

Giving

by Graham Jones - The Church at Gun Hill

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not that I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4 vv 10 -19

Giving is a delicate subject. Naturally speaking, it is one about which people do not like to hear too many messages. That was also the case in the days when Paul was writing: he said quite clearly, **"When I departed from Macedonia, no church was concerned with giving but you only."** Only one church was involved in giving.

Give Me Your Heart

Now I would like to start with a verse from Proverbs and then I will end with another verse from Proverbs. The first verse is one of a series of exhortations from father to son. As we read it, let us elevate our idea of father and children to that of our heavenly Father and us, His children - sons and daughters of God. So, in Proverbs 23 v 26, the father says to the child, **"My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways."**

The plea here, concerning giving, is, in the first place, **"Give me your heart!"** If we are talking about giving, that is what God requires. Give me your heart! Giving, by itself, is nothing. The unsaved give. The unsaved may give to a good measure - far more than we do. In fact Paul said, in that well-known chapter, I Corinthians 13 (v3): **"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor... it profits me nothing."** Without that Divine love in our hearts, unless we have given God our heart, unless we have allowed Him to do the work in our heart and life, unless we are motivated by His love working in us, we can give everything we have got and it is of no benefit to us at all. This is an important start. Our hearts must be right with God and we must be moving in love.

There is a lot written about giving. There is a lot said about it in Christian circles and especially in evangelical circles. Yet, in some way, I get the idea that any message on giving is not gladly received. Let us, therefore, look at what the Scriptures teach about giving.

Tithing - Before the Law

A specific area within the topic of giving is **tithing**, of giving a tenth. There is a lot of evangelical teaching on the subject of tithing. Indeed, it is a Biblical teaching, but I want to find out what the Lord requires of us in these matters. You see, the response of many church leaders when you mention church finances (and I have had it said to me) is "Have you preached to them on tithing recently?" - "them" being the flock,

reduced to some plebeian class who are there to provide the funds. "They" are my brothers and sisters in the Lord. Anyway, you preach a message on tithing and everybody gives 10% and, if they covenant as well, you get the extra tax bonus too - the favour of a worldly government. And that is supposed to be doing the will of the Lord and living a good Christian life. The cults tithed. The self-important Pharisees tithed. Of itself, it is nothing. So let us look at what the Scriptures say.

Abraham and Tithing

The first idea we get in the Bible about giving a tenth is in the story of **Abraham**. I want you to see that Abraham was involved in a free act of worship. Nobody said to Abraham, "Hey, you've got to give a tenth of that to God," or "You've got to give a tenth to God's representative." It was a free-will response. It was a free act of worship. Look at Genesis 14 v 18! Abraham had just returned from the slaughter of the kings. He had won a tremendous victory and then, in verse 18, it says: ***"And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all."***

First, note that Abraham (Abram as he then was) was blessed by Melchizedek. This king came out of Jerusalem, or Salem, and he blessed Abraham. He also brought out food, bread and wine to sustain him. There was blessing and provision from the Lord. Now, Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness". He was also king of Salem which means "King of Peace." This is who came out to bless Abraham and in response to the blessing which he received from this 'King of Righteousness' and 'King of Peace', Abraham gave tithes of all. The word 'tithe' is the Hebrew idea of a tenth. Do you want to know what Abraham actually did? He gave everything. He kept nothing to himself. He gave tithes of all to Melchizedek and when the king of Sodom invited Abraham to retain the spoil for himself, Abraham refused to take anything for himself. He gave it all up. Are you keen to make a law for yourself out of the Scripture. Are you basing your giving of 10% on what Abraham did? Take note! Abraham gave 100%. Give it all!

The New Testament Explanation

Now, in Hebrews chapter 7, we get the New Testament commentary on this episode. (Hebrews 7 vv 1 to 10): ***"For this Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abides a priest continually.***

"Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: but he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without contradiction, the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. And as I may so say, Levi also, who received tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him."

Thus, later on, the law would introduce a commandment for the people of Israel to give a tenth of their increase - a tithe. Here in Hebrews it declares that what happened in Abraham transcends the law. First, it was before the law was given. There was no commandment for Abraham to give tithes. Second, the argument is that the tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe which was to receive the tithe under the law, was, as yet unborn, in Abraham when he gave tithes to Melchizedek. So what was provided in the law for them, was subservient to this greater act that Abraham performed. This transcends the law. Abraham gave

tithes of all to Melchizedek and what we see in the New Testament, in Hebrews, is that Melchizedek is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is **"made like unto the Son of God."** Under the law, men who die (Levi) received tithes, but, here, the one who receives tithes is the one who lives. We have, in Abraham, a picture of the believer, the man of faith, giving tithes to the One who is the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace - our Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember! Abraham was giving a tenth, but he was giving all. I think we will find this in the New Testament, that our giving - what the Lord requires of us - is not just trying to scrape together a tenth for Him. You may have thought that I was going to suggest that it does not matter what you give, that we are not under the law and, therefore, under no obligation to tithe at all. Well we are not under an obligation to give a tenth; we are under an obligation to give everything - all. We are under grace. In other words, we owe Him everything.

Giving All

Ten lepers came to Jesus for healing. When one (a tenth) returned to give thanks, what did Jesus say? "That's enough - that's sufficient"? No! He asked, **"Where are the other nine?"** He wanted the other 90% too. He wanted a 100% return, giving thanks.

Abraham's giving was a free act of worship in response to Divine grace. The Scripture reminds us that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price. Then everything we have, belongs to the Lord. If we, like Paul, could say that we are bond slaves of Jesus Christ, then everything we have belongs to Him. All that a bond-slave had, if he had anything at all, belonged to his master. We too must give all.

We are, then, stewards of what we do have. We do not actually own it. It is the Lord's, because we are the Lord's, bought with a price. We are stewards and it is required that we be faithful stewards. In 2 Corinthians 8 v 1 and then verse 7, Paul says: **"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia... Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also."** In what grace? It is the grace of giving. He refers to giving as grace. It is the grace of God.

Later in verse 12 he refers to a 'willing mind', that there should first be a 'willing mind' concerning giving. Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek of his own free will. When we give, first, says Paul, there is to be a willing mind. If we have a heart filled with God's love, if we have a heart that is yielded to Him, we will know the truth of the Scriptures that say, in Philippians 2 v 13, **"For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."**

So giving, giving a tithe, 10%, a tenth plus what the Bible in the Old Testament calls the free will offering, is an act of grace. It is freely and willingly given. It was before the law; it transcends the law; it is the reality for which the law provides but a shadow. The commandment in the law to give is a shadow of the real experience of tithing. In Galatians, Paul says that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ because we did not know how to behave or what to do. The law constrained us and forced us, compelled us to go along a certain road. But now, we who are saved, we who are born again of the Spirit of God, we have been born into reality and the Spirit of the Lord has filled our hearts with His law - it is written on our hearts. It is no longer an outward constraint, but is something which is motivated by love from within.

Do not clutch at the shadow. That is what 'evangelicalism' has done. It has clutched at the shadow of tithing and made it a rule. It has become a regulation. Do you know, there are some churches that boast that they will not allow anyone to become a member of their church until they tithe regularly. That is making a law, a regulation, a rule. That is nothing to boast about. That is bringing men and women under a burden and we are not to do that. We are to encourage people to know the love of God working in their hearts so that all they do is a response of grace - a free-will response to the grace of God and to His blessing. Hallelujah! And we will know our giving to be 100%.

Tithing and the Law

A Burdensome Rule

Having considered Abraham's story, let us now look at what the law required. The law made tithing a duty. Every Israelite had to give a tenth. In Deuteronomy 14 v 22 and in Leviticus 27 vv 30 - 34 you can read about the laws of tithing. Tithing was done on the increase of the field, seed that was sown, tithing of animals and such like. A tenth was taken out and given to the Lord. It was commanded. It had to be done. When the harvest came in, there would be so much grain and a tenth would be for the Lord. And when they counted the cattle in, every tenth one was for the Lord. It was the Lord's. It was holy to Him. There was no other option. If they wanted to be part of Israel, it had to be done. But we who are born again of God's Spirit, we who are saved are not in that situation. The Word of God shows to us that we are now moved by His Spirit within; we are guided by Him and taught by Him. We are no longer children or babes who need the schoolmaster of the law to constrain or restrain us. We are free from that. We are free to do His will and to walk in His Spirit. Yet churches will get into this business of making rules, particularly rules on tithing, of giving a tenth. In fact, I know of one fellowship, which requires its members to sign a tithing agreement. As far as leadership is concerned, that is 'lording it over God's people' and should not happen. From the fellowship's point of view, it is bondage. Leaders even get into Pharisaical arguments about whether the 10% should be before or after tax and before you have paid your pension or superannuation contribution or after. I do not want to get into that sort of discussion. It is the sort of thing the Pharisees did.

Should I value every gift I am given so that I can give a tenth? Do I have to go through all my Christmas presents and work out their value so that I can give a tenth? I feel that it is bondage to a law that loses sight of the true blessedness of giving, but if that is what you feel the Lord wants you to do, then, by all means, do it! A brother I respected very much used to do that. He was a very godly man and he felt that that was what the Lord wanted him to do. That is fine and I would not seek to dissuade any such people. However, I believe it would be wrong to start making rules about it to make everyone do it. Where would we stop? Would we tithe on store discounts, 'two for the price of one' items, invitations to dinner at someone else's house and so on? What does making such rules do? It riddles people's consciences with guilt if they do not do it. They are always anxious in case they have left some item out. It brings people under a burden. Jesus said of the Pharisees of his day, ***"For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."*** (Matt.23 v 4)

This 'rule' system also creates the wrong idea that once I have given my 10% then the rest is mine. Every believer should come to the realisation that 'what I have is not my own' - it is the Lord's, 100%.

The Third Year Rule

Now, there is a part of the rule that they tend not to quote in evangelical teaching on the subject: in Deuteronomy 26 v 12 and in other Old Testament scriptures, it tells us that the 10% was given, a tithe, in the year of tithing, every third year. Do you hear that rule being taught in evangelical circles? Have you heard a rule that the tenth has to be paid once every three years? No way! The tithe was given every three years. That bit dropped by the wayside in making up the rules based on Old Testament law. Churches may be interested, for financial reasons, in the 10%, but not in the 'every third year' rule. (See also Deuteronomy 14 v 28). Rules like this run the risk of being an outward observance only. That is what is wrong with rules and regulations. It is mere outward observance. Anybody could do it. You can get unsaved people into churches and make them conform to the church rules. You could require them to give 10% if they are to remain members. They are not saved, but you can make them give a tenth. It is hollow and meaningless.

The Proverb said, **"Give me your heart!"** Give in love.

Tithing for Effect

Centuries before Christ, the Lord spoke through Amos the prophet. There is a certain sarcasm (not in the nasty human sense, you understand) that comes through the message of Amos. In Amos 4 v 4, God says: **"Come to Bethel, and transgress;"** He is telling the people: 'This is what you are doing now. Go on! This is what you want to do, is it not? Go to Bethel!' (What is Bethel? It means 'The House of God.') - 'Go to Bethel and transgress.' Why? Because there was sin there. There was idolatry. **"...at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years..."** (there is the three year rule again) **"...and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings:"** God is pointing out to them in this manner of speaking that, even as they outwardly keep the law's requirements on giving and sacrifices, they are blatantly living sinful and idolatrous lives. The Lord continues: **"For this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God. And I have also given you cleanness of teeth (because they have nothing to eat) ..in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."**

God was saying to them, "You can carry on doing all that you are doing according to the law, the sacrifices and the tithe every three years, but you have not returned unto me."

These are the things we have to avoid. Yet it seems to me that, time and again in evangelical circles in particular, leaders and people fall into the traps about which the Scriptures warn. Remember that Jesus said to the Pharisees, in Matthew 23 v 23, **"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, (herbs)"** - Well, there is nothing wrong with that particularly - although it is getting to the point of being ridiculous, pulling off little bits of plant to tithe - but He added, **"...(you) have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment (or justice), mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not leave the other undone."** Compare that with the passage in Luke's gospel (Luke 11 v 42), where the Lord refers to their omitting the weightier matters of the law and judgment but He also speaks about the love of God. **"You have the duty of tithing down to a fine art, but you have passed over the love of God."**

When it comes to rules, people do like to get things down to fine detail. 'Observing the law? We make sure we keep it in every respect. We are going to give a tithe or a tenth of our income. We are going to give a tithe of every gift that anybody gives us. We are going to give a tithe of every little herb that grows in the garden. We are going to give a tithe of everything.' But this is boasting in our own works. If we pass over the love of God, then it is all meaningless in the light of what is missed. No, Jesus did not say that you should not be giving. He said, **"This you should have done, but if you had done it in the right way, you would have given me all."**

You see, tithing was also done for another reason. It was done for show, to be seen to be religious or pious. In Luke 18 v 12, the Pharisee said, **"I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."** There is a danger of its becoming a human boast, a pride in how much and how regularly one tithes. And yet Jesus, when He was speaking in Matthew 6 vv 1 - 4, said, **"Make sure, when you give alms, that you do not do it before men to be seen of men."** From Matthew 6 vv 3,4 we get that expression in the English language, which people now use in a variety of contexts: **"Let not your left hand know what your right hand does: that your alms may be in secret, and your Father which sees in secret Himself shall reward you openly."** In other words, let it be between you and the Lord, not boastfully or for show. Mere outward observance of the law is no good. The function of the law was to act as a tutor (or schoolmaster) to bring us to Christ. Israel missed Christ and carries on with the outward observance only. Evangelicals, if they are not careful, will also get the outward observance only. Even though they are Christians, they will miss Christ in their giving.

Who Gets the Tithe?

I believe that if we look at the law we will find the right principle there, a principle which goes right through scripture and finds its fulness in the New Testament. There is a principle of giving; there is a principle of tithing.

In Numbers 18 v 21 it tells us that the tithes were for the Levites, the priests. The 10% of grain and of the flocks and so on, that was for the Levites. The priests had no inheritance. They had no provision from work, because their work was to minister in the things of the Lord, in spiritual things. Here was their provision. It came from the tithe of the people. Now who is the tithe for in the New Testament? Peter said, **"You are a holy priesthood."** The priesthood of all believers is a truth held by Bible-believing Christians... and the tithes were for the priests. However, even in the Old Testament, the tithes were not exclusively for the Levites. The tithes were also for the givers and for the poor and needy, that there might be blessing amongst the people of God. Look at Deuteronomy 12 vv 17, 18: **"You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your corn, or of your wine, or of your oil, or the firstlings of your herds or of your flock, nor any of your vows which you vow, nor your freewill offerings, or heave offering of your hand: but you must eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God shall choose, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite that is within your gates: and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all that you put your hands unto."** Who is going to eat of the tithes? The giver... you shall eat of them.

Deuteronomy 14 vv 22 to 25:

"Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which He shall choose to place His Name there, the tithe of Thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the Lord thy God shall choose to set His Name there, when the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: then thou shalt turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose." So, if you had a sheep which was the tithe, and you could not carry it all the way to Jerusalem, you sold it. You then took the money to Jerusalem and when you arrived there (vv 26 to 29): "...thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: (you do not hear this in evangelical teaching) and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, and the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee. At the end of three years (there is the three year rule again) thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: and the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest."

And so the principle that I find here is a principle of the blessing of God. And it is in the law. If you take that away and just have a law of giving a tenth, putting it in the money-box and then going away, duty done, then there is no blessing. But, here in the law, is the blessing of the Lord brought forth and all are satisfied - the poor, the needy, the priest that ministers, all are provided for. There is a wonderful provision because the people of God are a giving people. There is a blessing in it. There is a principle of blessing. Hallelujah!

The Principle of Blessing

I want you to see these principles, these blessings in the Old Testament laws, so that when we come to the New Testament, you can see the fulness of blessing in Christ Jesus. Please look at the first two verses of Deuteronomy 26: **"And it shall be that when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possesseth it, and dwellest therein; that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the Lord thy God**

giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shalt choose to place His Name there."

It then proceeds to instruct them what they had to say, how to testify of the Lord's bringing them out - how He brought Abraham out and how he brought them out of Egypt and so on. Then from verse 9: ***"And He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God: and thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you. When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, (there it is again!) which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; then thou shalt say before the Lord thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all Thy commandments which Thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them: I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away ought thereof for any unclean use, nor given ought thereof for the dead: but I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, and have done according to all that Thou hast commanded me. Look down from Thy holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Thy people Israel, and the land which Thou hast given us, as thou swarest unto our fathers, a land that floweth with milk and honey."***

It is blessing, blessing, blessing, not burden, burden, burden. They themselves are rejoicing in what they are giving. It is truly marvellous - and this is the Old Testament. This is the law and yet, as we see what it is pointing to in Christ Jesus, we can also witness the principle working behind the law. There is blessing, God's blessing, in giving.

They re-discovered this principle in the time of King Hezekiah. Do you remember what happened? After the terrible reign of Ahaz, his father, Hezekiah repaired and cleansed the Temple, he restored the sacrifices and worship, celebrated the Passover and commanded that the people should ***"...give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the Lord."*** But they did not do it in a spirit of burden, groaning heavily at another imposition on their resources. No, they found that as they entered into the spirit of the law, that there was great blessing upon them. It was an act of free-will which brought them into great blessing. Hallelujah!

Look at 2 Chronicles 31 vv 5 - 10: ***"And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the fields; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. And concerning the children of Israel and Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of holy things which were consecrated unto the Lord their God, and laid them by heaps. (Tons of the stuff!) In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month (four months collecting it all together - what a feast!) And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord, and His people Israel. Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. And Azariah, the chief priest of the house of Zadok, answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed His people; and that which is left is this great store."***

There was blessing - a restored blessing. What the people gave when they tithed, they gave of their own free will and they were abundantly blessed. That was the law.

Giving in the New Testament

A Cheerful Giver

Having looked at the Old Testament law, let us now consider the New Testament mind on these things. I think it is quite clear. First of all, it makes it quite clear that giving is not to be something that is to be done grudgingly. Giving is to be a blessing. It is not to be imposed as a law, or a rule, or a regulation. There has to be an inner desire, a desire to respond to the blessing of God.

Jesus said, in Matthew 10 v 8, "***Freely you have received, freely give.***" We cannot emphasise the 'give' without the 'freely'.

In 2 Corinthians 9 v 7 Paul instructs us that giving should not be done ***'grudgingly, or of necessity.'*** It should not be done because someone points the finger at you and says, "Now you are a Christian, you must give 10%." It says, 'not of necessity.' What it does say, in 2 Corinthians 8 v 12, is that you ought to give, willingly, according to what you have. That is what the Lord expects. "***For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.***" It is according to what you have, not according to what you can spare. Jesus pointed out the widow that gave her two mites and then He pointed to those who were giving much gold out of the abundance of their riches. The gifts of the very rich were nothing to them. It was something they could easily spare. But the widow gave everything she had; it was all her living. She had given everything - 100%. It is not according to what you can spare but according to what you have.

Now let me give you an example from the Old Testament. In 1 Kings 17, Elijah arrived at Zarephath and met a widow woman who had a bit of meal in a barrel and a cruse of oil. When Elijah asked her for something to eat, she replied that she had only sufficient meal and oil left for a final meal for herself and her son. After that there was nothing but death to look forward to. Elijah's response was to ask that first she make him a cake. You could imagine the thoughts going through the widow's mind. "What? I can't spare you a cake. I can't afford to make you a cake. That is all I have got." That is just the principle upon which the Lord works in the matter of giving - it is according to what you have. What do you have? A little meal in a barrel and a little oil. That is fine. I will have that. Give according to what you have. It is accepted according to what a man has, not of what he can spare, nor according to what he can afford. When you get on those lines, then you develop the attitude "that's mine (90%) and that's yours (10%)."

To emphasise this, 2 Corinthians 8 v 3 says: "***For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves...***" Willing to do what? They were willing to give, if it were possible, beyond what they could afford. Then in 2 Corinthians 9 v 7 the full text of a phrase I have already used: "***Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver.***"

All the time the New Testament reinforces the idea that giving is a free-will act; it is as one purposes in one's heart; it is to be done cheerfully, not of burdensome necessity.

Then in Romans 12 v 8, where Paul is explaining how things must be done in the right way, he says that if you are giving, do it with simplicity (or liberally).

How Much?

At this point let us consider the practical teachings of how much should be given, bearing in mind, of course, that all belongs to Him. Paul gives such practical advice in 1 Corinthians 16 v 2: "***Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him.***" You give as the Lord prospers you. And here we now get the suggestion of a proportion. You give in proportion as the Lord prospers you. They gave a tenth in Old Testament times. Why did they do that? I believe that it was because it was a good measure of preparedness to give all. Why did Abraham give a tenth? It was a

good token of giving all. So there is guidance here, in the New Testament, of giving in good measure. Note also, that Paul says that a proportion should be set aside regularly on the first day of the week to be kept in store (ready to give at the appropriate time). Why did Paul give this advice? He did so to prevent any 'gatherings' (AV) when he arrived. What does he mean by gatherings? Well, that is the AV translation of a Greek word which signifies 'collections'. Paul did not want them to have any collections when he came. There should already be sufficient store available from what believers had set aside for the Lord.

Have you ever been to a church where they do not take up a collection? If you have, you will have met people who are astounded that no collection has been taken up. We have grown so used to church collections and yet Paul said he wanted none. I have to confess that I do not like collections, with people rummaging through their bags, purses and pockets to find something to sling in the offering bag. I do not like it because it does not encourage giving to be done in the right way. Some people will but many will not. Giving should be done in a proper way, from a full heart to the Lord, not grudgingly because a bag has been stuck under one's nose. It does not matter how much it is announced from the pulpit, "Please do not feel obliged to give; please let the bag or plate pass along the row." If you have sat in a meeting where they have passed a big bucket along, you feel embarrassed if you do not put something into it. People do feel embarrassed and they feel they have got to find a few coins to put in. That cannot be right... and as for passing the bucket around again because there was not enough in it the first time round - which happened in one large meeting attended by people from this church - well, words fail me. That is why Paul asked for no collections.

In spite of all that I have said about tithing so far, I do believe that in the principle of tithing, in the principle of giving 10%, there is a good measure of giving. I will not argue about pre-tax or post-tax - it is between you and the Lord, but there is a measure of your willingness to give, according to what you have... not according to what you can afford or spare when all other bills have been paid, but of giving and giving beyond that - giving all. In such giving there is blessing. Be sure of that. A giving people are a people who are blessed. People who give when, humanly speaking, they cannot afford to give, will be a people who are blessed and people who, in the Lord, are prosperous.

For Whom?

Then we must consider the question of who such giving is for as far as the New Testament is concerned. I could say that it is for God, but that would be too vague. In the Old Testament it was for the Levites, and for the people themselves, and for the strangers, and the fatherless, and the widows, and the poor and the needy. The New Testament indicates that it is for the saints and for ministry. We find that where people gave money in the New Testament (for example in 2 Corinthians 9 and 1 Timothy 5 v 26), it was to provide for ministry, that those who minister the Word and spend their time ministering, might have provision. It is also to provide for the poor, the needy, the fatherless and the widows - it is for the saints.

In 2 Corinthians 9 v 1 Paul said that that it was for the saints... ***"as touching the ministry of saints.."*** What ministry is he talking about? He is talking about the ministry of substance. He is talking about giving to them according to their needs.

Have you tried to get money out of churches for needy saints. They will direct you to Social Security and the Benefits Office. They will use the tithes and offerings for building and repair work, for this project and the other, but it is for the saints. Some reaches needy mission work. But the blessing is seeing that the saints are provided for. There is a sowing and reaping principle at work here. It tells us in 2 Corinthians 9 v 6: ***"But this I say, He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully."*** There is blessing in giving.

Luke chapter 6 reinforces the idea: ***"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."*** There is blessing in giving.

Blessing from the Lord

The Old Testament promise in Proverbs 3 vv 9,10 said, "***Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.***"

In Luke 12, Jesus speaks about laying up '**treasures in heaven**', but it is in the context of giving. Paul tells us some words of Jesus in Acts 20 v 35, that it is "**more blessed to give than to receive.**" Humanly speaking we do not see it that way, do we?

I ask again, what is the tithe for? It is for the saints and the ministry and therein is the real blessing. It is to provide for those who minister spiritual things - the workman is worthy of his hire. It is for the poor and needy and so on. It is to assist outreach and evangelism. It is to aid the spreading of the Good News, the Gospel. Some independent, "Joe Bloggs Ministries Incorporated" style organisations try to entice people to give their money for some gimmick - a luxury Christian leisure holiday centre or something. That is why, in the New Testament, you find that the money was given to Apostles or given to deacons or to those seven men that were full of the Holy Spirit - to share out and to minister and to make sure gifts were not used on some hare-brained scheme. Neither, even though I have mentioned the blessing of the Lord and being prosperous and so on, do I believe in the so-called prosperity teaching in the way many today teach it. The idea, it seems to me, is to tempt people into giving their money by appealing to their greed. A book I have at home, by an American evangelist, shows you the way to get rich by giving - especially by giving to the Evangelist's Organisation. Giving is presented as making an investment. You give a hundred pounds and God will return you a hundred-fold. Before long you will have ten thousand pounds. These prosperity teachers tell us that believers should have a mansion to live in, a Rolls Royce on the drive and wear Armani suits as a testimony. **They** may well do so - on the tithes and offerings of ordinary people, on the widow's mites. God certainly blesses those that give, but not in this worldly, 'what-can-I-get-out-of-it' way.

Jacob did that in Genesis 28. He said, in effect, "Lord, if you will be my God and if you will bring me where you said you would bring me, and if you bless me, then I will give you a tenth of everything." He bargained with God and that is not moving in God's grace. It is not right. Yet, this is what the 'prosperity' teaching does. Yes, God does promise blessing; yes, God does say, 'Give and it will be given unto you,' but not so that you can get rich quickly. God's promises are there so that you can move out in faith to do all God's will, confident that God will provide. So, when you have got only 'two mites' you can give, confident that the Lord will provide all your need, because He has promised to do so: "**But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.**" (Philippians 4 v 19) Why does Paul give us God's promise to provide all our need here in Philippians? It is because he had been talking about their giving. He said that they could give, even beyond what they could afford, beyond what they could spare, according to what they had, and they would have the assurance that they would not suffer want. God would supply all their need. He was not suggesting that it was a way to get rich quickly.

God knows that if you have got a giving heart, a heart that will give everything, from whatever He blesses you with, you will give and give again. It is not prosperity in the worldly, financial sense, but rather, prosperity in the Lord. Trust Him always, moving in faith and giving in faith.

Prove Me Now!

Through the prophet Malachi, God said to His people, "**You have robbed me.**" They retorted, "**How have we robbed You, Lord?**" "**In tithes and offerings,**" came the reply. "**Now prove me; bring your tithes in; give and prove me now,**" said the Lord, "**and I will pour you out a blessing.**" They robbed God. Ananias and Sapphira robbed God of what they had given Him. They took it back. The early apostles gave all. They gave with a willing heart. '**Give me your heart!**' says the Lord. Give! Ten per cent is a good measure, but we can go beyond that. He says, 'Give me all!' It is all His.

Please do not take what I am saying wrongly. I am not saying that we should avoid giving or giving only what we can spare. We should give all - everything. We should regard all that we have as the Lord's. In that we will find blessing. You often find that the Christians who are stingy in giving are also the Christians who cannot make ends meet. They are always in debt, always struggling, always wanting and never satisfied. They say, "But I can't afford to give." If you cannot afford to give then you will never know the fulness of blessing. You will be poor if you do not give, but those who give know what it is to be rich spiritually.

AND FINALLY...

What is the final verse which I mentioned at the beginning of this study? It is in Proverbs 11 vv 24,25: **"There is that scatters, (gives, gives, gives) and yet increases;"** You might say that you do not follow this. But it is the way of the Lord's blessing. The more you give, the more you will have to give. That is how the Lord works - give and it shall be given unto you. **"... and there is that withholds (keeps it to himself) more than is meet, but it tends to poverty."** This is the one who saves and stores up wealth for himself but he never has anything. That is what I have said. Christians who are 'stingy' in their giving and give grudgingly never seem to have enough. They always seem to be out of money. They never have enough to meet their needs.

"The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that waters shall be watered also himself." And so it is with the faithful believer, who, though he never seems to have much, is always giving, and yet never seems to be in want.

Let us give of a free will, with free hearts. Let us give first, not last. Let us just give and give and give. Praise the Lord!