

# Principles for New Testament Giving

By Dale Ratzlaff

This question is from a reader of *Proclamation!*

**Question:** Please explain whether we should adhere to the 10% tithing system or are we free to give whatever we can to whomever is doing the Lord's work. Maybe it could be to Proclamation!, homeless programs, children's orphanages, etc.

**Answer:** I do not believe the NT teaches tithing per se. However, it does teach that Christians are to be liberal givers and it gives a number of principles that are to guide us in our giving. Following are twelve New Testament principles for giving that I have found.

**One:** We are to give to support the ministry of the local church we attend. In fact, pastors who are gifted at preaching and teaching by carefully exegeting the word of God should be paid well. Notice Paul's instruction to Timothy.

"The elders [pastors] who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, [wage in context] especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim. 5:17, 18).

Paul could have quoted from the OT law on tithing. He did not. Rather he chose to use an OT law regarding oxen and threshing. He took the principle behind the OT law and applied that principle to the elder (think pastor) of Christian churches. Then he quoted from the words of Christ which we find recorded in Luke 10:17 to validate his application of the OT law. He also showed there are qualifications for the well-paid pastor. He is to "rule well" and "work hard at preaching and teaching".

**Two:** The NT supports giving to gospel causes separate from one's local church. Paul commended the church at Philippi for supporting his ministry in other cities.

"For even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:16-18).

For the gospel to spread to new areas the gospel messenger must often preach the gospel to an audience that does not give financial support. This was the case in Thessalonica, noted above, and also in Corinth. Even though Paul was entitled to take money from the Corinthian Church, He did not take wages from it but was supported by "tent making" and gifts from other Christians. However, he again lays down the principle that gospel workers deserve support.

“If others share the this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:12–18).

“The hard-working farmer [applied to Timothy as Pastor] ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything” (2 Tim. 2:6, 7).

**Three:** The NT supports giving to help other Christians in need.

“...recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do” (Gal. 2:9, 10).

As Paul carried out this ministry of raising money from the Gentile churches for the poor in Jerusalem he gives some additional principles relative to giving listed below.

**Four:** The NT teaches that money should be handled with circumspect integrity.

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me” (1 Cor. 16:1–4).

“...and not only this, but he [Titus] has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. We have sent with them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you. As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you” (2 Cor. 8:19–24).

**Five:** The NT supports the principle of blessing proportional to our giving.

“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6–9).

“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (Lk. 6:38).

“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

One must be very careful applying this principle. I believe this principle is true and I have personally seen God fulfill this promise to us a number of times. However some TV evangelists, as well as some pastors, have abused this principle in fund raising techniques and used it as an enticing and legalistic lever to put emotional pressure on others to give toward their cause. I personally do not believe this principle should be used in this way. We must remember that blessings do not always come in like kind. If a person is persuaded by someone to give money for the express purpose of getting more money back, that person may well be disappointed if he is looking only for the monetary blessing. The blessing from giving may come in many different forms according to God’s mercy, grace and will.

**Six:** The NT supports the principle of proportional giving.

When Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to complete their pledge to help the poor in Jerusalem he noted:

“But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability. For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality—at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; as it is written, “HE WHO gathered MUCH DID NOT HAVE TOO MUCH, AND HE WHO gathered LITTLE HAD NO LACK” (2 Cor. 8:11–15).

Jesus taught the same thing.

“And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on” (Lk. 21:1–4).

Many Christians follow the Old Testament practice of tithing and have been blessed by doing so. One can support this principle in that Abraham— long before the law was given— gave one tenth of the spoils from the war with the local kings to Melchizedek king of Salem (Gen. 14:20.) and the writer of Hebrews mentions this event. However, the context of Hebrews is not specifically enforcing the principle of tithing; rather he is showing the superiority of Christ’s high priestly ministry over the Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:1-10)

**Seven:** The NT supports the principles of voluntary giving.

“Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, “HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER” (2 Cor. 9:7).

We should observe that the context of this statement is not giving for the support of the local church but rather giving for the poor in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, even though Christians have an obligation to give, it should not be forced, rather it should be voluntary and done cheerfully from the heart. Some see in the quotation above, “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart”, evidence that there may have been pledges made earlier and Paul is asking that they now be paid.

**Eight:** The NT supports the principle of secret giving.

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. “But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Mt. 6:1-4).

I believe some church fund-raising techniques violate this principle. People’s names are associated with their gifts. This has been done in a number of ways from plaques placed on stained glass windows, memorial buildings, and names on fund raising chalk boards or flyers. Usually this is done to either get others to give to keep up with big donors or to stroke the ego of the large givers. We should give thanks to those who support the ministry of the gospel but not do it in such a way as to manipulate others.

**Nine:** The NT teaches that givers should first give themselves to the Lord.

“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:1–5).

Just as new covenant Christians are to dedicate every day to God’s service, not just the seventh. So new covenant Christians are to consider everything they have belongs to the Lord, not just a tenth. They are to be stewards of Christ in all they do.

**Ten:** The NT teaches that we cannot purchase God's blessings with money.

"Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. "For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity" (Acts 8:18–23).

Simon was a new believer. Even though he had just been baptized (Acts 8:13) it does not appear he was really born again. It is important to note that Peter read his heart and did not accept his money. Today, I fear that there are many evangelists and/or pastors who would take the offered money and promise a spiritual blessing, especially if the promised gift was large. Church leaders must be careful in accepting gifts that are giving from the wrong motive. Too often in the history of the church large gifts have been accepted in exchange for position and power which often result in undermining the witness of the church and the furtherance of the gospel.

**Eleven:** The NT teaches that we should not support those who are able to work but are lazy and refuse to work.

"For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:10–12).

**Twelve:** The NT teaches that giving without love profits us nothing.

"And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3).

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose" (2 Cor. 5:14).