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# Bridging the Gap

Malachi 3:6-12

Russ Kennedy

## Summary

**Perspectives** on Christian grace giving as transitioning from Old Covenant to New Covenant.

## Introduction

Everyone comes to the Bible with a framework, a grid through which they see the Bible. This is inevitable. It is not possible to come to the Bible as a neutral observer. So we must be very careful to know what our framework is and to make it under not over the text. If we are not aware that we have a framework we will confuse it with the text. And if the framework is sovereign over the text, the text will be shaped to fit our framework, rather than our framework being informed by and changed to fit the text.

Now why is this important as we consider the grace of giving? Because the way we approach the arch of Scripture, the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament is a framework that will drive our understanding and our practice of Christian giving. If you believe that the Old Testament is pre-Christian and Jewish only, then what it commands and commends will be of very limited value. And much of what Pastor Ed preached last week will fall on deaf ears.

I believe that much of the disagreement over Christian giving are two opposite frameworks being worked out practically. The effect is that both are down-slope. Both have an inadequate Canonical/Biblical Theology of Giving. It is my aim in *Bridging the Gap* to bring us to the third way. We need a Canonical/Biblical Theology of Giving that understands and applies the principles being taught in Sunday Bible Study.

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## The Concept of a Canonical Theology

First, let's establish four essential principles derived from the Scriptures that will constitute a Biblically informed framework. I am choosing these because they have the most impact on how we work through the text.

### Revelation is Progressive

This principle simply acknowledges that there is a development through the Bible. Moses does not know all that David does. David does not know all that Isaiah does. Isaiah does not know all that Paul does. Revelation is unfolding. As we come to greater light, we use it to interpret what has gone before. The Old Testament informs the New and the New Testament interprets the Old.

### Revelation is Redemptive-Historical

This principle recognizes that the Bible is about God who is moving through time and history to redeem and restore His people. Revelation is given in the midst of the mess – it is first and foremost, given in the context of real history. It also is recognizing that the Bible is sufficient for life and godliness without being exhaustive. How each generation of God's people are to live is informed by not only its immediate context, but by what God has revealed before.

### Revelation is Christ-Centered

#### John 5:36-47

This principle recognizes that the Bible's revelation reaches its apex in the Lord Jesus. Now this is not a chronological center as though the 33 years on earth are what we are talking about. No, Christ is its theological center as illustrated by the cross. Jesus is the revelation of God. The Bible is the unfolding revelation of Jesus.

### Revelation is Promise-Fulfillment

This principle recognizes the trajectory of the Bible. It is moving from old to new, promises to fulfillment, from shadows to substance, from copies to realities, from lesser to greater, from local to global, from earth to heaven, from death to life, from fall to fullness. At first this seems obvious and trite. I contend that a great deal of bad and down-slope interpretation and application of Scripture has failed to really grasp this principle.

Now, make no mistake – undergirding all this is a strong commitment to the necessity at the first level to understand the Bible as revelation through human language requiring all the work at grammar, definition, meaning, flow and so on. To work the above principles with integrity means we must have the sense of the text right. But it also means that no meaning is entirely localized. All texts contribute to the

whole. This is what D.A. Carson calls grammatical integrity, textual fidelity and inter-canonical connections.

## The Content of a Biblical Trajectory

So let's do a jet flyover of a Canonical/Biblical Theology of Giving.

### Abraham and Melchizedek

### Genesis 14:17-15:1

This is the first clear reference to tithing as giving in the Bible. Here, Abraham has achieved a great victory in rescuing and is met by Melchizedek, King of Salem and Priest of God who brings bread and wine to the meeting. Abraham takes a tenth and gives it to him. He is blessed by Melchizedek.

Twice in this text, both in the blessing by Melchizedek and in the affirmation that follows by Abraham, God is asserted to be the Most High Sovereign, creator and owner of all of heaven and earth. These two statements lay the Canonical foundation for giving. God is our sovereign, superior and owner.

It is important to note that the author of Hebrews unpacks this event and makes those very attributes the center of his argument to show the superiority of Christ to Abraham and to Aaron.

### Tithing in the Mosaic Covenant

### Leviticus

The Mosaic Covenant, or what we commonly call The Law, governed the nation of Israel as the standard of holiness until Jesus came. What was written in the Law codified the righteousness of Christ and the holiness of God for a people in a particular culture until the in-breaking of the eschatological kingdom in this age through Christ. So the holy practice of Abraham did not look to the Law, but to God. The Law reflects the holy standard God sets and then shows in Christ in His life and in His Body.

#### Precept under Law

#### Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:21-28

A number of texts in Leviticus establish clear guidelines for what an Israelite was to give. There was the tithe which was 10% of each households "income" as measured in an agricultural economy. It was to be brought to the Temple. If a person lived far away, it could be store housed or stockpiled for up to three years, but had to be brought. It was considered dedicated to the Lord like the Temple vessels and was not to be put to any other use. Period. The tithe was used to maintain the Temple and Levites, who were responsible to tithe on what they received.

**Preached by Moses****Deuteronomy 12;14;26**

In Moses final 3 sermons before entering the land, he reinforces the necessity of heart obedience in giving. He intimates that the place the tithe is brought to will change in the language he uses. Listen to Deuteronomy 26:16-19, “This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. 17 You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. 18 And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, 19 and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.”

**Practiced by the People**

In this as in most of the Law, Israel failed over and over again. They sometimes gave from a good heart. They sometimes gave out of hard, resentful hearts and sometimes they didn't give at all. In many cases where this is exposed, the failure of the people to recognize the trajectory from Abraham through Moses where God is sovereign and owner, and our very great treasure is lost.

**Propheesied in Malachi**

That then brings us to our Malachi text. Are there distinctly Mosaic Covenant elements here? Yes. Are there elements that are Canonical and not limited to the Law? Yes. Later, at the end, we will summarize by looking at the Canonical Principles, Purposes and Precepts for giving.

It is important for me at this point to correct some mistakes commonly made in relation to the Mosaic Law.

- Tithes and offerings are not the same thing. Offerings were voluntary, but still had clear guidelines. They were not to be confused with the tithe and could never substitute for the tithe.
- The tithe was never more than 10%. Those who say it is up to 40% are making a very simple mistake. 10% of flocks, 10% of herds, and 10% of harvest is still 10% of the whole, not 30%. If I give 10% of my church income, 10% of my consulting income and 10% of my speaking honorariums, I have still only given 10% of my income.
- The tithe was not the government tax. That was separate and different. The Kings levied taxes. God required a tithe. Those who lump them together are simply not reading the Old Testament closely.

## **Giving in the New Covenant**

As we come into the New Covenant age, we find the shift from shadow to substance, lesser to greater impacting giving. Now, will be going into greater detail to unpack this next week, so I will not spend much time on this today.

### **Practiced by the Early Church**

As the New Testament church began to see itself as the new covenant community of God, it took to heart the teaching of the Scriptures about faithful giving and benevolent sharing. These two things came to the center of giving – to send the gospel and to help God's people in need. They were often extravagant and sacrificial in their giving.

### **Preached by the Apostles**

The apostles charged and commended a faithful, regular giving as a response to grace and with gratitude. Interestingly, there is a seeming silence from the Apostles in governing giving. Yet, they seem to understand giving as a vital necessity. Since they were largely preaching the OT Scriptures as interpreted through the cross and resurrection, they often reach back for OT texts, applying them a New Covenant, church framed understanding.

It is quite evident that whatever changes from the Old to the New is because of the centrality of Christ.

## **The Centrality of Christ**

John 5:39 & 46 as well as Luke 24:27 tell us that Christ is not only the center of the Bible, but that there is some way in which all the Bible can point to Christ. Further, Jesus argues that Moses wrote about Jesus in such a way that believing Moses' requires belief in Jesus. So how is Jesus central to our giving?

### **As the Reality to which OT Giving Points**

Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1 all tell us that the Mosaic Covenant was a shadow and Jesus is substance, the reality. The picture is that of the Lord Jesus in all that He is in solid truth and reality, cast a dim, insufficient yet divinely revealed shadow in the Mosaic Covenant. Thus the tithing, giving and offerings all point to Jesus who gives Himself fully and wholly to God and for His people. OT giving anticipates the self-giving of Jesus. NT giving reflects the self-giving of Jesus.

## As the Great Gift at the Center of OT and NT

2 Corinthians 9:15 closes Paul's long exhortation on giving with the following exclamation, "Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!" Commentators are divided as to whether this is the gift of grace or the gift of Christ. A compelling case can be made that this is the doxological response to verse 13 where the glory of God is manifested in a confession of the gospel and the contribution made by grace.

Jesus is not only the center of a Canonical Theology of Giving in His own self-giving, but also in His being the great Gift. God's love for the world is such that He gave His Son. This great gift of God of His Son brings Him glory and supplies us grace. Thus our giving is suspended from this tower upholding all the lines of Biblical giving.

## As the Pattern of NT Giving

Finally, Christ is the center of a Canonical Theology of Giving because of 2 Corinthians 8:9 where His giving up His own very great spiritual wealth for the relief of our very great spiritual poverty is urged as a motivation to give when the command to give is not pressed. Instead of being driven on by a command even when it is in force, Paul appeals to us to be drawn out by a compelling example.

Here is the glory of a Canonical Theology: Jesus is magnified at its core as the great giver, the grand gift and our gracious example.

## The Challenge of Third Way

How do we follow the high road of Biblical third way and practice Christian giving shaped by a Canonical Theology? I want to offer the following as a summary of what we find.

## Patterns – Framing of Biblical Categories

The giving of God's people is framed by three Biblical presuppositions.

**CANONICAL** – The Bible as a whole defines, describes and draws out our giving. It establishes both local and global, cultural and trans-cultural, immediate and through-time categories and commands for giving.

**CHRISTOLOGICAL** – At the center of all giving is the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great giver, gift and giving of our great God.

**CATEGORICAL** – As we follow the trajectory of the Scriptures, we find categories for our giving established, exemplified and enabled by the grace of God.

## Principles – Foundations for Biblical Commands

The giving of God's people has as its foundation God centered principles taught through the whole Bible.

- God is the creator, owner and possessor of heaven and earth.
- God is the sovereign ruler from whom all flows and to whom all is due.
- We are subjects, servants and stewards of the great King so that all we own is held and used in trust. At the end of days, we will be accountable to Him, both individually and corporately.
- At all points, God is to be acknowledged as the provider of all – from life and breath to our material sustenance. As sovereign, it is entirely up to His providence to distribute as He wills according to His plan and purposes.
- God has required that His people give in recognition of His status as God. Our act of giving is worship, acknowledging His worth as our great treasure.
- God has called His people to give out of hearts that delight in Him, not as mere duty. Our response in giving arises from reverential, grateful and grace filled hearts.
- God has ordained over time that giving to Him is done primarily through the central and visible locus of worship in that age. The giving of His people is first to a Person, God Himself through the men he ordains, then in the varying places and times and manners He decrees.

## Purposes – Focus of Biblical Call

The giving of God's people is aimed by purposes revealed by the whole Bible.

- To magnify and elevate the greatness of God in acknowledging Him as He truly is.
- To humble us and motivate a response to God from the heart.
- To provide for the ministers and ministry of His Word and spiritual kingdom in a way that maximizes community.
- To release our grasping for material things and thus its deadly grip on us.
- To respond to grace with gladness and gratitude as we give ourselves and then of our material things.

## Precepts – Function of Biblical Commitment

The giving of God's people is focused by a commitment to God expressed and fleshed out in practical obedience to God's directives.

- **PURPOSED** – The giving of God's people is shaped by an inward, heart purpose to please and glorify God, responding to His provisions of grace and goods.
- **PROPORTIONAL** – The giving of God's people is in a proportional or percentage relation to their income or, in Biblical terms, increase.
- **PLANNED** – The giving of God's people is a matter of careful planning and discipline as well as spontaneous responses to God's provisions and people's needs.
- **PERIODIC** – The giving of God's people is primarily done on the day of worship, particularly the expression of obedient giving to the place of worship.
- **PLEASURABLE** – The giving of God's people is to be done with extravagant joy and gratitude as a Godward act of worship.

## Conclusion

In conclusion let me highlight several items.

- May we have a Canonical, whole Bible theology of all we do. Let's be sure that we listen to all of God's Word, interpreted by the cross and resurrection and applied by the Apostles.
- May we have patience: patience to allow the teaching to unfold and patience when we disagree. While the Elders believe that tithing is an appropriate starting place for Christian giving, what we are more interested in is that you give yourself to God, obey Him with a clear conscience and give by grace, with generosity and gladness.
- Let us have the inner integrity to examine our struggles over giving as reflecting sometimes a greater struggle over stewardship. Simply this, does your giving make God look large in your life?
- May we look to our Lord Jesus Christ as the great Gift from God, as the generous Giver of Himself and the glorious act of Giving.