

Neglecting This Truth Will Sabotage Your Intimacy With God

Welcome to the future! No matter whether you and I were as generous as we may have wanted to be last year, it is now a new year and God *still* loves a “cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7b).

In this new year of 2018, God wants me and you to learn how to be even more generous in our stewardship of His blessings. Failure to do so robs God of the opportunity to bless us (Mal. 3:8-10).

Jesus summarized God’s plan for our financial future when he said, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8b). This promise of divine reciprocity and reward is intended to teach His children the joy of unselfish generosity.

“God so loved the world that He gave ...” (John 3:16) and He teaches us to “Give and it will be given to you: Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will men give unto you. For with the measure you use, it will be measured unto you.” (Luke 6:38).

In the Old Testament, God’s people paid tithes and gave offerings. The first mention of tithing was in Genesis 14 when Abraham gave “a tenth part of all” to Melchizedek, the King of Salem, who used it in a priestly act of worship. In the Hebrews recounting (Heb. 7), the priestly tribe of Levi is said to receive tithes because of his genealogy through Abraham, whose submission to the spiritual superiority of Melchizedek, “priest of the Most High God” (Heb. 7:1b) preceded the giving of the Law.

Subsequently, God’s covenant people were to give required amounts and also free-will amounts to God and His people. The

former amounts were described as tithes," meaning "a tenth." They were to sustain the sacerdotal (priestly) ministry of the tribe of Levites.

This Levite tithe has been described as a religious taxation to support the theocracy and was said to belong to the Lord (Lev. 27:30-33). Followers paid their tithes to the Lord by faith, believing He would reward them, heal them and protect them. Leviticus 12 and 14 speak of additional tithes which were used for the benefit of the covenant society and social justice.

Further, Jesus affirmed tithing in the New Testament, not as a law or legalistic obligation, but as a beginning point for an accepted discipline for His disciples (Matt. 23:23-24). New Testament giving is to be a demonstration of love and not law. If we have received the great gift of salvation freely, should we not give freely and liberally as well? Matching the giving minimum of the saints of old to sustain and expand local ministry seems like a good place to begin!

Additionally, Paul challenged New Testament disciples to give generously and systematically to needy followers of Christ and the poor (who Jesus says we will have around us always). Funding appeals were also made to support Christian workers expanding the ministry to other areas and even non-believers, in some cases. These were specific needs and specific collections or offerings, which were approved by congregational leaders. There was accountability expected from these outreaching ministries.

Paul directed the Corinthians in a specific plan of giving which became a prudent pattern of modern offerings and collections, as well. They are to be:

- Periodic: When the saints gathered each week
- Personal: No one else can do it for you
- Proportionate: An equitable sum proportionate to your

income

- Preventively: Precludes the need for pressured, emotional giving or poorly administered projects or unaccountable leaders

This type of systematic giving might be summarized as “grace giving” (2 Cor. 8:1-7): Giving Regularly, As Christ Enables!

Someone has elaborated on Paul’s principles of generous giving by advising, “Give according to your income—lest God make your income according to your giving!”

2018 is a new year and a new chapter in our journal of Christian maturity. May we each learn to excel in these disciplines of discipleship so our Master may say of us, “well, done you good and faithful servant ...” (Matt. 25:21b).
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