

THE SECRET OF HIS PURPOSE THE PLAN FOR THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES
TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN THE KING,
EVERYTHING IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH,
IN JESUS....

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#26

Giving by the Spirit—Not by the Tith

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The subject of the tithe or, as many view it today, giving a fixed percentage (i.e., 10%) of one's income (generally gross) to the church (however one defines the word *church*) or to some ministry with a cause, is not without controversy. As usual, like so many things, there are abuses regarding giving. I won't bother to elaborate, for if you are reading this you probably know what they are. At best, I see most teaching on the tithe as the tradition of men that is very difficult to change, especially within the institutional church with all its programs, paid staff, and other overhead costs. As such, I don't see the value in trying to refute the tithe that is often demanded from so many as if it is God's will, based on old covenant teaching. What follows is really for those who are troubled by the tithe, sensing in their spirit there must be a better way; one that is not so legalistic as it is often portrayed, and one that is from a leading of the spirit.

What follows are twelve spiritual principles or characteristics of giving, that I believe bring greater honor and glory to God.

1. **Liberty of the spirit of the Lord**
2. **Living sacrifice**
3. **Love**
4. **Caring for the needs of the body of Christ**
5. **Giving according to one's means**
6. **Liberality**
7. **Earnestness**
8. **Equality**
9. **Sowing and reaping**
10. **Harvest of righteousness**
11. **Cheerfulness**
12. **Grace**

There probably are more, but these are the ones that struck me as I studied the matter. Perhaps some are mere characteristics, but others, in their own right, are spiritual laws. Love is the third principle presented; but, without doubt, it is the foundation of giving, for giving is based on *the royal law of love* (James 2:8). For the sake of continuity, I have chosen to refer to the twelve as principles.

These principles pertain primarily to helping the body of the Messiah Jesus that is in need; however, I recognize that there are other things that involve giving, such as giving to a local congregation or some outreach or teaching ministry that we might be led to support. In these cases, liberty, love, righteousness, and grace are the more applicable principles. Some might continue to argue that we must tithe to a local congregation; otherwise, how will fixed

expenses be paid, such as the pastor's salary and maintenance of the property? The answer is simple; it is called a budget. Those committed to such a thing should contribute whatever is needed to keep it going, if that is what the spirit of the Lord leads them to do. Further, giving is not restricted to money, for there are other things that can be given, such as giving of one's gifting (i.e., talent, ability, or skill) when needed to help others.

First, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of liberty**.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (2 Corinthians 3:17 NASB)

We are to follow the spirit of the Lord to know and to do the will of God. When we do, there is liberty, not bondage to a tradition. The fact of the matter is that the holy spirit knows the needs of people, and meeting these needs may require more, not less, than the tithe that many seem so convinced they must give without any thought as to why or for what. Many opportunities for giving according to God's will probably are missed by those who adhere to a rigid giving of a tenth every week.

I realize that there is also the matter of the so-called "free-will offering," which implies that the tithe has nothing to do with one's will. In other words, you just give 10% without rhyme or reason; "do it or be cursed." I find this sort of thinking rather interesting, for the ones who push the legalism of the tithe, as if it has nothing to do with one's free will, are often the same ones who believe that man's free will determines whether one ends in heaven (bliss) or in hell (torture) for eternity. If you have read much of my material, you know that I reject such thinking. The fact of the matter is that all giving should be based on an offering and not a tithe, for the offering leaves the giving open for the holy spirit to lead, and the tithe does not.

It is rather interesting that there are no directives given to believers under the new covenant to tithe or, more specifically, to give 10% off the top of one's gross or net income to a local church or ministry; thus, it clearly was not a "hot topic" among the early church.

I suppose that one could make the argument that since the embryonic church was comprised mostly of Jewish believers they did not need any teaching or exhorting on the matter. Simply, it was an unchallenged tradition that continued, just as it is unchallenged in our day 2,000 years later. This argument would have some merit if it weren't for the fact that the first council of the church held in Jerusalem failed to give any instruction on the matter of tithing (Acts 15). They had convened to give instruction to the non-Jewish believers in Antioch, the believers from among the nations, and they came to an agreement.

(19) For this reason, I judge not to trouble those from the nations turning to God, (20) but to write to them to hold back from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and that strangled, and blood. ... (28) For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to put not one greater burden on you than these necessary things: (29) to hold back from idol sacrifices, and blood, and that strangled, and from fornication; from which continually keeping yourselves, you will do well. Be prospered. (Acts 15:19-20, 28-29 LITV)

If there was ever an opportunity to make sure that the tithe flowed into the coffers, so to speak, to keep the apostles and others employed, this would have been the perfect occasion to do so. They could have established a scheme to send the tithe to Jerusalem every week to make the church a viable institution within the control of the Roman government. But they did no such thing. Instead, they gave a few instructions dealing with idolatry.

Notice that the holy spirit was involved with this instruction, so we cannot state that, somehow, the council missed the boat, so to speak. This was the will of God. Consider the result when the believers in Antioch received this word: *And reading it, they rejoiced at the comfort* (Acts 15:31 LITV). It brought comfort or encouragement to them, not fear, nor discouragement, nor bondage. It liberated them because they were set free from tradition to follow the leading of the spirit of God.

Simply, the early church leaders knew something of the leading of the spirit of the Lord. In turn, they knew that they had to entrust the Lord's people to this same leading.

Thus, the key to our understanding of this instruction is the holy spirit—being led by the spirit of God. This is one of the most critical underpinnings of the spiritual law of giving, as well as the Christian life in general.

Second, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of a living sacrifice**. Allow me to build this thought.

When God called the sons of Israel out of Egypt to become a kingdom of priests and sons of God, He reminded them that He is the creator of all things and that all things belong to Him. In other words, as creator, He has the right over His creation, for He owns it all.

"Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine..." (Exodus 19:5 NASB)

"The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me." (Leviticus 25:23 NASB)

We see very similar declarations when the Lord spoke to Job: *"Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine"* (Job 41:11), and as the Lord spoke through the psalmist: *"If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains"* (Psalm 50:12).

Obviously, man belongs to the Lord as well, for he is contained in the world. This reminds me of another word that I find most encouraging.

But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!" (Isaiah 43:1 NASB)

Are not believers the true spiritual Israel, the new creation, in this day? To the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, the Lord declares: *"You are Mine!"*

But there is more to this, for mankind came forth from the land; that is, Adam was literally fashioned out of the soil of the earth. He was made of soil or, if you will, dirt. Our mortal bodies could be likened to a piece of real estate on earth that belongs to the creator. Our entire body is made up of materials that are found on and in the earth. Consequently, mankind is a piece of the earth.

The Concordant Literal Version (CLV) has a strange read, but it makes the point of our connection to the soil.

The first man was out of the earth, soilish; the second Man is the Lord out of heaven. Such as the soilish one is, such are those also who are soilish, and such as the Celestial One, such are those also who are celestials. And according as we wear the image of the soilish, we should be wearing the image also of the Celestial. (1 Corinthians 15:47-49 CLV)

According to Paul's logic, we started out soilish but are destined to be celestial, just like our Lord Jesus, who is the celestial one.

This leads to the principle of a living sacrifice, and again, it comes through Paul.

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. 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)

We are to offer our soilish bodies to God as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. We are not to present a part of our body, like a hand or a foot or an ear. No; we are to present our whole body to God as a living sacrifice. In other words, we are to give our whole life to God as a service to God. We are to be consumed on the altar of His service. Again, a foot or a hand will not do. It is a total and unequivocal presenting of ourselves to God.

But notice that there is more to it, for we are not to be conformed to this world. We are to be conformed to Christ, not to the world. To do this, we need to be changed by the renewing of our minds, which means we are to have *the mind of Christ* (1 Corinthians 2:16), for only this mind knows and proves the will of God.

This is a vital step in giving, for it begins with giving oneself to God, which leads one into the will and mind of God. Again, this requires that one 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.

In fact, giving is sacrificial. The will of God tells us: *And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased* (Hebrews 13:16). The Macedonians were a wonderful example of living sacrifices as they ***first gave themselves to the Lord and to us*** [i.e., Paul and company] *by the will of God* (2 Corinthians 8:5). They had the proper order in their lives; it was

giving of themselves to the Lord first, and, out of this giving, they knew the will of God in regard to helping others.

Third, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the spiritual law of love**, or, as James called it, **the royal law of love**. After all, the law itself hangs on the commandment (law) of love.

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? And Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." Deut. 6:5 This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Lev. 19:18 (40) On these two commandments all the Law and the Prophets hang. (Matthew 22:36-40 LITV)

Our **first love** is to be for the Lord Himself (Revelation 2:4), and, out of this love, we are to love our fellow neighbor, which not only includes our brethren in the Lord but all mankind.

Love comes from the heart; therefore, the motive of the heart is the guiding factor in giving. It is a much higher law than the law of the tithe. It is based on the royal law of love, which comes from a living relationship with the living God who is love.

We see an example of the relationship of the heart to giving when the Lord spoke to Moses about His desire to have a sanctuary in which He could dwell among the sons of Israel.

"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 Lord 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. He wants hearts like His that manifest love and righteousness and mercy and grace. Shouldn't we be like our Father?

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)

Therefore, openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you. (2 Corinthians 8:24 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)

The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the holy spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:5), and this love must be manifested to others and one way, if not the most vital way, is to give to others.

Now, to add to these three basic principles or spiritual laws, it is best that we turn to a real-life example of taking up a contribution for brethren in need as seen through the heart of Paul. The entire matter of giving from the new covenant perspective begins when the early ecclesia was faced with a challenge; the brethren in Judea were in need.

Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 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. And in the proportion [according to ability] that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders. (Acts 11:27-30 NASB)

The first thing to note is the involvement of the spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7) in revealing the need. As seen already, where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and the disciples were at liberty to take up a contribution for the brethren in need. They weren't forced or coerced into it. Simply, they knew that the spirit of the Lord made them aware of the need, and they needed to offer some relief to the brethren in Judea. Another way of stating this is that they were obedient to the prodding of the holy spirit and out of this nudge, if you will, they contributed.

The above verses reveal the fourth and fifth principles.

Fourth, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of the body caring for the needs of the body**; that is, the body of Messiah Jesus is to meet the needs of the members of the body when there is a need. In other words, we are to care for our own when they are in need if the holy spirit brings their need to our attention, regardless of where they are located.

The word *need* is emphasized for good reason, for there is a difference between needs and wants. Needs deal with essentials of life and wants deal with the extras, even excesses, of life. Another way of stating this is that needs are for survival of the body and wants are for the satisfaction of the soul. Satisfying one's wants can and often leads to greed.

It has been said by others that we are to *give by need and not in response to greed*. This is so true. However, I would add that we are not compelled to give for someone's wants either. When a request for help is brought to our attention, we need to discern a true need versus a want, especially one based on greed.

Today, much demand for giving to the ministries of men so that they can live opulent lifestyles is based on greed and their desire to go beyond their needs to wants. Simply, they want to get rich and live in excess of what they need. 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. *Flee from such things, people of God* (1 Timothy 6:11).

I have little doubt that if the Lord appeared on earth today, He would speak of such men in the most severe way. They would be like the hypocritical religious leaders of the Jews to whom Jesus spoke woes (Matthew 23:13-33).

Consider how the Lord handled the rich who sought to enter the kingdom; He told them it would be difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of the heavens. Why? Because it is difficult for a rich man to part with his excess wealth!

Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:21-25 ESV)

In this case, being saved is not about immortal life but about eonian life, that is, having life in God's age today and in the age to come when the kingdom of King Jesus begins to openly manifest among the nations. The problem for this young man was not that he was rich but that he had excess he had acquired from his fellow countrymen who had fallen on hard times and had to sell their property. In other words, the Lord was telling him to give his excess wealth back to the poor. He wasn't telling him to become poor but to simply help them with the excess that he did have.

The Lord spoke a parable warning the crowd gathered around Him to be on guard against every form of greed, which means that greed can manifest itself in many forms, some subtle and some very obvious.

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. (Luke 12:15-23 ESV)

The fool stores up goods for many years. We might not think of this as a form of greed. After all, aren't we told to save for retirement and for so-called rainy days? However, Jesus encouraged no such thing. Instead, He told His disciple not to worry about life but to seek His kingdom and His righteousness.

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:33-34 NASB)

Worrying about tomorrow hinders giving to others, for those who worry in this regard will fear that they might not have enough for their own needs if they give to meet the needs of others.

Now, returning to the example of contributing to the brethren in Judea, we see another principle.

Fifth, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of giving according to one's means**.

And in the proportion [according to ability] that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. (Acts 11:30 NASB [added by writer])

The brethren in Judea were in need, and, when the disciples learned of it through the prophets that came from Jerusalem, they determined, that is, purposely and willfully decided, to help the brethren according to their ability to help. In other words, they gave what they could, which means there was no percentage attached to it. They gave according to their means. If they had no means, we must assume that they did not give; a principle confirmed by Paul.

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

One can give only from what one has; if there is nothing, there is nothing to give. It is that simple! If we do not have anything to give, 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. Such a practice is not giving according to one's means; it is giving what one does not have and then paying back the bank with interest, which is usury, which is unacceptable to God. Let us wake up and begin to follow God's spiritual laws.

Now, Paul elaborated further on the contribution to the Judean brethren in his second epistle to the Corinthians, starting in chapter 8. Here we discover more principles at work.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints--and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5 ESV)

Paul had traveled to the areas of Macedonia and Achaia. The Thessalonians and the Philippians were in Macedonia, and the Corinthians were in Achaia. Evidently, the brethren in Macedonia were under much trial and tribulation (e.g., 2 Thessalonians 1), and it appeared that they had nothing to give. Paul recognized their plight and did not place any sort of demand on them to give. In fact, it seems as if Paul had told them they did not have to take up a contribution; however, the Macedonians would hear of no such thing. They begged Paul to allow them to participate in helping to provide support (i.e., relief) for the saints. They not only gave according

to their ability but also beyond their ability. The need was great and their hearts were opened wide by the love of God.

What was the key to their heart of giving? It was that they first gave themselves to the Lord and out of this they knew the will of God. The will of God said to respond out of love for the Lord and His people. This is **first love** in action, and a beautiful example of the first three principles of giving—the liberty of the spirit of the Lord, a living sacrifice, and love. Paul had not expected such a reaction from the Macedonians, but he was thrilled to see it.

It is not uncommon for the poor and afflicted to bemoan their condition and to continually put their hand out for help from others. The Macedonians were in deep poverty, which means it was severe poverty, a poverty that brings one down; but, instead of holding them back from making a contribution, they begged and urged Paul to allow them to do so. This reminds me of a word from James.

Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (James 2:5 NASB)

This leads to the next principle.

Sixth, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of liberality**.

Although the Macedonians were in deep poverty, their giving overflowed in the wealth of their liberality, a word that Paul used to encourage the Corinthians in their giving. We could say that their wealth was in their heart not in their purse.

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:10-11 ESV)

Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all.... (2 Corinthians 9:13 NASB)

The word *liberality* comes from the Greek word *haplotes*, which means "simplicity, singleness, sincerity." Thus, depending on the translation, it is translated with the words *simplicity*, *singleness*, or *sincerity* (Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22). It also conveys the thought of being "folded together."

In the above verses, the word *liberality* conveys the idea of giving generously or of being a liberal giver. Such a one is not stingy or demanding in giving. Such a one gives generously out of a heart of love, not expecting something in return. What a far cry this is from the whole concept of the tithe that so many are told to give or be cursed, which, by the way, breaks all the spiritual laws that apply to giving.

Applying the other meanings of the word *haplotēs* to the principle of liberality reveals that such giving is *sincere* for, out of the love of Christ, we are to desire to help others; it is *simple*, meaning it is not based on fear, coercion, compulsion, or some formula or form of legalism; and it is *single*, for we have been folded together with Christ, and we respond with His heart of love to which we have been joined. After all, Paul reminds us that we have been betrothed to another, that is, to one husband (Romans 7:4; 2 Corinthians 11:2).

Continuing on in his encouragement of the Corinthians, evidently, Paul became concerned that they might not take up the full contribution as first intended, which leads to the seventh principle.

Seventh, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of earnestness**.

So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well. But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love [the reality of your love] also. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it. But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. (2 Corinthians 8:6-11 NASB [BWD])

For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to speak of you—will be put to shame by this confidence. So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness. (2 Corinthians 9:1-5 NASB)

Some had the desire to give a year prior and had begun to do so, but Paul encouraged them, not commanded them, to finish the job as proof of their earnestness and sincerity of love. There had to be a reality to their love, which means it had to be manifested; otherwise, their love for the brethren was not real. Paul had bragged of the Corinthians' heart; however, if he had arrived with a Macedonian and the contribution had not been prepared, it would have put Paul and the Corinthians to shame. It would have been a horrible testimony.

Earnestness demands preparation, diligence, and zeal.

The Greek word for *earnestness* is *spoude*, which comes from a root word meaning "speed." Thus, attached to this word is the need to do something in all diligence, even haste. In other words, do it without delay. After all, if one is in need, it is not enough to say that you will help him later or in some nebulous future. The need is now and should be met with all due diligence or haste.

Eighth, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of equality according to one's level of need.**

For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality 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; as it is written, "HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK." (2 Corinthians 8:13-15 NASB)

It is interesting that, through Paul, the holy spirit quoted Exodus 16:18, which is found in the story of the Lord providing bread, fine as the frost on the ground, to the sons of Israel as they were in the wilderness. Some had gathered much and some little, but, according to scripture, the ones who gathered much had no excess and the ones who gathered little had no lack. In other words, the issue was not how much one had gathered but that what one gathered (much or little) was enough to meet one's needs for the day. Each had all that they needed, and they were to consume it before the next morning; otherwise, the sun would melt it.

Of course, the spiritual lesson is that the Lord will provide for our daily needs, and He is our daily bread from heaven. But this is beyond the scope of this article. We could say that it was a matter of quality not quantity, for it is obvious that all did not require the same amount of bread; some required much and some required little.

So, in the case of the contribution for the Judeans, the issue was not that everyone had to have the same amount of wealth or goods, but that they had enough to meet their needs, so there was no lack on the part of the giver or the receiver.

Today, within the body of Jesus, the level of need may vary across the globe. In some parts of the world, people can live on a few hundred dollars a month, but, in other parts of the world, it may require thousands of dollars. According to Paul, equality would come into play if the ones requiring a few hundred dollars suddenly were faced with having to live on a few dollars a month. Those who had gathered much would help those who had gathered little so that there was no lack.

Some might read these words and conclude that Paul was extolling social justice or some form of socialism, but this is not true. *Social justice* means that government takes from an advantaged group and gives it to a disadvantaged or disenfranchised group because the advantaged group supposedly treated the disadvantaged group unjustly. The problem with such ideology is that injustice is often defined by those who are best called *social engineers*, not by righteous judges. In the US, as well as in much of the world today, this ideology is more about *redistribution of wealth* than it is about a sense of equality. In the case of the above

example of ones living on hundreds of dollars verses ones living on thousands of dollars, social justice and redistribution of wealth would demand that the rich become poorer and the poor become richer, which is what socialism is all about. *Socialism* seeks "to level the playing field" by making everyone dependent on the state and somewhat equal in wealth or poverty.

This is not what Paul meant with the word *equality*, which means "likeness." Paul was practical, and he knew that within the body of Christ there would be those in need and those in abundance. However, I do not see any evidence that he believed that all within the body must be at the same level of wealth or even poverty. To me, equality is more about bringing balance into the body so that each part can do what God has called it to do, all to His glory.

Simply, if one has abundance, then this abundance is a provision of God for those in need. It doesn't mean that one is to remain in abundance all the time or for one to remain in need all the time. There are seasons of abundance and seasons of need in various places within the Lord's body, and these may and, most likely, will change over time, and when they do, we need to be open to adjust our giving, as well as our receiving. This is the Lord's way of providing balance within His body, *if* His body is obedient to the leading of His spirit.

The key to equality is found in the heart of the apostles: *Remember the poor* (Galatians 2:10).

Now, in Paul's closing words on the matter of a contribution for the saints, we discover some more principles.

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. (2 Corinthians 9:6-12 ESV)

Ninth, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of sowing and reaping**.

Needless to say, this principle is well-known among Christians, for it is used often in teaching on the matter of giving. Unfortunately, it also is used as if it were a formula or a demand on the Lord to make one rich. According to the false prosperity gospel, one is to sow seed to another man's ministry to make the "minister" rich in hopes of reaping riches for oneself. Unfortunately, it does not always work out this way. No matter what happens for the giver, the ministry always gets rich while the giver may or may not reap anything. Of course, when nothing happens for the sower, the response from some of the prosperity preachers is that the giver, perhaps, lacked faith, didn't give enough, didn't give with the right heart or motive, or has to wait a while for a harvest.

The simplest way to look at sowing and reaping is that God provides the material or the seed to be sown, and the spirit of the Lord reveals the needs in His body. We are to be obedient in sowing as we are led by the holy spirit, and, as we are, God increases the supply of seed. Why? It is so that we can increase our service to others, that is, so that we can give more to help others, but not to make a man rich in his ministry or to become like him. In other words, the purpose is not so much for our benefit but for the benefit or relief of others in need. When we follow this principle, it brings glory and thanksgiving to God, and we fulfill the principle of liberality as well.

Tenth, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of the harvest of righteousness**.

I may be wrong but much of the teaching on sowing and reaping seems to miss the heart of the matter and that is righteousness. The sowing and reaping teaching mostly emphasizes what one will get in return in the way of material goods for sowing abundantly: "*Give a lot, get a lot!*" What is seldom heard is that the sowing is for a harvest of righteousness, which is something far greater than material goods. Righteousness is about character, the very character of our Lord Jesus. Righteousness is about doing what is right in the sight of God.

Giving with a heart of love to help bring relief to others in need speaks volumes of one's character; it speaks of one who is practicing righteousness and harvesting the righteous character of Christ, who is our righteousness.

The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. (1 John 3:7)

This is more than imputed righteousness; this is practical, living righteousness that brings pleasure and glory and thanksgiving to God.

Eleventh, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of cheerfulness**, for God loves a cheerful giver.

We could say that this is a subset of the law of love, for it is a matter of the heart. If one loves, then one will manifest this love through a giving heart that gives willingly and cheerfully and not under compulsion.

The word *cheerful* comes from the Greek word *hilaros*, which means "propitious or merry as in hilarious." In fact, we can see the similarity in the Greek word *hilaros* and the English word *hilarious*, which means "noisily merry, even boisterous." In other words, there is great emotional merriment in one who gives cheerfully. This is the kind of giver that God loves. Merry givers give with an open heart, and no one needs to tell them when to give, what to give, or how much to give. We could say that such a one has a "big heart" just as our heavenly Father has a "Big Heart."

Twelfth, the spiritual law of giving is based on **the principle of grace**.

I saved this one for last, for, like love, it sums up all the other principles of giving.

We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. (2 Corinthians 8:1 ESV)

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9 ESV)

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.... (2 Corinthians 9:8 NASB)

Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9:13-15 NASB)

Notice how Paul wove grace into the matter of giving. We give as an act of grace, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became poor that we might become rich in character. Before Jesus entered into our life, we were poor in character, even bankrupt. We had nothing to commend us to God. But when He broke into our life, He gave us His life so that we could become rich in His character, *so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Now, by His grace we are to abound in His grace that is manifested in an abundance of good deeds. Good deeds are more than giving money to others; there are countless ways to manifest the grace of God to others.

In conclusion, what is grace? This is how I see it!

Grace is "the overwhelming power of God that takes the ugly and transforms it into the joyously beautiful."

Dear brethren, when by the grace of God, we help others by our loving, sacrificial giving, we are taking what could be viewed as an ugly situation and turning it into something joyously beautiful, not only for the recipient but also for us the giver.

May God receive all the glory and honor as we follow the spiritual law of giving!