

ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP: THE OFFERING

The offering of one's financial gifts into the church treasury is a part of our worship unto God. Because the New Testament does not specify a precise amount to give, some have chosen to severely restrict what they are willing to give unto the Master. The prophet Malachi spoke frankly to ancient Israel when he asked: *"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation"* (Malachi 3:8,9). The Jewish believers that became the early church understood the both the command to give and the reason for doing so. The commands were clear, they were to give a tenth of all they had unto the Lord as a minimum. The reasons were equally clear: Everything they had belonged unto God and was given to them to use. They were stewards of the blessings of God.

Giving became an integral part of the church from the first days. Luke writes: *"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."* (Acts 2:44,45). Immediately, we find the church collecting and disbursing money to aid those in need.

Later, Paul would make a more formal command to the churches: *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come"* (1 Corinthians 16:1,2). Furthermore, Paul orders that the collection was to be put *"in store"* and that this collection be gathered *"upon the first day of the week."* We see, in our language of today, that the collection was to be literally *"heaped together"* (from the Gk. *thesaurizo*) on Sunday. And, if you read a little further you see that the local congregation, through an approved representative, was charged with overseeing the disbursement of the funds (vs.3 & 4). So here we have a clear example of the Bible command to give of our wealth.

Some may ask for guidance and direction in determining the amount of their gift. They are commended, for this speaks of the preparation necessary and suggested in the Corinthian letter (2 Corinthians 9:7). We offer the following guidance:

Ten percent was always a *minimum* amount among the Jews. In fact, many scholars believe faithful Jews may have given more than 30%! Similar giving was done within pagan, idolatrous nations too. Perhaps we should consider what the Hebrew writer says about our present faith. I would suggest a thorough reading of Hebrews, with an understanding of the great superiority of our faith above that of Judaism. That should convince us that since we have a better system in place than ever before, we dare not seek to short change the Lord's work.

Another way of looking at giving is to ask simply: How much do I love the Lord? Some might say that love has nothing to do with money and giving. However the Bible says otherwise and the Scripture is our absolute guide. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 8, begins by commending the marvelous liberality of the Macedonian churches who gave even though they were in *"great poverty"* (2 Corinthians 8:2). He then encourages the Corinthians to do the same, which he charges will *"prove the sincerity of your love"* (2 Corinthians 8:8). At the very end of the chapter he again calls upon the brethren to show the *"proof of their love"* though their giving (2 Corinthians 8:24). Do we really believe, that with a good conscious, we can do anything less than our first century brothers?

One may say: I have too many expenses and too much debt to give anymore! Then brother, do the best you can while extracting yourself from debt and increasing your gift. Jesus said: *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God..."*(Matthew 6:33). That should settle the question once and for all.

We hasten to add the following proviso: Offer happily and freely, lest both your money, and your heart be tainted. *"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: **for God loveth a cheerful giver**"* (2 Corinthians 9:6,7).

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NEXT WEEK: PREACHING