



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Malachi 3:7-12

“Shall We Tithe?”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and particularly for the section that we are to read and study tonight. We ask again that Thou would give each one of us spiritual understanding. Enable us, Lord, to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit as he speaks through the words of the prophet. And may they have vital meaning for us in our own personal lives. We commit this meeting to Thee and the ones that follow. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject is "The Tithe, The Church's Unwarranted Claim," or as I also have entitled it: "Shall We Tithe?" And we're turning to Malachi chapter 3, verse 7 through verse 12 which is the section of Malachi to which we have come in our exposition of this prophecy.

Let me say just a few words by way of introduction. Money is a very important matter in spiritual things. I think as you read the word of God you notice this in many different ways such as, for example, we find the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 in the great section on the resurrection moving immediately without any break or apology to chapter 16 and verse 1 in which he speaks about the collection.

I think it is also interesting that the term for giving in the New Testament is fellowship. Now fellowship is a great Christian word. As a matter of fact we are told in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 9 that when we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we are called into the fellowship of his son. And yet in matters of Christian giving, it is called fellowship, participation with God in the things that he is doing, so that the person who gives becomes a co-participant in the great activities of God. And a person who gives to those who minister the word of God become fellow partakers of the fruit of the ministry of the word: fellowship.

We know that the opposite of giving, the covetous spirit, is idolatry. And so I think it's very striking that the opposite of covetousness, which is idolatry, is giving, cheerful giving, which is an expression of fellowship.

And then, of course, we all remember that in Hebrews chapter 13 in verse 16 the writer of that great epistle tells us that we worship by means of our giving, so that giving may be an act of Christian worship. In Believers Chapel when the offering plates are passed, when the believers are observing the Lord's Supper, that is part of the worship service. It is an act of worship to give.

John Wesley knew the temptations that come from the love of money, and he said, "When I have any money, I get rid of it as quickly as possible, lest it should find a way into my heart." Now I get rid of it as quickly as possible for other reasons, but Mr. Wesley was more spiritual.

Now poverty may actually set free the springs of liberality because it is certainly true that those who are poor generally have a greater appreciation for others who have needs. So, at least we can say this, that from the standpoint of the Bible, the way we handle our money is important.

When we come to the doctrine of Christian giving, we find a rather strange thing, a strange situation in the Christian church. I guess that in the matter of giving money, the church has failed to follow the word of God just about as significantly as in any of its

activities. God's plan for giving is traced to the Old Testament, generally speaking, by the Christian church which prides itself on being a New Testament church.

Now this is a remarkable thing. In no other doctrines of the faith do we do this. Most of the other New Testament doctrines we find in the New Testament, and we lay great stress upon the New Testament and rightly so because it is the completion of God's revelation. It is his final word. And so all of our doctrines should be in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. But in the case of the doctrine of Christian giving, the great mass of the Christian churches find their doctrine not in the New Testament but in the Old Testament.

I have with me here a pamphlet or two. They are very interesting. I have collected a few of these through the years, and I haven't collected any that have been recently sent out because they all seem to be saying pretty much the same thing. This one is called "Let's Talk About Tithing," entitled, well, that's the title of it, and then underneath a subtitle: "A Great Bible Principle."

Now you would expect in reading "Let's Talk About Tithing" put out by the General Counsel of the Presbyterian Church in the United States which they have sub-headed "A Great Bible Principle," you would expect that it would at least have a few texts from the Bible that have to do with the doctrine of Christian giving. Well, I notice on the first of the small pages, there is no text of Scripture. On the next there is a reference to 1 Timothy chapter 6 and verse 10, "For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils." And then on the next little page there is no reference to any Scriptural text. And on the next, there is no citation from Scripture. And on the final page, so far as I remember, I don't see any specific reference other than right at the conclusion, "Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay Thou vows unto the Most High, and call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me." Not a single reference to any New Testament text that has to do with tithing. And yet, it is supposed to be a talk about tithing. And even the Old Testament passages are neglected as well.

I wonder what a person, a member of a church such as part of this denomination, I spent over a score of years in it myself, I wonder what they think when they read something like this, "Let's Talk About Tithing, A Great Biblical Principle" and no texts are given.

Now lest you think I'm trying to attack the Presbyterians, I want to notice another little pamphlet I have here which comes from the Baptists. And in this we have "The Tithe" as the title of this. And underneath, "Tithing is vital to the progress of Christianity." And there are here nine or ten points in this little sermon. It is a Scriptural principle. It is not a human device for meeting the financial demands of the church, so the author says. The tenth shall be holy unto the Lord. Jesus approved the principle when he said to the Pharisees, "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin. These ought ye to have done."

Now notice that, we'll say something about this later on; that doesn't really have a thing to do with the doctrine of tithing today. It has to do with the doctrine of tithing in our Lord's Day who lived under the Law of Moses. But now this is a sneaky sentence that follows. "The Apostle Paul approves the principle of tithing for New Testament believers." No text at all cited because as you know the Apostle Paul doesn't mention tithing at all, not once.

Now he goes on to talk about a biblical minimum, a Christian witness, an acknowledgment of ownership, a token of consecration, a symbol of devotion, a starting point for giving, an expression of gratitude, an adventure in blessing and an aid to world evangelization.

And in the conclusion, in the references, listen to the references to Scripture that have been given in it: Leviticus 27:32, Matthew 23:23, that's a reference to the Old Testament practice of tithing, Malachi 3:8, 2 Chronicles 31:6, 2 Chronicles 31:5, Deuteronomy 12:6, Deuteronomy 14:28, Malachi 3:10. One passage from the New Testament which refers to the Old Testament practice. All of the other passages are derived from the Old Testament by a group of churches that profess to be New Testament

churches. That's an amazing thing, isn't it? "Let's Talk About Tithing, A Biblical Principle" and not supported by Scripture at all.

The normative passage on Christian giving is in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 1 through chapter 9, verse 15. Now we're not going to turn to it right now. But I want you to notice that these two chapters are chapters in which the Apostle Paul expounds almost all of the New Testament principles for giving. But since they do not harmonize with the teaching that the tithe is applicable to the Christian church today, it's no wonder that not a one of these pamphlets that I have here has cited from Paul's references to Christian giving in the two chapters.

Now let's turn to Malachi because here we are dealing with an Old Testament context in which the prophet Malachi speaks about the tithe and Israel's responsibility to give it. And we'll talk for a little while about that. And then I want to say a few words about the tithe in the Bible as a whole, and finally a few words about true principles of Christian giving for us today.

A gracious appeal opens the section that we are to study tonight in verses 7 and 8 when the prophet Malachi writes,

"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts. "But you say, 'How shall we return?' Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' (And the answer comes.) In tithes and contributions."

Now the recipients of the prophecy of Malachi we have already noted are individuals who are not distinguished by spiritual understanding. You must be spiritually dense to not only not know the truths of the word of God, but to not even know your own failure to live up to them. And that is the condition of the people to whom Malachi is writing. Their reply to him when he speaks to them giving the words of God, "You

say, 'How shall we return?' Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' They do not know that they have robbed God. They do not know that they need to return to him.

When Malachi says that, or requests that they return to the Lord, "Return to Me, and I will return to you," he is using the Old Testament word for repentance. The Old Testament word for repentance was the Hebrew word *shuwb*, and when he says here to them *shuwb*, he means return in the sense of repent. It is the equivalent of the New Testament expression to repent. When John the Baptist, for example, came and said, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand," he was saying precisely what Malachi is saying here: Turn ye for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.

Now the Old Testament tells us it is God who gives us repentance. But nevertheless, we have responsibility to repent. The New Testament also tells us that it is God who gives us repentance. I think it would be good if I just took a moment out and asked you to turn to a couple of passages in order that you might see that there is no contradiction between the request that God gives us to repent and also the teaching of the word of God that it is God who gives repentance.

Turn to Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 18 and verse 19 first of all. Jeremiah 31, verse 18 says, "I have surely heard Ephraim grieving, 'Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained calf; Bring me back that I may be restored, For Thou art the Lord my God. For after I turned back, I repented.' "

Now notice, you bring me back. You bring me back that I may be restored. "For after I turned back, I repented." So you can see that the prophet understands that the proper way for repentance to come is for God to bring us back and then we repent. So it is God who works first in order that our minds change with reference to him.

Now in the New Testament it is stated more directly, though no more significantly. In Acts chapter 5 and verse 31, we have a clear reference to the fact that repentance is the gift of God. Acts chapter 5 in verse 31, Peter is speaking and he has just said,

"We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. (And now Acts 5: 31) He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, (to give or) to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

So repentance is something that is given by God. But nevertheless, he calls upon the Israelites to repent.

Now what do you do in a case like that? Well, you get down upon your knees and ask God to give you the repentance that he has promised. And repentance will surely come, just as we get down upon our knees today and ask God for the faith to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, which we are responsible to exercise, and he responds to that prayer of faith.

So the prophet addresses them and says, "Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts. "But you say, 'How will we return?' Will a man rob God?" he asks in the 8th verse. And incidentally, we have a clue to the force of the doctrine of the tithe in the Old Testament in the very word "rob". "Will a man rob God?"

Now the word "rob" is very suitable for a debt, but it is not suitable for a gift. If, for example, the tithe was simply a gift that men gave voluntarily without any obligation, a gift or an offering, then you could not say when they did not give it that they were robbing God. But if it were a debt, if it were something that they had to pay, if it were something that they were required to pay, then of course, if they do not give it, you can speak of them as robbing God. So we can see right here in the term "rob" that the responsibility to tithe should not be regarded as an offering at all.

In Old Testament, the Old Testament speaks about tithes and contributions, as we will see here in just a moment. So to give a tithe is to give what you had to give. We already learned that by just observing the word "rob". "Will a man rob God?"

Now he goes on to say, "Yet you are robbing me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?'" They were so dense that they didn't understand just what I've been saying. And the answer comes; you have been robbing me "In tithes and contributions."

Now the tithe is misunderstood even in its Old Testament setting. In the first place, we all know, I hope in this room, that it was a legal obligation. It pertained to the Mosaic Law. And in Leviticus chapter 27 and Deuteronomy chapter 14 we have the various specifications with regard to the obligation to tithe.

There strictly speaking were three tithes. At least three tithes were various aspects of obligations that rested upon the Israelites. And incidentally, the priests or the Levites, I should say, who received tithes also had to tithe their tithes. That's an interesting thing, isn't it? Tithe their tithes.

I wonder how many churches tithe their tithes. Well, that's found in the Old Testament, too, if you're just looking at the Old Testament as a collection of texts and applying them willy-nilly to us.

Now when you study the Old Testament you learn that the tithe was a debt, that is, it was like income tax. A person was responsible to give a tenth of his produce, of his income, so that the tithe was income tax. It was not giving. It shouldn't even be associated with the term giving.

Furthermore, it was given to the priests. It wasn't given to the whole congregation. It was given to the priests. Would we do that today? No, of course not. We cannot apply any of this. It involved also keeping all the law. If a person put himself under the law to tithe, he was saying in effect, I'm under the Mosaic Law. He should keep all the other aspects of the Mosaic Law. We wouldn't want to do that, would we? No, I speak for you because I know what you would say.

It was never imposed on Christians. Let's just look at a few texts in the New Testament. I think it would be interesting for us just to read all of the texts in the New Testament that refer to the tithe. It won't take long, just a few minutes.

Matthew chapter 23 and verse 23. This may be the first time that some of you have ever looked up anything in a concordance. This concordance is named Johnson. Matthew chapter 23 and verse 23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law."

Now notice even in this text, it is said in the New Testament that it belongs to the law. Remember our Lord lived under the law. The law was not done away with until the cross. So he was a good Jew who fulfilled all of the requirements of the Jewish law. These texts are not texts that the church should use for its doctrine of giving. He goes on to say, "Justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others."

Now will you turn over to Luke chapter 11 and verse 42. Luke 11, verse 42, "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others." You can see this is a parallel passage that doesn't add anything to the passage in Matthew.

Chapter 18 and verse 12 of Luke. Chapter 18 and verse 12 we read, "I fast." Now the Pharisee is talking and of course, he too was living under the law. And this is the little parable Jesus told about the Pharisee and the publican. And the Pharisee says, "God, I thank Thee that I am not like the other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all I get." So again, it's an Old Testament situation. A man living under the Old Testament law makes reference to his tithing.

Now in Hebrews chapter 7, we have the only other place in the New Testament where the tithe is mentioned. Hebrews chapter 7. And here we read, while you're finding Hebrews,

"For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace. Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, abides a priest perpetually. Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth (a tithe) of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth (a tithe) from the people, that is, from their brethren, although they are descended from Abraham. But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. And without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes."

Now notice, in this incident we have reference to the Levites who received tithes. But we also have reference to one case, and there, we have the case of Abraham paying tithes to Melchizedek. One historical case before the time of the law. Now I'll say just a word about that in a moment, but we will just keep that in our minds.

And I want you to notice: this is what the New Testament has to say about tithing. That's what the New Testament has to say about tithing. So, New Testament tithing, a biblical principle? No, it's not a biblical principle at all. It's an Old Testament principle. If we can call, we can call it an Old Testament biblical principle; it's not a New Testament principle at all.

So he says, "In tithes and contributions."

Now then he speaks in verse 9 of the result of their failure to exercise their responsibilities. He states, "You are cursed." Malachi chapter 3, verse 9, "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!"

Now the curse that he refers to is the curse that I referred to last week when we turned back to Deuteronomy chapter 28 and saw that the Palestinian covenant was made with Israel in order to govern their use of the land which had been granted to them by divine unconditional covenant.

Now God gave Israel the land and the promises, but he said you will not be able to enjoy them if you do not keep the principles that I have set forth. He said if you disobey me, then I am going to exercise discipline. And he sets forth a series of disciplines, disciplinary action that increase in intensity until finally if they keep on persisting, he's going to scatter them to the four corners of the earth. That's, incidentally, the discipline under which they are resting today. That is why we find Israel in the four corners of the earth. Wherever you go, you find Israelites. God has scattered them to the four corners of the earth because they have been disobedient. They abide under the curse of the Palestinian covenant.

Now if we had time, we could turn to Deuteronomy 28 and even the very words that Malachi uses to describe the curse that rests upon them are the words that Moses uses in that 28th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. I wish we had time to do it, but we don't. I hope that you will in your study do that.

So here he is saying because you have been disobedient, you are abiding under a curse. You see, you do not take the word of God lightly. He really means what he says. You may say: I don't really believe that. I don't want to pay any attention to it at all. But you will find that you will have to suffer because he will make the circumstances such that his word is carried out. You cannot possibly take the word of God lightly. So he speaks then of the curse.

And finally in the last three verses, he speaks of the reward for faithful giving. And it really is a form of a challenge for them to put God first in their tithes and in their offerings, that is, to fulfill the Mosaic Law in these respects. So he states in verse 10, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse."

That hasn't the slightest thing to do with the Christian church. Now I know that there are people that like to think that. "Bring the tithe into the storehouse" means to bring all of your giving into the local church in order that the deacons may handle that particular money. That is not what he is talking about at all. He's talking about the temple treasury when he says the storehouse. So, "Bring all of your tithes into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house." That is so that the priests and the Levites may have that by which they may live, for remember, they were not given an inheritance in the land and that is why the other tribes had to give a tenth to support the ministry of the Levitical cultus. So bring it all into the storehouse.

And then he goes on to say, "And test Me now in this, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need." So that he challenges them to give to fulfill the law, and that he in turn will bless them because of their obedience. In the 11th verse he says he will rebuke the devourer. "Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes." You're suffering because of your failure to obey the word of God. I will stop that when you become obedient.

And finally, he says, " 'And all the nations will call you blessed , for you shall be a delightful land,' says the Lord of hosts." Here he speaks in the same kind of language that he does in Isaiah chapter 62 in which he says that that land shall be called Hephzibah, that is, my delight is in her. So he looks on to the future and says when Israel is obedient, then I shall bring them back into the land and there will be a place, a delightful land, a place of blessing.

Well now, let's consider second the tithe in the Bible because that's the reason that Israel has been disobedient. And it might help to review, just briefly, the tithe in the Bible. And first of all, our capital A in the outline: Before the law.

Now we can tell from the incident in which Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek that the paying of tithes was a historical fact before the giving of the law. So that when God gave the Law of Moses and gave the law concerning the tithe, they knew what the tithe meant. They knew what that meant. But let me point out this important fact: There is no evidence whatsoever that it was required. It was a voluntary offering that a person gave. And so far as we know, we have only this single case.

So what tithing was before the Mosaic Law was isolated, voluntary giving. There is no evidence that it was required at all. It is not until the time of the giving of the law that we have general tithing in an obligatory sense. So we have special cases of individual tithing voluntarily, that's all.

Now under the law we have a special tithing law. I've mentioned to you the three specific kinds of tithes and that these tithes were legal obligations. They were given to the Jewish priests in order to maintain the Levitical ceremony, and therefore, they were very much like our income tax.

To say today: give God a tithe is just as unscriptural as to say I will give my grocer his bill. We say we will pay our grocer's bill. We don't say we will give him his bill. We pay his bill. To give him is very inappropriate if we're speaking about a bill. So to say I will give God a tithe was extremely inappropriate. But nevertheless, that is the way the Christian church has taken this over because they like to have some way by which they can bludgeon us and make us feel very bad if we do not put money in the collection plates, little realizing, it seems to me, that if they were to preach the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, they would have grateful people who would give voluntarily.

Now during the Lord's ministry he commended tithing because he was living under the law. And so he commended the law. He always kept the law. He always commended the keeping of the law. So he told them that when they paid their tithes of mint and anise and cummin and rue, that they were doing that which was right. But they also should have done some things that were more right, that is, justice and mercy. Exercise those virtues. So during the Lord's ministry he commended it, but he lived under law. That's the important thing to remember.

Now during the present age we have no instance whatsoever of the use of the term tithe. Since the Christian church has come into existence, we don't have any mention of the word tithe. Some people say when you say things like this: Well, why is it that we are blessed when we tithe if it's not scriptural? Why, my dear Christian friend, you are blessed when you tithe not because you tithe, but because you give. That's why you're blessed. There is no proof or evidence whatsoever that you are blessed by tithing.

So, tithing is an Old Testament doctrine. It is not a New Testament doctrine at all. You are blessed when you give, and it is great of course to give. We live by giving and giving is great. But tithing is something else.

Now let's turn to the true principles of Christian giving. What are they? The New Testament teaches, first of all, grace giving. Grace giving. Will you turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 9, one of the chapters that is neglected by all who talk about, almost all, not all, almost all who talk about giving in the local church.

The apostle has verse after verse here which has to do with giving. But he states in verse 7 of 2 Corinthians chapter 9, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." What he says is don't give by impulse, don't give by pressure, give as you have purposed in your heart, not grudgingly, not under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Now, this principle of grace giving is the principle that is taught in the New Testament. Now we can spell it out in various ways. And I want to talk for a moment

about the motive in giving. Why do we give? Do we give because we've heard a very good sermon? There are some preachers who are so confident of their sermons that they have the offering after the sermon.

Now I have no doubt that in the case of some preachers that does bring in more money. In the case of others, it might discourage giving, and so they have it before the sermon. That may be a striking testimony to the quality of our preaching because ninety-five percent of the churches have that offering before the sermon. That may mean, may be meaningful, I don't know.

But now, many churches practice principles that are entirely contrary to this grace principle. You'll often have the principle of matching gifts in Christian service. One brother will say I will give a thousand dollars for such-and-such if you will match that gift. And we have organizations that say, certain such-and-such a fund or such-and-such a trust will give so-and-so if we are able to match that by such-and-such. This is just a form of pressure in giving.

Or we have pledge systems. We all have been under the pledge system in which we promise to give a certain amount for the year when Paul says we ought to give according to that which a man hath and not according to that which he hath not.

Now some people don't like the term pledge because they grew up in a church which used the pledge system but didn't preach the Bible. So now that they're in a Bible preaching church, they don't like to use the same terms that they did when they were in that church that didn't preach the Bible. And so instead of having the pledge system, they have a faith promise system, which is nothing more than a pledge system by subterfuge. And we have every member canvasses, and all other types of ways by which we give.

Many of our churches don't bother to take up a collection at all. If they have something large, they hire a firm which does all of the collecting. And they come in with the membership list. They check the financial standing of every single member, put down by the side of every one of the members what they think they ought to give, and then

organize the campaign in the church in order to meet the needs for the new building. Again, that is not a scriptural principle.

What does the Scripture say about the method of giving? Let me give you seven things. I think there're more, but I'm just going to pick out seven real quickly. And I think these seven will describe Christian giving.

First of all, Christian giving is dedicated giving. And by that, I must explain that; I tried to make this just as brief as possible. I mean by that that a person who gives should first give himself to the Lord. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 5 the apostle says, "And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and then to us by the will of God." So Christian giving should be dedicated giving. It should be giving from individuals who have given themselves to the Lord first.

Second, it should be voluntary giving. 2 Corinthians chapter 8 in verse 3 and verse 12 and 2 Corinthians chapter 9 in verse 7 which we have read already. That means that there are one hundred possibilities, well there're really infinite numbers of possibilities, but there are one hundred possibilities at least for giving. We can give one percent, two percent, three percent, ten percent, eleven percent, twelve, twenty-five percent, and so on. Christian giving is voluntary giving. Now this is fair and it is right. And I'm not surprised then that in the New Testament, we should have the principle of voluntary giving.

Third, Christian giving is sacrificial giving. Chapter 8 verse 3 and chapter 9 verse 6. In chapter 9, verse 6 the apostle says, "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully." Let us remember this, that God's shovel is always bigger than ours. But giving should be sacrificial giving.

I heard the story of some fellow who was asked by another Christian brother, How much are you going to give? He said, Well, I think I could give twenty-five dollars

and not feel it. The other fellow said, Well, give fifty and feel it. It's much better when you feel it. So it should be sacrificial giving.

Fourth, it should be proportionate giving. Now I think this is important. We read in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 12, "For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have." Now notice that. That's important. "It is acceptable according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have."

And in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 2, the other passage that has some special relevance to giving, the apostle states there in verse 2, "On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." As he may prosper, so it is proportionate giving. Proportionate giving is fair to the rich and it is fair to the poor alike. And in the case of some, the gift of a dime is more than the gift of a million dollars. The gift of the widow's mite was greater than all that the others were putting in the common treasury of the temple.

Proportionate giving. We should never feel obligated that we have to give ten percent or five percent or twenty percent. Proportionate giving as the Lord has prospered us.

John Wesley was a beautiful illustration of this. Mr. Wesley, so stories of his giving go, the first year that he was engaged in giving, he made thirty pounds. He gave twenty-eight pounds. Incidentally, thirty pounds was a lot of money in Wesley's day. He gave twenty-eight. The next year his income was sixty. He still lived on twenty-eight and gave thirty-two pounds. The next year his income was almost a hundred pounds. He still lived on twenty-eight pounds and he gave the balance. And so he did through most of his life. It is estimated that Mr. Wesley gave thirty thousand pounds, which is a vast sum of money. A half a million or a million today in the life of that itinerant preacher who had established what he thought was his needs and gave the rest to the Lord.

Proportionate giving.

Fifth, giving should be cheerful giving, not grudgingly, with a smile in the heart. Not the kind of giving in some of our Christian churches in which the deacons are exhorted to take up the collection. And when a dollar is put in, the deacons are authorized to say out loud, Amen. Incidentally, this done go on, it does go on. The deacons are told: Now if a dollar is put in the plate, plates, say Amen. If five dollars is put in, say Hallelujah. And if ten is put in, Glory. [Laughter] If you'd ever heard a collection taken up in a meeting like that, it's very interesting. Amen, amen, amen, glory, hallelujah, hallelujah, amen, amen. That's quite an incentive to giving, but it's not very biblical. It does make you laugh, but it's not cheerful giving.

Sixth, I must stop. Private giving. 1 Corinthians chapter 16 in verse 2, the apostle says that we should lay it by, by ourselves. We don't have storehouse tithing in the New Testament. We have house giving.

Now, when should we give? Well, we're to give to the family, to needy saints, to the teachers of the word of God, and to those of whom the Holy Spirit reminds us.

And finally, our giving should be systematic. So Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, verse 2. He speaks about giving on the first day of every week.

Well, our time is up and we must stop, but I think you can see that the tithe is not a New Testament principle at all. New Testament giving is grace giving. May God help us to give according to those principles. And of course, may he help us to give. That's important.

Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we're grateful to Thee for Thy word. We thank Thee for these great principles which make so much sense to us. Deliver us from things that are contrary to holy Scripture. For Jesus' sake. Amen.