

# Everyone Needs to Give

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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Why on earth is a man expected and even commanded to give to God?

We are, you know. Before I explain that let me get one thing out of the way.

If you are one of those people who get upset when a minister talks about money, or if you assume the guy is just trying to line his own pockets, I have one request to make of you. Please do not send any money to this ministry. Let's get that idea off the table, because it may be standing between you and something that can change your life, just hear me out, Okay. This is not for me, it's for you.

## **We are Commanded to Give to God**

Now back to my question. Why is a man expected and even commanded to give to God? Well it is certainly not for God's benefit. Consider what He had to say in one of the Psalms. It is Psalm 50 and verse 7: "Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you: I am God, your God. {8} I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are ever before me." In other words, I'm not telling you to stop giving offerings, but know this, {9} "I have no need of a bull from your stall. I have no need of goats from your pens, {10} for every animal of the forest is mine and the cattle on a thousand hills. {11} "I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine." Got it? God continues: {12} "If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it." Is that clear enough?

God does not command us to give for His own benefit. He continues in verse 13: "Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? {14} Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, {15} and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

## **God is Proposing a Deal**

Do you realize that God is proposing a deal? Giving to God is a part of your life and you can call upon Him in the trouble and He will bail you out.

Then He says "This is the deal, I will deliver you and you will honor me."

Now, note well, which comes first. We honor God, because He has delivered us. It is not the other way around. Is this clear? Now if the offerings are not for God's benefit, for whose benefit are they commanded? Well, obviously, for the giver, for everyone needs to give no matter how rich, no matter how poor, we have a need to give.

## **How Does Tithing Work in Practice?**

Now how does it work in practice. Well let me tell you a story. In ancient times a band of warlords came down and plundered the old city of Sodom and carried off their goods and a lot of their people to be their slaves. But, there was a problem, one of the people they carried off had a near Kinsman named Abraham. Abraham organized a private party, a private army actually, and went after them and destroyed their army and recaptured the people and all the booty they had taken out of Sodom. You can read the whole story in the 14th chapter of Genesis. As Abraham came back from the battle on his way home, he was met by the king of Sodom and another person named Melchizedek, who happened to be a priest of the most high God. The priest brought out bread and wine, which kind of sounds a little like communion doesn't it? He blessed Abraham with these words. They are very important words, listen. Genesis 14 verse 19, "Blessed be Abram by God most high, Creator of heaven and earth, and blessed be God most high who delivered your enemies into your hand. Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

### **Abraham Tithed**

Abraham had called on God in his day of trouble and God had delivered him and now Abram honors God with a tithe, a tenth, of all of it. It is note worthy that what Abraham was tithing on was the spoils of battle, the property of the people of Sodom. God gave into his hands, so Abram gave God a tenth, off the top.

Well, after that, the King of Sodom said Abraham {21} "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself. {22} But Abram said to the king of Sodom. "I have raised my hand to the Lord God most high, Creator of heaven and earth and have taken an oath {23} that I will accept nothing belonging to you. Not even a thread, not the thong of the sandal so that you will never be able to say. I made Abram rich. {24} I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share." and that's that.

Abram took the tenth for God off the top before any distribution of goods. But the important thing to notice is that Abram's tithe was a response to the declaration that God had given him the victory. He gave that tenth to the man who represented God at that time in that place.

### **Is Tithing Commanded or Is It Voluntary?**

Now about this tenth. Is it commanded or is it voluntary?

So what about these things called tithes and offerings to God. Are they commanded? Yes. Are they voluntary? Yes. Is that a paradox? No not really. You see every aspect of the law of God is voluntary at the personal level. The Scripture says "Thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). Is compliance voluntary? Yes, it has to be. You have to decide to tell the truth. You're commanded to do it, but you can lie, and if you're good at it and nobody catches you at it, it may seem that you can get away with it. The Scripture says "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Is that commanded? Yes. Is it voluntary? Yes it is at the personal level. Obviously there is not going to anybody coming into your house to be sure you're not painting the walls on the Sabbath day. It's up to you.

The Law is there to teach you right and wrong and to make your life better. So, at the community level, there may be enforcement. If you kill somebody you will be prosecuted, and chances are sent off to jail.

If you don't give to God, He has no IRS, no Internal Revenue Service, so He won't come and take your money away from you. But remember how that Psalm, that we read earlier, how it concluded. "Call on me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you and you will honor me." But when He blesses you and you do not honor Him, then you fall out of that relationship and you are on your own.

How's that working out for you?

### **Too Poor to Give**

Now let's get something else out of the way.

What if you're too poor to give? Maybe poor people shouldn't have to give. Well, let's consider an incident that Jesus observed and commented on and let's notice what He had said about it. It is in Luke 21 and verse one: "As Jesus looked up, He saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. {2} He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. {3} "I tell you the truth," He told His disciples, "This poor widow has put in more than all the others." Now that is a stunning thing to say.

His disciples saw people put in hundreds, thousands into this treasury, big coins, gold coins. This woman gives two coins, two very small copper coins probably the minimum denomination coin.

Jesus said, "This poor widow has put in more than all the others. {4} All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." This is a big lesson. God does not look at the raw amount of the gift, but the proportion. He measures it in proportion to what you have.

I think there is one thing fascinating about this. Jesus did not say that the woman should not have done so.

He did not say or send somebody after her to return her money to her. Why not? Because He would've taken away from her the good thing that she has just done. She made a decision to sacrifice. Who was He or anyone else to say "You can't do that! You're too poor."

The meaning of this passage though does not stop here.

Following right on the heels of it, some of His disciples were remarking about how the Temple was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. Jesus said ". Well, for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another, every one of them will be thrown down (Luke 21:5-6)."

Now, what do we conclude from that? Well, what I conclude from this is that it's not the building that is important. What is important is the relationship between the giver and God.

### **The Widow's Offering**

Now about the widow's offering. God can do more with that little bit than you think. Remember that day when Jesus and His disciples were up in Galilee or someplace and they had been out there a long time. There were about 5000 people out there gathered around them (Matthew 14:14-22). Jesus was becoming a little concerned because He didn't know if everybody had enough to eat. So he said to His disciples, "Can we give these people something to eat?" They said "We don't have anything to eat." Jesus said

"Well, what do you have?" They responded "We have five loaves and two fish." So Jesus said "Okay make them sit down out there in ranks and He broke the bread and the fish and put them in baskets and said "Go feed them." They went out and fed those people, 5000 of them, and still had food to collect up when it was over for people to carry home take out boxes as it were. How did He do that? Folks, He is God! So don't tell me that God cannot do more with two copper coins from a little widow than He could with \$100,000 donation from some rich guy.

Yes, He actually can do that. Moreover, the poor need to give and need to have it appreciated every bit as much as the rich. It's an important lesson.

### **Proportion**

So, when we speak of proportion, that's what we are talking about here, what proportion are we talking about? God basically teaches us proportional giving. If you are poor you give little and if you are rich you give much and we all equal. Okay?

In Genesis chapter 28 we got a man named Jacob. He had been sent off by his mother into a northern tribe to try to find a wife for himself and come back at some later time because his brother threatened to kill them. That's a long story, but along the way he stopped at a little place called Luz (Genesis 28:19) and made himself a place to sleep there, actually the Scripture says he took stones and used them for pillows and I thought, what! No wonder he had some dreams because as he dreamed he saw a ladder (verse 28) going up to heaven, and angels ascending and descending on the ladder. And when he woke up, he said "Surely the Lord is in this place and I didn't know it."

So "he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. {18} And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. {19} And he called the name of that place Bethel" which means the house of God. "The name of that city was called Luz at the first. {20} And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, {21} So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then the LORD be my God: {22} And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that you give me I will surely give the tenth to thee."

### **Jacob Tithed**

Now about Jacob and his tithes that is mentioned here.

Jacob is entering a covenant with God. It is a classic 'If then' statement. If God will be with me and keep me in the way I go, if God will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on so I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord will be my God, this stone will be God's house and all that you give me I will surely give the tenth to you.

How did he calculate what God had given him? I don't know, that was up to him, wasn't it? When you make a deal like this, isn't it up to you in good faith to carry through on the deal?

You sit down and you think it through, you pray about the matter. You make your decision and you follow through. After all we're talking about your relationship with the Creator of the universe, who said: "Let there be light and there was light" (Genesis 1:3).

So you do want to keep faith with Him, don't you?

### **Entering into a Covenant with God**

Here is the burning question. A man is entering into a covenant with God, a partnership with God, what part of his life does he want to exclude from the covenant? His children, his house, his farm, his mule, his business, his money? You know it is his choice. God is committed to our freedom, our liberty, and if we don't want him in He will not force the issue. That said, time and chance, will force this issue. So that is where you are. You have the same choice that he had. What part of your life do you want to exclude from your relationship with God? Sit down and think it through. Look at all of the stuff you have. Look at all the relationships you have. Look at all things you do and ask yourself "What part of this is none of God's business and I do not want Him involved in it?"

In any case, the principle of proportion of giving is laid out right here. If God gives a person nothing, then the man owes God 10% of nothing.

### **Jesus Taught Tithing**

Now, let's just consider what Jesus said about tithing.

Luke 11 verse 42 "Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and you just pass over judgment and the love of God. These you ought to have done, not to leave the other undone."

So, can we dispense with the idea that Jesus did not teach tithing? Because He most assuredly did! But did he teach an obligation to give? Well there is a fascinating little parable in Luke chapter 12 and verse 16: He said, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: {17} And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no place to put all of this stuff, I know what I will do, I will tear down my barns, and build bigger barns; and I will bestow all my fruits and my goods. {19} And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. {20} But God said to him, You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be, which you have provided? {21} So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Proportional? Sure. Rich man, rich toward God. Well, here's my problem, if I have to give according to the blessings God has given me I could never reach that level because I have been blessed so much that I can't give enough. You don't have to give it all. Just reach the tenth. After that, consult your heart.

### **I Hate to Tithe**

I knew a man in England years ago and he came to me to counsel about tithing. I was taken back, you don't always, when counseling with people encounter real honesty. I did here. He said "Mr. Dart, I hate to tithe. I do it, but I grit my teeth and I hate it every time I do it." My reply was "Then don't do it, it's not doing you any good anyway unless you do it cheerfully." Remember what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9:7 "Every man should give what is decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly, or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

I don't know if you noticed this but I will repeat it for you.

In the law of Moses there was no internal revenue service. If you don't want to tithe, then don't. However, consider one more passage from the Old Testament, it is in Malachi 3 and verses 8 through 12: "Will a man rob God? But you have robbed me." Now I can see you standing there and saying "Well how have we robbed You?"

You can only rob someone when we take something away from them that belongs to them, right? If you take something away from somebody else that belongs to you, you haven't robbed him. You say "How have we robbed you?" and He said "In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even the whole country has done it. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, Prove Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the LORD of hosts; All nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts."

Even though there is no I.R.S. to enforce the tithe, there are consequences for not tithing.

My friend in England, who hated to tithe, continued to do it even though it galled him.

Why? Well, because he knew that the failure to tithe, carried consequences. I pray that somehow, he worked his way through all that.

Now I am fully aware that there exists a raft of arguments on this issue but why argue. If you don't want to tithe then don't tithe. If you are not persuaded you should, why bother and to those who will write to me to debate the issue, what I just said will be the answer that I give you and to argue this point is mere self justification

### **Practical Questions about Tithing**

Now before I start down my list, let me make one thing perfectly clear. This is entirely up to you, it's not up to me. You pray about it and make a decision in good faith and you'll be fine.

First. Should the poor tithe? This is an odd question in a way because in some cases, the failure to acknowledge God is the reason why they are poor in the first place. Let me give you another absurd question. Should a crippled man walk? Well, if you can walk you should. It may only be when walking that his legs will gain strength. People who have had knee surgery have to go through rehab to get built back, they have to walk. So even though sometimes you're in trouble, and you are poor, the tithe makes it possible for you to start small.

Another question. What you do if you have debts? Well if after meeting your contracted debts. What is contracted debt? The mortgage on your house. The note on your car payment or your credit card bills because they are contracted debts. After you have done those and after you have fed and clothed your wife your children and meeting expenses necessary to keep your job like gasoline and a car payment and train fare, if you have nothing left over, then you can't tithe. There is no decision to make, but if you have five dollars left over, don't spend it at Starbucks. When you're in that situation, no luxuries, only necessity should be taken until you have dug yourself out of the hole you are in.

Now another question. Do I have to make up the tithe that I have not paid in the past. I don't think so. That's the meaning of grace, unmerited pardon of debts. Did you notice this in the Lord's prayer. "Give

us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). So God will forgive you your debts, and you have got to let everybody go that owes you.

Where do I pay my tithes? Is it okay to give it to the poor? Well, where and how you tithe, as I started out, is between you and God. I will say this about giving to the poor, be sure that they know it is coming to them in Jesus' name. It does not come to your good credit, it should come to the credit of Jesus Christ. Jesus did say "In as much as you have done it to the least of these my brethren," talking about giving food and clothing to wear, visiting them in jail or what have you, "In as much as you have done it to the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me" (Matthew 25:37-40).

Paul said, "As we have opportunities, let us do good to all men especially to those of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10). What I think he means by opportunity, is that as we have the opportunity, we are to do it personally as we encounter a need. I do not recommend giving to the poor through a third party. Inefficiencies enter in and corruption enters in and who knows what happens and the poor guy at the other end of the thing may have no idea that it came to him because of something Jesus Christ said.

How do I start? First, absolutely first, talk it over with God. Get out a pad and pencil and start laying out your life, write it down. Talk about what you put on that pad when you talk to God in prayer and when decision time comes, put God first. I could say put God ahead of your house payment, but you gave your word on that and you have to keep your word. The same is true of all contracted obligations. Get out your checkbook and start paying attention to where stuff goes. What are all of the things you are spending money on out there? Cut off every expense you can, to the best of your ability, after meeting your contracted obligations, after taking care of the minimum needs of your family, set something aside for God. Plan for the day when you can get it up to a tenth of all God has given you. You don't have to have a BMW, you know. If you have one sell it and buy a Chevy or get yourself a clunker. Buy a car that you can pay off in short order or perhaps not have to make payments at all.

Avoid paying interest on anything except basic housing and basic transportation. One of the biggest mistakes we make in this world is the interest we pay so we can have it now, instead of saving up for it.

If you can't afford to tithe, what else is on that pad or in that checkbook that you cannot afford? I can almost guarantee you that if you can't afford to tithe, there's a bunch of other stuff in there you can't afford either.

One of the greatest lessons to the tither is a simple truth. I can live on less than my entire income.

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Ronald L. Dart is an evangelist and is heard daily and weekly  
on his Born to Win radio program.  
You can contact Ronald L. Dart at Christian Educational Ministries  
P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791  
Phone: (903) 839-9300 — 1-888-BIBLE-44

[www.borntowin.net](http://www.borntowin.net)