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# Obeying by Faith

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Russ Kennedy

## Introduction

These last 3 weeks have been an adventure of discovery – about God’s Word and about ourselves. We have come first and primarily to the text to hear, over the whole of Scripture, what God says to us about giving. It is my privilege this morning to bring this to a very pointed and practical conclusion. Frankly, all this talk from the Bible is merely theory if at the end of it we do not give.

One other concern that we have is that you get “stuck” on the issue of tithing. If 7 messages are heard to be about tithing then the Word preached is not profiting as we aimed and hoped. In other words, yes, we believe there is a connection between tithing and proportional giving. But what we desire is that you give in such a way that the profit, the piled up interest is spiritual and there is a harvest of righteousness that is pleasing to God. May I encourage you then to come to this message with a poise to hear and heed, each according to their light, their conscience and the grace of God for you.

It is my aim to stir up your joy in God by helping you to be, not only a hearer of the Word, but a doer also. So we will recapture what your elders have preached to you and then we will give some practical counsel to guide you into an obedient, God pleasing, grace enabled giving.

Pastor Greg and I challenged you to recognize:

- How worry and anxiety exposes our treasures and undermines our giving;
- How contentment with God and His provisions releases our treasures and fuels our giving.

In the context of thinking about the Old Covenant tithe in a Christian way, Pastor Ed gave us 4 key principles.

- The GRACE of Giving - We should seek the grace of liberality in our giving. We should be characterized by our generosity – our liberality in giving.
- The EXAMPLE of Giving – Jesus, our savior, was the greatest example of giving. He became poor so that we may become rich.

- The EXTENT of Giving - We are called by God to give “out of what we have”. God simply says bring to Him out of what we have - what He has blessed us with.
- The ATTITUDE of Giving - The attitude of the Christian toward giving to God’s work needs to be cheerful and with “a willing mind”.

Pastor Dan challenged us that giving is to be:

- Collective – All are to be involved
- Purposeful – Committed plan for obedience
- Cheerful – Seeking my joy in the pleasure of God over my obedience
- Worshipful – An act of sacrifice acknowledging the greatness of God

If you are not giving, you are:

- Not supplying others needs in the church
- Not glorifying God
- Resisting grace
- Disobeying the command of God
- Disregarding the example of the church
- Misspending a portion of God’s provision

Pastor Dale showed us our partnership in the gospel through giving:

- is an expression of our hearts.
- is empowered by grace.
- has spiritual value.
- is visible.
- is God-centered

## Identifying Key Questions

As I have wrestled with this topic in the past and as we have moved through this series there are lingering questions in people's minds that we should address.

### Isn't grace giving spontaneous?

This is not how most would ask the question? They actually say, "If our giving is not spontaneous, then how can it be by grace?" There is a notion that grace causes spontaneous giving.

That leads to the next question...

### Can grace giving function with discipline and planning?

If I sit down, analyze my budget, plan what I want to give, establish on what weeks I am going to give then all this discipline and planning replaces or even thwarts the spontaneity of grace. It is Law, not grace. However, the Scripture shows grace functioning through means and structure. Grace produces the self-discipline and work of giving. It may produce spontaneous acts of worship and response to need, but this is occasional. Grace enables planned regular giving.

### Why is giving seemingly treated differently in the New Testament than the Old?

The movement from the Old to the New with Christ as the center of both largely accounts for the difference. The Old Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ. But the category and principle of regular, proportional giving weaves its way through the whole Bible. In the Old Testament, we have all kinds of details that are applications of the principles applied to the Jews in their culture until Christ. In the New Covenant, we have the same principles, but broadened so as to be applicable to any culture, since the gospel is to all people groups. As a result, the Old Covenant seems to be all about detailed commands and the New Covenant about broad principles.

### Should giving be primarily based on needs or on principles?

It is both. Giving in the Bible is called for from God's people as:

- Principle based – foundational is God's character and our response to that character by surrender and sacrifice.
- Need oriented – as the principles are put in place, then the need is presented and met. The tabernacle and temple were built this way and most of the New Testament's giving is focused on needs.

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## **If I disagree with the teaching by the elders on tithing, then what should I do?**

First, let me say this: there can be no disagreement on the New Covenant responsibility of every believer to give. This is the clear and unequivocal teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. But, on our understanding that a tenth is a guideline, let me suggest some questions to ask yourself in the midst of genuine, God-fearing and honest disagreement.

1. Be sure that you have sound, exegetical grounds for your disagreement. Root and ground your position in the texts themselves. We respect and respond to Bible people – people who disagree because of what the Bible says not because some other popular preacher or commentator or theological argument says.
2. Be sure your disagreement is not driven by the realities of your financial situation. Too many people either have spent God's provision or have little desire to give and use a theological argument to salve their consciences.
3. Am I still committed to my covenantal responsibilities as a member? All of us when we committed to membership at the Chapel covenanted together to regular, proportional giving. This is not referring to a tithe, but to grace enabled obedience to 2 Corinthians 9:6. Doing God's will means that we keep our covenants.
4. Does my position free me to give more or less? If we are freed from the restraints of the Law and redeemed by the death of Christ so that we are no longer our own, but owned and mastered by God, does my giving reflect both abiding freedom and abounding generosity.
5. How then do I give according to 2 Corinthians 9: that is (a) planned, (b) proportional (c) periodic and (d) with pleasure? I would challenge you to pay close attention to the texts so that we carefully and cheerfully obey God.

## Interacting with Key Truths

Giving is anchored to several key truths emerging from the texts we have studied. Let's review and then make some practical application. To be doers of the Word and not hearers only, we need to think through truth with an eye towards real, practical implementation.

### Personal

All of God's people are to give. "Each one must..." is Paul's language. Every family and every Christian is to give. We taught our children to give even from their allowances. Grace flows where Christians hear and heed God's Word.

### 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. We should not approach such an important topic casually, but carefully. Determine in your heart to please God in all your finances and to demonstrate that God is great in your life by the kind of giving you do. Determine in your heart that you will give and how much you plan to give. Do so with prayer, openness to God's Word and to counsel and with a pure conscience.

Purposing for us has meant no less than a tenth not only on our salary, but on any form of increase. We have determined to give on the gross, to give on any increase, to give it to the church and the church alone and to do so on the next Sunday we can. These are non-negotiable for us. We have determined to trust God's provision and have never ever found Him wanting. We have pointed our wants to the priorities of God's kingdom and have great joy in not only faithful proportional giving but also in great opportunities to do more my helping people and supporting missionaries above it.

### Proportional

The giving of God's people is in a proportional or percentage relation to their income or, in Biblical terms, increase. Further, 1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 indicate that there is a greater responsibility on the part of those with greater means for greater and larger sacrifice. For those who have little financial means, determine what proportion you can give now and set a tenth as a target. Pray and plan towards, not as a matter of Law, but as an expression of love for God. For those with greater financial means, determine what proportion you want to give that is sacrificial and then give with great liberty and liberality.

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## 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. Honoring God with planned proportional giving means you have to have a budget, a sense of what you earn and spend. If you have no plan, you will give casually and possibly carnally. If you do not know what you will give, plan your budget accordingly and write the checks or bring the cash the Sunday after you will get paid, your giving will probably function like tipping.

Planning for my family has meant that from the beginning, we have taken our gross income, deducted our proportion (which for us has never been less than a tenth, even when I made \$100 a week), deducted our taxes then budgeted the rest. In other words, God's Kingdom was the first priority. Further, when we have been "between" churches, we set aside our giving each week, stored it up until we committed to a church, then we brought all our stored up offering. And brothers and sisters, it was great! It was fun!

## 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. Paul told the churches in Galatia and Corinth to set aside on the Lord's day (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Many wise Christians I know give every Sunday, planning their giving so that while they may not be paid every week, they are prepared to give every week. We do not believe that this is neither necessary nor even the intent of Scripture. But certainly, this periodic giving is identified to be on the Lord's Day.

Now let me address at this point a question many of you have raised. It gets asked in all sorts of ways but the essence of all the forms of the question is simply this: do I give my regular, proportional, planned, periodic giving *only* to the church. We believe the answer is, "Yes". I know that there are all kinds of ministries out there, a very few of whom are worthy of support. While it is commendable to give offerings to them, your proportional giving ought to be to the church. All through the Bible and in most texts in the New Testament, all offerings – benevolent offerings, missions offerings, support offerings, proportional offerings were all brought to the church and then distributed by the church.

If you want to support a missionary or a ministry not supported by the Chapel, then do so through offerings/givings that are above and beyond your regular proportional giving. We have tried to be faithful to this principle even here when we have done special fund raising for

building, debt-reduction and projects in that we have clearly asked you to support these with above and beyond offerings.

## Pleasurable

The giving of God's people is to be done with extravagant joy and gratitude as a Godward act of worship. One of the commentators said that gratitude cannot be commanded, only commended. The problem with this is that several times in the New Testament "be thankful" is an imperative, a command. So your attitude in giving and your action of giving are both commanded (as well as commended) by God.

So what do I do if I do not want to give or am struggling with giving as it is emerging from the Bible in this series? As with all other commands in the Bible you are disobeying, what you must do is repent. Repentance is not just sorrow over failure. Repentance is change inwardly and outwardly. Repentance is when we recognize what God is commanding, acknowledge that we have disobeyed by not believing the Bible and not wanting to please God and affirm. Further true repentance is when we assert truth in our hearts and begin to want to please God and to want the particular obedience required. Both of these are done through confession to God and through words in our hearts that speak truth and desires to ourselves, to others and to God. In other words, repent of you actions, your unbelief and your wants/desires.

So, I want to pause at this moment and ask you to examine yourself:

- If you have been faithful and proportional in your giving, then express gratitude to God for His grace to you. Then, in the quietness of the next few minutes, evaluate your purposes and plans as to whether your giving is sacrificial and extravagant.
- If you know that you have failed in your giving, then repent. And do so now. Acknowledge to God not only the facts of your sin, but its reasons, causes and motivations as well. In the light of Jesus' great sacrifice for us, see your giving for what it truly is (or is not). Purpose to believe the Bible and want what God commands and commends. Say these things to God in confession. Receive His forgiveness. Commit yourself to do what it takes to be obedient.
- If you find yourself bristling at the above calls, dearly beloved, please examine yourself. We are here teaching the Bible and calling for Biblical change. Our aim here is for you to walk with our God in faithful love and obedience. Where is your treasure? Are you living so Christ-like with your treasures in heaven that dying is gain, not loss?

<< Pause for reflection and response >>

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## Implementing Key Strategies

So you say to me, “What should I do? How can I begin to obey God?”

### Budget

Make a budget. Add up all your income. Determine what proportion you want to give, and deduct it. Then, deduct your taxes. Now, everything else you do must be less than that.

### Harvest

Recognize that you may be harvesting the fruit of sinful choices – that is, you may be way over your head in debt or God has been chastening you in your finances and now it seems as though there is no way. You simply do not have the money. So, confess your sin to God. Commit yourself to obedience. Trust that God will supply.

### Amputation

Do radical amputation in order to avoid sin. In other words, many of you will have to downsize, sell, unload, get rid-of, cut back, and reduce in order to obey God. Here is where the issues of the heart will surface. Do you really want to obey God? Do you really want to please Him? Or will you serve your stuff and hold tightly to what you own and actually owns you?

### No Excuses

Stop making excuses. God has heard them all. He is not impressed:

- a. *I give/tithe my time and ability instead of my money.* Then you should be giving 16.8 hours per week to God in ministry at this church.
- b. *I give to other churches, missions, ministries or charities.* The proportional giving ought to go to the church you are committed to, serving in and benefiting from. Give to those other organizations the above the your regular proportional giving.
- c. *I split my regular proportional giving between General and Project (or some other fund).* The Elders want this people to understand that we do not endorse such a practice. We have consistently called for Special Funds to be supported above the tithe.

### Conclusion

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

Brothers and sisters, may God increase the harvest of your righteousness in this grace of giving so that there will be an abundant supply overflowing with thanksgiving for glory of God because of His inexpressible gift to us of Jesus Christ.