

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

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The Spiritual Law of Giving

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Many Christian groups demand that their members give 10% (tithe) of their gross income to their organization in order to be a member in good standing. Unfortunately, some groups go so far as to link tithing to salvation, and others link it to the only way to receive God's blessing; "give and be blessed, don't give and be cursed." Of course, they use specific verses to make their demand, generally based on the letter that kills and not the spirit that gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). In other words, they apply the old covenant law of words (letters) etched in dead stones and fail to embrace the new covenant law of the spirit or, we could say, the spiritual law of giving etched in living hearts of love. There is a law for giving, but it is a spiritual law based on love.

Simply, each of us must be led by the spirit of God as to what church, ministry, cause, or individual we should support and by how much. As long as one feels led to give a donation (i.e., love offering) and is not coerced or driven by fear or greed (i.e., "give so I can demand God to give me more"), then the giving is between the believer and the Lord, and none of us should judge or question such giving.

With this in mind, I offer some guidance. There are several ways to approach this subject, but I am going to offer only a few highpoints from Scripture. An article will follow sometime in the next month or so that will fill in the details on giving and the tithe.

First, there are no directives given to believers in the New Testament epistles to tithe or, more specifically, to give to a local church or ministry 10% off the top of one's gross income. Even the first council of the church held in Jerusalem was not led to instruct those among the nations that turned to God to tithe (Acts 15:1-5). Their instructions were few and simple; they did not want to trouble them with a lot of rules or, even, to observe the Law of Moses (i.e., the letter written on stone).

Second, the earth and the land belong to God (Exodus 19:5; Leviticus 25:23) and, in like fashion, we belong to God, and as such, we are to offer our bodies to God.

(1) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2 NASB)

This is our first step in giving, for it begins with giving to God and then coming into the will and mind of God [of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16)]. We are to be totally dependent on the Holy Spirit for guidance in the matter of giving or, we could say, in the matter of sacrificial living, of which giving is a major component. The will of God tells us: **And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased** (Hebrews 13:16).

Third, the motive of the heart is the guiding factor, and this motive must be based on love and a relationship with the living God. The love of Christ demands that we give freely. After all, **God so loves the world that He gave His only begotten Son** (John 3:16). Giving starts with the love of God and extends to the world. Paul was very clear on the matter of love.

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:3 NASB)

Let love be without hypocrisy. ... Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (Romans 12:9; 13:8 NASB)

Paul witnessed this love manifested through the abundant giving of the Macedonian believers.

(1) Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, (2) that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. (3) For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, (4) begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, (5) and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5 NASB)

This is love in action, based on the fact that **the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us** (Romans 5:5).

Fourth, notice that the Macedonians first gave themselves to the Lord and then, by the will of God, to Paul and his companions. This goes along with offering your bodies a living and holy sacrifice to God. We must give ourselves first to the Lord, and through this giving, we will know and embrace the will of God in giving to others out of His love.

Fifth, it has been said by others that we are to **give by need and not in response to greed**. This is so true. Much demand for giving to men's ministries so that they can live opulent lifestyles is based on greed. These men are greedy as they seek more and more money from people, and they do this by playing off the greed of people who want to get rich just as they are. If this doesn't work, then they play off fear that God is going to curse and toast them if they don't give.

(27) Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. (28) One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. (29) And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. (30) And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders. (Acts 11:27-30 NASB)

Notice that the Spirit identified the need (not want), and the disciples contributed for their relief.

Sixth, we are to give according to our means; that is, we give what we can, not a fixed amount, and we cannot give what we do not have. The disciples gave in proportion to their means.

For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. (2 Corinthians 8:12 NASB)

If we do not have anything, then God is not demanding that we give. This is contrary to some ministries that tell people to put their donation or tithe on a credit card. Not only does this break God's spiritual law of giving, but it also breaks His law against usury (charging interest for credit). In God's house, as well as in the world, people might go through seasons when they have abundance and when they have little. When ones are in a season of abundance, they are to give liberally to ones in need and, when those in need begin to come into abundance, they are to give to others in need. Again, Paul offers the Macedonians as an example of ones who gave according to their ability, even beyond their ability.

(14) At this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; (15) as it is written, "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack." (2 Corinthians 8:14-15 NASB)

Seventh, giving that pleases God comes from a cheerful heart and, we could say, a committed heart.

Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7 NASB)

"Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution." (Exodus 25:2 NASB)

The contribution was for the building of the tabernacle, the place where the Lord put His name and dwelled among His people. He did not demand that they give. Why? Because **God is love** and His love does not coerce, demand, or instill fear and greed, but wins hearts. Should we be any different?