

SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 23 JUNE 2019



Why Give?

Randy Alcorn

(The style of this article reflects that it consists of edited sermon notes.)

Fifteen percent of everything Jesus said is related to money and possessions. Our Lord made more reference to money and possessions than to either prayer or faith. He spoke about money and possessions more than heaven and hell combined.

Why? Because the Scriptures make clear there is a fundamental connection between a person's spiritual life and his attitudes and actions concerning money and possessions. Often we divorce the two. Christ sees them as essentially related to one another.

Luke 19:1-10 Zacchaeus, the tax collector

He tells Jesus that he will pay back four times what he has illegitimately taken and give half to the poor. Jesus replies: "Today salvation has come to this house." How does Jesus judge this fundamental change in Zacchaeus's heart? By the change in his attitudes and actions concerning money and possessions. (This change didn't earn his salvation but demonstrated it.)

Matthew 19:16-26 The rich young ruler

Jesus knows that what's keeping him away from God is his attachment to his money and possessions – these are his god. So Jesus says, "Give away to poor, come follow me, and you'll have riches in heaven."

The man regretfully says "no." Jesus talks about how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. He knows this man is not saved; he has not changed. On what basis does he conclude this? His attitude and

actions concerning money and possessions have not changed.

Mark 12:41-44 The poor widow

She gave up everything in her offering, and Jesus used her as an example. What demonstrated her devotion to God and trust in God? What revealed her true spiritual condition? Her attitude and actions concerning money and possessions.

Luke 12:13-21 The rich fool

He built up his own kingdom – saved up everything for retirement. The modern dream. (It doesn't say he cheated; he worked hard.) But he spent it all on himself. God calls him a "fool." "Tonight your life is required of you." The greatest indictment against him – the proof of his spiritual condition – was that he was rich toward himself, but not rich toward God. What revealed his true spiritual condition? His attitude and actions concerning money and possessions.

Matthew 6:19-25 The two treasuries, heaven and earth

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Whenever we put our money into something we develop vested interests in that thing. Ideally our treasures will go where our heart is – so if our heart is changed, it will change where we put our treasures. But it works the other way – where we put our treasures our heart will follow.

If your treasure is in house and lands and cars and boats and electronic equipment, where will your heart be? Tell me your chequebook and VISA statement and receipts for cash expenditures, and I'll tell you where

your heart is. Because your heart is wherever you put your treasures.

You want your heart to be in the things of God? Here's a simple solution: put your treasures in the things of God. Develop vested interests in God's kingdom. You want to feel more of a part of your local church? Then *be* more of a part of it. Invest yourself in what the church is all about. That's how you gain vested interests in what's going on there. You want to have a heart for missions? Put your money in missions.

As a pastor many years ago I felt I didn't have a heart for missions. So I started giving more and more money to missions. And guess what? Jesus was right. (Surprise!) My heart followed my treasure. The same way a person gains a deep interest in IBM or Apple or General Motors by putting his money there, a person gains a deep interest in the kingdom of God by putting his money there.

*...where we put
our treasures our
heart will follow.*

Two treasuries, two perspectives, two masters. Choose yours.

Tithing: The Training Wheels of Giving

I'd like to focus now on the biblical foundation, the cornerstone of stewardship. It is not the whole superstructure of stewardship, far from it. It is not the ceiling of giving, but merely the floor of giving. But it is for many people the single most fundamental step in transforming your attitude and actions concerning money and possessions.

Leviticus 27:30

"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD."

God couldn't have made it clearer.

1. "Tithe" The meaning of the word "tithe" is ten per cent. If someone makes \$2,000 a month and puts \$50 in the offering box, he hasn't tithed. If you make \$2,000, a tithe is two hundred dollars. You cannot tithe 2% or 4% or 6% of your income any more than you can "whitewash" a wall with red paint.

2. "Everything" Doesn't mean "some things." Doesn't mean "most things." It means "everything."

When our kids were young, we taught them from the beginning that when grandpa gave them \$20 for Christmas, it didn't mean they had \$20 to spend, it meant they had \$18. The first \$2 belonged to God. Win a scholarship for \$2,000, \$200 belongs to God. "Everything" made them stop and think at every turn about God's hand, God's provision.

3. It "belongs to the LORD." It doesn't belong to me. It's not my money. It's not your money. It's God's money. Ultimately, it's all God's. The 10% is given as a representative offering of the 100%.

4. It is "holy to the LORD." "Holy" means "set apart." It is to be set apart and given to God and used for no other purpose.

Malachi 3:8-10

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

God says "Bring the *whole* tithe into the storehouse" – don't hold back any of it. The obedient Israelite didn't ask whether he could give seven percent instead of ten. He knew the answer. God couldn't have made it clearer.

Where does the tithe go?

Into the "storehouse." This was something in Israel that you didn't decide for yourself. The whole tithe went into the temple, for the work of the Levites. The closest parallel today to the temple is the church, the closest parallel to the Levites is the elders of the church. (You see that in Acts 2 in Jerusalem, where it says the money was laid at the feet of the apostles, who then decided how to distribute it.)

It seems to me that the tithe should go to the centre of God's program, which is the local church, even though it is more of a clearing house than a storehouse. It has a world evangelism focus that the temple didn't have.

Where do additional offerings go?

Freewill offerings can go anywhere. Beyond the 10% we're free to invest in eternity with freewill giving.

The New Testament portrays the norm of Christian giving as far beyond the tithe. It never suggests the "floor" set by the tithe was eliminated, but simply that the ceiling of Christian giving was far above it.

Obey, relying on God's character

Start now – never put off obedience. God has given you a challenge. If you fail to take it, you will suffer the curse. If you test him in this, if you decide to obey him and work without a safety net in worldly terms, you will in fact be stepping out over the biggest and strongest safety net in the universe: the character of Almighty God. And you'll get started on a lifelong adventure of giving that you will never regret. Your giving will pull along your spirit, and your spirit will pull along your giving, and you will experience the joy of Christ in ways you have never imagined.



Randy Alcorn is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM), a non-profit organization dedicated to teaching biblical truth and drawing attention to the needy and how to help them.

EPM exists to meet the needs of the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, unreconciled and unsupported people around the world.

Edited from: <https://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Feb/25/practice-tithing-minimum-standard-christian-giving/>

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