The Truth About Tithing

Part One: Why Do We Give?

You may think that the question concerning *why* we give probably doesn't even need to be asked, but in the spirit of re-addressing our current Christian concepts of all things "doctrine," it is a subject that needs to be thought-out and spelled-out scripturally, in order that we each make sure that our belief system concerning ALL things is truly grounded in the Scriptures, and not in man-made traditions and ideas.

And so, as we talk about "giving," both in a material sense and a spiritual sense, I'll do my best to lay out the biblical argument as I currently see it (which is far from complete), using word definitions, specific context, and general context. This first part explores the WHY of giving; Part Two explores the WHAT of giving, and Part Three the TO WHOM of giving. In this short series we will hopefully get a better understanding of the biblical picture of gifts, offerings, tithings, and sacrifices – *all things we, as Christians, give* – as well as get a practical understanding of what our own personal lives should look like with respect to that.

I urge each one of you, as should be the case when broaching any familiar or unfamiliar biblical territory for the first time, to please rid your minds of all pre-conceived notions concerning giving/tithing/offering, and ask the Lord to show you His truth as it is laid out in His Word, regardless of whether it matches up with your own beliefs and practices. There is no doubt that this will require *much faith*.

Since this part focuses on the "why" of giving, the "what" is not necessarily important right now (also, the "how much" of giving is taking a back-seat as well). But to give us some sort of framework in which we are operating when we say "give," we are talking about giving *tangible* things away (our personal property), e.g. money, material goods, etc. The exploration of giving away material things will inevitably lead us to explore the concept of giving away spiritual things, but for now let's stay within the scope of the former.

To begin, why do we (Christians) give our stuff away? Whether it is money, food, clothes, Bible materials, whatever… why do we consciously make an effort to offer our personal property to someone else?

Most of us would say that first and foremost, on a most simplistic level, we are supposed to give some of our stuff away because God commands us to. This is probably enough to settle the matter for any Christian who is desiring to be faithfully obedient to the Word of God ("It says to do it, so do it…"), but we also need to grapple with the oh-so-ubiquitous question, "*Why* does God's Word tell us to do that?!"

Let's explore that question of "Why?" by first asking another basic question that should actually precede it, which is, "*Does* the Word of God even *tell* us to give some of our own 'stuff' away?"

Remember, right now we're not differentiating between what and to whom quite yet; so, since we all give or have given stuff away on one level or another, does God's Word tell us to do it?

Let's look at the following passages –

> **1 Timothy 6:17-19**
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> 17 *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.* 18 *Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,* 19 *storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal [age-lasting] life.*
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> **Ephesians 4:28**
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> *Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*
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> **James 2:15-16**
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> 15 *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,* 16 *and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*
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> **Proverbs 22:9**
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> *He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor.*

The first two passages are about sharing some of our stuff, and the idea is the same as when we think of "giving." In Ephesians 4:28 the word behind "give" is the Greek *metadidomi*, which means "to give a share of," "to distribute," or "to impart." It is an amplified version of *didomi*, the common way of saying "give" (as in "give us this day our daily bread" [Matt. 6:11], "ask, and it will be given to you" [Matt. 7:7], "it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" [Matt. 13:11], or "what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" [Matt. 16:26], and so on). Attached to *didomi* is *meta*, which is most commonly translated "with." In 1 Timothy 6:18, "ready to give" is *eumetadotos*, built on that same word, and "willing to share" is *koinonikos*, from *koinonia*, fellowship.

These verses are clearly telling us to give, as in SHARE, *what we have* WITH others who are in need.

One could also argue that all of these passages seem to be more of a suggestion than a command – meaning, if a person gives some of their stuff away *it will go better for them*. Still, God is making a point about giving your tangible goods away, and this point of obeying an imperative vs. a suggestion will be addressed later.

I think that for many Christians the idea of sharing or giving their material goods to another may seem among the highest degree of "faithful obedience" one can perform (E.g. "I give away 10% of all my money" or "I built an orphanage with x amount of my own $$.."", etc); however, it

may be important to note that there are only a few places in the New Testament where either the simple words "give" or "share" are used contextually regarding giving one's *material goods* to another – and I have noted almost all of them here. In fact, believe it or not, God just doesn't seem to spend much time talking about giving our *stuff* away.

Actually, when it comes to "giving" away one's material stuff (e.g. money and goods), I think once I'm done with this series we will find that it is *quite low* on the totem pole of expected sacrifices and offerings. Exponentially more often is found the command to share *suffering* with one another, share *joy* with one another, share *the gospel* with one another, and so on. But more on that in Part Two. This part, as I keep saying (and I keep saying it so that you won't jump ahead of me), is about WHY we give… not WHAT AND TO WHOM. So let's stay on track.

Getting back to the few passages in the beginning about "sharing our stuff" with others, you'll notice that in the context the *why* of giving our stuff away is pretty much spelled out.

First (and not necessarily first in order of *importance)*, we need to give in order to keep ourselves from getting focused on money (and "stuff") and becoming conceited with worldly things. The reason we need to not be focused primarily on worldly things is that we need to keep our hope focused firmly in and on heaven, particularly *things that have to do with the future*. This is how Paul put it (the full context of that first scripture passage above) –

> **1 Timothy 6:3-11, 17-19**
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> 3 *If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,* 4 *he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,* 5 *useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain [meaning material gain]. From such withdraw yourself.*
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> 6 *Now godliness with contentment is great gain [meaning, not material gain but spiritual gain].* 7 *For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* 8 *And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.* 9 *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.* 10 *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* 11 *But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.*
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> 17 *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.* 18 *Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,*

> [19] *storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal [age-lasting] life.*

It is clear from the context that our "sharing with others who are in need" will put our focus where it needs to be, and will help keep us from falling into temptation – a temptation and snare that riches can bring, e.g. ruin, destruction, all sorts of evil, ultimately culminating in straying from the faith. And consequently, sharing with others and being rich in good works rather than seeking after worldly riches will enable us to *lay hold on eternal* [age-lasting] *life*, by storing up for ourselves "a good foundation *for the time to come*." This is about our eyes (and consequently our whole person) being focused on the kingdom *which is to come*, and <u>not</u> on the realities of the physical world *now.*

This is exactly what Jesus dealt with when He encountered the rich young ruler – a man who desired to inherit *life in the age to come,* but felt unable to do what was required of him *now* in order to receive it *later* –

> **Matthew 19:21-27**
> [21] *Jesus said to him, "If you [this specific young man, not you in a general sense] want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* [22] *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.* [23] *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "<u>Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.</u>* [24] *<u>And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.</u>"* [25] *When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"* [26] *But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* [27] *Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"*

Hence the reason for Jesus to then go on to state how difficult it is for a rich man/person to get into the kingdom. Worldly riches in the here and now can so easily take our focus off of the future age.

Another practical reason we see in the Scriptures to "give our stuff away" is to meet the needs of another person. Which, of course, works to *take your focus off of yourself!*

When we focus on meeting the needs of another person, we essentially put their needs above our own needs. And when we do this, our beginning Scripture passages tell us, we will receive something as well – a blessing for ourselves (Proverbs 22:9) and a "profit" (an increase, a return on) on our faith (James 2:15-16).

After hearing that, it may seem to many of you as though God is giving us some rather self-centered reasons to give our stuff away, because Look, <u>I</u> will get life; <u>I</u> will get my hope realized; <u>I</u> will receive a blessing; <u>I</u> will make a profit on my faith. However, that is not the case.

Notice the fact that *even the disciples* realized that the giving away of their material goods would benefit them in some way (Matt. 19:27, immediately following the encounter with the rich young ruler: "Then Peter answered and said to Him, 'See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?' " To which Jesus answered, essentially, "You get to rule all of Israel" [Matt. 19:28]).

The benefits received from the Lord in return for us giving our stuff away goes much deeper than simply getting something for something. In other words, it's not a business transaction –

> **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.*

Our giving our stuff away in order to meet the needs of another is just one of many ways to express love for our brother, which God says is a perfect expression of our love for Him. It doesn't get much bigger than that, does it? And if we can't, or don't, part with our own stuff in order to meet the needs of our brother, then notice what the above Scripture says: *we have shut up our heart from him.* And if our heart is shut up from our brother, then our heart is shut up from God and His love does not abide in us. (And for further commentary on this, see John 15 regarding what happens when God does not abide in us and us in Him.)

However, what I believe God is talking about is not the outside form of the action, but the inward choice that THEN results in the outward action. Both must come from a place of love –

> **1 Corinthians 13:3**
> *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing [remember James 2:16?].*

Furthermore, may I suggest that, really, ALL of our actions of faithful obedience stem from an individual choice to do something that emanates from ME for a specific reason that benefits ME. ALL of our actions begin with a conscious decision for ME to do something… and the rationale is always going to be, What is the benefit or what is the loss, as it pertains to me? I don't say this to trivialize our actions, but every choice begins with ME. The difference is this:

I obey God so that He'll give me something (the focus is ultimately on me)…

OR

I obey God because it pleases God and I desire to please God (the focus is ultimately on God). And it pleases God for me to desire all that He desires, and to want His will as my own –

> **Matthew 6:5-13**
> 5 *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be*

> *seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.* [6] *But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.* [7] *And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.*
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> [8] *"Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.* [9] *In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.* [10] *Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.* [11] *Give us this day our daily bread.* [12] *And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.* [13] *And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

God's desire and God's will, relative to you and me, is for His kingdom to come… for His will to be done on earth just as it is in heaven. That is, God's will is for man to rule *with Him*, *doing His will over all the earth* (that's essentially what the kingdom is for). And so God's reward to man for putting God's will first is that He receives God's will for him. And since God has spent millennia telling man exactly how to accomplish this, for you and me to desire this – to desire to do exactly what God wants us to do in order to achieve that which He created and SAVED us for – is NOT in any way selfish. It is righteous and it is godly.

So there must be a reciprocal relationship to giving; we give to others to show love to others by meeting their needs, thereby putting their needs above our own, which is a scripturally correct way *to love God*. This love and obedience of God honors God's name, rather than our own. Our focus is taken off of ourselves and the here-and-now, and by this very act of honoring God, we ourselves ultimately benefit from the act (which, strangely enough, also honors God).

Isn't this what happens each and every time we obey God? He is glorified as we are sanctified, and as we are sanctified we are that much closer to being glorified. The reciprocity is necessary.

However, a warning is needed here. To just *give away your stuff* for the sake of blindly following God's commands can be problematic ("He says to do it, so I'll do it"). Now, it may be a good idea for the Christian who finds himself unable to discern spiritual matters, or perhaps finds himself at a loss as to how to obey God. It may even be a good idea if a Christian is simply starting out on their journey and just desires to do what God has said. In any of these cases it would be good for that person to just give away something to someone in need…even if, *especially if*, they don't want to. In this case, the action itself can help the person into maturity, because in this scenario the person's heart desires to do God's will… it's just unsure of what God's will is.

This, I believe, is how God teaches us. We begin as children with a desire to please God, but with little or no concept as to how to do that. We read some words on the pages of the Bible

and we think – hey, God likes it when we help others, so I'm going to help others. We simply do what our Father wants us to do.

However, maturity must come into play. To continue to do something because you are simply following the "letter of the Law," so to speak, puts you in danger of becoming a performer of religion on the outside *only*, while keeping the inward man far from God's abiding love and the Spirit's work.

To give stuff away to others in need may begin with the childlike desire to please God. But it could, eventually, become a detached action that then begins to emanate from the mind or body, rather than from the heart. It ceases to be pleasing to God because it exists in form only, rather than in heart-desire. So, what appears to be "good," or what starts out as being "good," isn't always "good."

It is absolutely necessary for the maturing Christian to evaluate their heart in the course of every action they take, and to measure their actions in accordance with the will of God rather than their own will. This is all part of the journey and part of the process we call 'sanctification.' For every Christian who desires to find himself together with Christ in the age to come, he or she must take careful account of their actions AND their motives.

So, having said all of that, with respect to giving, God is crystal clear. He desires that ALL types of giving, whether to a brother in need or to Him directly, come from a willing and joyful heart, because it's not so much about the recipient as it is about the transformation of the giver. Take careful note regarding how God wanted <u>His first tangible dwelling place with man</u>, the tabernacle of Moses, to be built –

> **Exodus 35:4-29**
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> 4 *And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying:*
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> 5 *'Take from among you an offering to the LORD. <u>Whoever is of a willing heart,</u> let him bring it as an offering to the LORD: gold, silver, and bronze;* 6 *blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair;* 7 *ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood;* 8 *oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense;* 9 *onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.* 10 *'All who are gifted artisans among you shall come and make all that the LORD has commanded:* 11 *the tabernacle, its tent, its covering, its clasps, its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets;* 12 *the ark and its poles, with the mercy seat, and the veil of the covering;* 13 *the table and its poles, all its utensils, and the showbread;* 14 *also the lampstand for the light, its utensils, its lamps, and the oil for the light;* 15 *the incense altar, its poles, the anointing oil, the sweet incense, and the screen for the door at the entrance of the tabernacle;* 16 *the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, all its utensils, and the laver*

> *and its base;* [17] *the hangings of the court, its pillars, their sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court;* [18] *the pegs of the tabernacle, the pegs of the court, and their cords;* [19] *the garments of ministry, for ministering in the holy place—the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests.' "*
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> [20] *And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses.* [21] *Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the LORD's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments.* [22] *They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, and brought earrings and nose rings, rings and necklaces, all jewelry of gold, that is, every man who made an offering of gold to the LORD.* [23] *And every man, with whom was found blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair, red skins of rams, and badger skins, brought them.* [24] *Everyone who offered an offering of silver or bronze brought the LORD's offering. And everyone with whom was found acacia wood for any work of the service, brought it.* [25] *All the women who were gifted artisans spun yarn with their hands, and brought what they had spun, of blue, purple, and scarlet, and fine linen.* [26] *And all the women whose hearts stirred with wisdom spun yarn of goats' hair.* [27] *The rulers brought onyx stones, and the stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate,* [28] *and spices and oil for the light, for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense.* [29] *The children of Israel brought a freewill offering to the LORD, all the men and women whose hearts were willing to bring material for all kinds of work which the LORD, by the hand of Moses, had commanded to be done.*

I would just like to point out that nowhere does it say *how much* each person was to give in order for it to be accepted as a proper contribution. The amount was irrelevant.

Also, each person's contribution (*gift)* of a particular item was just as necessary and just as valuable as the next person's willing contribution *(gift)*, though invariably they were of different monetary value.

Furthermore, the chapter goes on to read about the skilled workmen who were to contribute their *gifts of skill* in the building of the tabernacle, and no differentiation exists between the value of the goods offered willingly vs. the value of the time and effort offered willingly.

What does God care about? The willing heart *behind the gift.* It begins with a command from the Lord, but the response must emanate from a "stirred heart," with willingness to give that which you have to give. (And it is no small thing to note that each individual who had some material contribution to make to the building of the tabernacle was actually giving something that had originally been given to them. When the children of Israel left Egypt, they left with

articles of silver, gold, and clothing that they "plundered" from the Egyptians, that *the Lord* allowed them to have [cf. Ex. 12:29-36].)

It all came *from the Lord*, and it was to go *back to the Lord*. But it remained a choice on behalf of the giver.

It is important to note, even though it may seem obvious to us, that money and riches are not bad, *but they have the ability to be tempting;* therefore, material goods *can be dangerous*. Think in terms of alcohol. Alcohol isn't bad, but to certain people it is *when it's misused*. Does everyone misuse alcohol? No. But to the person to whom it is a snare, it's dangerous to have around. It's individually particular (hence the episode with the rich young ruler).

You're probably reading this and thinking, "Yeah, I know this. Duh. Money isn't first; God is. I get it. This is elementary." You probably tithe regularly and you give to organizations that you believe in and you're thinking you're doing alright. And you may be. Perhaps this doesn't challenge you. However…

Let me ask you… Do you give 10% of your income away? Gross or net pay? How did you arrive at whatever calculation you use? Why do you do give away 10%? If you believe the Bible commands it, where does it say to give away 10% of all your income?

Let me go one step further…. Do you judge others by their stuff? Do you judge others on how they spend their money? If they seem to have *too much money*…if they seem to *squander* money? No? Okay, do you judge others by <u>how much</u> they give? Do you judge others by *what* they give? Do you judge other by what they DON'T give? (Are you being challenged yet?)

> **James 1:26-2:13**
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> 26 *If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion [literally, ceremonial observance, worship in its outward sense] is useless.* 27 *Pure and undefiled religion [ceremonial observance] before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, <u>and</u> to keep oneself unspotted from the world.* 2:1 *My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.* 2 *<u>For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,</u>* 3 *<u>and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool,"</u>* 4 *<u>have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?</u>*
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> 5 *Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?* 6 *But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag*

> *you into the courts?* [7] *Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?*
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> [8] *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;* [9] *but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.* [10] *For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.* [11] *For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.* [12] *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.* [13] *For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Did you notice that v. 27 encompasses the whole idea behind God's commands to give? Visit widows and orphans = meet others' needs. Keep oneself unspotted from the world = don't get too focused on and wrapped up in material goods. THIS is pure, undefiled *ceremonial observance.* And notice the context from v. 26 = *it's about deceiving your own heart.* And what does v. 8 say is the fulfillment of the "royal law"? What would be the exemplification of *pure religion*, i.e. taking care of widows and orphans and staying unspotted from the world? = LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. This is how we are to speak; this is how we are to act.

So don't judge another person by anything having to do with material goods, and furthermore, don't judge another person's giving away of their "stuff," either. As we will see in Part Two, there is no "right" amount of stuff to give away and there is no "wrong" amount of stuff to give away. There is no "right" *type of stuff* to give away and there is no "wrong" *type of stuff* to give away. Because, if all that matters is the loving of your brother and the meeting of his needs (and thereby the loving of God), and giving your stuff away is God's way of keeping you from getting too focused on the here and now and the comforts of the stuff of this world, then material goods can't be a barometer for any such judging. At all.

> **Luke 21:1-4**
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> [1] *And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury,* [2] *and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites.* [3] *So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all;* [4] *for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."*

We'll come back to this passage in Part Two, but for now I want to ask you to think about something. This widow is commended for *the value of her gift*; a value which has nothing to do with the world currency valuation. It doesn't say she gave 10%, it doesn't say *how much* was enough for her commendation. This simply says that she gave *an amount that was clearly a physical sacrifice on her part.* It says a lot about her heart, doesn't it? And isn't it cool that we have this physical record of the Lord's words concerning the true value of her gift? Because, if it

was you and me witnessing this same act apart from the Lord's verbal commentary, would we see the same thing with our physical eyes? Or would we just see a poor woman? Or even worse, would we only see two coins that can't buy much stuff?

Before I wrap this up, I would like to just briefly touch on a commonly misunderstood reason for giving (not amongst us, of course). Within some Christian circles there is an expectation that we will somehow be further "blessed" *here and now* with much **material prosperity** if we give just a little bit of our stuff away now.

I read this quote about this idea of *materially* prospering *now* –"God wants to pour out his blessing and prosper us in every way."

That statement carries two errors: first, that material goods have any bearing on being blessed or not; and second, that material goods have any connection with God's idea of prospering.

And one of the scripture passages given in support of this is the following –

> **Deuteronomy 28:1-12**
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> 1 *"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.* 2 *And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:* 3 *"Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.* 4 *"Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.* 5 *"Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.* 6 *"Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.* 7 *"The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.* 8 *"The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.* 9 *"The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.* 10 *Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you.* 11 *And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.* 12 *The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.*

This scripture has to do with Israel, not the Church.

This was and is about Israel dwelling in her land in fulfillment of Abraham's promises.

This was a promise to Israel which was dependent on her continual obedience.

None of this has come to pass for Israel in full, lasting form. Israel tasted it under Solomon, when Judah and Israel were "as numerous as the sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing" (1 Kings 4:20-25), but the kingdom was torn apart right after his reign (1 Kings 11:11-13). None of it will come to pass for Israel in full until the Seventh Day, the coming thousand-year reign of the Messiah, when the "rest for the people of God" that still remains finally arrives (Heb. 4:9; Rev. 20:4-6).

None of this will literally come true for the Church in this present age.

And exactly what is a "blessing," according to God? Is it your current affluent status in the hierarchy of our capitalistic lifestyles? If I'm rich, I'm blessed, but if I'm poor (materially) then I am not blessed?

The word "blessed" has to do with God's favor, not with possessions. When God blesses, He speaks well of a person or a thing and sets His favor on it; the New Testament verb for it, *eulogeo*, literally means "to speak well of." And the one on whom that favor rests is called "blessed" in the sense of fortunate, *makarios*, the word used in Luke 6:20 and Acts 20:35 –

> **Genesis 2:3**
> *Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.*
>
> **Genesis 12:3**
> *I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*
>
> **Numbers 23:11**
> *Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and look, you have blessed them bountifully!"*
>
> **Acts 20:33-35 [Paul speaking]**
> 33 *I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.* 34 *Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.* 35 *I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "*

And do you think God speaks well of us, or shows us His pleasure in us by giving us an abundance of material goods to satisfy our every desire? Do you think God speaks well of us, or shows His pleasure in us by giving us the freest country on the planet to live in? Of course not, right? You know this. But do you use the word "blessing" in its proper sense? Or do you think of yourselves as "blessed" because you live in the United States, or blessed because of the house you own, or blessed because of the freedoms you have with the amount of money in your bank

accounts? In other words, does your physical, material status convey that God has blessed you, that He has shown His favor to you by your stuff? Would this be the proper way to think of being "blessed?"

Or, do you think that perhaps your physical stuff is simply stuff, and God expects all of His children – whether they live in the USA or elsewhere – to have the same mindset concerning stuff as He does. Which is, it's a potentially dangerous temptation, yet it surely can be a tool that He uses to ultimately effect His will.

> **Luke 6:20-26**
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> 20 *Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God.* 21 *Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh.* 22 *Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake.* 23 *Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed <u>your reward is great in heaven</u>, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.*
>
> 24 *"But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation.* 25 *Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep.* 26 *Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

Do you think that the "poor" or the "hungry" or the "rich" people mentioned in this passage – those that are "blessed" or not – really has anything to do with how much money they had? Or does the mention of these types of people get down deeper, to the heart of the individual, whether that person is content with the stuff in the here and now… or is yearning and desiring the riches which are to come in the age to come?

So, as was said before, it IS okay to give *knowing* that we will receive something precious from the Father in the age to come. When we give we are "blessed" (God's favor rests on us), but only if our "giving" is in accordance with how God expects us to give. We must give solely out of love, with a willing heart, in response to the promises of God, in response to future treasures and rewards –

> **Matthew 6:2-4**
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> 2 *Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.* 3 *But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,* 4 *that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret <u>will Himself reward you openly</u>.*

> **Luke 12:13-34**
>
> 13 *Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."* 14 *But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?"* 15 *And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."* 16 *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.* 17 *And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'* 18 *So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.* 19 *And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." '* 20 *But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'* 21 *"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*
>
> 22 *Then He said to His disciples, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on.* 23 *Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.* 24 *Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?* 25 *And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?* 26 *If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?* 27 *Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* 28 *If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?* 29 *"And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.*
>
> 30 *For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things.* 31 *But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.* 32 *"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* 33 *Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.* 34 *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

What I see in God's Word as I study through the few mentions of "giving our stuff away" is that God is trying, through His word pictures, to get us to see that there is nothing in this world that is our own, there is nothing in this world that takes precedence over Him, and there is nothing in this world that should take precedence over our brothers and sisters.

Having “stuff” has always been for a purpose – to serve as a tool to meet the physical needs of God’s people during their pilgrim journey on this earth, and to be the medium through which we can express gratitude and love (perhaps mercy and justice) to one another and to God (whether by building a tabernacle, feeding widows and orphans, providing sustenance to the priests as they minister to us, etc.). And whether it’s my stuff or your stuff or whatever, it’s a tool to be used for God’s greater purpose, that which culminates in the coming age, and that in which, when it comes, we will have absolutely no need for any such stuff.

Our needs for now are simple. Yes we need to eat, and we need clothes, and we need shelter. God promises us that He will meet those needs, but in many cases those needs will be met through your brother’s or sister’s gifts. What we really need is to learn how to love one another, because by doing so, we will learn how to love God. And our “stuff” can help us to accomplish this.

So just let it all go. If you *really let it go,* then it shouldn’t matter how much or what or to whom… just let it go. And then, once you let it go, let God tell you what to do with it.

Which is the subject of Parts Two and Three.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.