The Truth About Tithing

Part Three: To Whom Do We Give?

We covered quite a bit in Parts One and Two concerning "giving," even though we've only just scratched the surface of the topic. In Part One we talked about *why* we should give, and it basically comes down to 2 things:

We give our stuff away in order to meet another person's physical needs, thereby showing and living and abiding in the love of God in this simple action.

And we should give our stuff away because God wants us to stay focused on Him, His promises, and His amazing plan for us in the age to come and not be focused on the pleasures and fleeting security that the world's goods can give. God's plan for us to rule and reign with His Son requires no less than our complete sanctification, which is accomplished as we pour out our own self-will and allow God's will to replace it. This we know takes much hard work, determination, and complete reliance on God to meet every single one of our needs.

Additionally, in Part Two we talked about there really being no distinction made by God in the item of giving, for the item itself is immaterial. He wants us to give willingly, no matter what it is, and every single act of giving that we perform must come from a willing heart, for with this God is pleased.

To give (or do anything "for the Lord") in a mechanical way, just to follow His commands and ordinances <u>in outward form alone</u> is *worthless*, and with such things God is not pleased –

> **Mark 7:5-9**
> 5 *Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"* 6 *He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.* 7 *And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'* 8 *For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men —the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."* 9 *He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.*

As we noted in Part Two, the nation of Israel was to offer sacrifices and tithings and offerings of every sort – daily, weekly, monthly, annually. They were to give their time, their money, their goods… everything. The intricacies of the Mosaic Law were complex, yet Intelligently designed.

Because of the inherent dangers of being a chosen child of God in this world ruled by Satan, God's sworn enemy, God designed a mechanism that would guard and protect His kids as they

grew up into the full knowledge of Him, His plans, and His purposes. The Law served as a "tutor" to lead Israel to Christ, so that they would fully grasp and understand that justification comes by *faith* (Gal. 3:21-25), and not simply by actions alone.

God wanted (and still wants) to teach His children that He should come first in everything. And when you're focused on Him, everything else should grow dim—

> **Hebrews 12:1-2**
> [1] *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,* [2] *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

God wanted His firstborn son, Israel, to follow His commandments and His law in order to show Him that they loved Him. He promised that if they did that, He would in turn take care of them. God wanted their whole hearts, their minds, their souls, and their strength. He wanted them to love mercy, to act justly, and to walk humbly with Him. The Law was the tutor that was to teach them how to do just that. It was the actions of a kind Parent, who desired to grow up His son to the status of "the head of the nations," to be the reflection of Him amongst all nations of the earth… and so He implemented a system that would teach them, from Pre-K to College, so to speak.

But here's the kicker: if they gave of their "stuff" simply because they were blindly following the Law, they were missing out on something greater that God had for them. It was never about the animals, or the firstfruits of the land, or the 10% on top of the 10% on top of the 10%. As God's chosen people followed the Law, they would have grown up into maturity to understand the weightier things of the Law – the things which spoke of all that which Christ came to offer – love, mercy, and justice - a righteousness that surpassed even that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20) – those who "sit in Moses' seat" (Matt. 23:2) and kept to every jot and tittle of the Law.

However, as time passed, the great majority of the nation of Israel decided that they knew better than God. They decided that they would follow the letter of the law and still keep their hearts from Him, for they misunderstood that which the giving was supposed to teach them. That the ACT and the HEART must be in tandem – one without the other is worthless –

> **Matthew 23:23**
> *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*

> **Psalm 51:15-19**
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> 15 *O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.* 16 *For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.* 17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.* 18 *Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.* 19 *Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.*

Israel got so far away from where they should have been, that when the fulfillment of the whole Law came – God Incarnate, Who offered a "new and living way" in direct contrast with the **form** of the Law, Israel *totall*y didn't get it… nor did they want to -

> **Matthew 23:37-39 [Jesus speaking]**
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> 37 *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were <u>not willing</u>!* 38 *See! Your house is left to you desolate;* 39 *for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' "*

They missed it; they *willingly* missed it by having their senses dulled by complacency and arrogance –

> **Acts 28:27 [Paul quoting Isaiah]**
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> *For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." '*

And so Jesus announced that He would build something new – the Church – and that the kingdom would be taken from Israel and given to "a nation bearing the fruits of it" –

> **Matthew 16:16-19**
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> 16 *Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* 17 *Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.* 18 *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.* 19 *And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*
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> **Matthew 21:43**
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> *"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you [Israel] and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.*

> **Romans 9:30-32**
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> 30 *What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;* 31 *but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.* 32 *Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.*

And the question was: Would the Church understand that which Israel didn't? Would they understand what God really required from them, as His children? Would they learn it and would they live it?

> **Romans 12:1-2**
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> 1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* 2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*
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> **Matthew 16:23-27**
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> 23 *But He [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."* 24 *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.* 25 *For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.* 26 *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?* 27 *For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*
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> **1 John 3:17-18**
>
> 17 *But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?* 18 *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

And so here we are, Church. We are here, now, nearly 2,000 years after those first Jewish men – men who knew the Old Testament Scriptures and understood that which God was teaching them – started the first groups of "Christians." Groups that were made up of both Gentiles and Jews –

> **Romans 9:24**
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> *…even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*

The groups of Jews who accepted their Messiah would have had a pretty good idea about what God was requiring of them, although for most of them they needed to be taught the spirit of the Law and convinced that the form of the Law was not to be followed anymore.

And those first Gentiles-turned-Christians who believed in Jesus as their Savior were once without a God, and were then suddenly with a God… a God that they knew only through either the words spoken to them by Jewish men, or words spoken to them by the Perfect Jewish Man –

> **Matthew 12:17-18**
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> 17 *…that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:* 18 *"Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen, My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased! I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.*
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> **Romans 15:15-21**
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> 15 *Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,* 16 *that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.* 17 *Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.* 18 *For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—* 19 *in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.* 20 *And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,* 21 *but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."*

So many "newborns," so to speak, needing to be taught how to act appropriately… and needing to be taught how to drop all of their man-made customs and previous pagan ideals and traditions. They were taught the pure milk of the Word… and they were to move on to the strong meat of the Word.

In fact, God gave them the apostles to do just that, and the letters in the New Testament are our glimpse into that time period of transition and teaching (e.g. Will the Church understand and live out that which Israel didn't?). The letters in the NT are the writings of Jewish men – men who understood the weightier matters of the Word, men who grasped the Spirit of God and the mysteries to be found within the Word itself – and these men were charged with teaching everyone how to live in such a way as to please God.

In Corinthians we read about Paul trying to bring up an immature group of Christians who were having a big problem with sin inside their group. In this city of Corinth the main problem

appeared to be in keeping the oppressive worldliness out of the Church, a Church comprised mainly of newly converted Gentiles.

In Galatians we read about Paul struggling to get a church made up mostly of Gentile converts (Gal. 4:8), who were being pressed to be circumcised and take up the Law (Gal. 5:2; 6:12-13), to understand why the Law doesn't have to be followed to the letter, but it still has to be followed *in spirit.* (And remember, most people aren't getting that it's all about the inside and not the outside. Remember the state of the nation of Israel at this point and what was being taught - a complete overhaul was necessary [as it is here, now, presently, in the Church].)

And in Ephesians we read about Paul encouraging and exhorting a mature group of Christians who seemed to grasp the strong meat (after he taught it to them for 3 years), and we see Paul warn them about falling away from what they have learned.

And it goes on… each letter is different because each group that Paul is talking to is different. And when we get to Hebrews we see that the writer is clearly addressing Christians with a Jewish background and knowledge of the Scriptures, and the writer has to succinctly teach them what the OT was *really* teaching –

> **Hebrews 4:2-9**
> 2 *For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.* 3 *For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' " although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.* 4 *For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works";* 5 *and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."* 6 *Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience,* 7 *again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts."* 8 *For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.* 9 *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.*

AND, the author of Hebrews has to warn these Christians (who were once mature and were now slipping) that they could still miss the rest that remains for them; they could still fall away from it; they could still "come short of it" (Heb. 4:1, 11).

And finally, in Peter and Jude, we read about a corruption that has snuck in to the teaching, and a bunch of false teachers who have arisen from among them that were leading everyone astray. People with ideologies that sounded nice and tickled the ears, but had nothing to do with the Truth of the Word.

So what's my point in giving you an overview of Exodus to Jude? Israel (the corporate majority) didn't hear and understand the truth that God was trying to get them to see. They didn't understand what the Law was really all about because their hearts were *far from Him*, even while their actions appeared to be in line with what He wanted them to do. Hence the repetition of the same words over and over again –

> **Psalm 51:16-17**
> 16 *For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.* 17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.*

And so a new nation was born – the Church, "a holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9). And guess what? Do you think they (the corporate majority) will see and hear and understand the truth of what God is trying to get them to see?

> **Revelation 3:14-17**
> 14 *"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God:* 15 *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.* 16 *So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.* 17 *Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—*

So let me ask you, are you holding on to ideologies that belong to Churchianity's religion, or are you truly seeing the Truth that CHRISTianity shows us? What are the odds that the current teaching on tithings and offerings are really based in the Truth of God's Word, given the glaring example of how Israel ended up after the same amount of time had passed? Think on that a bit.

So again I ask you, Why do we give? Simply, because God wants us to. Why do we want to do what God wants? Because we love Him and we want to belong to *Him* – body, soul, and spirit. We want to be taught, and disciplined, and matured, don't we? So we do whatever He wants because He knows what is best. His will is to be our will, period.

So again I ask you, How much do we give? The truth of the matter is that we are to let it *all* go because nothing here is ours. Nothing. Why do we differentiate between giving money and giving time? Why are they in any way separable and distinguishable as far as "offerings" go?

God has brought us into this world; He is sustaining us; and He will take us out of this world when it is our time. He provided us with our bodies, He provides us with breath. He provides us with parents, sometimes siblings, food, shelter, clothing, money, and our jobs. He provides the 24-hour days and 365-day years, the rain, the snow, the sunshine. He provides us with animals as companions, with people around us, with our relationships. He gave us our emotions and our

intelligence and our talents; He gives us hardships, struggles, trials, joys, victories, challenges, and opportunities... Shall I go on?

What do we have that He has NOT given us? What do we have that is NOT His?

So what should we be *willing* to give…just money? And how much should we be *willing* to part with…just 10%? It's almost a silly question now, isn't it?

But there's still the main aspect of the question, TO WHOM are we to give? TO WHOM are we to give that which isn't even ours? It may seem, at this point, that that shouldn't even matter…Like there's a list or something of who is worthy to receive OUR stuff that isn't even ours, yet we control it like it is?

But it's a legitimate question because we do have choices to make concerning our offerings, and we want those choices to be God-centered, in accordance with His Word. So instead of randomly sending out envelopes of cash in the mail and hoping that they reach, by supernatural intervention, the appropriate destination, we actually do have to do some thinking and studying and praying concerning the recipients of our offerings. We have to take it seriously, because God expects us to. After all, it's God's "stuff" we're dealing with here, right?

So now let's do some methodical study here to take a look at specifics in answer to this question, TO WHOM do we give? Scripture gives us some pretty clear examples of how God wants us to give, so let's spend the rest of this part answering this question.

PLEASE NOTE: The unequivocally clear overall scope of giving is that we give to God Himself. Please don't forget this major point. However, since God Himself is not in need of money, food, or clothing, we give to others as though we are giving to Him. Since I am assuming that we all know this, I am dealing strictly with WHO the earthly recipients of our material goods should be, since we obviously have numerous billions of people to choose from.

I am just going to take for granted that you know that you must first use your stuff to meet your own needs, and those of your children/family, first. And this is the verse that comes to mind concerning this –

> **1 Timothy 5:8**
>
> *But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

It's like the demonstration they give you on the airplane – put your own oxygen mask on first because if you don't, how will you be conscious to take care of those others in need of assistance? It's a no-brainer. So let's move on.

Another seemingly "no-brainer" is the giving to widows and orphans, as we've been talking about in Parts One and Two. TO WHOM are we to give? Widows and orphans. Seems clear,

right? But *which* widows and orphans? The ones on the street? The ones just in your church? The ones in Haiti? The ones that come to you or are you supposed to go find them?

> **Deuteronomy 26:12**
> *"When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled,*
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> **Exodus 22:20-24**
> 20 *"He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.* 21 *"You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.* 22 *"You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.* 23 *If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry;*
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> 24 *and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.*

I would just like to answer that question of *which widows and orphans* with a non-answer. "You shall neither mistreat a stranger… You shall not afflict ANY widow or fatherless child," because if you do, and they cry out to God, God will hear them and He'll turn His anger on you. Because of the severity of that statement (though directed to Israel but secondarily pertinent just the same), I'll let you decide whether *you* should take care of only Christian widows and orphans, or ALL widows and orphans.

And I'll also leave you to decide what God meant by the "strangers," and consequently which "strangers" you are to give to. You obviously can't give – nor should you give - to ALL strangers and you can't give to ALL widows and orphans. But the suggestion to take care of them is still there in God's Word, so it can't be ignored. However, don't forget -

> **James 1:26-27**
> 26 *If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.* 27 *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

I want to look for a minute at one of the first pictures of "giving" we see that seems to be oh-so-popular in Christian circles, and that is the event we talked about in Part Two, where we see Abraham give "a tenth part of all" to Melchizedek –

> **Hebrews 7:1-2**
> 1 *For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,* 2 *to whom*

> *<u>also</u> Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated "king of righteousness," and then also king of Salem, meaning "king of peace," …*

And it's recorded in this way –

> **Genesis 14:17-24**
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> 17 *And the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley), after his [Abram's] return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him.* 18 *Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.* 19 *And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;* 20 *And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.*
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> 21 *Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself."* 22 *But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth,* 23 *that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'—* 24 *except only what the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men who went with me: Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."*

Notice the way the event is recorded, as well as its commentary from Hebrews. First, there is a battle between kings in which Abram/Abraham is victorious, though his victory was won on his behalf by God Most High. Abraham's first response is to give a portion of his goods (Hebrews tells us it was "a tenth of the spoils" [Heb. 7:4] – a tenth of what was taken in that one battle, not of everything he owned) to the priest – the representative - of God Most High who came to him to bless him (pronounce God's favor on him) on behalf of the Lord Himself, who is the "Possessor of heaven and earth" (and at this point you need to remember Abraham's promises, for the interchange here is directly related to that). Abraham's response is a simple acknowledgment of this.

Abraham's second response is to the king of Sodom (i.e. the world), and his actions here are directly related to what he just did with Melchizedek. Abraham, via God, has just been victorious in his "worldly" battle and he's just given some of his worldly goods away to the priest of God. And subsequently he refuses to take any more bounty, for that would mar his reputation regarding his relationship with the Lord. *Notice who Abraham considers himself a servant of, and how he realizes that his <u>profit</u> of material goods speaks volumes concerning this.* Abraham is content in giving, rather than receiving.

So what's the application for you and me? It certainly has nothing to do with the amount (10%) or the circumstances (been to war lately?), but everything to do with Abraham's focus, and how his material goods follow that focus.

Abraham gives to the Priest of God Most High who blesses him, in direct context concerning the promises that God made to him about inheriting the "heaven and earth." Abraham fully believes and trusts that God will one day give him the world (Rom. 4:13), and he gives his "stuff" to the man who also fully believes and trusts in that promise.

You and I need to fully believe and trust that God will one day deliver on His promises to Abraham's descendants (you and me), and we need to give to those who minister to us regarding those very promises.

Let's now move on to the Mosaic Law (picking up from Part Two) and take note of WHO received all of those offerings and sacrifices and tithes that the nation of Israel parted with on a daily/weekly/yearly basis, and WHY –

> **Numbers 18:20-24**
> 20 *Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.* 21 *"Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.* 22 *Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die.* 23 *But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.* 24 *For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.' "*

In the same way that Melchizedek was a representative of God Most High, and ministered to the recipient of the promise for God Himself, we see that the tribe of Levi – the Levites, and among them the priests, the sons of Aaron – were acting in the same capacity, for the very same reasons.

And interestingly enough, the Levites (the priests among them) are mentioned to NOT have a portion of the earthly inheritance (land), and it is specifically this reason why the rest of the nation of Israel was to take care of them; *their offerings were the Levites' inheritance* (Num. 18:21-24). So the deal was that the Levites were to dedicate their whole lives to serving God Most High, and part-and-parcel with serving God Most High, they were to serve His chosen people. So as a result of dedicating their lives to serving God and Israel through the work of serving in the tabernacle/tent of meeting, they couldn't work in the capacity necessary to take care of their own material needs. Their needs were to be met by gifts from the very ones they served.

Please don't forget that this was all in relation to the goal of the nation – that Israel was to be the light to all other nations, blessing them while in the land and receiving rest from all their enemies, while God Himself dwelt among them. This is/was but a glimpse of the future perfect picture which will come about one day, but reality-wise this was the training and maturity ground for the Nation themselves. The priests took care of the management of the Law.

Translate this to today. We're not in our land, nor do any of us have our inheritance. We don't have one, single, physical tabernacle in which God physically dwells, nor do we have the litany of sacrificial laws that were to be kept. So what does this picture teach us?

How about the simple fact that we are to take care of those who serve and minister to us on behalf of the Lord? We are to give offerings to the men and women who see to our spiritual needs, who dedicate their lives to providing service to us on behalf of God Himself. And let's take note of one more thing in this same scripture passage –

> **Numbers 18:25-32**
> 25 *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,* 26 *"Speak thus to the Levites, and say to them: 'When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to the LORD, a tenth of the tithe.* 27 *And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress.* 28 *Thus you shall also offer a heave offering to the LORD from all your tithes which you receive from the children of Israel, and you shall give the LORD's heave offering from it to Aaron the priest.* 29 *Of all your gifts you shall offer up every heave offering due to the LORD, from all the best of them, the consecrated part of them.'* 30 *Therefore you shall say to them: 'When you have lifted up the best of it, then the rest shall be accounted to the Levites as the produce of the threshing floor and as the produce of the winepress.* 31 *You may eat it in any place, you and your households, for it is your reward for your work in the tabernacle of meeting.* 32 *And you shall bear no sin because of it, when you have lifted up the best of it. But you shall not profane the holy gifts of the children of Israel, lest you die.' "*

Just quickly note God's vantage point on "giving." He says that the Levites take their tithes from the Israelites, but that *He has given the tithes to the Levites from the Israelites.* The Israelites gave, but God sees it as *Himself giving it*. Interesting, isn't it?

Anyway, the point to be grasped from this passage is that even the Levites were to give a tenth of the tenth that they received. And their offering of the offerings they received was to go upward, to Aaron, who ministered *to them* on behalf of the Lord Himself.

You and I are to give to those people who serve our spiritual needs. And even those who serve others' spiritual needs have someone who serves *their* spiritual needs. We all are to give. And we are to give to those who minister to us according to God's will, His Word, His plans.

Everything to do with our salvation – past, present, and future. (That surely limits us in this day and age, doesn't it?)

Let's move forward through the Bible to the early church, and add to this picture something that Paul spoke about that is directly relative to the topic at hand –

> **1 Corinthians 9:1-14**
>
> 1 *Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?* 2 *If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*
>
> 3 *My defense to those who examine me is this:* 4 *Do we have no right to eat and drink?* 5 *Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?* 6 *Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working?* 7 *Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?* 8 *Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also?* 9 *For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about?* 10 *Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.* 11 *If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?*
>
> 12 *If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.* 13 *Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?* 14 *Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.*

Notice how emphatic Paul is, and how he ties in his work relative to the gospel with the work of those who ministered in the temple. Both have the scriptural right to get their living from those they minister to. And implicit in this argument is that they – the Church – were to support those who ministered to them.

But notice Paul's position on this –

> **1 Corinthians 9:15-19**
>
> 15 *But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.* 16 *For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!* 17 *For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have*

> *been entrusted with a stewardship.* [18] *What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.* [19] *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;*

Paul refused to take money from the Corinthians for ministering the gospel to them, because he wanted to *freely minister the gospel, with no strings attached to anyone* except God Himself. (He did gladly receive gifts from other churches, like the one at Philippi [Phil. 4:15-18; 2 Cor. 11:8-9], but not from the Corinthians. Is there not a huge lesson in that, in this day and age???!!!)

And he's not saying here that he wants the Corinthians to take care of him – he doesn't! But he's stating a scriptural truth: It's okay for ministers of the gospel to earn their living from it. But in his case, at Corinth, he didn't want to. And in his case, *as it was with Abraham,* it was for the express purpose of having NO ties to anyone of this world who could claim mastery over him. Paul, as Abraham, was truly *free* to serve the Lord as he saw fit.

And we can definitely see the correlation between giving to the spreading of the gospel (the WHOLE gospel) for the express purpose of building the spiritual temple of God, with the giving of that first generation in order to build the first tabernacle in the wilderness, can't we?

So the question is, Why support *specific individuals* who minister the gospel? You may think we all minister the gospel in some shape or form, so why not just support yourself? Here's the answer –

> **Ephesians 4:11-14**
> [11] *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,* [12] *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,* [13] *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;* [14] *that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*

Are we all pastor-teachers? Are we all evangelists? Are we all doing the work of the apostles? No, no, and no. But we all work together to equip <u>each other</u> (the saints) *for the work of ministry*, for the edifying of the body of Christ. And each part will have different needs…needs that should be met by the body itself.

But the purpose here is the same as we see with the Levitical priesthood – it's for the maturity of the Nation in order to bring truth to the multitudes who are without a God. And as it was with Israel, so it is with us – we have been saved for a purpose and we are to unify *for a purpose*: to come to the full knowledge of the Son of God*, in the faith.* And Paul clearly states that it is so we will not be carried about by every wind of doctrine.

So does it matter which Christian organization you give to? You bet it does. In this day and age, with lukewarm Christianity surrounding us on every side, with false doctrines surrounding us on every side, we need to be extra careful who we support and which *doctrines* we support. And on this subject, I will say no more… I think you get my point.

Going back to the picture of the early church and its giving, let's address this idea of giving to one central "church" organization, rather than individuals themselves –

> **Acts 4:32-35**
> 32 *Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.* 33 *And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.* 34 *Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold,* 35 *and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.*

This is probably one of the places in the Bible where we have drawn our current belief system of individuals pooling their resources/material goods in order to distribute corporately to those who are in need, and to distribute corporately to the needs of the ministers of the gospel. If we want to stay within the scriptural picture of giving, there is nothing that directly contradicts the present day idea of a corporate pooling of money. And historically speaking, we can sure see how this type of setup made a whole lot of sense, since it was the apostles themselves needing to physically travel from place to place in order to spread the gospel, and it was the apostles themselves who had the full knowledge of the gospel in which to share. And it sure was a lot harder back then to get specific goods to specific people within a reasonable amount of time (they didn't have PayPal or online banking back then!).

But remembering that we live in the Laodicean era, can we be absolutely sure that those we give our money/goods to will distribute them as godly and accurately as the apostles did?

Is the leadership in charge of the corporate account you give to made up of "those who believed" and were "of one heart and one soul"? Are they as like-minded as those apostles were? I do believe that it should be.

And are they spreading the *whole* gospel?

And I just want to close with this, and then I'm done harping on the subject of giving. Church, we need to evaluate ourselves when we give, and to whom we give, and make sure we're not settling for the simple corporate giving because we're just too lazy, or just too busy. I'm not at all making a judgment call, but I am presenting a challenge. Imagine these two scenarios:

One, you write a check and send it somewhere where they deposit it in a bank account, and you wait for the monthly or yearly report on how it was spent.

Or two, you get some cash/food/material goods and you search for what's important to both you and God…and you travel on down to the place where the individuals in need are, and you physically hand over your offering to the very person that will use it. You get to see their eyes; you get to hear their story. And you get to share yours.

Or you do both. These two options are not mutually exclusive.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.