

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Give - Proportionately as God Has Prospered

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As we have looked at 2 Corinthians Chapters 8 and 9, we have seen a couple of themes mentioned throughout this passage. We will take a closer look at two themes that the Apostle Paul deals with in this issue. Among other things, Paul indicates that the Grace of Giving involves each person giving according to two principles: giving proportionately to their income and giving as God has prospered them (2 Cor. 8:3, 12-14; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

As we think of giving proportionately, we understand that this is a comparison between our prosperity and our giving. So what is the proper proportion of giving for a believer today? We know that in the Old Testament God required a tithe or 10% "of everything from the land" (Lev. 27:30-33) be set aside to be used as God might command. Other passages expound on this. Numbers 18 says the tithes were to be used to support those who were dedicated to serving God. In Deuteronomy 12 and 14, a tithe was to be brought to the sanctuary for distribution. In Deuteronomy 14 and 26, another tithe was introduced to be collected every third year for the local needy. On top of this, the Law also made provision for "free will offerings," which were not viewed as a burden. God was more than able to make the land grow and produce abundantly so all needs would be met. Malachi 3:10 indicates this type of giving was an act of worship and an expression of confidence in God. What a wonderful way to view giving to God.

In the New Testament, we do not find a mention of a tithe or any dollar figure imposed by God for the believers' giving. What God wants first is the giving of ourselves (Rom 12:1-2). When this takes place, we will then give out of a heart of love and gratitude to God. Is a tithe still a proportionately appropriate amount to give to God? I believe so. It is, at least, a good place to start though we might give more as God directs and prospers us. I also believe we might permissibly give less under some circumstances. In any case, a tithe should never be viewed as what we owe God, or as a bribe for securing God's blessings, nor should any guilt be associated with our giving. We should give from willing hearts of gratitude as directed by God. Our giving is an offering to God--an act of worship. If the amount given is with the proper attitude as the Holy Spirit directs, it is acceptable to God.

How do we determine how to give as God has prospered? In 1 Corinthians 16:2, the word prosper means "in keeping with one's gains." A similar Greek word is used in James 5 relative to storing up treasures. So we should give according to what our treasure is, and in keeping with our gains or increases as God allows and blesses. This moves us to think about giving beyond what we take in on a weekly basis. In giving we should also consider our gains. This includes giving from the gains of an increasing stock portfolio. It means giving based upon the increase in an estate. It includes giving based upon the increase in our bank account. Many of us never think about giving from our increase or gain, but instead only consider our standard weekly or monthly income.

Hasn't God blessed you in other ways? Maybe He's allowed your estate to grow significantly, or a small investment you made many years ago increased dramatically, like allowing a small investment made many years ago that you have forgotten about to increase dramatically. All this is an indication of how God has prospered you and should be seriously considered when thinking about giving.

When the New Testament speaks about giving, the emphasis is on meeting the needs of other believers. The Grace of Giving is a privilege that each believer should participate in as an act of loving worship to God. This expression of worship will bring great blessing to the giver, other believers, and recipients of our giving. Grace giving will bring God's blessing on his people and His work as we give according to our prosperity. I challenge you to take a fresh look at how and what you are giving. There are many worthwhile ministries that deserve support, your local church being first and foremost. Your faithful giving will be used by God to supply the needs of those who are serving Him. Are you giving proportionately as God has prospered ...or is God prospering you according to your giving?

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