is the place to be. She deserves our faithful loyalty. She encourages us to be a part till our souls at last depart. Certain as the truth will last our gifts are given until we see the brighter bliss of heaven.

WE GIVE TO HELP HER GROW.

Let us give like we really loved the Bride of Christ.

AS MUCH AS YOU ARE ABLE

The churches in northern Greece were suffering “*severe trials*,” II Corinthians 8:2a. The area had been ravaged by civil war. Their possessions were confiscated. Their livelihood was taken away. Yet, “*their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity*.”

. They Gave Voluntarily. Suffering often leads to selfishness. Our pain blinds us to the pain of others. How could the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea afford to give? Should they not hold back in case things get worse? They did not!

. They Gave Liberally. As it turned out, these newly planted congregations were generous, II Corinthians 8:2b. “*They begged for the privilege to give*,” II Corinthians 8:4. They evidently saw a need and willingly pitched in. It was not a matter of how little but how much.

. They Gave Joyfully. Compulsory kindness is of little worth. Happy are those who want to share with others. The Macedonians gave as much as they were able. What an example! We tend to give as little as possible. But “pinch-penny-Christians” are not happy believers.

A missionary was given a beautiful seashell. “*Where did you get this shell?*” he asked. “*On the shore of the ocean*,” the poor man replied. “*The ocean is two hundred miles away*.” “Yes,” the man said, “*but the long walk is part of the gift*.”

Let us give as much as we are able.

BEYOND THEIR ABILITY

When they had every right to withhold their money, the Macedonians gave what they could. Indeed, they “*gave beyond their ability*,” II Corinthians 8:3.

Grace prepares the way for grace. Denial of self, leads to cross bearing. Our giving should not be mechanical obedience but a preferred lifestyle. Zeal, holy desire, and commitment do not expire at baptism.

Though strapped for cash, the believers in northern Greece had great joy in the “*riches of their liberality*,” II Corinthians 8:2. Their joy was not bound by what they wanted to do but by what they actually did.

Exuberant feelings and impulsive giving can deceive us. But, if couched in thanks for the gift of salvation, our liberality is not regretted.

Not all people in the first century were like the Macedonians. Generosity is not a common virtue. We tend to wait to be urged or begged or entreated to give. Is that not the way it is?

What kind of giver are we? What kind of giver does God prefer we be?

Let us voluntarily give beyond our ability.

THE PRIVILEGE OF GIVING

It seems strange that Paul spent so much time discussing a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Yet, chapters 8 and 9, of II Corinthians, are the longest, continuous narrative about charitable giving in the Bible.

Christianity introduced into human society new and powerful principles of benevolence. The Corinthians were an example of *"the privilege of sharing,"* II Corinthians 8:4.

. They Loved God. The generosity of the Corinthian congregations was based on what the Lord had done for them, II Corinthians 8:9. Calvary motivated their kindness. Everyone should glorify God. Charity was His thing before it was our thing. No one should live solely for himself.

. They Loved His Church. The Corinthians did not know the Jerusalem brethren. But they were united in one faith. Their shared conviction made them a family. Racial differences were ignored. Strangers were drawn together as friends.

. They Loved His Cause. What we do for His people, we do for Him. We value our money. And, in sharing it with those God loves, we are sharing it with Him. So, when we give, we prove the sincerity of our concern for His cause.

Should we NOT give to Him when He has so generously given to us?

Let us view the collection as a privilege to honor God.

DID NOT DO AS EXPECTED

Praise from Paul was a precious thing. The apostle was a serious person. He did not give empty compliments. In other words, having a high sense of Christian virtue, he did not merely flatter others to please them.

What did the Macedonian churches do?

. They Went Above And Beyond. When they contributed to the poor, they surprised Paul. The collection is usually a routine matter. No so in Macedonia! They did not simply drop a coin in the plate. They “*did the unexpected*,” II Corinthians 8:5a. They gave over and above what was anticipated.

So what did they do?

. They Submitted To The Will Of God. All Christians supposedly give themselves to the Lord at conversion. But, Sopater—from Berea—joined Paul on his missionary journey, Acts 20:4. Aristarchus—from Thessalonica—also joined them, Acts 20:3,4; 27:1,2. And Epaphroditus—from Philippi—did, too, Philippians 2:25. They gave themselves!

The contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem became more than a collection. It was a commitment to the cause of spreading the Gospel.

Let us give ourselves as a living sacrifice to the Almighty.

THEY GAVE THEMSELVES

Paul wanted to inspire the churches in southern Greece. So he mentioned the generosity of the churches in northern Greece. The brethren in the north “*gave themselves first.*” And, then, they gave their donations, II Corinthians 8:5. Are we like them?

. We Are Religious. In our assembly, everyone is (to some degree) a believer. We are polite. We greet each other. It looks like we listen to the sermon. And we bow our heads in prayer.

BUT DO WE GIVE OURSELVES TO GOD?

. We Take Part. We sing the hymns. We take Communion. We drop something into the collection plate. We listen to the announcements. We go through the motions of worship.

IS THAT GIVING OURSELVES TO GOD?

. We Claim To Belong. Our name is on the membership rolls. It is in the directory, too. But is that enough? Might it be a Sunday thing that lasts until worship is dismissed?

HAVE WE GIVEN OURSELVES TO GOD?

Religion must include us. No gift is a real gift until the giver is part of the giving.

Let us include ourselves in our contribution.

ACT OF GRACE

The word “*grace*” is the term used for the contribution that was distributed among the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul also used other words for this benevolent gesture:

- . “*gift*,” II Corinthians 9:5,6.
- . “*sharing*,” II Corinthians 8:4; 9:13.
- . “*service*,” II Corinthians 8:4; 9:1,12,13

He used this same vocabulary when he wrote to Rome, Romans 15:25-27. Only one time, in speaking of that contribution, does the apostle employ a commercial (or non-theological) word, namely, “*collection*,” I Corinthians 16:1,2.

Beyond any doubt, however, his favorite term in this context is “*grace*,” II Corinthians 8:1,6,7; 9:8,14. The word grace—in reference to the collection—is sometimes translated “*concern*” or “*favor*.”

The Macedonians first received the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And, then, in reference to that gracious gift from heaven, they gave to their Israelite brothers and sisters as a token of their thanks to God.

One becomes a giver when he recognizes he has been a receiver.

Let us give like we have received.

EXCEL IN GIVING

Paul urged Titus to complete the special collection he had begun in Macedonia, II Corinthians 8:6. And the apostle encouraged the Corinthians to do the same. “*As you excel*” in other endeavors, “*see that you excel in this grace of giving*,” he wrote, II Corinthians 8:7.

The word “*excel*” refers to “more than enough.” It speaks of a superabundance, an overflowing, a surplus, or an excess—like the “*fullness of deity*” that lived in Christ when He was dressed in human skin, Colossians 2:9.

Our giving should have more than a dab of divine grace in it. We need to be fully engaged. We should not be satisfied with a mindless, mechanical sharing of our possessions. The amount we give and how we give shows what we think about our gift.

A woman bought a cup of coffee and a bag of cookies. The coffee shop was crowded. So she sat down at a table where a man was reading a newspaper. Every time she ate a cookie, the man ate one, too. He smiled. She frowned. Finally, there was only one cookie left. He broke it in half. She could not believe his rudeness. He nodded. She departed in a huff. But, when she got home, she found her cookies in her purse. Unknowingly, she had been eating his cookies all along!

Let us remember we are really giving back to God His money.

TEST OF SINCERITY

In the first century, among Gentiles, benevolent giving to help the needy was all but unknown. Therefore, Paul had no basis, in daily life, on which he could ask the Corinthians to give.

How, then, did he urge them to contribute to the poor-saints-in-Jerusalem fund? *"I am not commanding you,"* he wrote, *"but I want to test the sincerity of your love,"*

II Corinthians 8:8. So the apostle refers to two tests.

1. The Example Of Others. The Christians in northern Greece had given generously, II Corinthians 8:1,2. They did not have much but they did what they could (and then some). It is good to let the sacrifice of others stimulate charity in us.

2. The Example Of Christ. The Corinthians knew the grace of Jesus. *"Though He was rich, for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich,"* II Corinthians 8:9. There was no need to command them to give. What the Lord did was a sufficient motivation.

We do not give to raise money but to lift people. Consequently, our giving is a gauge of our spirituality. Or, to state it differently, stingy givers are not poor in finances but in faith.

The Sunday collection is a test of our Christian sincerity.

Let us give like we intend to please the Almighty.

FINISH THE WORK

Our giving should be carefully considered ahead of time. We have all week to prepare.

The collection is gathered each Sunday. We can anticipate the event because it is regularly done. We know when it will happen.

Therefore, when it is time to give may our willingness to contribute be matched by our glad participation in seeing that it is completed, II Corinthians 8:11a,b.

Paul was issuing his advice, II Corinthians 8:10a. The Macedonians had the desire to share with the poor saints in Jerusalem, II Corinthians 8:10b. Since there was a readiness to do it, they were to see that it got done.

A desire to give is good (but not good enough). The desire must be matched by an action that completes the intention. The thought alone is not sufficient.

A sermon on giving may excite a congregation. But unless that excitement plays out in a self-denying gift, the congregation is left in a worse state than before the sermon was preached.

Heaven is for those who do right (not for those who intended to do right). In other words, to delay often results in not doing something at all.

Let us contribute what we intend to give.

ACCORDING TO WHAT ONE HAS

The most important part of the collection is a willingness to give. *“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have, II Corinthians 8:12.*

Giving is more of a heart thing than a hand thing. The Lord does not judge as humans do. *“Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart,” I Samuel 16:7.*

Our motive behind our contribution is the soul of our giving. *“If I give all I possess to the poor ... but have not love, I gain nothing,” I Corinthians 13:3.*

God weights our desire to give (more than the amount of the gift). The poor widow would have surrendered a fortune but she could only spar a couple of cooper coins. Yet, in those coins, there was more value than what a millionaire could ever give because she gave *“all she had to live on,” Luke 21:3,4.*

Some have the means to do good but not the heart to do it. Others have the heart to do it but not the means to get it done. In which group are we?

Let us give willingly according to our means.

THEN THERE WILL BE EQUALITY

Paul was reminding the Corinthians that at that time their abundance must be used to relieve the poverty in Jerusalem. For, some day, the abundance in Jerusalem may be used to relieve the Corinthians.

What goes around often comes around. The present distress of others may become our distress in the future. What is measured to them may become our measure. *"Since the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings,"* Romans 15:27b. The end result is *"equality"* between them, II Corinthians 8:14c.

. There Should Be An Equality Of Obligation. The Corinthians were not to be burdened so that the Jerusalem saints would be relieved of their responsibility. Quite to the contrary! Each should help the other when the other needs help, II Corinthians 8:13,14. Benevolence is a two-way street.

. There Should Be An Equality Of Action. Needs should be carefully evaluated. No one must be impoverished so that others may be enriched. Giving to people who have enough is a waste. It leads to great mischief. Unwise charity smothers the benevolent duty of those who receive it.

Let us give in a way that preserves equality.

BEING HONORABLE

In the first century, money was hand-carried to the intended recipient. There were no bank transfers, no overnight parcel deliveries, and no Western Union services. Therefore, Paul had to be careful.

The apostle wrote that he “*took great pains to do what was right in the sight of God and also in the eyes of men,*” II Corinthians 8:21. Why? He wanted “*to avoid any criticism*” regarding the way he administered the funds for the poor in Jerusalem, II Corinthians 8:20.

Appearances must always be considered. No one should think himself immune. Neither should he neglect or despise them. The enemies of Christ will always take advantage of our naive trust. Hence, it behooves the community of faith to exercise common sense. Prudence must be practiced.

. The Rule Proposed. Honorable actions are approved behavior. Such is especially wise in matters of public money where the devious gaze of sinful men is often present.

. The Motive Given. An open-and-above-board handling of funds enhances the faith of the church. The treasurer must not be happy until he secures the approval of everyone involved.

Let us be honorable in all things (especially in matters of money).

ZEAL IS CONTAGIOUS

Paul boasted about the Corinthians' willingness to give. "*Their enthusiasm stirred*" the Macedonians to do the same. It is good when the zeal of others causes us to act.

The apostle was ready to collect the gift for the poor in Jerusalem, II Corinthians 8:16,17. He appealed to the unselfish generosity of the Corinthian church.

. He Was Confident In Their Concern. "*I know you are eager to help,*" he said, II Corinthians 9:2a. He realized their hearts were in the right place. They held proper sentiments regarding the needs of their Jewish brethren. They were not merely tossing money at a problem. They were sharing love.

. He Held Them Up As An Example. Paul said he "*boasted*" about their readiness to give, II Corinthians 9:2b. Whenever a saint willingly displays the grace of our Lord, he becomes a model for such behavior. The Body of Christ will always need living, breathing examples of kindness.

. He Wanted Them To Finish. He did not wish his boasting to be "*hollow,*" II Corinthians 9:3. It is embarrassing to make an empty claim, II Corinthians 9:4. The collection was a delicate matter. It had been a year since Corinth had expressed their initial interest.

Paul wanted to see their feelings ripen into the fruit of giving. And I wish the same for all of us today.
Let us give as we have planned to give.

LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING

The more generous the sowing the more bountiful the harvest will be. It is the law of nature. It is also the reality of the collection. *"He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed,"* Proverbs 11:25b. *"A man reaps what he sows,"* Galatians 6:7.

. The Rule Of Proportion. What would life be like if God only gave us a tithe of what we give Him! Why should we expect much when we offer little? Is giving a one-way street? Is God indebted to us or are we indebted to God?

. The Rule Of Abundance. *"Whoever sows generously will also reap generously,"* II Corinthians 9:6. Open hearts have open pocketbooks. We should not give because we have to but because we want to. Personal giving is purse-and-all.

. The Rule Of Plenty. *"God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work,"* II Corinthians 9:8. That is an "all" inclusive promise!

We have every incentive to be generous. But will we give like we want to receive?

Let us give like we trust the law of sowing and reaping.

A CHEERFUL GIVER

Christians must not give “*grudgingly*,” II Corinthians 9:5. For, God loves “*a cheerful giver*,” II Corinthians 9:7. The collection should be a highlight during Sunday worship. Why?

What does a glad giver do?

. He Makes A Willing Gift. Each contributor is thankful to do his part. He appreciates the opportunity. He is elated to be included. He makes his offering with a smile. In short, he enjoys giving. He is grateful for the chance to help.

. He Makes God Happy. The Lord has kind regards for the eager donor. The miser offends heaven. It is a terrible affront to withhold from our generous Father what belongs to Him. Is it not more blessed to give than to receive?

. He Makes Himself Joyful. “*Give and it will be given to you*,” the Master said, Luke 6:38. In other words, “*there is a giving that gains more and there is a withholding that comes to poverty*,” Proverbs 11:24.

When we “*prove ourselves*” in the collection, others will praise God for our “*generosity*,” II Corinthians 9:13. The Lord plants the charitable notion in our hearts. And He receives the glory for our kindness. Is that not how it should be?

Let us happily give and allow the Lord to receive the praise.

ABOUNDING IN EVERY GOOD WORK

The Lord gives such abundant gifts that we feel no loss when we generously share with others. For, the Almighty meets all of our needs, Philippians 4:19.

To some, giving is not always pleasant. They feel it is a command to be obeyed. However, in reality, our contribution is solely based on the actions of God.

. He Is Able. At best, we are dependent creatures. The grace of giving comes from above. It is God who is “*able to make all grace abound . . . so that in all things at all times*” we may “*abound in every good work*,” II Corinthians 9:8.

. We Are Enabled. Christianity takes for granted that believers will share with those in need. Giving is a natural function of a believer. Jesus gave. We desire to be like Him. So we give. We are moved to share because we are motivated by His example.

We can do everything through Him who gives us the strength, Philippians 4:13. And, surely, by now, we have learned that “*apart from Him we can do nothing*,” John 15:5.

We see His work in us. We feel His power prompting us. We know He is able. Will we yield? Will we let Him work through us? Now is the time in which that can and should happen.

Let us allow Him to enable us to give.

AT ALL TIMES

The Lord expects us to be consistent. He requires a life that is regulated by a steady faith and an unrelenting hope. He blesses us “*so that in all things at all times*” we will “*abound in every good work,*” II Corinthians 9:8.

But our strength wavers! Our light flickers! Our obedience fluctuates! It is so common that we take it for granted. But is such fickle behavior acceptable? Should we shrug our shoulders and overlook such erratic conduct?

. What Does Reason Say? Our body works day and night without us telling it to do so. The physical self runs on auto-pilot. But our moral self requires constant prodding—a conscious guidance from heaven. We are asked to believe. We are expected to live in harmony with our faith.

. What Does Scripture Say? We are to “*set the Lord before us always,*” Psalm 16:8. Like Jesus, we should continually “*do what pleases*” God, John 8:29. In matters of holiness, in zeal for the Gospel, and in tender affection toward the needy, we should “*always abound in every good work!*”

We long for our liberality to be as consistent as the generosity of God.

Let us give in a way that is in harmony with our confession.

REWARD FOR GIVING

We are promised a rich reward for our generosity. Paul said that God would “*enlarge the harvest of our righteousness,*” II Corinthians 9:10. What did he mean?

The phrase—harvest of righteousness—is NOT suggesting that we will get our money back. Rather, it indicates that when we do right the Lord will give us the power to do more right. When we love, the Almighty will reward us with the capacity to love even more.

This has implications in three directions.

1. It Does Something For Us. People may question the genuineness of our faith. But our liberality will show that we are really what we claim to be. The truth will be authenticated.

2. It Does Something For Others. It relieves their needs. It restores their faith in religion. It demonstrates that kindness is not died. A gift can renew hope in the hopeless.

3. It Does Something For God. Others will see our good deeds and glorify the Father. What we do turns the minds of sinners to the Lord. Heaven is pleased that our righteousness is seen, Matthew 5:16.

Our gifts keep giving. Everyone is blessed. The world is made better. And heaven becomes more real.

Let us give knowing the reward is greater than the gift.

YOU WILL BE MADE RICH

Paul assured the Corinthians that if they gave they would “*be made rich in every way.*” Indeed, they could “*be generous on every occasion,*” II Corinthians 9:11.

A man of means noticed a poor widow. She gave to the benevolent fund regularly. He told the church treasurer he would increase his offering so she could stop her giving. The widow politely refused. “*How can I stop sacrificing for Him who sacrificed His life for me!*”

. We Must Give. Regardless of our financial state, we all should express our thanks to God. Everyone can give something to the Giver of “*every good and perfect gift.*” For a Christian, giving is not optional.

. We Will Receive. The storehouse of heaven is open. The Father knows our struggles. He will help. He is ready and able to share. All that He has is ours. He will give us everything we need. There are no grounds for worry.

The principle of Providence is quite clear: Liberality results in prosperity! The more we give the more we receive. Such is the economy of heaven.

Let us prove our love so He can prove His promise.

THE GIFT OF GIFTS

The conditions in Jerusalem were deteriorating. Strife among the Jewish religious parties was at an all time high. Alienation from Rome was increasing. Christians were losing their jobs because of their newfound faith.

Therefore, the monetary relief from Greece was likened to the “*indescribable gift of God*,” II Corinthians 9:15. It was timely. It was needed. It was beyond description. It was the gift of gifts.

. The Gift Of Christ. The kindness of the brethren in Greece was like the gift of Jesus. God so loved the world He gave His Son, John 3:16. The Son gave eternal life, Romans 6:23. There is no other gift like it. It was the power of God. It demonstrates His love. It shows His grace. And, above all, it is priceless.

. The Gifts Of Man. The gift from above should motivate our gifts here below. But, unfortunately, for the most part, the sacrifice of Christ is ignored. However, among those who have tasted the goodness of God, it is a stimulus for giving. We give praise to the Father. We give aid to the less fortunate. We give because we have received.

Our reason for giving will not cease until the Almighty stops giving to us.

Let us give like God gives.

AS NEEDED

The infant Church experienced a sudden change. Up to that time, the believers praised God. They prayed for the Holy Spirit. They worshipped with glad hearts and singleness of mind. And, then, without warning, persecution broke out.

Members of the congregation were going hungry. The saints were suffering. The Body of Christ had to rely on each other. Those who owned lands and houses sold them. They gave the money to help the needy.

The early Christians felt a responsibility toward each other. They expressed a real desire to share what they had. *“And it was distributed to anyone as he had need,” Acts 4:35.*

Their generosity was not legislated. It was spontaneous. They did not have to give. They wanted to share.

They knew God was present. They felt His power. They spoke His word boldly, Acts 4:31. Grace was upon them all. They had a community spirit, a sense of oneness, Acts 4:32. Certainly, when all of these ingredients come together, charity is inevitable.

Are we a brotherhood? Do we belong to a believing community? Is the Spirit of God among us? If so, the elements of giving are present.

Let us give so that no brother or sister goes hungry.

FREEWILL OFFERING

The Feast of Weeks (also called Pentecost) was celebrated by bringing freewill offerings. In other words, nothing was prescribed specifically. Each person gave as he felt God had prospered him, Deuteronomy 16:10.

The Feast of Weeks was not connected to an epoch event (like Passover). It was a harvest festival. Several principles guided its observance.

The crops were a blessing from heaven.
The Lord was to be thanked for His bounty.
The needy were helped.
And the celebration was a show of unity.

The forms passed away. But the principles remained.

. We Receive From God. Our existence still depends on the Almighty. Though we buy our food from the supermarket, we are aware that it comes from above.

. We Give To God. Our gratitude should overflow in thanksgiving every day. We should still give a freewill offering. His mercies never come to an end. And neither should ours.

Since He loved us, should we not love one another?
1 John 4:11.

Let us give our freewill offerings.

DO NOT WEAR YOURSELF OUT GETTING RICH

He who wants to be wealthy has a deceitful goal. For the wish rarely becomes reality. In truth, more times than not, “*riches sprout wings and flies away*,” Proverbs 23:5. Hence, a person should not wear himself out trying to get rich, Proverbs 23:4.

Never has such advice been more needed. But never have people been slower to accept it. Why should we pay attention?

- . It Is Unlikely. In the lottery of riches, there is seldom a prize. The race for wealth has many runners but very few winners. Vying for wealth is a gamble laced with much anxiety.

- . It Is Costly. The battle for affluence is exhausting. It requires rising early. It demands staying up late. And, after all of that, most folks rarely catch their competitors.

- . It Is Disappointing. Money does not buy what satisfies. The soul is neglected. The family is ignored. Friends are left behind. Money is a poor substitute for a broken heart.

- . It Is Dangerous. Life is more than riches. “*Seek first the Kingdom of God*,” Jesus said, Matthew 6:33. The only wealth worth caring about is the treasures of heaven.

If we wait until we can afford to give, we will likely never give.

Let us not wear ourselves out trying to get rich.

NONE OF SELF

Self must be crucified—not glorified—if Christ is to be edified. Or, to say it differently, to be aware of Christ, we must beware of ourselves. The biggest obstacle for a Christian is to be small enough so that there is room for the Lord inside.

Oh, the bitter pain and sorrow when I proudly said to Jesus: *“All of self and none of Thee.”* What was I thinking? What did it accomplish? Is there not more to life than me?

When I saw Him bleeding on that awful tree it caused me to rethink my prideful boast. So my wistful heart said faintly: *“Some of self and some of Thee!”*

Day after day, His tender mercy helped and healed me. His grace brought me lower until I finally whispered: *“Less of self and more of Thee!”*

Today, I am a new person. Higher than the highest mountain, deeper than the deepest sea, His love has finally conquered me. Now I can say: *“None of self and all of Thee!”*

The contribution is never a problem when I finally get out of the way.

Let us keep growing in Him until He fills us completely.

QUALITY AND QUANTITY

We live in an age of numbers. Everything is measured by size, speed, or sustainability. When a church is large, we want to be part of it. When a church is small, we ignore it. Huge crowds give the appearance of success. Sparse attendance speaks of little happening.

There is no precedent in Scripture for such a sentiment. God is not merely interested in quantity. He prefers quality.

Gideon had 32,000 men in his army. The Lord told him that was too many! Gideon reduced the number to 10,000. The Almighty was still not convinced! Gideon ended up with 300! And God gave the victory.

Why did heaven refuse the 32,000? Why did it reject the 10,000? Why was the number pared down to 300? *“Lest they boast that their strength saved them,” Judges 7:2.*

Yeah! If they had won with the 32,000 (or even the 10,000), they would have taken credit for the win. But, in the work of the Lord, the flesh must have no reason to brag.

The church grew the most when it was small, when it was persecuted, when it was unpopular. Quality over quantity is the preference of God. The church is stronger in spirit when it is weaker in the flesh.

We tend to give more when we feel it is important we give.

Let us rejoice in being a mustard seed in the hands of God.

DESIRE TO BE RICH

Hipolito had professed faith in Jesus. He lived in rural Bolivia. He attended church occasionally. But, often, he was selling his wares on Sunday in a nearby village.

This peasant merchant wanted to get rich. And he was doing well. He worked hard. He lived frugally. He saved his money.

Hipolito had to cross a rickety, rope-and-wood bridge. It spanned a narrow canyon. A hundred feet below was a deep, cold mountain stream.

Every time Hipolito came to that bridge he hesitated. He would always pray for God to protect him.

On a beautiful Sunday morning, Hipolito stood at that bridge. He said his prayer. And, with a donkey loaded with goods, he ventured out on the swinging span. About half way across, the bridge gave way. Miraculously, Hipolito, survived the fall (though he was severely injured).

It took several months for him to heal. He had time to think. And, during his recovery, he realized his error. He turned his life around. He gave up his desire to be rich. And, for the next forty years, he worked tirelessly for the Lord.

His favorite verse was: *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,”* Matthew 6:19.

Let us decide to be rich in God.

SHAMEFUL INCONSISTENCY

The Jews were to give a tenth of their crops to God. The Pharisees went a step further. They gave ten percent of their garden herbs, Luke 11:42a. They even debated whether the stalks of the plants should be tithed!

Their concern was admirable (in spite of it being misguided). The Pharisees made a big to-do about little things and neglected the bigger issues. They focused on external appearances and ignored internal cleanliness.

. Exaggerated Obedience. The Pharisees made a ritual out of washing their hands. But they left untouched the greed in their hearts. They carefully cleaned their eating utensils. Yet they disregarded the wickedness in their souls, Luke 11:39. Their religion was about rules that effected the body but sidestepped the spirit, Luke 11:40.

. Hidden Hypocrisy. What did it matter if their dishes were clean, when their conscience was dirty? Luke 11:42b. The Pharisees were negligent. They should have practiced outward cleanliness without overlooking inward purity, Luke 11:42c. The Law of Moses emphasized both. And, obviously, Christ did, too.

Today many will tithe their income down to the penny (though fail to clean up their lives). But appropriate giving must be coupled with appropriate living, Jeremiah 17:10.

Let us not practice shameful inconsistency.

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY

Life is a mixture of joy and grief. Both emotions test our character and train our spirit.

Happiness and sadness are to be shared. Or, as Paul said, “*rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn,*” Romans 12:15. What is Christian sympathy?

- . It Is Reciprocal. When we participate in the feelings of others, we relieve some of their burden or heighten some of their joy. Our hearts respond to the hearts of others.

- . It Is Shared. Our empathy for others is based on the empathy of Christ for us. For, none of us lives to himself and none of us dies to himself, Romans 14:7. We are a community.

- . It is Benevolent. As the Body of Christ, we are devoted to one another. We “*share with those in need,*” Romans 12:13. We start with the saints and reach out as far as our funds will go.

Those who are sympathetic know the happiness that comes from sympathizing. A tear is dried. A burden is lifted. A heart is cheered. Hope is restored. Heaven becomes real.

An oasis is established in a heartless world. The church becomes a light in the darkness. The collection is a form of our sharing.

Let us sympathize with those in need.

BRING AN OFFERING

Psalm 96 is an encouragement to praise the Lord. The sky and the earth are to worship the splendor of His holiness. And humans are to declare His marvelous deeds.

The psalmist mentions three ways of expressing this adoration: singing, proclaiming, and giving. Of the three, we will focus on “*bringing an offering*,” Psalm 96:8b.

. Giving Has A Precedent. Throughout the Bible, giving has had a central part in praising the Almighty. “*Abraham gave a tenth of everything*” he had, Genesis 14:20b. Jacob did, too, Genesis 28:22. The Jews gave generous amounts of money into the temple treasury, Mark 12:41. And the disciples of Jesus “*gave according to their ability*,” Acts 11:29. A belief in the blessedness of giving is crucial.

. Giving Has A Purpose. Paul was anxious for the church in Corinth to bring their offerings. Thus, he asked them “*to lay by in store*” each Sunday. Weekly giving avoids procrastination. It makes worship more real. It nourishes our spiritual life. It keeps our responsibility in view. It breaks up the task into manageable chunks. It is the will of God.

What you give shows how much you love the Almighty. What you withhold shows how much you love yourself.

Let us bring our offerings to the Lord.

LENDING TO THE LORD

The word of God says, *“He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,”* Proverbs 19:17. And, *“good will come to him who is generous and lends freely,”* Psalms 112:5. In these passages, “lending” appears to be synonymous with “giving.” In other words, *“he who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to the needy will be cursed,”* Proverbs 28:27.

. To Whom Should We Give? The Bible distinguishes between the poor who are lazy and the poor who suffer misfortune. The poverty of the sluggard is not approved, Proverbs 24:30-34. But, want due to tragedy, is the responsibility of the saints. Helping the unfortunate will be rewarded.

. What Kind Of Giver Should We Be? There are three kinds of givers—the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything from a flint, you have to hammer it (and, then, you only get sparks). To get anything from a sponge, you have to squeeze it (and the more pressure who apply, the more you get). But the honeycomb overflows with it own sweetness. No hammering! No squeezing! Just spontaneous giving of what it has.

What kind of giver are we?

Giving is like living.
But how long must we give?
Only as long as the Master gives to us!

Let us freely lend to Lord.

WISE USE OF MONEY

In the parable of the shrewd manager, Jesus taught about the wise use of riches. *“Whoever can be trusted with little,”* He said, *“can also be trusted with much,”* Luke 16:10.

Money is either a way of helping others or a means of benefiting ourselves. Those are our only options.

. Money As A Bad Boss. It is well known that *“no one can serve two masters,”* Luke 16:13. In other words, money will not share first place with anyone or anything. Or, to say it differently, nothing seems more foolish than bowing to wealth. For, when life is over, all of it will be left behind.

. Money As A Good Servant. God gives us wealth so we can pass it on to others. We merely manage it for the Lord. Christ said, *“Inasmuch as you do it for the least of these, you did it for Me,”* Matthew 25:40. We are blessed when the money we have serves God (rather than us).

“Use worldly wealth to gain friends on earth,” Christ said, *“so that you will be welcomed into heaven,”* Luke 16:9.

No amount of money can atone for the poverty of character.

A distinguished businessman was dying. He was given the “Outstanding Citizen Award” while lying on his deathbed. *“Thank you,”* he said. *“But where I am going it will be of no help to me!”*

Let us use our money in the way God wants.

NAME YOUR PRICE

Jacob had worked for his uncle (and father-in-law) for fourteen years. He wanted to go back home, Genesis 30:26. Laban did not want him to leave. He had become rich from the labor of nephew, Genesis 30:27.

So, in order to retain his services, Laban asked, “*what shall I give you?*” Genesis 30:31. In other words, “*how much will it take to keep you as my employee?*”

. The Question Asked. The motive of Laban was greed. He wanted to get rich. He had taken advantage of Jacob before. Likely, he intended to do so again!

. The Answer Given. Jacob agreed to stay if he could claim all the speckled and spotted animals as his own, Genesis 30:32,33.

God blessed the strategy of Jacob, Genesis 31:10-13.

What is the point of this story?

There is danger in wanting material prosperity (in the case of Laban). There is wisdom in trusting God (in the case of Jacob). There is value in honest labor. And, perhaps, most of all, there is peril in asking, “What is your price?”

The collection is less a matter of what we want and more of what we are willing to give.

Let us always put God first.

WHAT I HAVE I GIVE

Peter and John were going to the temple during afternoon prayers. And, at the same time, a crippled beggar was being carried to the temple gate. Both had an agenda. Neither had money. One of them received. The others gave. What a contrast!

. What Did The Apostles Have? The fishermen from Galilee were country peasants in the big city. They did not have much. *“But what they had they were willing to give,”* Acts 3:6a. What they offered they had received from God. They were very much like us. They were the messengers of the Almighty.

. What Did The Apostles Give? The government and the temple had failed. The civil authorities harassed the people. The temple officials kept most of its money for themselves. Neither changed the helplessness of the world. But the apostles shared a new power that healed society, Acts 3:16.

Like Peter and John, we have something the world needs. We have little money. But, in His name, we can save souls.

The gifts of the Lord are to be given away. He makes our voice strong so it may speak. He mellows our hearts so that we may love. He gives us money so that we can help others.

Since we have received, we are responsible to give, to spend, and to use what we were given to bless the world.

Let us give what we have.

THE RULES OF PENTECOST

Pentecost (or Feast of Weeks) is an important time for both Jews and Christians. For the Jews, it was one of three occasions each year when they made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. For Christians, it marked the birthday of the Church.

In the Old Testament, there were attitudes required during this festival. Those sentiments are still appropriate today.

. It Was A Time Of Giving. Worshippers were to “*give a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the Lord had given them,*” Deuteronomy 16:10. They were not “*to appear before the Lord empty-handed,*” Deuteronomy 16:16c.

. It Was A Celebration Of Joy. The people were to “*rejoice*” in the presence of God, Deuteronomy 16:11. They were to be happy to give. They owned nothing. They were merely managers of the gifts the Almighty had given them.

. It Was An Edict Of Obligation. The people of God were to “*follow these decrees,*” Deuteronomy 16:12. Obedience was not optional. We are blessed to be the children of God. We are required to act like it.

This is the way the first century Christians behaved. They happily gave—sharing what they had with those in need, Acts 2:45. It is also the way we should conduct ourselves today.

Let us keep the Rules of Pentecost.

TAKE MY LIFE

As we approach the collection, we must be fully engaged. The act of giving involves more than donating money. It is a surrender, a sacrifice of self.

LORD, TAKE ME.

Take me and mine and make them Yours. May I always be willing to share. Take my life. Help me to be what You want me to be, to live the way You want me to live.

PLEASE, GOD, TAKE ME.

I pour at Your feet my treasure store. What I have belongs to You. What You gave me is Yours. You deserve it all and more. I am glad I feel this way.

FATHER, TAKE ALL YOU NEED.

Take my time! Take my energy! Take my hands and heart!
Take all of me! You gave me Jesus. You gave me hope.

LORD, I HOLD NOTHING BACK.

Take my silver and my gold. Not a penny I withhold. It is Yours to use as You need. Care for the lost and the hungry feed.

For this I know: Riches are not mine until they are shared.

Let us give all we are to Him who owns all we have.

WHAT IS OUR CONTRIBUTION WORTH ?

Martyrdom has been common throughout history. Many saints have paid the ultimate price for their faith. But, as Paul wrote, *“Though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing,”* 1 Corinthians 13:3.

That is some of the strongest language in the Bible. It, in effect, says, if love does not accompany our giving, it is worthless. Two things must be noticed.

. Self-Sacrifice Is Priceless. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were willing to die in a fiery furnace. And many faithful believers through the years have been burned alive. Their sacrifices are dear to God. *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,”* Matthew 5:10.

. Love Must Be Included. If love is absent—where zeal is present—our sacrifice is called into question. Why give when we dislike giving? Is not such sacrifice an empty gesture? Yes! Though giving is a loving act, self can be the pivot upon which our offering is made.

Members of the church are often like the little boy who invited his father to play catch. *“Come on, Dad, I will throw the ball and you catch it. And, then, you say, ‘Great throw!’ ”*

Is that the spirit in which we put our money into the collection plate?

Let us make sure our contribution is given in selfless love.

WHAT GOOD IS IT ?

In the first century, people could be lumped into two groups. One group assumed obedience was most important. The other group put faith in first place.

Things have not changed much. These two ideas still persist. The writer of James spoke to those who championed belief over action.

He challenged his readers with a simple question: “*What good is faith without works?*” James 2:14.

Two answers were given.

1. Faith Needs Exercise. We can (and often have) faith but do nothing. What good is that? Faith must not remain idle. We can say we believe. We can claim church membership. We can faithfully sit in a pew. Yet, if we remain inactive, of what value is all of that?

2. Action Shows Belief. It is a mockery to claim Christ but not obey Him. Are we a Christian when we have plenty but do not share with the needy? “*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in Him?*” 1 John 3:17.

Our faith must be busy. Is it? We show our faith by what do. We demonstrate our faith in what we give. Does our giving convince God that we trust Him?

Let us put our profession into practice.

GIVING BACK WHAT IS RECEIVED

Hannah “*made a vow*,” I Samuel 1:11a. She promised to dedicate a son to God if the Lord gave her one, I Samuel 1:11c. In short, she promised to give God what God gave her.

. She Was Allowed. A married woman could make a vow if her husband approved, Numbers 30:10,11. Since her man did not object, Hannah obligated herself to the Almighty. And, like her, we are indebted to the Lord.

. She Promised God. Her barrenness led her to take extreme measures. Personal affliction and religious profession often move us to make vows. And, when we do, we should “*fulfill them*,” Psalm 76:11a.

. She Was Faithful. Broken vows undermine character, interrupt fellowship with heaven, and pave the way to destruction, Ecclesiastes 5:4-6. Hannah kept her vow. And, we should, too.

There was a man who promised to give a bag of gold to God. He rode his camel toward Palestine. On the way, he changed his vow to a bag of silver. And, later, he decided to give a bag of brass. As he traveled on, he assumed a lamb would die. Then, when Jerusalem came into view, he thought his dates would be sufficient. But, alas, after eating lunch, he gave God the date pits. Is that the way we keep our promises to God?

Let us give what we have vowed to give.

GOD DEALS WITH US ACCORDING TO OUR THOUGHTS

It is a sobering thought to realize that God knows our hearts, I Kings 8:39. And it is equally sobering to realize that He rewards us according to our conduct, Jeremiah 17:10.

Why are those terrifying ideas? Two things come to mind.

1. Our Hearts Are Evil. In the Bible, the heart refers to our true self—our thoughts and intentions. Our behavior is merely the mask that displays our inner thoughts, Matthew 15:18,19. From the chambers of our inside self, spring our outside action. It is sobering to contemplate the present condition of our heart (much less the future one).

2. Our Hearts Are Examined. Though we may not know our hearts, the Lord searches our inner self, I Chronicles 28:9. God is not fooled by our pretensions. He knows. And He deals with us accordingly. He reads us like a book. Everything is exposed before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. And He responds to us in light of our musings.

Hence, what are we thinking at this very moment? As we place our offering in the collection, the Almighty is reading our minds. Do our thoughts make Him happy? Are we comfortable with what He sees?

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life,”
Proverbs 4:23.

Let us be sure to give our hearts as well as our money to God.

THEY TOOK RESPONSIBILITY

A group of Jewish exiles came back to Jerusalem. Excitement filled the air. Lest their joy end in forgotten emotion—these former exiles were asked to make a pledge of faithfulness.

A covenant was written. The people “*promised*” to “*carry out the commands*” of God, Nehemiah 10:32.

. They Made An Agreement. Nehemiah did not want their fervor to fade. So he wrote a document. The people signed it. They “*assumed responsibility*,” Nehemiah 10:35. A serious moment was preserved in a tangible archive.

. Everyone Participated. The leaders put their seal on the instrument, Nehemiah 9:38. The clergy and the laity, the men the women, and the sons and daughters all agreed to the stipulations, Nehemiah 10:28,29.

. Their Vows Were Specific. The people obligated themselves to obey the details of the covenant. They promised to avoid evil, keep the Sabbath, and maintain the temple, Nehemiah 10:30-33.

We, too, should make a similar resolution: to worship God and dedicate a chunk of our resources to His work. What we do as a community of faith has eternal implications.

Let us take personal responsibility for serving God.

WE WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT

Every spring we are required to report our earnings to the government. It is not optimal (though we wished it were).

And we will “*all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one of us may receive what is due him,*” II Corinthians 5:10.

Tax season is not a favorite item of conversation. Neither is the final judgment. We would prefer to ignore them.

. There Will Be A Day Of Reckoning. We try to forget it but cannot deny it. Our monetary offerings may be part of the assessment. The proceedings will be thorough and fair. No bribes! No tampering! No cover-up!

. Everyone Will Be Accountable. No one is so high and mighty in this world to avoid the last reckoning. No one is so low that he will go unnoticed. Rather “*each of us will give an account of himself to God,*” Romans 14:12.

. Christ Will Be There. All of us will experience the probing eye of the Almighty. However, we will not be alone. Christ will stand beside the believer. He will plead our case (if we have a case to plead).

Our accountability regarding our giving supplies the motive for a serious evaluation of our contribution—how we give and how much we give.

Let us be ready for the final exam.

GIVE GLORY TO GOD

They were a band of homeless men. They remembered happier times. But now they were a fellowship of misery. Though they were a common sight, they remained a sad spectacle.

“Tame! Tame!” they shouted. *“Unclean! Unclean!”* They were lepers. Despised! Avoided! And lonely! *“Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”* they begged, Luke 17:13.

The Lord healed them. Only one thanked Him. When they realized they had been cured, what went through their head? If they were thankful, they did not bother to say so. They merely continued on their merry way.

We can be like those ungrateful lepers. We have received the gift of salvation. Yet we go on as if nothing happened. The collection is a special moment in every week when we can praise God for His abundant blessings. Do we?

The one leper gave praise to God, Luke 17:15. Jesus noticed. *“Where are the others?”* He inquired. In effect, He wondered why they did not praise the Almighty, Luke 17:18.

There is peril in being saved. We may forget that we were lost. Like a sailor who becomes oblivious to the grandeur of the sea, we can forget the wonder of our redemption.

Let us not allow the repetition of the contribution obscure the glory of our Savior.

THE GREATER BLESSING

In his parting words to the elders of the Ephesian church, Paul mentioned the words of Jesus: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive," Acts 20:35.*

That statement is a simple sentence full of profound meaning. Anyone can receive. Only noble of souls will give.

. Giving Is Divine. God lives to give. In other words, His distinguishing characteristic is His disposition to help others. His joy is rooted in generosity.

. Giving Is Christ-Like. Our Savior *"went around doing good," Acts 10:38*. He lived to enlighten, bestow, and rescue. He received very little. He gave much.

. Giving Is Christian. Believers live to make the world better. People appreciate those who generously distribute their wealth among the needy. Givers are blessed.

Those who constantly receive become selfish. As beggars, they expect to be helped. They assume others exist to serve them. They are only happy if supplied with fresh gifts.

To receive is to get superficial and fleeting satisfaction. To give is to gain deep and lasting happiness.

To teach is to be taught. To love is to be loved. To comfort is to be comforted. To give is to be blessed.

Let us empty our pockets so our hearts can be filled.

MAKE AN OFFERING

When David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he composed a psalm for the occasion. Though David had died, that psalm was sung years later at the dedication of the temple.

In this psalm, David told the people to “*bring an offering*” to the Lord, I Chronicles 16:29b. His reasons for giving still apply to us today.

. It Is The Right Thing To Do. There are many things we could do. But the best thing is to “*ascribe to the Lord glory due His name*,” I Chronicles 16:29a. What is due our name matters little. What is due His name means everything. It is in Him “*we live and move and have our being*,” Acts 17:28.

. It Is An Acceptable Thing To Do. The Lord does not need anything. But, even if He did, He would not rely on us to supply it. No! We give to support His cause: to spread the word and help the poor. Thus, when we bring an offering (in proportion to our income), it will weigh heavy on the scales of heaven.

It is not what we give to please men but what we share to please God that counts. For a gift without the giver is bare.

Our giving, then, is a gauge of our spirituality. And, if we neglect to follow the Lord in His generosity, we will not likely follow Him in other things either.

Let us bring an acceptable offering to God.

SHOULD WE CONTINUE ?

In a startling statement, near the end of the Book of Revelation, John wrote, "*Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong,*" Revelation 22:11. Why did the apostle say that? Why did he seem to encourage sin?

Is there a point of no return in our spiritual life? The words of John seem to indicate as much. Though, as long as there is time, there is an opportunity for repentance.

Yet the end of time is coming. The righteous should remain righteous. But, if a sinner prefers to sin, let him sin, John said. Or, as Daniel wrote, "*The wicked will continue to be wicked,*" Daniel 12:10. Thus, "*whoever refuses (to listen) let him refuse,*" Ezekiel 3:27. We carry our destiny in our hands.

As we look back, have we changed all that much? Do we approach the collection with more or less the same attitude? Do we give the same amount (though our income has increased)? Should we continue to do as we have done?

Those questions could hardly be more important. Are we in a spiritual rut? Are we satisfied to do what we have been doing? Should we do differently? Yes, if we need to! For, there comes a time when changing our ways is over, Proverbs 1:24-32.

If we are serious about going to heaven, we must not be content with the way things have always been.

Let us continue to grow until our season on earth is over.

FOLLOW ME

Jesus was leaving the area where He had been, Mark 10:17. A rich young ruler went to meet Him. He was perhaps the ruler of a synagogue. Therefore, he had both wealth and status. In other words, he could say, life was good.

. What He Wanted. He was living honorably (though he felt something might be missing). So he sought the Lord, while He could be found, called upon Him while He was near, cf. Isaiah 55:6. “*What good thing must I do to get eternal life?*” the rich man asked, Matthew 19:16.

. What He Was Told. The young man had kept the commandments, Matthew 19:17–20a. Yet, he wanted to be sure. “*What do I lack?*” he inquired, Matthew 19:20b. He was asking the right person but was unprepared for the answer. “*Follow Me,*” Jesus said, Matthew 19:21.

. What Did He Do. He “*went away sad,*” Matthew 19:22. Likely, he was expecting a different response. Following the Lord was not on his radar. He was disappointed (though not angry). He knew Christ was right! Nevertheless, he did not have the courage to do what was right.

Our Master wants us to follow Him. The conditions of eternal life have not changed. We are still required to give our selves and our money.

Let us surrender our wealth so that we can follow Him.

EMPTY-HANDED

There were three major feasts on the Jewish calendar. The worshiper was not to come to the Lord “*empty-handed*,” Deuteronomy 16:16. Everyone was to bring an offering. The festivals were high points in the life of an Israelite.

. They Were Occasions Of Joy. A harvest was connected to each feast: Barley during Passover, wheat during Pentecost, and grapes during Tabernacles. The weather was mild. And the harvests provided food for the travelers.

. They Were Festivals Of Hope. Life is a pilgrimage. The journey to Jerusalem reminded the pilgrims that their time on earth was temporary. Thus, they looked forward to the permanence of eternity, cf. II Corinthians 5:1.

. They Were Seasons Of Giving. The children of God were not to come “*empty-handed*” to the celebration. During the feasts, the people were to give to God and those in need. Liberality was encouraged.

The Old Testament festivals cultivated an attitude of sharing. And the New Testament promotes generous giving, too. We must NOT come to the house of God empty-handed.

It is not what we would do with a fortune
If riches were our lot,
But what we are doing now,
With what we've got!

Let us not come empty-handed before the Lord.

GIVE WHAT YOU DECIDE

There should be nothing sudden, last minute, or impulsive when it comes to our contribution. No one should look in their wallet and determine on-the-spur-of-the-moment what they will offer to the Lord.

Paul said to the Corinthians: *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give," II Corinthians 9:7.* The Sunday collection is governed by several guidelines.

- . There Is The Rule Of Proportion. *"Whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly. And whoever sows generously will reap generously," II Corinthians 9:6.* We need to plan ahead so that we can harvest much.

- . There Is The Law Of Planning. God allows us to determine the amount we give. But we are obligated to put prayerful thought into it. Haphazard and mindless worship does not please the Almighty.

- . There Is The Element Of Reward. *"God is able to make grace abound unto all of us," II Corinthians 9:8.* Blessings used rightly bring more blessings. This is certainly so in the collection, cf. Psalms 112:9.

The Lord gives to us so that we can pass it on to others. There is a future for every seed sown, for every dollar earned. And, when we use them with appropriate forethought, the future is especially bright.

Let us plan to give and give as we have planned.

COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

Sympathy for those who suffer is a powerful emotion. It causes us to be kind where kindness is needed.

Sympathy for those who are blessed is quite rare. It seldom gains much traction. Those who prosper receive less empathy.

Yet, in the scheme of things, we are supposed to have compassion for everyone. *“Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn,” Romans 12:15.*

Isaiah called on the whole world to sympathize with Israel. She was going to be released from captivity and restored to the Promised Land, Isaiah 42:11,12.

Everybody was to be glad. Good things were to come from the returning exiles. The Jews would be *“made a covenant for the people, a light for the Gentiles,” Isaiah 42:6*. In other words, salvation was on its way!

Such blessings often cause jealousy. Folks will say: *“Why should they be favored over us?”* But it is the way God works! He blesses some so they can bless others.

All prosperity is from the Lord. He gives to those who can handle the responsibility. We are among the blessed. We need to put our wishes aside and fulfill our calling.

Let us have compassion for everyone and give to those in need.

GOD WILL CURSE OUR BLESSINGS

The Jewish priests allowed Israel to offer unworthy sacrifices. And, when spiritual negligence is supported by the leadership, the community of faith is in grave peril.

The Lord said, *"I will curse your blessings,"* Malachi 2:2c. He either meant the gifts of the people would become a curse or the blessings of the priests pronounced on the sacrifices would become a curse. Perhaps, both were intended.

. Turning Offerings Into Curses. The priests received portions of the sacrifices. Since the animals were diseased, the priests would become sick. If a person gave an unhealthy sacrifice to God, would he not share a diseased animal with the priests? Malachi 2:2d.

. Turning Blessings Into Curses. The people had not set their hearts to honor God. Hence, God would not honor them. *"The lips of the priests should preserve knowledge.... But they turned from the way and caused many to stumble, Malachi 2:7,8.*

The Lord does not overlook lax giving. If we are to honor Him, we must offer our best to Him. Our intentions must be good, our gifts honest, and the Lord respected.

A group of Christians were asked what they thought about God. *"That is unimportant,"* they replied. *"All that matters is what God thinks of us!"*

Let our blessings not become curses.

IS MONEY AN ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING ?

The fortunes of a nation and the life of a congregation are in large measure dictated by its leadership. They set the tone. This is doubly true when they support the notion that “*money is the answer for everything*,” Ecclesiastes 10:19c.

. Those Who Lead A Nation. Happy are the people who have a qualified leader. He is mature. He is not wearied by small concerns. He does not pursue personal pleasures, Ecclesiastes 10:15-17. Unlike those who relish the power of their position, a noble ruler seeks the welfare of his subjects.

. Those Who Lead A Church. The leadership in the Body of Christ must not be enamored by their public pronouncements, Ecclesiastes 10:12,13, nor lazy in fixing internal problems, Ecclesiastes 10:18. When decay in the congregation surfaces, they do not ignore it.

Thus, good leaders in government and in the church must not be reviled, Ecclesiastes 10:20. Though they are not perfect, they deserve our respect. This is especially true when they knew “*money is not the answer to everything!*”

We do not contribute to solve the ills of the church. We give to honor God. If we fail to keep that in mind, we are no better than those who think money is the answer.

Cash can help us get anywhere (except heaven). It can provide most anything (except salvation).

Let us give like the Lord is the answer to everything.

REJOICING IN OUR WEALTH

Job said it was wrong to rejoice in wealth, Job 31:25. He seemed to anticipate the words of Paul: "*Greed is idolatry,*" Colossians 3:5. Job advised finding our delight in God rather than in gold, Job 24:22-24.

. The Fascination Of Riches. Rejoicing in wealth is a deadly sin. It is a source of selfishness, the alpha and omega in the alphabet of satan. It is the first vice in life and the last vice to die. Covetousness might enrich some but condemns all. It should be strongly resisted by everyone.

. The Worship Of Money. Job had great riches, Job 1:2,3. But he carefully sidestepped the evils that his possessions could cause. He did not "*put his trust in wealth,*" 1 Timothy 6:17. Money is not the greatest good. It must not be allowed to become our greatest interest, Ephesians 5:5.

He who adores gold will become a slave of his passion. Finer spiritual qualities will be smothered. A sordid appetite for cash will consume the soul. Money will become a god. It will dominate life. Faith will be lost. Heaven will be forgotten.

Money is limited. It can only do so much. The Lord is limitless. He can do everything. Why chose a loser when the "*riches of Christ*" can be ours?

Let us rejoice in giving our money to God.

A SIMPLE IDEA

After the Revolutionary War, missions languished for the lack of funds. The economy of the United States had not recovered from the military conflict. People wanted to go overseas but had no way of getting there.

In 1800, at a Boston dinner party, the subject of missions was mentioned. The opinion among the men was negative. *“There is no way we can spare a penny,”* they said.

Out of that discussion came a simple idea. One of the women at the dinner talked with her female friends about setting aside a penny every week for missions.

Indeed, that was a simple plan. Yet a simple idea was well suited for simpler times. The plan caught on. Within a year, it had spread to all thirteen states (as well as the frontier). A penny a week for mission became a driving force. Thousands of dollars were raised. Dozens of missionaries were sent. Churches were planted. Souls were saved.

The Penny For Missions Movement is outdated (though newer versions have taken its place). By 1900, the penny a week became a dollar a week. Today, the concept has morphed into five dollars a week!

An ordinary idea became an extraordinary influence in the history of missions. God blessed a simple decision because a simple plan furthered His cause.

Let us do as our foremothers did.

IS IT OUR MONEY ?

After God brought Israel out of Egypt and settled them in the Promised Land, they were never to assume it was their strength that caused their rescue, Deuteronomy 8:10-18.

Their prosperity was not a product of their doing. Why was it so outrageous for them to think that it was?

- . It Was Untrue. Our wealth depends on circumstances over which we have no control. It is a blessing from above.

- . It Was Disloyal. It is the Almighty that paves the way for us to get what we have. We work but He provides the strength.

- . It Was Ungrateful. The Lord puts up with so many of our flaws. Must He endure our claims of self-sufficiency, too?

- . It Was Hurtful. To believe “*my money is mine*,” encourages pride and fosters thanklessness. The Lord is not pleased.

- . It Was Destructive. Such an attitude is punished. “*Those who exalt themselves will be humbled*,” Luke 14:11.

The varied experiences of life are an appeal of God to prostrate oneself before Him. If we take credit for our money, we are ignoring reality.

Let us give credit to whom credit is due.

THE GENEROSITY OF THE JORDAN

There is a lesson for all to see in the flow of the Jordan River to the Dead Sea. It is a truth that shouts its message loud and clear. It is time to perk up our ears and hear. The River gives and lives while the Sea keeps and dies.

The lesson goes like this.

The Jordan River receives day after day the water from cedar streams and mountain snows. It gladly receives and happily gives that others might live. The river flows swiftly to the lowest point on earth.

The Dead Sea receives its moisture free. But, because it does not share it with others, it turns to a briny brew. As heavy as molten lead, its dreadful name proclaims its shame as a lake both selfish and dead.

Which do we wish to be? Will we accept the gracious gifts of God and share them happily? Or will we receive them and keep them for ourselves? Will we be the Jordan River or the Dead Sea?

Christ showed us how to live. He had it all but gave His riches so that others could enjoy them, too. Thus, by His grace, the sinful race can share His glorious crown.

Let us give like the Jordan River and not keep like the Dead Sea.

KEEPING OUR PROMISES

The people of God had been under great duress. The Assyrians had attached Judah. But, by the grace of God, the enemy was defeated, Psalm 76:5,6. No doubt, in the process, the besieged Israelites had made vows. The psalmist encouraged them to keep their promises, Psalms 76:11.

Vows are pledges made to acknowledge divine mercies. They are promises to do something for the Lord in return.

It is easy to make such resolutions but much easier to neglect them. Promises are often forgotten. So the people of God were *“to make vows and fulfill them.”*

. Making Promises. It is good to make pledges. They strengthen our resolve. A promise can be ignored. But, when the desire is verbalized, the wish becomes public. And God expects us to keep our word!

. Keeping Vows. We make numerous promises: wedding vows, New Year resolutions, sick bed promises, and tithing commitments (to name a few). Yet many of these pledges are not remembered. Is God happy with broken vows?

Very seldom have all our resolutions been kept. We seek in vain to find a vow completely fulfilled (much less a promise done better than promised)! Pledges must be treated like debts. Be sure to pay them! This is equally true when we make commitments about giving money.

Let us be sure that we give as we promised.

HOW SHOULD WE GIVE ?

The church in Philippi was very young. Yet they sent support to Paul more than once. He felt “*amply supplied*,” Philippians 4:18. Their generosity is a model for our giving.

Though they were in extreme poverty, they still managed to find the funds. Their lack was not used as an excuse for withholding their contributions. “*They gave themselves first to God*” and then to those in need, II Corinthians 8:5.

. They Gave Gladly. The Philippians made the afflictions of Paul an opportunity to serve. They were happy to do so. It proved that his work was not in vain. And it was good for them, too. Christian sympathy is twice blessed: it blesses those who give and those who receive!

. They Gave Repeatedly. The Philippians gave to Paul when he was a few miles away in Thessalonica, Philippians 4:16. They gave to him when he was further away in Corinth, II Corinthians 11:9. They gave to the poor saints in Jerusalem, II Corinthians 8:1,2. And they sent Epaproditus to help Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome.

. They Gave Voluntarily. Paul did not ask for support. He did not desire gifts, Philippians 4:17. But, “*entirely own their own*,” the Philippians shared their limited resources, II Corinthians 8:3,4. They gave freely out of love. They gave willingly out of joy. They gave as God asks us to give.

Let us follow their example.

SETTING OUR POCKETBOOK IN THE SON LIGHT

A young girl was watching her mother work in the flower garden. “Mom,” she said, *“I think I know why the flowers grow up!”* “Why?” *“So they can get out of the dirt!”*

As Christians, we live in this world. But, we grow so that we can go to a better place. We set our minds on things above where Christ is at the right hand of God, Colossians 3:1.

Even if we plant a seed “up side down,” it will always seek the sun. Our houseplants turn toward the windows. And a sunflower is called a *sunflower* because it turns its face to the sun in the east and follows it to its setting in the west.

Why does a dandelion open on sunny days and remain closed on cloudy days? It is the power of the sun. Obviously sunlight affects life on earth—plants and people alike.

So we should put our pocketbook in the S-o-n. It needs the warming influence of Jesus—the Son of God.

*I want to live above this world,
Because evil darts at me are hurled;
My faith has caught the light,
My home above is in sight!*

We ought to love this life, to live here as long as God ordains. But, when our time on earth is done, may we reach for the Son. He is the light of love from above.

Let us put our pocketbook in the Son light of heaven.

GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT

The Body of Christ has had her share of people who think the church is “*a means of making money*,” I Timothy 6:5. The chief purpose of these people is to line their pockets under the guise of serving God.

Paul comments on his condemnation of such pretenders. He offers two thoughts: one is about the gain of godliness and the other mentions contentment with our income.

1. The Gain Of Godliness. Those who are godly rest serene in the care of heaven. They live above all the vexations, temptations, and disappointments of a mercenary lifestyle, I Timothy 6:9. They are happy with the way things are. The godlike are freed from the desire of perishing treasures because they already have enduring riches.

2. The Contentment Of Godliness. If we have food and clothes, should we not be content? For “*we brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing out of it*,” I Timothy 6:7,8. Therefore, since all our possessions will be left behind, why spend our earthly existence collecting what has no heavenly value?

A man was standing on a street corner listening to the birds sing. “*Do you hear the birds?*” he asked the people hurrying by. “*No!*” Then the man dropped a quarter. Everyone stopped to find the coin. Obviously their minds were more alert to the sound of money than the songs of nature.

Let us enjoy the gains of contentment as we give today.

THE DESIRE TO GET RICH

Paul wrote, “*People who want to get rich fall into temptation,*” I Timothy 6:9a. The desire for wealth is a trap. It distorts life. It leads to ruin. For, with money, a person can buy forbidden things or help his neighbor in difficulty. We must manage our money or our money will manage us.

- . Riches Never Satisfy. They are like seawater: the more you drink the more you want. There never seems to come a time when affluence says, “*Enough!*” Those who have much always want more.

- . Money Leads To Selfishness. Luxury fosters competition—keeping up with the Joneses! In such competition, those in poverty are ignored. Is that not the way it is? Unfortunately, it happens all too often.

- . Wealth Is An Allusion. People want riches in order to be secure. But prosperity does not bring safety. Neither can it buy health or purchase love. It does not lead to unending joy. Wealth is more of a problem than a solution.

The desire to have leads to want—to want safety, to want happiness, to want more. Yet, frequently, money “*plunges us into ruin and destruction,*” I Timothy 6:9b.

It is right to earn enough to provide the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, and clothing. But to evaluate our life in terms of money is a perilous evil to avoid at all costs.

Let us put God first in all things.

LOVE OF MONEY

One of the most quoted verses of Scripture, yet one of the most misquoted passages in the Bible, is found in the first letter to Timothy. We often hear it stated: “*Money is the root of all evil.*” Actually, Paul said, “*The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,*” 1 Timothy 6:10a.

The apostle was not suggesting that money is the one and only source of sin. For that runs counter to other verses. Does not “*bitterness*” and “*temptation*” also cause us to do evil? Yes! They do, Hebrews 12:15; James 1:15.

An infatuation with money led the rich young ruler to leave Jesus. It deceived Judas into betraying Christ. And it moved Ananias and Sapphira to lie.

The desire for riches has been at the heart of untold wars, murders, frauds, robberies, perjuries, and divorces. Moreover, “*some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith,*” 1 Timothy 6:10b. We cannot serve two masters, Matthew 6:24.

Yes! The affection for money has destroyed many lives. And it can destroy ours, too. We are not helpless. But we must be vigilant. Money is like fire. It is good or bad depending on how it is used. It can cook a meal or it can commit arson. We must control our money or it will control us.

Love is blind. The love of money is especially so.

Let us give to God and ignore the devil.

BEING SATISFIED

Who is really happy? Who is genuinely satisfied? In my experience, I have seen few individuals that are completely content. Almost everyone seems to want more!

Satisfaction is an attitude. In the play, *Henry The Sixth*, Shakespeare comments on contentment. When the king was asked, “*Where is your crown?*” Henry answered,

*“My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not decked with diamonds and precious stones,
Nor to be seen; my crown is called contentment,
A crown that people seldom enjoy!”*

Indeed, when being king is not enough, no amount of riches will be sufficient. For true satisfaction is not adding to our wealth but taking away the desire for more.

The problem with life is that no one seems to know how to live on little. Almost all we have is unnecessary for our existence. When we are happy with simple living, we are scarcely moved by a financial downturn. Why wish for more when we already have enough?

This is not a plea for poverty. There is no virtue in being poor. But it is a twofold piece of advice. (1) Things cannot make us happy. And (2) only what is eternal will bring lasting joy. Satisfaction is found in loving God and loving our fellowman.

Let us spend our money on what really satisfies.

UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES

The apostle Paul had spoken to those who wanted to become rich, I Timothy 6:9. Then he turns to address those who are already rich, I Timothy 6:17a.

Sometimes we assume the early church was composed of poor people. Obviously that is not altogether true. Though few in number, many congregations had a wealthy member or two in their midst.

Here is the advice Paul gave to these affluent folks.

. Do Not Be Conceited. Though they had more money than other people, they must not think they were better than other people. There is nothing in this life that gives a person the right to look down on anyone else. “*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant,*” the apostle wrote, I Timothy 6:17b. For, riches are very uncertain: here today and gone tomorrow. The wealthy need not be smug.

. Put Your Hope In God. It is the Lord “*who richly provides us with everything,*” I Timothy 6:17c. In other words, what we have is from the Almighty. Moreover, wealth in itself is not a sin. It is a responsibility. But, if our possessions are used to pamper our pride, it impoverishes our soul. If it supplies help for others, it is a treasure laid up in heaven. God has been good to us. We should be good to others.

Riches are a precious gift—bright but brittle.

Let us handle our money with care.

SENDING OUR MONEY AHEAD

Paul spoke to those who had money. He encouraged them to consider their obligation. Earlier he had focused on their attitude toward God, I Timothy 6:17. Then he drills down on their benevolence toward others, I Timothy 6:18.

. Be Generous. “*Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*” The apostle reminds us that our wealth only has value in this world. So we must not be high-minded—thinking we are better than others. God must be the centerpiece of our life. He gives us plenty to enjoy as well as plenty to share with our fellowman.

. Invest Wisely. We are to promote the happiness of others. Because we have plenty, it is within our means to give plenty. The joy of giving will far outweigh the sacrifice of sharing. And, best of all, we will be laying up treasure in heaven. When we deny ourselves the frills of this life, we will gain the thrills of eternal life. For, he who sends his possessions above will have no regrets below.

Our material gifts become our spiritual treasures, Mark 10:21. This heavenly fortune includes—but is not limited to—a “*good conscience*,” I Timothy 1:5, and a glad reception into eternity by those who were benefited by our generosity in time, Luke 16:9. In short, our kindness here will be our confidence on the Judgment Day.

Let us send our money ahead.

MANAGING THE MONEY OF THE MASTER

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus mentions the obedience of the servants. The master gave different amounts of money to three people. They were to invest the money for the profit of their master. The money was distributed in proportion to the skills of each recipient, Matthew 25:14,15.

. The Master Represents Christ. The story says the master “*went on a journey*.” This points to Jesus’ ascension back to heaven. Before he departed, the master in the parable gives varying responsibilities to his servants. So, also, in the church, “*there are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God*,” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6.

. The Servants Represent Us. After a long time, the master returns. Each servant is called “*into account*,” Matthew 25:19. Two servants were diligent. They doubled the money of the master. The third servant failed. He could have done well but did not. He buried the money he received. He made excuses. He blamed the master for his laziness. He was “called on the carpet” and condemned, Matthew 25:24-27.

The collection demonstrates our management of God’s money. What we receive becomes our responsibility. We must do everything in our power to use that money wisely. No excuses! No blaming! The Lord holds us accountable.

Let us show God this morning how we use His money.

HE DID NOT ASK FOR MONEY

God knows our hearts. He reads our thoughts. When we pray, He hears our words but answers our intentions.

Therefore, the Lord said, *“since this is your heart’s desire and you have not asked for wealth,”* Solomon received what he needed, II Chronicles 1:11. In other words, Solomon sought first the kingdom of God.

. What Solomon Asked. The king had said, *“give me wisdom and knowledge that I may lead”* Israel, II Chronicles 1:10. And that is precisely what Solomon got. Or, as Christ said to His disciples: *“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer,”* Matthew 21:22. *“No good thing does the Lord withhold from those whose walk is blameless,”* Psalms 84:11. Solomon asked for wisdom and riches were added to his request, Matthew 6:33.

. What Solomon Received. The Lord is able to do *“immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to the power that is at work in us,”* Ephesians 3:20. When we seek the best we will receive the best. And, the Lord may add additional blessings to it. He gives what is needed and what we can handle. Therefore, we should pursue the best and let heaven add what is right for us. The Almighty cares for His children.

Our responsibility is to desire what will further the will of God. His desire is to respond to our righteousness.

Let us seek the kingdom of God first in prayer and in giving.

CARING FOR THOSE WHO SERVE

God laid out how the priests in the Old Testament were to be supported. When a man was called away from the ordinary occupations of life, provision was made to feed his family.

. He Deserved His Support. His livelihood was earned in keeping his priestly duties. God could have chosen to continue the daily manna. But He provided the priest with bread through his faithful service at the altar. It became the appointed place for the people to give and the priests to receive, Numbers 18:8.

. He Was Bound To His Supporters. In some respects, the priest was set apart from the people. But, in sharing the sacrifices, they were united by a bond of dependence. This kept the people from presumption and the priest from pride. A mutual dependence was formed—like a preacher and his congregation.

. He Was Held Accountable. The priest was accountable to the people. The people were accountable to the priest. The spiritual well being of both parties was constantly under review. Each helped the other walk the strait and narrow. And, in the process, both were blessed. And God was pleased.

Is this not similar to the pulpit and the pew in our day? We care for the one who watches over our souls. Both depend on the other. Both are blessed. God smiles.

Let us support the pulpit that gives so much to the pew.

CONCERNING THE COLLECTION

The resurrection had been discussed in detail. Then Paul turns to a more mundane matter—the collection, I Corinthians 16:1. In a similar manner, we have just taken the holy supper. Now we contribute our money. Both are important. Both require our full attention.

. Our Giving Spreads The Word. The Gospel must be heard at home and abroad. We need to be part of the mission of God. The word must go beyond the four walls of this building. We “*go into all the world*” by helping others get there. It takes each of us to do our part in spreading the Good News.

. Our Giving Helps Us Grow. Those who do not give do not mature. Our sharing His blessings multiplies our faith. It broadens our vision. It stretches our horizons. It demonstrates our love. It moves our focus away from self and toward others. We are blessed and they are helped.

. Our Giving Blesses The Church. A giving church is a prospering church. A spirit of charity within the community of faith strengthens her sense of purpose. Is there such a thing as a selfish congregation? I think so! We must not exist for ourselves. High walls do not grow good gardens.

Giving manifests the power of Christianity. The world notices. It may scoff at our profession but it will pay attention to our practice.

Let us show others who we are by how we give.

THE SIGNIFICENCE OF THE COLLECTION

The Corinthian brethren were encouraged to help the needy saints in Jerusalem. In Greek society there were organizations that stepped in to assist Gentiles who fell on hard times. And, likewise, in Jewish culture, the synagogues took up a weekly collection to feed poor Jews. However, Paul wanted Christians to show a similar concern for ANYONE in need.

Why?

. It Was A Way Of Practicing Unity. Charity was not to stop at the border of the brotherhood. The church was to love all people. Therefore, benevolence in the Body of Christ was to help Jew and Gentile alike. A narrow concern for “our kind of folks” was to be avoided. Jesus loved everyone. He wants us to love everyone, too.

. It Was A Way Of Proclaiming Christ. The Lord asks us to love our neighbor. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, He made it clear that our neighbor included those who our culture rejects. By collecting money for poor Jews, Paul was teaching the Corinthian Gentiles to be Good Samaritans. The collection was a sermon in action.

Charity with limits is love with handcuffs. It has tunnel vision, selective mercy, and narrow application. God loves us in spite of social differences. Should we not do the same with our fellowman?

Let our giving be charity without borders.

WHAT IS THE COLLECTION ?

. Paul called it additional giving, I Corinthians 16:1. The word meant extra generosity (beyond neighborly good deeds).

. He also labeled it a free gift, I Corinthians 16:3. It was a heart felt overflowing of voluntary kindness.

. He used the word fellowship, II Corinthians 9:13. The collection involved sharing with others.

. The apostle said it was a service, II Corinthians 9:1,12,13. The money ministered to the needs of people.

. Paul described it as an abundance, II Corinthians 8:20. It was beyond an ordinary gift given to assist those in need.

. He saw the collection as a bounty, II Corinthians 9:5. The word pointed to the joy of giving.

. Paul called it a voluntary donation, II Corinthians 9:12. The Christian collection is like a philanthropist's donation.

. He likened it to alms, Acts 24:17. In the Old Testament, the word for almsgiving often stood for "righteousness."

. And Paul called the collection an offering, Acts 24:17. The best sacrifice given to God is kindness to our fellowman.

Let us keep the full meaning of the collection in mind as we give.

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING

The church began in Jerusalem. And, in a short time, it suffered a rift among its members. The widows were poor. Some of them came from foreign countries and spoke Greek. Others were born in Palestine and spoke Aramaic, Acts 6:1.

These differences lead to an unwholesome division in the Body of Christ. Paul was interested in healing the split. To do so, he took up a collection to help those in need in Jerusalem. He issued a set of guidelines to regulate the giving!

. Support The Family. The collection was not a hand out to beggars or alms for the homeless. It was an expression of love to fellow Christians, Galatians 6:10.

. Prepare To Give. The need was beyond their means on any given day. So Paul told them to “*lay by in store*”. Thus, even a congregation with limited resources could serve when the opportunity presented itself.

. Set A Time. Paul advised “*the first day of the week*,” I Corinthians 16:2a. The saints were already gathered to worship God. And, when their minds were focused on His grace, it would be natural for them to show their concern.

. Decide The Amount. Paul did not say how much. He left it to their discretion. “*In keeping with your income*,” he said, I Corinthians 16:2b. Or “*as the Lord has prospered you*.”

Let us be ready when the contribution is gathered.

GOD REMEMBERS

The faithfulness of God is highlighted in Scripture. Humans may falter but the Lord keeps His promises.

It is not easy to see His control over adverse circumstances. Sometimes things seem to go beyond His managing. Yet He remembers. And He is faithful, Lamentations 3:22,23.

In the spring, a missionary asked one of his converts—a farmer—to go with him on a preaching trip. *“I have not planted my wheat,”* the farmer said. Though he protested, he felt God wanted him to go. So he went.

His heathen neighbors scoffed. They thought he was a fool. But the Christian farmer persevered.

After several weeks, the believer returned home. His neighbors’ fields were green with new grain. His field was brown and barren. But he believed God would bless Him. The farmer worked hard. He endured the mockery and insults, cf. Psalm 89:50. *“Lord, remember me,”* he begged, *“come to my aid,”* cf. Psalm 106:4.

He planted his wheat. There was no rain. His neighbors’ crops died. Then the drought ended. And the farmer had his best harvest ever. God honored his obedient servant!

He will honor our faithfulness, too. Our task is to remember His mercy and pray for His grace, Psalm 25:6; Jonah 2:7.

Let us give and leave it to God to manage the circumstances.

PIETY IN PROSPERITY

Several chapters in Leviticus describe the major festivals on the Jewish calendar—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. And, in the middle of that discussion, an important rule of charity is mentioned.

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest; leave them for the poor and the alien,” Leviticus 23:22. Likewise, “do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick the grapes that have fallen,” Leviticus 19:10.

. God Provides. The Lord recognizes our spiritual needs. He appointed certain times of worship. He gave specific instructions for expressing our devotion. He issued guidelines for venerating His majesty. And, when that worship required traveling to Jerusalem, God provided food for the trip. In short, He watched over His children.

. Believers Respond. The provisions of heaven demanded a response from earth. Part of the harvest was to be shared with those in need (which included the pilgrims traveling to the temple). The Lord provided those in need through the generosity of the “gleanings.” Piety in prosperity is part of godliness in action. So is giving as we have been prospered.

Remembering the needs of others, glorifies God. He is honored when we assist His children. And we are saved from selfish excess and wasteful luxury.

Let us not look down on others when we look up to God.

TRUSTING IN MONEY

The perplexities of life leave us vulnerable. We search for protection hoping to escape the danger that confronts us. People often turn to money. That is a mistake!

"Better the little the righteous have than the wealth of the wicked," Psalm 37:16. "For man, despite his riches, does not endure," Psalm 49:12. Indeed, those who have money are suddenly destroyed, completely swept away by terrors.

. Wealth Is Limited. Money cannot save us from dying, Psalm 49:7,8. There may be an escape from poverty but not from the grave. And, once in the cemetery, our money is left to others, Psalm 49:17. It is better to put our hope in God who provides us with everything we need, I Timothy 6:17.

. Wealth Is Fleeting. The rich trust in their riches. They boast in their bounty, Psalm 49:6. Yet they ignore the inevitable, Psalm 49:11. They long for eternal life. But they die like everyone else. They are proud of their prosperity, Psalm 49:20. Yet, they are no better off than a beggar!

It is insane to spend our life getting what we cannot keep. It is the height of stupidity to sacrifice eternity for the passing joys of time. How silly!

We have been warned. God has spoken plainly. Are we listening? How can we remain oblivious? Our money will be worth nothing in the Judgment.

Let us give today like we trust God for tomorrow.

DO NOT WORRY

Since we cannot serve two masters, Jesus directed us to choose God. He loves us. And He will care for us. “*I tell you,*” the Lord said, “*do not worry,*” Matthew 6:25.

. The Nature Of Worry. Fretting is useless. It does not add even a millisecond to our life, Matthew 6:27. There is no reason to be anxious. God is aware of our needs. He takes care of the birds. They do not sow or reap or store in barns. Yet they have plenty to eat! Are we not more valuable than they? Matthew 6:26. And is not life more than food? So allow the Almighty to do what He promised. Then we can be free to seek His kingdom, Matthew 6:33. Each day already has enough trouble of its own, Matthew 6:34.

. The Cure For Worry. No one thinks that worry is worth it. But few stop “wringing their hands.” So how do we quit being anxious? Christ suggested opening our eyes. Observe the flowers. They neither toil nor spin. And they do not fret. God made them blossom where they are. And did He not make us to relax and enjoy life? Absolutely! Allow the sunshine of His providence to supply our needs. The flowers do not worry. Why should we! They flourish. And so can I. Faith is the antidote to anxiety.

If we worry about tomorrow, how can we enjoy today? We are not strong enough to carry the burdens of the past, the present and the future. So cast your cares on Him, 1 Peter 5:7. Worry brings misery. Trust reaps happiness.

Let us stop worrying about getting and be glad in giving.

MARCH ON, O LORD, MARCH ON !

Life is a victory parade. Each day we move in confidence toward our eternal home. It is just around the corner. The pearly gates are open to receive the soldiers of the cross.

“Stay the course, O Lord, stay the course!” We follow close behind. In fields of conflict we raise our banner high. Your strength makes us strong. Your grace becomes our song.

“Walk on, O Lord, walk on!” We bravely face the foe with sword and shield. Our King will lead the charge. And, into the fray, His troops will advance with shouts of victory sure. It is only a matter of time.

“March on, O Lord, march on!” We follow unafraid. Your face is firm. The war was won before the battle was begun. We fight because You—our God—have overcome. The crown is ours when the conflict is won. We do not surrender because the foe is on the run.

The victory does not lie in human hosts,
Nor in charging armies with carnal boasts.
Only God can save from death and shame,
Those who fear and trust His name.

There is no reason to hesitate, no point in quitting. The Commander in Chief of heaven asks us to do our best. We gladly spare no pain to salute His call. And no want will he know who gives his all.

Let us show God that in our giving we are really on His side.

DO NOT GO UNTIL I BRING A GIFT

The Midianites had invaded Israel. The children of God were devastated. An angel of the Lord told Gideon to save His people. Gideon hesitated. But he asked the Lord to “*wait until he returned with an offering,*” Judges 6:18.

. Gideon Needed To Give. When Gideon was asked to do a heroic deed, this humble servant wanted to give. His gift was a token of gratitude. He thanked the Almighty for visiting him and for recruiting him. He acknowledged the goodness of heaven and the joy of being counted worthy to serve. And we need to give for the very same reasons.

. The Lord Decided To Wait. God waited for Gideon to give. And He waits for us to make our contribution. What is seen as a routine gesture can become a transforming moment. What is considered a means of balancing the church budget is really an opportunity to worship the Lord. And, when we do, we will find ourselves in the grip of God.

In recognizing our responsibility to keep His commands, we catch a glimpse of a nobler life. He gradually pulls us out of our selfish shell and into the bliss of serving Him. Our self centeredness is turned into gratitude. We focus on heaven. The temporary satisfaction of going to church becomes a permanent desire to honor God.

It all starts with God waiting for us to give. And, when we do, He can turn it unto a lifetime of grateful service.

Let us give because the Almighty is waiting.

ALL SHE HAD

When the contribution is collected, Christians want to give an appropriate amount. How should that be measured?

In the story of the widow's offering, Jesus answers the "how much" question, Mark 12:41-44.

. What Is Acceptable? The Lord observed the rich and the poor giving their money. The actual amount of the gifts was immaterial. The acceptableness of the donations was based on the attitude of each contributor. In other words, the copper coins of the widow were appreciated more than the gold coins of the wealthy.

. What Was Complemented? The value of our gifts is determined by the amount that we possess (and the reason for our giving). The widow "*out of her poverty*" gave "*all she had.*" God notices what we give and what we keep. In the story of the widow, the wealthy donated to secure a good opinion among men. But showy acts of charity are a fraud.

People are prone to criticize the widow. She should not have impoverished herself. After all, she was already poor. Yet, who among those who judged her would imitate her?

Our contribution is weighted on the scales of why we give as much as on the generosity of our giving. God looks for happy givers who freely donate their gifts to honor God and help others. Anything less is suspect.

Let us give generously with pure intentions from happy heart.

AS GOD WANTS YOU TO BE

Lang Shu became an elder in the church. He took an oath to “*shepherd the flock.*” He also promised “*not be greedy for money.*” For that is how God wanted him to be, 1 Peter 5:2.

All went well. Lang Shu served with distinction. The congregation grew. The faithful appreciated his service.

Then, during the summer of 1900, war broke out in China. Lang Shu (and the church) was caught in the middle. Military conflicts always devastate the local people.

Lang Shu was forced to serve in the army. He proved to be an able leader. After each victory, the soldiers looted the villages. Lang Shu joined in. The spoils of battle became his passion. He experienced wealth like never before.

The war ended. Lang Shu packed his “goodies” and went home. He was rich. He disdained his poor neighbors. He lived in sin. Alcohol disgraced his name. The church was embarrassed. Soon he was arrested and put in jail.

Prison was a wake-up call. In the damp darkness of his cell he called out to God to have mercy on his soul. Upon his release, he apologized to the congregation and rededicated his life to the Lord.

He gave away all his booty of war. Lang Shu lived a simple life, avoided greed, and died a respected man.

Let us live as God wants us to give.

A GIFT FROM GOD

There is no way getting around it. We depend on heaven. When we obtain possessions, when we get a measure of wealth, when we accept our lot, and enjoy our work, *"this is a gift of God,"* Ecclesiastes 5:19.

There is a vast difference between desiring and rejoicing in the things of this world. Those who desire wealth keep it for themselves. Those who rejoice in wealth use it prudently—thanking the Father and sharing it with their fellowman.

. Good Comes From God. The world belongs to the Almighty. Everything in it is His. And, in the creative wisdom of heaven, He gives us power to acquire, to use, and to enjoy His gifts. All is from Him.

. Enjoy What God Gives. Money is not given to tempt us. It is sent to gladden our hearts and enrich our lives. For, with His riches, the Lord sends benevolent impulses. We are happiest when we share with others.

. Acknowledge What He Does. Even the simplest things on earth can be used to glorify His name. The hearts of the grateful should express their thanks for His goodness. For, beyond all doubt, God is generous.

If we have little, we should be content. If we have much, we should enjoy it without asking for more. Restraint is of God. He keeps us occupied with what we have, Ecclesiastes 5:20.

Let us acknowledge His gifts as we give today.

WHEN THE GOSPEL CLASHES WITH OUR INCOME

The apostle Paul spoke out against the worship of idols. The craftsmen who made the idols feared their income would suffer, Acts 19:27. An “uproar” ensued, Acts 19:29a.

When the Gospel meets the forces of idolatry, one of them must step aside. Throughout history, the faithful have stood their ground.

In Ephesus, convincing signs of divine power accompanied the Good News, Acts 19:11,12. Several were baptized, Acts 19:5-7. “*The name of Jesus was held in high honor,*” Acts 19:17. The message spread far and wide, Acts 19:8-10.

But, when the opposition saw the power of Gospel, they pushed back. They made up lies. They resisted the truth.

The motive behind the unrest was the loss of money. Incomes were in jeopardy. Nothing causes sinners to flee quicker than a perceived attack on their pocketbook. Self-interest trumps God-interest.

However, those who put the Lord first will be blessed. For “*godliness with contentment is great gain,*” 1 Timothy 6:6.

There has always been a struggle between the desire for money and the love of God. The battle is not over until a decision is made.

Let us make sure God gets the victory.

THE BLESSING OF THE LORD

Our blessings come from heaven. They are not obtained by luck or chance. They do not come exclusively from our effort. Our wealth is a gift from God, Ecclesiastes 5:19.

. Wealth Comes From Human Effort. Certainly we have a part in earning our paycheck. For, if we do not work, we do not eat, II Thessalonians 3:10. “*Diligent hands bring wealth,*” Proverbs 10:4. Yet riches are not solely the enterprise of the hard worker. For, it is the blessing of the Lord that provides our needs, Proverbs 10:22a.

. Wealth Comes From Divine Enrichment. God has a hand in our earning a living. He blesses our effort. He rewards our industry. He helps us to eat and drink and find satisfaction in our labor, Ecclesiastes 2:24. The Lord is with us every step of the way. And, best of all, He does not add “trouble” to our earnings, Proverbs 10:22b.

A man was shipwrecked on a deserted island. A local tribe rescued him. The tribe made him their king. He soon learned his kingship only lasted for a year. After that time he would be returned to the island to die.

So the man put the people to work. They built him a home. They planted a garden. And, when his year was completed, he went to live in luxury on the island.

We are that king. We should be preparing for the next life.

Let us use His blessings wisely.

RICH TOWARD GOD

Jesus warns us not to keep all of our wealth to ourselves. For there will be a day of reckoning. Hence, we should be “*rich toward God*,” Luke 12:21. What does that mean?

. We Should Be Rich In Spiritual Thoughts. If He rarely crosses our mind, is that not a sign of spiritual poverty? The more we revere His word the richer we are toward Him.

. We Should Be Rich In Divine Qualities. We can never be God but we can copy some of His characteristics. We can “*participate in His divine nature*,” II Peter 1:4. When we are empowered by His Spirit, we share in His qualities.

. We Should Be Rich In God Himself. We can enjoy His favor. We can be friends. We can live in His presence. This is not church talk. This is real truth. We cannot be rich toward Him unless He occupies every corner of our life.

There are many levels of wealth in the Lord. For instance, we can be destitute—absolutely devoid of any godliness. Or we may sample His goodness (though not plunge deep into His grace). But we should abide in Him, bear fruit for Him, and surrender completely to Him, John 15:8.

It is our choice. How deep are we willing to go? How rich are we willing to be? As for me, I am all in. He is mine and I am His. Every day we walk and talk as good friends should and do!

Let us show in the collection how rich we are toward God.

MEASURING THE SINCERITY OF OUR LOVE

Among Gentiles, fundraisers for the needy were all but unknown. Yet Paul urged the Corinthians to do the unfamiliar. He was careful not to command but to encourage. He wanted “*to test the sincerity*” of their love, II Corinthians 8:8. They had said they would give to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Now it was time to keep their promise.

. Is Our Giving A Genuine Love For Christ? We are aware of the power of love. And we have seen its unrivaled motivation. Songs in our hymnbook mention it. And history records the sacrifices of the fully dedicated. A sincere love motivates an unparalleled giving.

. Is Our Giving A Pretended Love Of Christ? Jesus is absent. Our contribution is not motivated by His bodily presence. Do we permit competing attractions to take His place? The rich young ruler did. If the sincerity of our love is measured, will we be embarrassed by the outcome?

All of us are to some degree religious. That is why we are here. But how deep is our religion? We are part of a so-called “Christian” country. We were baptized. We attend worship. But is our religion satisfactory to the Lord?

Can God depend on us? Do we pass the test? Or is our religion merely an association with religious people. God knows. And, likely, we do, too. Such an association is good. But a deep relationship with Christ is best.

Let a genuine love for Him motivate our giving.

MISFORTUNES OF THE WEALTHY

God has blessed us abundantly. We have everything we need (though not everything we want). But do we enjoy our possessions? cf. Ecclesiastes 6:2.

. A Sad Experience. The image of those who work hard and gain much is quite familiar. The misfortune of such success is also quite familiar. Many people possess the means for happiness yet they are not happy. Riches become a useless mockery of affluence. What is possessed does not seem worth possessing. Since we have so much, why do we continually want more?

. A Common Condition. The sorrow of having much is the predicament of many Christians. Contentment escapes them. Enough never seems to be enough. The reason for gaining wealth is to glorify God. It is an empty celebration when the successful have no one with whom to celebrate their good fortune. In other words, the rich frequently remain poor!

Two lessons are embedded in this discussion. (1) Wealth does not make us happy. If we live to ourselves, we will die alone. We can be rich without being wealthy.

And (2) we seek satisfaction where satisfaction is not found. Lasting enjoyment does not come from the stuff of this world. If we receive wealth, we should share it with God and others. The selfish do not have many friends.

Let us not experience the misfortune of the wealthy.

DISHONESTY IN BUSINESS

God said, *“Do not use deceitful standards when measuring length, weight, or quantity,”* Leviticus 19:35.

Few people think of robbing a bank or counterfeiting money. Yet they often cheat others.

The Lord hates such behavior. It erodes the sense of fairness. It damages trust and abandons morality. The Almighty *“detests”* the dishonest, Deuteronomy 25:13-16.

There are laws against such behavior. And there should be. But illicit transactions of every form and kind abound. They have become the expected practice in many occupations. And, sadly, these so called “tricks of the trade” are defended.

. We Need Rules Of Honesty. Society suffers when lies are allowed. Unfortunate consequences result. They should not be permitted. We ought to support upright businesses. The Almighty does!

. We Should Expect Honesty. Christians are to be trustworthy. It should be our trademark. What is more disappointing than the deceptions of a church member? God is embarrassed. The community of faith is disgraced.

The wise do what is *“right, just, and fair,”* Proverbs 1:3. But those who are *“dishonest in little things will be dishonest in big things,”* Luke 16:10.

Let us give in a manner that does not cheat God.

YOU HAVE ALL YOU NEED

It is good to be satisfied with what we have. But it is not good to be arrogant about it. There were some in Corinth who were proud of their accomplishments. Paul spoke plainly to them about their attitude.

. Who Made You Different? If, according to human standards, we appear better off than others, who made us so? I Corinthians 4:7a. Was it not God? Who makes us better than the drunk, the felon, or the unbeliever? *“By the grace of God we are who we are?”* I Corinthians 15:10.

. What Do You Do More Than Others? Paul compared his struggles with those of the arrogant. He felt God had put him at the end of the procession like men condemned to die in the arena, I Corinthians 4:9; cf. II Corinthians 11:21b-28. Why, then, should we be boastful?

Like Christ, those who live the surrendered life, will be despised and rejected. How grand is that? Where is there room for pride? The high-minded should reconsider their attitude. God gives grace to the humble.

Indeed, *“God opposes the proud,”* I Peter 5:5b. We already have all we need. Why mess with the Master in heaven? Those in Corinth were told to rethink their position. And so should we (before it is too late)!

Let us be satisfied with what we have and act accordingly.

GOD DOES NOT FAVOR THE RICH

The Lord loves the poor as much as He loves the wealthy, Job 34:19. Both are *“the work of His hands,”* Proverbs 22:2. The status and power of the rich means nothing to Him. Everyone is His servant. He differentiates between them solely on the basis of their submission to His will.

. God Is Fair. The Almighty could favor the rich. But He does not. His grace will not allow Him to do so. He cares for everyone He created. Though many of us give Him little respect, He still respects us. He treats us fairly. He is impartial, equitable, and unbiased. It is impossible for God to be otherwise. He does not have favorites, Acts 10:34.

. God Is Good. Life may not seem fair. Yet who can charge the Lord with injustice? He does not do wrong. He repays us according to our deeds. The fault lies at our door, Job 34:10-12. Indeed, all the mischief in the world is due to human sin. God is good. He always does what is right. We are safe in His hands. Blessed is the man who puts his trust in Jehovah!

A mother who had three kids was asked: *“Do you love all your children?” “Yes. Of course I do!” “Do you love them equally?” “No! When one is confused, I give him more attention. When one is sick, I give him special care. When one disobeys, I shower him with extra kindness.”*

Is that not how God loves us?

Let us give like He gives to us.

SEEK THE GOOD OF OTHERS

When an unbelieving neighbor is in need, what should a Christian do? Paul said, “*Nobody should seek his own good but the good of others,*” I Corinthians 10:24.

. His Words Were A Caution. We should not seek our own good. Yet, is not “our good” a natural reaction? Society approves it. Common sense expects it. For, if we do not care for ourselves, who will? Indeed, we ought to provide for our own necessities (without neglecting the needs of others).

. His Words Were A General Rule. Let everyone seek his neighbor’s good. Whatever our status, we are obligated to deny self and help others. There is plenty to do. The sinner needs the Gospel. The sad should be consoled. The hungry should be fed. And those in danger need protection.

. His Words Were A Command. Paul spoke to the followers of Christ. He issued a distinctly Christian idea. Jesus died for us. Should we not sacrifice for our neighbor? Selfishness is not acceptable. His life was a life of “*doing good*.” How can we be His unless we act like Him?

Must we be our brother’s keeper? In the Garden of Eden, Cain did not think so. And how did that turn out? This is a dog eat dog world because everyone is focused on himself. Life becomes what we make it. If everyone sought the good of others, would anyone be destitute? That kind of world should begin right here, right now, Romans 15:2.

Let us give like we were seeking the good of others.

DO NOT BE OVERAWED BY THE RICH

It is common to envy the wealthy. They enjoy life. They have plenty to eat. They live in comfort. But “*despite their prosperity, they will die,*” Psalm 49:12. Therefore, do not be “*overawed*” by them, Psalm 49:16.

Who was speaking? Who should listen? What is the message?

. The Author. The writer had “*wisdom,*” Psalm 49:3. He spoke to “*all who lived in this world,*” Psalm 49:1. What he knew he freely passed on to all who would listen. He wished to reveal a mystery, to strip falsehood of its disguise. Such a one certainly had a right to speak.

. The Audience. The writer calls for everyone to pay attention. Without listeners, speech is unless. However, when words of wisdom are heard, the mind can be informed, the conscience awakened, and the emotions stirred. The rich and the poor would do well to take heed.

. The Message. The wicked may become rich. They may use their wealth to oppress others. God may leave them to their unholy schemes. But time will level the playing field. Their prosperity will not save them in the end, Psalm 46:7-9. How, then, will they redeem themselves from the grave?

Consequently, there is no reason to be overawed by the wealthy. Trust in God. Money is a fool’s paradise.

Let us give like we do not intend to get rich.

THE FAITHFUL

Faithful people are few and far between, Ecclesiastes 7:28. Most folks are intent on getting rich, Proverbs 28:20. And, in the process, they fall victim to dishonest schemes. But the faithful will be blessed. Why?

- . The Faithful Are True To Themselves. They have convictions. Momentary joy does not alter their action.

- . The Faithful Are True To God. They are loyal to their Maker. They obey Him regardless of the circumstances.

- . The Faithful Are True To Their Friends. They keep their pledges. They help when needed. They can be counted on.

- . The Faithful Keep Their Promises. Even when their vows cause them hurt, they do not break their word.

- . The Faithful Always Do Right. In public or in private, seen or unseen, the godly remain the same.

God notices. He blesses His faithful servants. Their fidelity is a reward in itself. Though it does not usually bring worldly wealth, it gives peace. It results in a well-deserved respect. The faithful have riches of another kind—where moth, rust, and thieves cannot take it away.

Best of all, the faithful will hear the sweetest words of all: “*Well done good and faithful servant,*” Matthew 25:21.

Let us be faithful—in season and out of season—in our giving.

BEGGING FOR MONEY

Paul worked to supply his needs, 1 Thessalonians 2:9. But, it seems, he required additional help that the Philippians gladly gave him, Philippians 4:17a.

. Their Gifts. The apostle did not seek alms. Still the sympathy of the saints was much appreciated. It was his greatest comfort (beyond the presence of Christ). It proved his labor was not in vain. It was a double blessing: the Philippians gained the joy of giving and Paul gained the joy of receiving. They gave “*again and again*,” Philippians 4:16. They did not grow weary in “*doing good*.” They shared without being asked.

. His Gratitude. Paul did not beg for their kindness. He was pleased not for his sake but for their sake. Their generosity was “*accredited to their account*” in heaven, Philippians 4:17b. Paul was content with his circumstances. And we should be, too. Likely, we have some growing to do. The apostle had a “*peace that passed all understanding*,” Philippians 4:7. Is that not better than money?

. The Outcome. Their gifts were “*pleasing to God*,” Philippians 4:18c. Likewise, our contributions are sacred—a sacrifice on the altar of the Lord. The Philippians had given in the spirit of worship. God was glorified. Their gifts were acceptable. The Almighty was pleased. Something so simple and so routine became something so special. The same is true in the twentieth-first century.

Let us give an acceptable offering that pleases God.

INVITE THE POOR

Jesus attended a feast at the house of a prominent Pharisee, Luke 14:1. The host had invited his well-to-do friends.

It was common then (as it is now) to invite those who will likely return the favor. How did the Lord react?

. He Corrected A Frequent Flaw. Christ did not condemn having people over for dinner. He did, however, comment on the tendency of having those who could repay the favor at a later date. This excluded the poor and spent valuable resources on the rich (who did not need it), Luke 14:12.

. He Supported A Noble Alternative. Social occasions should be used to help the needy. “*When you have a banquet,*” Jesus said, “*invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed,*” Luke 14:13,14a. One-way (or disinterested) benevolence enriches the giver and the receiver.

. He Promised A Handsome Reward. Though a host should not invite others to dinner to gain a prize, helping the poor has its compensation. The generous will be “*repaid*” in the resurrection, Luke 14:14b. God gives back to those who pay forward! He sees. He knows. He remembers.

There are those who make themselves rich yet have nothing. There are those who make themselves poor but have great riches, Proverbs 13:7. Of the two, which are we?

Let us give so that we can receive.

THE GIFT OF GOD

Jesus asked for a drink of water, John 4:7. The woman was surprised. He was a Jew. She was a Samaritan.

But “*if she had known the gift of God,*” she would have been the one asking for a drink, John 4:10. The words “*if you had known*” turned the conversation away from physical thirst and toward spiritual satisfaction.

. What We Fail To See. Because we are so wrapped up in this world, we fail to see the full implications of Christ. He is the “*indescribable gift of God,*” II Corinthians 9:15. We often fail to look beyond the obvious. We do not see the glory nor behold the infinite power of our Lord.

. What We Fail To Ask. If the woman had known who He was, she would have asked Him for “*living water.*” The reason for not being blessed by Him today is an unawareness of who He is. People do not think of Him as their Savior. He is just another religious fanatic.

. What We Fail To Enjoy. If only the Samaritan woman had asked. But she did not. If only people would ask. But they do not. Salvation has been purchased. It is ours for the taking. Why do folks hesitate? A multitude of blessings are unclaimed. The gift of God must be unwrapped.

God gave first. Now it is our turn.

Let us accept His gift and give like we are thankful.

THE STINGY PERSON

Misers are tight-fisted. Literally, the Hebrew says, they have “*an evil eye*,” Proverbs 28:22a. They want to get rich quick and do not worry about who gets hurt in the process. They practice “*fraud*,” Proverbs 20:17, in order to get “*ill-gotten treasures*,” Proverbs 10:2.

The stingy appear “*unaware that poverty awaits them*,” Proverbs 28:22b. Others to treat the stingy as the stingy treats them. Misers have many enemies. Their riches are “*a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare*,” Proverbs 21:6. What good is money on the Judgment Day? Proverbs 11:4.

. Wealth Is Temporary. It is good to have a nice home, ample education, and sufficient food. It is good to relieve human need and support the cause of God. But the Christian gives careful thought to how his money was earned, how it is spent, and how long it will last. An unrighteous fortune does not make a man righteous. The stingy will keep his money. The fool will squander it. But the believer will share it.

. Giving Is Permanent. A faithful steward will honor God and help those in need. “*He will be richly blessed*.” But “*one who is eager to get rich will be punished*,” Proverbs 28:20. “*For people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires*,” I Timothy 6:9. Getting rich is not a good preparation for a peaceful end or a glorious future.

Let us be generous with God and our fellowman.

PARADOX OF CHRISTIANITY

Life in the kingdom is full of contradictions. Every believer involved in the cause of Christ feels the conflict. We minister faithfully yet are called unconcerned. We complement yet are criticized. We are genuine though regarded as imposters, known yet treated as unknown, accused yet not guilty.

What a life! We are good though considered bad, innocent though treated as condemned, have nothing but possess everything, poor yet make many rich, II Corinthians 6:8-10. We are misunderstood though we understand. We trust God yet appear to be abandoned by Him. What we do seems silly (but will make sense when the Lord returns).

The world we are trying to save wonders: "what does the Gospel do for those who believe?" Christians have a ready answer. In spite of all the appearances to the contrary, we rejoice. And our "*hope will not disappoint us*," Romans 5:5. Since our faith rests in Jesus, we stand unmoved in the face of persistent paradoxes.

We give because we believe in the cause. We sacrifice convinced it is worth it. Yes! We do not have much but we make others rich. Indeed, in terms of this world, "*we are poor yet we possess all things*."

Let us live the paradox: having little we give our all.

ENJOY YOUR MONEY

Money is an essential part of life. There is nothing wrong with it—though the Lord warns us about its potential dangers.

. It Can Be A Chronic Obsession. “Whoever *loves money is never satisfied with his income*,” Ecclesiastes 5:10. The more we get the more we want. This endless appetite becomes an addiction. It can lead us to wander away from the Lord, 1 Timothy 6:10. Is not such a craving pointless?

. It Makes Fair Weather Buddies. Wealth attracts “friends” like a magnet draws iron. “*As goods increase, so do those who consume them*,” Ecclesiastes 5:11. The more we possess the more others will want to enjoy our possessions. They want to make our property their property. Why gather so much that we have to spend our time protecting it?

. It Leads To Over Indulgence. “*Wealth is often hoarded to the harm of its owner*,” Ecclesiastes 5:13. This may refer to excessive spending on our selves. One of the ironies of affluence is suffering diseases the poor do not have: too much weight and high cholesterol. What is the use of being restricted from enjoying what we own?

It is called a “*grievous evil*,” Ecclesiastes 5:13,16. It is a sad tragedy, a waste of time and energy. Our money should be enjoyed (in moderation). It is a gift from the Lord, Ecclesiastes 5:19.

Let us find joy in receiving and sharing what God has given us.

GIFTS

Peter encourages Christians to use their gifts *“to serve others.”* Every gift is from God. The Lord is counting on us to use them for the good of all.

. Everyone Has A Gift. *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received,” I Peter 4:10a.* No one is excluded. The church depends on every member doing his part for the good of the whole. Some gifts are more public, more spectacular than others. But no gift is better than the rest.

. Everyone Is A Steward. We are to *“faithfully administer”* our gifts, I Peter 4:10b. Each congregation has within her membership what is needed to be a light in this dark world. The gifts remain His. They are merely on loan. He wants us to employ them to rescue the lost and encourage the saved.

The tools in a workshop held a meeting. The hammer presided. Several tools suggested he be removed because he made too much noise. The screwdriver was also told to go because he just went around and around. And the plane was disqualified because his work was shallow. He had no depth. The sandpaper was also the excused because he was so rough—rubbing people the wrong way!

Then the Carpenter of Nazareth walked in. He put on His apron. He was making a pulpit for someone to preach the Good News. He used the hammer, screwdriver, plane, and sandpaper. They were all important. None was excluded.

Let each of us do our part for the sake of others.

GIVING LIKE GOD

Shortly after selecting the twelve, Jesus told them to “*give*,” Luke 6:38a. For, He said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*”

. What Can We Give? We have much that we can offer. Our money, our time, our food and our shelter can be shared. We can give our sympathy, our affection, and our advice. We have a lot to donate.

. To Whom We Should Give? Our relatives, our fellow Christians, and our neighbors can be recipients of our charity. People with physical and spiritual needs—whether at home or abroad—have a claim on our kindness.

. Why Should We Give? Giving reflects the heart of God. It is Christ-like to do for others. We are heroic when we give in proportion to our ability to help. It makes people happy when our benevolence is distributed among the needy.

. What Will We Receive? Our kindness will be returned to us in measures “*pressed down, shaken together, and running over*,” Luke 6:38b. We receive gratitude, thanks, and appreciation. In short, we get far more than we give.

There are many ways to be benevolent. We can share with regret. We can give only when asked. We can happily give without knowing our beneficiaries. Or we can give until the needy escape their situation. What kind of a giver are we?

Let us give like God gives.

THE LORD PROVIDES

A young man—home on furlough from the mission field—was invited to speak at a small church. He began his sermon with a story. *“Over a decade ago I was raising funds to go to Argentina,”* he said. *“My efforts had not produced much fruit.”* The economy was suffering from double-digit inflation. *“I became discouraged.”*

Then an elderly man handed me a silver dollar. *“I want to encourage you,”* the old man said. *“I know my dollar will not get you very far. But keep it in your pocket and remember: If anyone serves, he should do so with the strength God supplies,”* 1 Peter 4:11.

The young man kept the silver dollar. The fund raising was a trying experience. But that coin kept him going. He finally got his support. He went overseas. He planted forty-two village congregations. Every day that silver dollar reminded him that he was not alone. The missionary was profoundly grateful for the advice of that old man.

When the worship service ended, a ninety-eight year old codger hobbled up to the young missionary. He was the one who had given him the silver dollar. *“Thanks for your mission work,”* he said. *“God always gives us what we need.”*

Indeed, the work of the Lord is never stymied by the lack of money but by the lack of faith in those who are doing His work. When we are ready, God will provide.

We can trust the Lord to do His part.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO GET ?

Since it was hard for a rich man to enter heaven, Peter wondered what the poor disciples would get, Matthew 19:27. Jesus responded by laying down three principles regarding the Judgment Day.

1. We Will Share The Victory With Christ. In this world, soldiers that win the battle rarely get the accolades. They are often forgotten. That is not so with our Lord. For, he who bears a cross will wear a crown, Matthew 19:28.

2. We Will Get More Than We Give. In many places, churches are few and far between. If we leave our brothers and sisters in Christ, to work where there are no Christians, God will honor our sacrifice, Matthew 19:29.

3. We Will Be Surprised In The End. The judgment of God will be different from the judgment of man. Eternity will redress the injustices of time. Those who were exalted on earth will be humbled in heaven, Matthew 19:30.

A millionaire came to the pearly gates. A guide took him on a tour of heaven. Eventually they came to a humble cottage among small, unpretentious houses. *"This is your eternal home,"* the guide said. *"But, on earth I lived in a mansion,"* the rich man replied. *"Why is my home here so small?"* *"We built your heavenly home out of the materials you sent us. We could have built a palace but you did not lay up enough treasures in heaven!"*

Let us remember we always get what we give.

THANK YOU FOR GIVING

A Christian, in a foreign country, was standing beside a atheist. The atheist asked the believer, *"What will you do when you get to heaven?" "I will walk the golden streets until I find Jesus and thank Him for saving my soul!"*

"Then what will you do?" "I will look until I find the missionaries who came to my country. Then I will thank them for their part in my salvation."

"Fine," the atheist sighed. "Then what will you do?" "I will search the highways of heaven until I find the families who gave their money to send the missionaries to preach."

The atheist began to realize he was not saved. He did not look forward to eternity. He had no hope. No expectation. No one to thank! He was alone.

Will there be people in heaven who will thank us for helping them get there? Or will we just stand around and listen to others receive words of gratitude?

I can think of no greater joy than hearing "thank you" from others for my part in helping them get to the celestial city. Whether I went or helped others go, I will hear the joy of those who got there because I had a part in their salvation.

That will not happen unless I contribute to the cause.

Let us be a part in saving the soul of someone today.

THE QUESTION

Jesus has done so much for us. What have we done for Him? The grace of God is not a one-way street. We do for Him because He did for us. Otherwise selfishness takes over.

Love will not ignore a kindness received. It will give in return. To withhold from the giver is to despise his gift. To despise the gift is to snub the giver.

Christ gave His life for us. He offered His body and shed His blood. What have we done for Him? *"I have given you everything; what have you given to Me?"* He wonders.

He left His home in heaven. He abandoned His glorious throne on high. He walked this lowly earth, carried that cruel cross for all of us. *"I did it for you; what have you done for Me?"* He asks.

He was despised and rejected. He took our sorrow and bore our grief. *"I suffered your pain to rescue your soul; what have you suffered for Me?"* He pleads.

He purchased salvation full and free. His pardon and peace He promised to everyone. *"I brought rich gifts to you; what have you brought to Me?"* He wants to know.

Our gift today is the measure of our love for what He did for us long ago.

Let us give like He gave.

SWALLOWING ELEHANTS AND FILTERING FLEAS

The Pharisees were careful to keep little details but often ignored big issues. For example, they washed their hands but did not bother to clean their hearts. They tithed backyard herbs but neglected “*justice, mercy, and faithfulness.*” They should have done both, Matthew 23:23.

The Lord is concerned about our attending to trifles and paying no attention to truth. For instance, we strive for brevity in the communion so that worship will not take more than an hour. “*We strain out a gnat but swallow the camel,*” Matthew 23:24.

. Omitting The Weighty Matters. Christians must keep the commands. Yet, in the process, we often lay down rules regarding how, when, or where that is done. And, these rules become more important than the commands of the Almighty. The regulations of man checkmate the will of God.

. Keeping The Little Details. Humans tend to put their mandates ahead of the Scripture. For example, a prayer must be concluded with the word “*Amen*” or it is not a viable prayer. And we must base our giving on pre-tax earnings instead of post-tax money in order to give properly.

Must not the things of God come before the things of man? cf. Matthew 16:23. Only when we keep the greater matters can we consider the lesser ones. There can be generosity without rules but not rules forbidding generosity.

Let our contribution keep the weightier matters.

HE GAVE HIMSELF

White Feather was a Pima Indian warrior. His father was killed by an Apache when White Feather was sixteen years old. The young man vowed to get even some day.

That day came when he was twenty-two years of age. He organized a war party. He asked his fellow braves to follow him into Apache country. He led the warriors deep into enemy territory. They were armed for battle.

The Pima braves caught an Apache alone in an open prairie. White Feather fought and killed his enemy. He returned home, went through purification rites, but still felt guilty.

During his turmoil, White Feather visited a little adobe church. Charles Cook, a missionary, had worked among the Pima for fifteen years. No one had responded. But, on the day White Feather attended, Cook preached about forgiveness. *"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy," Proverbs 28:13.*

White Feather was baptized. Peace flooded his soul. He remained true to the faith until his death at eighty-two years old. *"The greatest thing that ever happened to me,"* he said, *"was the forgiveness of God."* For *"a man tormented by guilt will be a fugitive till death," Proverbs 28:17.* White Feather became chief of the Pima tribe. He led the whole tribe to accept the Lord. He died a very prosperous man.

Let us give so that we may prosper.

THE RICH

“God has chosen the poor in the eyes of this world to be rich in faith,” James 2:5. Or, as Paul wrote, “Not many of us were wise by human standards; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things . . . so that no one may boast,” I Corinthians 1:26-29.

The world practices social distinctions that honor some and dishonor others. The Lord does not operate that way. Everyone is precious in His sight. The Christian faith is a brotherhood. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

Every culture in the world draws lines between people. Often, though not always, those lines are determined by wealth. Many churches have favored the rich—given them seats of honor, preferred their opinions, and appointed them elders (when they were not qualified).

The Bible does not support such “*favoritism*,” James 2:1. God is not a respecter of persons. Since He is not, why should we be? James 2:2-4. This is an insult to those in poverty, an affront that heaven condemns. For do not the wealthy exploit those who are poor? James 2:7,8.

The upper classes crucified Christ. They disgraced His name and persecuted His church. To show deference to the rich, defies common sense. And it is disloyal to the Lord.

Let us be rich in faith and act accordingly.

I GIVE TITHES

Jesus spoke to those *“who were confident in their righteousness and looked down on everyone else,”* Luke 18:9. They boasted saying, *“We fast twice a week and give a tenth of all we get,”* Luke 18:12.

Interestingly, they took pride in what the Law of Moses did not require. The Jews were to fast once a year, Leviticus 16:29. And they were to tithe only their corn, new wine, oil, and firstborn animals, Deuteronomy 14:23.

. Arrogance Is Wrong. When we compare ourselves with others, God is not being worshipped. We have a zeal that lacks knowledge. Pride erodes spirituality. God becomes an after-thought. Self takes center stage. How dare we think we are better than others! God is not pleased. *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,”* Luke 18:14c.

. Humility Is Right. Those who are conscious of the Lord will forget themselves. The proud are blind to the presence of the Almighty while the Christian bows down. The contrast is obvious. There is no righteousness until there is unworthiness. And *“he who humbles himself will be exalted,”* Luke 18:14d.

Do we give more than others? If we do, are we better than they? The branches that bear the most fruit always hang the lowest.

Let us approach the collection with a humble heart.

THE RIGHT WAY TO GIVE

One of the last things David did was take up a collection to build the temple. Three words were embedded in that momentous event. These three words describe how the people of God should support the work of the Lord.

1. Willingly. The people gave, I Chronicles 29:6. They were not forced. They gladly submitted to the Almighty. The Israelites joyfully obeyed the request for funds. The people could not wait to contribute. They were “*willing*” to serve.

2. Wholeheartedly. The people of God gave from the heart, I Chronicles 29:9. The underlying idea refers to a freewill offering. Gifts were given without regret. The people happily brought their possessions. God is pleased with happy givers, II Corinthians 9:7.

3. Honestly. The Israelites gave with “*honest intent*,” I Chronicles 29:17. God had pleasure in their sincerity. Our heart must agree with our hand when contributing our money. The Lord knows our thoughts when we give. He grieves when we fake it. Pretended worship is hypocrisy.

It is far more pleasant to give when we want to instead of when we have to. Remembering that He gave first, that He owns all things, and that He will always provide for us, paves the way for a pleasant experience in laying up treasures in heaven.

Let our offering be willing, wholehearted, and honest.

THE POOR AND THE RICH

James began his letter with the words “*Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds,*” James 1:2. Poverty and wealth were among those trials.

The poor are exhausted by their labor. They barely have enough to survive. Each day is a struggle to keep their heads above water.

The rich face daily temptations. Their minds are distracted by the cares of protecting their wealth. They are in peril of losing their faith.

. Triumph Of The Poor. The brother “*in humble situations ought to take pride in his high position,*” James 1:9. He has the love and sympathy of Jesus. He is rich in God. His elder brother is a King. He is an heir of an eternal kingdom. Angels minister daily to his needs. When we realize all of that, is a brother of low degree really poor?

. Victory Of The Rich. The brother who is wealthy also has trials—though of a different sort. His abundant resources can become a source of pride. His trial is to be “*poor in spirit.*” He need not divest himself of his wealth. His trial is not in having money but in wisely using it. “*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial,*” James 1:12.

Obviously, everyone has difficulties. But the righteous ask not for “*poverty or riches,*” Proverbs 30:8.

Let us put God first regardless of our circumstances.

IS OUR OFFERING ACCEPTABLE ?

From the beginning, humans have fallen into two categories: those who believe in God and those who trust in themselves. The story of Cain and Abel is a case in point.

Both of them brought a sacrifice. *“By faith Abel made a better offering,”* Hebrew 11:4. He believed in God. Cain seemed to have *“a form of godliness but denied its power,”*

II Timothy 3:5. Obviously the attitude of the worshipper determined the value of his worship, Proverbs 15:8.

The same is true today. Woe to us, when we follow the way of Cain, cf. Jude 11. Cain got angry—not with himself, not with God, but at Abel. He covered up his mistake by blaming someone else.

Cain should have known better. We should, too. Nevertheless, we tend to rationalize. Cain did not offer the wrong thing. He offered the wrong way! He gave out of duty—not out of faith. Likely he gave because he had to—not because he wanted to.

Do we give to keep up a front, to go through the motions? Or do we give as a demonstration of our faith, as means of appreciating God? Actions speak louder than words. What are our actions saying?

It is devious to pretend. The destiny of our soul is at stake. We should give in faith.

Let us not rationalize but offer acceptable gifts.

CHRISTIAN TWINING

To twine is to twist together or encircle by coiling. Many plants are too weak to support themselves. They must twine around other plants (or objects) to grow properly.

There are more than thirty-five such species. Those who have studied these climbers tell us that their tips move slowly in circles. The pole bean is such a plant. When young, it may complete one circle a day. But, later, at a more mature stage, it can complete as many as eight spirals in twenty-four hours.

Most twining plants circle to the right. About thirty percent spiral to the left. But all of them must climb if they are to survive.

Christians are like twining plants. We must wrap ourselves around Christ if we want to thrive spiritually. *"Do not fear,"* God said, *"I am with you . . . I will uphold you,"* Isaiah 41:10; cf. Psalm 37:17. Our heart searches instinctively for divine support. Those who do not twine around their Savior are stunted, spiritually weak, and unfruitful. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit,"* John 15:5.

Are we depending on the Lord? Are we leaning on Him for support? We must if we expect to climb heavenward!

Let us give like we are twining with God.

REAL RICHES

Some in Laodicea boasted about acquiring wealth on their own, Revelation 3:17a. So these brethren were reminded of the real source of wealth.

. Their Condition. Though they were “*wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked*,” the Laodiceans did not seem to realize it, Revelation 3:17b. Are we in a same condition?

. His Advice. The Lord suggested they seek a proper remedy. They could only find “*all the hidden treasures*” of spiritual wisdom in the Lord.

. The Outcome. The threats of heaven were actually gracious promises in disguise. “*Those whom I love I discipline*,” He said, Revelation 3:19. The Lord was serious.

Jesus was begging them to reevaluate their lives. The Messiah pleaded with them to return, accept their chastising, make amends, and walk in the right path.

In effect, the Lord was asking them to stop depending on themselves. Surely, by now, we have learned we must lean on God. The core of our faith says we have been saved by grace through faith and not by anything we have done (lest we should boast), cf. Ephesians 2:8,9.

Our Savior waits for us to respond, Revelation 3:20.

Let us seek real riches where true wealth is found.

AS OUR HEARTS PROMPT US

There are many incentives for contributing money on Sunday. Some give to have a tax deduction. Others donate to satisfy the church budget. But the Scriptures suggest to give “*as the heart prompts*,” Exodus 25:2, as the “*heart moves*,” Exodus 35:21, or as the “*heart is willing to bring*,” II Chronicles 29:31. In other words, our giving should be a matter of the heart!

- . The Offering Clarified. Israel was building a house for God. It was considered an honor to have Him dwell among them. And, likewise, it is an honor to have the Lord dwell among us. The opportunity to assist heaven must not be undervalued.

- . The Collection Accepted. Every one should contribute on one condition! They must help “willingly” or “from the heart.” Gifts to God are like a sacrifice—an outward sign of an inward grace. If the grace is absent, the gift is empty.

- . The Response Expected. The people of Israel felt privileged. They knew what God had done for them. They were eager to show their gratitude. They gave “*more than enough*,” Exodus 36:6,7. Church debts and missionary beggars abound. Yet, the core issue in giving must be God.

We must give—but give for the proper reason. Only a willing heart can offer a happy gift.

Let us give what we have decided in our hearts to give.

SOMETHING FOR JESUS

Christ gave His all. He emptied Himself, suffered humiliation, and died for me. I dare not withhold any thing from Him. My soul rejoices. My offering I bring—something for Jesus!

In this holy moment, at His mercy seat, my feeble heart rests in faith. Help me to bear my cross, His wondrous love declare. And sing a song of praise—something for Jesus.

Give me a faithful heart like His. May each day see a new work begun, some deed of kindness done, some wanderer found and won—something for Jesus.

All that I am, His gifts freely received. Whether in joy or in grief, life is good because He ransomed me. Now it is my turn—something for Jesus.

Something for Him—who gave everything to me. Something for Jesus to show I appreciate His gift, something to honor His name. Something that says thanks for what He did and what He will do—something for Jesus!

Why should I wait? Why should I hesitate? He has done for me more than I will ever do for Him. He is my Lord and my Savior. The offering I bring is a token of my gratitude for His sacrifice—something for Jesus.

Let us give something that truly expresses our love for Him.

TAKE A RISK

The Jews were not known for being a seafaring nation. They dreaded the ocean. It was a thing of mystery and menace. However, during the reign of Solomon, for a brief time, Israel had a fleet of merchant ships, II Chronicles 8:17,18.

But joining the navy was regarded as a risk. If a person remained at home, there was little pain and no gain. Yet, if one dared to ply the open waters, he would see "*the wonders of the deep*," Psalm 107:23,24.

In other words, to win anything, we must risk something. And, likely, as it often turns out, the greater the risks, the greater the rewards.

Abraham was told to leave his country, his people, and go to a land where he had never been, Genesis 12:1. It sounded like a pipe dream. "*He did not know where he was going*," Hebrews 11:8. Surely, his friends thought it was an insane venture. He risked his reputation, his life, and his possessions. As his handful of years slipped away, he lived in a barren desert. Yet, he kept the faith. Like him, we must "*lose our life in order to find it*," Matthew 16:25.

We have the strongest reasons to risk everything: the example of Christ, the life of the apostles, and the sacrifice of the saints. We will win in proportion to what we lose. Christianity is not a dull, drab journey. Count on it!

Are we taking a risk in giving?

DOING OUR PART

God depends on us. We are accustomed to thinking of Him as omnipotent. And He is. But He relies on humans to cooperate with Him.

. We Must Do Our Part. Every harvest is a shared effort between heaven and earth. The Lord does not plant the seeds. He does not gather the crop.

Likewise, a convert is the product of divine and human effort. We proclaim the word. He melts the heart of the sinner.

. God Will Do His Part. There is no doubt the Almighty will keep His end of the bargain. And, certainly, we can do nothing without Him, John 15:5.

The Lord will receive what we offer. We rely of Him to use our gifts to keep moving His kingdom forward.

It is our responsibility to give ourselves to Him. He has already given Himself to us. What we do affects how He accomplishes His work.

“He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32. He made His move. Now it is our turn to make our move. He does His part. Will we do ours?

Let us do our part in giving to His cause.

OFFERINGS THAT PROVOKE GOD

It is a serious mistake to upset the Lord, to blatantly disobey the Almighty. Yet Israel did.

. God Gave Them Canaan. He promised them the land. And He kept His oath, Psalm 105:42a. They were to keep His precepts, Psalm 105:45a. But they failed to do so.

. Israel Rejected His Kindness. The people worshipped idols. They had the tabernacle. Yet Israel preferred idolatry. They provoked the Lord. They tested God, Psalm 106:14b.

Their actions were deliberate. They ignored what the Almighty said. The Jews did what they wanted to do.

. The People Revolted. They desecrated His commands, Ezekiel 20:13. Could they disobey and expect to be blessed? No! Thus, they became worthless, Jeremiah 2:5.

. God Was Disappointed. Despite the warnings of heaven, they did as they wanted. Can an Ethiopian change the color of his skin? Can a leopard erase his spots? Jeremiah 13:23.

Many of us want the crown without the cross. But, in order to be a Christian, we must know the discipline of Christ. For discipline is doing what we ought in spite of what we want.

Does our giving provoke God? It can! Are we following His dictates? We should!

Let us not offer what upsets the Lord.

OUR MONEY TALKS

The reason we are so touchy about our money is that we are so closely identified with it. Money represents our toil, talents, and time. We are hesitant to talk about giving because it means examining ourselves.

Yet, the Lord often spoke about it. Of His thirty-eight parables, fifteen dealt with money. One out of every six verses in Matthew, Mark and Luke mentions money.

The way we spend our paycheck provides a window into our heart. It indicates where our chief interests lie. Yes, our money talks! What is it saying?

Those who invest little in the work of the Lord, show little interest in heaven. We *“cannot serve both God and money.”*

A real estate agent was taking some clients through a lavish mansion. She expected them to be in awe of what they saw. Instead, one of them said, *“this is what makes dying difficult!”*

The IRS audited a couple that generously supported the work of God. After examining their cancelled checks, the IRS agent said, *“you must really believe in the Lord!”*

We are invested in what we support. *“For where our treasure is, there our hearts will be,” Matthew 6:21.* To many people, the greatest book is their checkbook. But prosperity is a blessing to be used not a deity to be worshipped.

Let us declare our faith with our offering today.

HONOR OF GOD

Near the close of the Old Testament, God told the priests to extinguish the altar fires and shut the temple doors. The Lord was not pleased with their worship, Malachi 1:10.

But how would the Almighty be honored? Who would esteem His name? Jehovah said, "*The nations* (that is, the Gentiles) *would glorify His name,*" Malachi 1:11.

. A New Group Of Worshipers. The Jews had mistakenly thought His honor was attached to the Ark of the Covenant, to the Tabernacle, and, later, the Temple. But, like Christ, He came to His own but His own did not receive Him, John 1:11. Therefore, as Malachi wrote, God expanded His body of worshippers to all the tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations.

. A New Offering Of Praise. The worship of the Gentiles was encouraged and accepted. The word of God was fulfilled. The Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob was invited. The alms and prayers of Cornelius were received. The praise of the Gentiles was heard. Everyone is welcome at the altar. God is continually worshipped, Hebrews 13:15.

We rejoice that His honor is proclaimed around the world. It is a perpetual celebration that echoes His greatness day and night without ceasing.

Our humble offerings are part of that constant symphony of honor. We give our money to glorify the God of gods.

Let us sacrifice in a way that magnifies His name.

FREEWILL OFFERINGS

Whatever the motivations might have been, all offerings in the Old Testament involved presenting a gift to God. The worshipper was to willingly bring his sacrifice.

. Grudging Gifts. Appeals are made, in all religions, for sacrifices to deity. The spirit in which these appeals are received varies. Sometimes the requests are met with scoffing. *“If God is God, why must He depend on offerings from humans?”* At other times, the appeal is received with resistance. *“Why is so much required?”* And, the demand can be questioned. *“Why was I not consulted?”* Each of these reactions is very different from a freewill offering—an offering that the Lord prefers.

. Willing Gifts. In the building of the tabernacle, the gifts of the Israelites were a model of giving. For instance, they were voluntary. *“All the men and women were willing, Exodus 35:29. Their gifts were spontaneous. *“Their hearts prompted them,” Exodus 35:21*. Their contribution was immediate. There was no questioning, no debating, and no discussion. And, no one asked to be consulted. Each did his part in the work God had set before them. Everyone was happy to be included in the effort.*

People do not lack the means to give but the willingness to contribute. In other words, it is easier to withhold our gifts than to make our offerings. Yet God is our model. He gives us an opportunity. It is up to us to follow His lead.

Let our sacrifice today be a freewill offering.

GIVING VERSUS GETTING

The epistles—while not quoting Christ—mentions what the Lord wanted people to believe and do. Beyond the Gospels, Paul is the only one who stated a direct quote from the Son of God: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive,”* Acts 20:35.

These words are usually cited as a basis for contributing our money. Notwithstanding, their original purpose was to inspire a life of service to God.

. It Is Good To Receive. No one will argue that receiving is bad. We grow up looking forward to Birthdays, Valentine’s Day, Easter, Halloween, and Christmas. However, unless tempered by giving, receiving can lead to selfishness. Hence, each of us *“should look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others,”* Philippians 2:4.

. It Is Better To Give. The greater blessing is in giving. *“Freely we have received, freely (we should) give,”* Matthew 10:8. That is what Jesus did. *“Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, so that we through His poverty might become rich,”* II Corinthians 8:9. A beggar receives. A follower of Christ gives.

He who “gets” is happy on earth. He who “gives” will inherit eternal life. Therefore, the person who refuses to give, refuses to live, Matthew 16:24.

Let us seek the greater blessing.

THE HOME COMING

The exiles that returned from Babylon were an organized group. They had leaders. They were divided into ranks. Each one was identified under the head of his family.

The trip home was a long and arduous trek. It took at least four months through hostile territory. Though ironically, nothing is said about the trip.

. They Arrived. Few people could lead such a large group so far under such duress. Yet that mixed multitude of defenseless people arrived intact. When they left Egypt for Canaan, we have a detailed account of their journey. But when they left Babylon for Canaan, nothing is recorded. Why? Perhaps, nothing worthy of comment happened. “*The hand of God*” was on them, Ezra 8:31; cf. Psalm 107:7.

. They Gave. Once the hike was completed, the people got down to business. They gave freewill offerings toward rebuilding the house of God, Ezra 2:68. Though they needed to build their own houses, dig wells, and plant crops, they put God first, Matthew 6:33. The once banished exiles were home. But they did not forget the Lord. Does that not speak to us?

They gave to Him who had given so much to them. Moreover, they gave “*according to their ability*,” Ezra 2:69. And so should we.

Let us put the Almighty first today and every day.

THERE ARE NO LITTLE THINGS

Those who had seen the temple of Solomon viewed the replacement temple as insignificant. They cried when the smaller building was being built, Ezra 3:12. It seemed “*like nothing*,” Haggai 2:3. They despised the day of “*small things*,” Zachariah 4:10. Yet what they did mattered.

. There Are No Little Sins. Few of us will miss heaven because of murder, theft, idolatry, or treason. Likely, if we are lost, it will be due to what is labeled the little stuff: stinginess, lukewarmness, and such like.

. There Are No Little Kindnesses. Sometimes we feel like we cannot do much so we do nothing. But, when the life of Paul was threatened (after his conversion in Damascus), some one supplied a basket and rope. It saved his life.

. There Are No Little Decisions. When we decide to accept Christ, we often assume we have made the big choice. Yet should we pray, read the Bible, and go to worship? If we say “no,” these “little” decisions will undo the “big” one!

Actually there are no little things in life. Every thought, every gesture, and every command counts. Though some seem bigger, they are all essential components of the whole.

We are as important as anyone else, I Corinthians 12:21-26. God asks that we do our part. And, when we do “what we can,” we are approved by the Lord, Mark 14:8.

Let each of us realize that our contribution is important.

SO THE TEMPLE WAS FINISHED

It was a huge accomplishment. After seven years of constant effort, the temple was finally completed, II Chronicles 8:16. And, then, the real effort actually began.

. The Material Must Serve The Spiritual. Though the last stone was put in place, though the last piece of furniture was positioned, the house of worship was not really finished. It only achieved its purpose when it facilitated worship, when it was used to serve God, II Chronicles 8:12,13.

. The Worship Must Fulfill The Commands. Their praise must not deviate from what was required, II Chronicles 8:15. It must honor the Lord. The regulations must be followed. Those who feel they can dispense with the rules make a serious mistake. Self-will does not fulfill God's will.

. The Congregation Must Keep The Details. Those who served in the temple were to keep their duties "*as each day required*," II Chronicles 8:14. No job was too small. Everyone was to do his part. And, if they did, the Almighty was honored. The worshippers were blessed.

Our worship in the sanctuary will never be perfect until we bring our best to the altar. Since we seek the greatest things from Him, we should give our greatest gifts to Him. Is not our God worthy of our most reverent thoughts, our warmest gratitude, our fixed resolve, and our sweetest song?

Let us render our utmost to Him who gave His utmost to us.

RETIRED CHRISTIANS

In the parable of the rich man, Jesus condemns him who said, *"Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry,"* Luke 12:19. This is certainly the dream of our generation. Instead of thanking God for blessing our labor, we try to avoid work. The rich man was called a *"fool,"* Luke 12:20.

There is no retirement for a Christian. Our work is not done until we take our final breath. Shorter work weeks and early retirement is an opportunity for a believer to do more in the kingdom. Unfortunately, too many of us just waste our time doing nothing of lasting value!

A fella went to a recruiting office to enlist. The officer in charge asked, *"In what branch of the military do you want to serve? In the infantry, you will walk. In the cavalry, you ride."* The recruit thought for a moment. Then he said, *"Please, sir, I prefer the Coast Guard where I can simply coast."*

As a Christian, we must not be coasters. Neither should we try to hitch hike a ride to heaven?

There are three kinds of church members: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who have no idea what is happening. Who should we be?

When we become a follower of Christ, the Lord issues us work clothes. He has a job for us to do.

Let us give to Him what belongs to Him.

OBEDIENCE IS BETTER

From ancient times, the prophets said “*to obey was better than sacrifice*,” I Samuel 15:22; cf. Hosea 6:6. They affirmed in the clearest terms the superiority of moral behavior over ritual routine.

. The Preference Of Humans. King Saul thought it best to modify the command of God. He had his reasons. But he did not realize the consequences of doing so. Was not the word of the monarch “law?” No! The Lord called his action “*rebellion*,” I Samuel 15:23a. We know that God wants us to submit completely. But, like Saul, we often prefer to do things our way!

. The Consequences Of Rebellion. Saul lost his crown, I Samuel 15:23b. The blessing of God was withdrawn. A life of promise became an empty shell. When we do what we want (instead of His will) God sets us aside. Yes! Saul still occupied the throne, but he lost the acceptance of the Lord. We may continue to go through the motions, but our actions no longer have the divine seal of approval. Obedience is always better than pretense.

It is dangerous to reinterpret the commands of God. He asks us to lay by in store, to give as we have been given, to invest our wealth in heaven. It is so easy to do otherwise. There are plenty of justifications for it. But rebellion is rebellion. How dare we provoke the Almighty?

Let us give in a way that obeys our Father.

REMEMBER THE SALT

Salt was sprinkled on both grain and burnt offerings, Leviticus 2:13; Ezekiel 43:24. The expression “*covenant of salt*,” Numbers 18:19; II Chronicles 13:5, refers to a personal agreement. Eating salt with someone was supposed to result in a bond of loyalty.

Jesus told His disciples to be “*salt*,” Mark 9:50. And, Paul wrote, “*Let your conversation always be . . . seasoned with salt*,” Colossians 4:6. We are to maintain a mutual loyalty in our covenant relationships. We are “*the salt of the earth*,” Matthew 5:13a.

. What Does Salt Symbolize? When sealing an agreement, people in the Middle East did (and still do) eat bread and salt. When an offering was salted, it reminded the offerer that he had a covenant with God. Faithfulness was required.

. Why Be Salt? A Christian is a living expression of Christ. We purify. The Church is to be salt in a corrupt and sinful world. We are models of loyalty in a crooked generation. We are to be the epitome of grace and truth in all we do.

But our saltiness can be lost, Matthew 5:13b. We can stray from the teachings of Christ. Our religion can become corrupt. When faith is polluted, it supports wickedness.

Our giving should be seasoned with salt. Our offering is a sign of our loyalty. We are in covenant with God.

Let our contribution demonstrate the depth of our devotion.

SHE HAD NOTHING

Our world thinks that power comes from aggressive self-promotion. But the Lord made it clear that that was not so. The mother of James and John asked Jesus to provide a special place for her sons in His kingdom, Matthew 20:20,21. Unmistakably, that was raw self-promotion.

It was an awkward moment. The Messiah met it head on. *“That is the way pagans do,”* He said, Matthew 20:25. However, *“not so with you,”* Matthew 20:26a. *“Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,”* Matthew 20:26b. The halls of government are filled with power-hungry, self-promoters. The words of our Savior seem so out of place.

And so it was with Mother Teresa. At a Capitol Hill luncheon, a tiny woman wearing a blue and white habit stepped to the podium. A gray sweater—that had seen its better days—was covering her shoulders. The most powerful leaders in the world gave her a standing ovation.

This little woman who asked for nothing, who never demanded anything, was given the acclaim of a queen. That is real power!

Mother Teresa loved the unlovely—the destitute, poor, and dying. Seeking nothing for herself, she received the Noble Peace Prize. She was a servant yet moved the powerful to tears. She had nothing, yet in a strange way, had everything.

Let our giving be covered in a gray tattered sweater.

RIGHTEOUS SACRIFICES

While hiding in the desert of Judah, David composed a psalm. In it, he spoke of “*righteous sacrifices*,” Psalm 4:5a. At the time, since David did not have access to the tabernacle altar, he was probably referring to “*a broken and contrite spirit*,” Psalm 51:17.

Sacrifices without faith are vain, Psalm 4:5b. While writing quiet thoughts in troubled times, David focused on giving to God. His words still apply today.

. God Listens. He hears our plaintive plea. He sees our intentions. He cares. He blesses, Psalm 4:3. If we give in faith, we will receive a righteous man’s reward.

. God Responds. Jehovah hears our faintest cry. If He does not seem to respond, it may be a sign of our failure to see His response, Psalm 3:4.

. God Delivers. There will be troubling times. But the Almighty reigns. Nothing surprises Him or stymies His power. Count on it. In His hands, we are safe, Psalm 3:8.

We have no arena in which to be a martyr. But we have a wicked world in which we can make a righteous sacrifice. Our contribution is an indication of our willingness to make an offering. Everyone is a proportionate giver. Indeed, we all give in proportion to the faith we possess.

May our giving today be a righteous sacrifice.

MINIMUM, AVERAGE, OR MAXIMUM

In the parable of the sower, the seed fell on different types of soil, Mark 4:3-8. The soil represents the human heart. Therefore, the seed produced different amounts of grain.

Jesus was not endorsing every crop. No! He was saying we should strive for a maximum harvest. Most believers are satisfied with a minimal productivity. The Lord is not. He encourages us to do all we can.

There are three kinds of fruit-bearers. Some are content with doing the bare minimum. They pray a little, read their Bible occasionally, but rarely (if ever) talk to others about the Gospel. They never volunteer and never accept responsibility for anything. They are minimalists.

The second category of fruit-bearers is neither minimalists nor maximalists. They are average. They are happy to do a little. They show up now and then. They give sparingly. *"We do more than many,"* they contend. *"Is that not enough?"*

The third group is the "all outers." They do not measure themselves by what others do but by what God wants! They are the "hundred-percenters." They give all they can and than some. They can be counted on to get things done.

In what category do we wish to be found on the Judgment Day? *"With what measure you use, it will be measured to you,"* Jesus said, Mark 4:24.

Let us do the maximum for Him who did His best for us.

WEARINESS OF WORSHIP

The Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah. *“You have not wearied yourselves for Me . . . I have not burdened you . . . but you have burdened Me with your sins and wearied Me with your offenses,”* Isaiah 43:22-24.

. Reasonableness Of Worship. Our obedience is not servitude. It is not a burdensome task. And special provisions are made for the poor, Leviticus 5:7. There is nothing required that is hard or impossible. God makes full allowance for all our circumstances. But He expects from us what He has entrusted to us. *“For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have,”* II Corinthians 8:12.

. Weariness Of Worship. The Lord complained that His people withheld what was due Him. Israel had kept back even the small offerings. They *“did not weary Him.”* We often do the same thing. God gets the scrapes, the left-overs. Furthermore, many of us have added blatant sin to our careless omissions. We have *“wearied Him with our offenses.”* We substitute what He wants with what we prefer. None of that honors the Almighty. We act like we are weary of worship.

Yet we want Him to blot out our transgressions, remember our sins no more, Isaiah 43:25. We want Him to do for us while we neglect to do for Him. Good luck with that!

Let us not grow weary in giving to the Lord.

MINISTERING TO JESUS

Many of us wish we could personally minister to Christ. In the first century, a group of women did, Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41. They went out of their way to help the Lord. They lavished expensive gifts on Him, Matthew 26:7.

Do we not realize we can still minister to Him now? Here? Today? We can! We should! We must! He wants us to support His church. And, when we do, the Lord regards our giving as gifts offered to Him.

For instance, Saul was persecuting the church. Jesus stopped him on the road to Damascus. The Savior told Saul that what he was doing to the saints he was doing to Him. For, He asked: *"Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?"*

A humble fruit vender and vegetable peddler dropped his notebook. A Christian found it. Inside the notebook, on the first page, were the words "FOR HIS SAKE." And, on the following pages were reminders to minister to the needs of various people: *"Cheer up Jim. Visit Mike. Invite Susan to church. Give some fruit to the Bensons."*

The peddler said his notebook was a ministry reminder. *"What I do for them I am doing for Christ!"* he said.

We do great things for Jesus when we do little things for others. Hence, do unto them what we want to do to the Lord.

Let our giving be our ministry to Christ.

HOLY EXPECTATIONS

When God makes Himself known, He expects us to be dressed in righteousness. *“Maintain justice and do what is right, for My salvation is close at hand and My righteousness will soon be revealed,”* Isaiah 56:1. Are we ready for His appearing?

. Our Condition. We are completely dependent on the Lord. Our best efforts need His divine blessing. We do what we can but heaven must complete our work. Salvation from evil—whether physical or spiritual—must ultimately come from God.

. Our Expectation. We hope for great things. The Almighty taught us to trust Him. Like a farmer relies on the grace of rain and the soldier depends on divine strength, so we lean on the Lord for rescue. Did He not say, *“Call on Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you,”* Psalms 50:15?

Holy expectations will not materialize unless we abandon sin. We fool ourselves if we expect His blessings while harboring evil in our hearts.

Did not Jehovah require Israel to purify themselves in anticipation of His visit at Sinai, Exodus 19:10,11? Did not God require the soldiers to consecrate themselves before conquering the Promise Land, Joshua 3:5? Did not John the Baptist tell his followers to repent for the kingdom was near, Matthew 3:1,2? Does not the Lord expect us to have clean hands and a pure heart when giving our money?

Let our contribution be accompanied with holy expectations.

SHE WROTE LETTERS

Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth were missionaries in China. During the early 1900's, poverty was rampant. People were dying from starvation. By 1920, the famine in China had grown to epic proportions.

It is impossible to preach to empty stomachs. The Goforths had to do something. But what could they do? The crisis was overwhelming.

Rosalind decided to write letters, to spread the word. She wrote to churches in the United States. She spent eight to ten hours everyday pleading for money to rescue the starving. Forty million people had already died. Three times that many would likely die in the coming months!

The newspapers in America had printed story after story of the unfolding calamity. Rosalind's letters underlined the urgency. The churches responded. Her efforts raised over one hundred and twenty thousand dollars—a tidy sum in 1920!

"She opened her arms to the poor and extended her hands to the needy," Proverbs 31:20.

The people in China were fed. With their hunger satisfied, they listened to the Gospel. Thousands were converted. A bad situation did not turn into a horrific catastrophe. The work of one missionary dodged a disaster and cleared the way for the Good News.

Let us make a similar difference with our giving today.

LEARN WHAT IT MEANS

Jesus quoted the prophet Hosea: *“I desire mercy not sacrifice,”* Matthew 9:13. Then, He suggested that His audience *“go and learn what that means.”*

His suggestion was relevant. God wanted *“mercy, not sacrifice, acknowledgement rather than burnt offerings,”* Hosea 6:6. “Mercy” and “acknowledgement” refer to spiritual excellence while “sacrifice” and “burnt offerings” point to religious ritual. Is not obedience better than merely going through the motions? I Samuel 15:22; cf. Matthew 12:7.

Yes! *“To do justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice,”* Proverbs 21:3. *“To love Him with all our strength is more than burnt offerings,”* Mark 12:33. Why is this so?

. Empty Ritual. Without obedience, ritual is worthless. *“Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to Me . . . I cannot bear your evil assemblies,”* Isaiah 1:13.

. Meaningful Religion. The Lord wants us to live our faith, to act like His people every moment of every day. Indeed, our daily behavior prepares us for our Sunday worship.

Our interaction with others reveals the depth of our connection with God. *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his neighbor in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in Him?”* I John 3:17. Mercy is the basis of piety.

Let our Sunday giving be a reflection of our weekday living.

WE GIVE WHAT ALREADY BELONGS TO HIM

We can only give to Lord what is already His. The collection is a time of paying our debt to heaven. All we have belongs to God. He has given to us so that we can use for Him what has been received from Him.

The Scriptures say, *"Everything comes from the Lord. We give Him only what He has already given us,"* I Chronicles 29:14.

We simply return His generosity as good stewards should and do. We can only give because He has given to us. Our contribution originates with Him and is returned to Him.

The construction of the temple was a huge undertaking. David said, *"The task is great because this palatial structure is not for man but for the Lord God,"* I Chronicles 29:1c.

We believe His word (though we may not fully understand the implications of all it says). Whatever I do I want to do for the Lord. I give because He first gave to me.

"I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him," II Timothy 1:12.

Since what we have is His, we must guard against congratulating ourselves for giving. For, in effect, we are merely returning what He already owns.

Let us happily give to the Lord what already belongs to Him.

SACRIFICES OF THANKSGIVING

We are far more ready to pray than to give. Likewise, we are more ready to express our needs than to show gratitude for His supply. We succeed in requesting but fail in thanking.

This ought not to happen. We are urged to “*give thanks to the Lord,*” Psalm 107:1,8,15,21. Furthermore, we should make thank offerings to Him, Psalm 107:22. Whoever is wise will “*consider God’s great love*” and act accordingly, Psalm 107:43.

. Our Need. Life is challenging. There are dangers of travel. Illnesses abound. Temptation lurks at every turn. Cruelty and oppression are the order of the day. And freedom from trouble seems beyond our reach.

. His Deliverance. God comes to our rescue, Psalm 107:7,13,16,20,29,30. The Lord is mindful of our daily needs. He delivers from harm. The doors of escape are opened. We can live in confidence of His protection. Does that not deserve our deepest expression of thanks?

. Our Gratitude. The natural response of the thoughtful is to be thankful, Psalm 107:2,31,32. The redeemed of God should proclaim His goodness. The saints owe the Lord unbroken declarations of gratitude in song, prayer, and contribution.

A life full of heavenly blessings should overflow with heartfelt praise. Dare we neglect to thank Him?

Let our offering be the measure of our thanksgiving.

UNACCEPTABLE OFFERINGS

God had criticized Judah for offering Him false worship. The priests did not think their (spiritual) digressions were serious, Jeremiah 6:14. “*Were not the people offering expensive incense?*” Jeremiah 6:20. Yet the sacrifices of Judah were not acceptable. Why?

. Wrong Intent. The Almighty did not need their sacrifices, Psalms 50:8-12. Their offerings were only valuable as expressions of their intentions. In other words, our giving is merely an outward indication of our inward thoughts. Worship is a mockery when our life is full of sin, Isaiah 1:15.

. Mindless Ritual. Though sacrifices are offered to God, they can still be vain. They may be done correctly. They may be costly. But they can still be unacceptable if the intention is to bribe heaven with empty worship. God is not fooled. He weighs the heart.

. Awful Mistake. Unacceptable offerings insult the Lord. It is better to give nothing than to give with wrong intentions. If we do so, we deceive ourselves. For, after the gift is given, the conscience is relieved, false assumptions are supported, and spiritual weakness is hidden.

Those who give unacceptable gifts should not stop giving. No! They should rethink the way they give. They should revise their commitment. They should worship “*in spirit and in truth*,” John 4:24.

Let us NOT allow our offering be a thoughtless sacrifice.

CONSECRATE YOURSELVES

The temple of Solomon had been standing for two centuries. The worship of the people had become stale. The sanctuary was defiled. The house of God needed repair. The Hebrew religion was in decay. A strong effort was needed to renew the worship of Jehovah, II Chronicles 29:4,5.

. Cleansing The Heart. A sincere return to God must include a purification of the temple. This is what Israel did, II Chronicles 29:15,18. We too must purge every thought and practice that is contrary to the will of God.

. Accepting The Challenge. Faith grows cold when worship becomes routine. The leaders gave “*willingly*,” II Chronicles 29:31. The first step in rekindling a connection with heaven is to recognize our infidelity on earth, Luke 15:18.

. Renewing Commitment. The people renewed their agreement with the Almighty, II Chronicles 29:10. The same applies today. To shake off the shackles of dead religious habit, we must recommit ourselves to the One above.

A spiritual renewal will result in a joyful celebration of praise, II Chronicles 29:28. So the worship in the temple was reestablished, II Chronicles 29:35. Generous giving always follows religious consecration.

Now is our hour to show the true colors of our commitment. Are we up to the challenge?

May our giving be a measure of our faith.

EVEN IN DEEP WATER

David was in trouble. His enemies were attacking him. He cried out to God to save him. *“For the waters have come up to my neck,”* he said, Psalm 69:1.

That was a favorite expression of the psalmist when he was overwhelmed by hardship. *“Deep calls to deep in the roar of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and breakers have swept over me,”* Psalm 42:7; cf. Psalm 32:6. He begged God to help him.

Where do we turn when life is difficult? Do we still rely of God? Do we still remain faithful in deep water?

A jeweler can identify gemstones in a “water test.” An imitation diamond is never as brilliant under water as a genuine diamond. The difference is easy to see. The light of an imitation stone (when submerged in water) is practically extinguished. But the sparkle of a genuine diamond will still shine—even under water. The contrast is so obvious any one can identify the counterfeit.

Likewise, many so-called believers can pass as genuine Christians until they get in deep water. For, when the waves of difficulty overwhelm them, their pretensions are extinguished, their light goes out.

Financial difficulties can test our faith. Those who are fortified by the Lord keep giving. They know heaven will provide. They put God first.

Let us shine even when the waves of life overwhelm us.

MONEY PROBLEMS

There are two ways to misuse our money. The first way is well known and easily recognized. We can “*squander our wealth in wild living*,” Luke 15:13. The Lord does not bless our labor so that we can waste it on the sinful practices of the world, 1 John 2:15-17.

The second way to misuse our money is less conspicuous. We can simply fail to share it with those in need. Instead, we “*tear down our barns and build bigger ones*.” We say to ourselves, “*Take life easy: eat, drink, and be merry*,” Luke 12:18,19.

Both ways of spending our money has disastrous results. God issued clear warnings to all who use their blessings on themselves (and are not rich toward God). “*Share with the poor*,” Christ said. “*For where your treasure is, there your hearts will be also*,” Luke 12:33,34.

We get so absorbed in our stuff that we ignore the circumstances of those around us. Our wants loom larger than the needs of our fellowman. We never seem to be satisfied with what we have. All of self and none of others will eventually catch up with us. There is going to be a day of reckoning.

Sometimes we do not share because we are not aware of anyone in need. But do we really have our eyes open? Poverty is everywhere. There are more folks to help than we have resources to help them.

Let us use our money for the Master.

DOING WHAT IS RIGHT

We gain nothing when we give with sin in our life, Proverbs 21:27; Ecclesiastes 5:1. *"To do right . . . is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice," Proverbs 21:3.* The superiority of proper behavior over ritual routine is a common refrain in Scripture.

. Divine Control. God influences the thoughts and actions of the powerful. He turns their decisions this way or that way like the banks of a river determine the flow of a stream, Proverbs 21:1. To king Cyrus, the Lord said, *"I have called you by name . . . though you have not known Me,"* Isaiah 45:4.

. Human Behavior. Because the Almighty is in control, He reads the motives of our hearts, Proverbs 21:2. He judges our attitudes. Nothing is hidden from His eyes, Hebrews 4:13. Why, then, should we pretend? Why fake the sincerity of our contribution? We might fool men but we cannot fool God.

There is an outward and an inward side to giving. The outward has value only when it is accompanied by an honest inward intent. Believers cannot deceive heaven.

"The Lord detests the offering of the wicked. The prayer of the upright pleases Him," Proverbs 15:8. He *"does not delight in burnt offerings . . . as much as in obeying"* Him, I Samuel 15:22.

God does not need a committee to investigate our heart because He IS the investigation committee!

Let our contribution be connected to a committed heart.

SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

The Bible is full of metaphors to describe believers. For example, in I Peter 2:5, Christians are called “*living stones*,” a “*spiritual house*,” and a “*holy priesthood*.” And such we are.

As a Jew, writing to Jews, Peter used language familiar to his audience. He connected what they understood to what they had recently accepted as followers of Christ.

. We Are A Temple. Indeed, “*we are the temple of the living God*,” II Corinthians 6:16. Christ is “*the chief corner stone*.” And, we are “*living stones*” built on the foundation of Jesus. Together we constitute a spiritual house, a place where God dwells, an edifice where He is honored. Like the ancient temple in Jerusalem, each of us does his part to worship the Lord.

. We Are A Priesthood. Peter continued using metaphors. He said we are “*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God*,” I Peter 2:9. That is a mouthful! As priests, we are “*holy*.” From Leviticus, we learn what priests do. They offer sacrifices. They give themselves to helping others approach the Lord correctly. They officiate at the altar.

The collection is a part of that service. We give to continue what others began. We give to honor the Lord. We sacrifice to fulfill the will of God. We are a living example of what a Christian ought to be.

Let our contribution reflection our true intention.