The Church, part 19
(2 Corinthians 8-9 and assorted Scriptures)
(preached Pine Grove 11/5/17; Sunday PM)

Introduction

I enjoy simplicity.

I find little enjoyment in complicated or complex matter..

I enjoy addition and subtraction..

I find little enjoyment in algebra and calculus.

Someone once said that the US Constitution is a work of brilliance because it is the operating manual for a nation of millions but is limited to 21 pages…

While the typical operating manual for a car that seats only 5 people is often 200 pages long…

I would agree…

For the past 3 weeks, we have been looking at a biblical model for giving to the Lord…

And I have taken us through a good number of verses in the OT to help us understand how God expects his people to give to Him..

And it has been quite detailed at times looking at how Israel gave to God before they got the law and then after they got the law…

And I wanted to do that in order to help us think about all the things that God has said in regards to our giving from a biblical perspective….

Because often times, man's perspective gets mixed in and you end up with what the Bible says about giving being confused with man says about giving…

And that mixture is not always helpful but often complicated and confusing…

But tonight I want to pull the last 3 weeks in the OT together and dig into the NT and really simplify matters for us on how to give the Lord in a way that pleases him..

So, let me you a simple summary of OT giving..

And that summary would be this..

Israel gave to God in two ways….

One way was freewill offerings or voluntary giving…

The second was commanded tithing…

The first way of freewill offerings had no percentage tied to it…

It was never called a tithe and it was based upon what a person decided in their heart to give to God…

The second way to give in the form of commanded offerings had a percentage associated with it…

It was at least 23 1/3% if not closer to 25% and it was referred to as a tithe that went to support their nation by funding the priests, supporting national festivals, and giving to the poor, widow, and orphan…

That was the picture from the last 3 weeks in the OT…

Now, we move to the NT and what it says about giving, and guess what we will find?

The same model for giving..

The NT will speak of freewill or voluntary giving to God, and the NT will speak of commanded giving to God in the form of paying your taxes…

And the beauty of NT teaching on giving is that for the most these two types of giving are found in two passages..

So tonight, we are going to briefly look at how NT Christians are to give to God in terms of paying their taxes and then giving to God voluntarily…

So, let's address the issue of commended giving by turning in our Bibles to Romans 13…

And let's call this…

I. Giving to God's Governments (Romans 13:1-8)

In Romans 13, we find a very helpful passage on a Christian's relationship to government..

Verse 1…

13 Every [a]person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except [b]from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore [c]whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for [d]good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

I do not have time to get into everything seen here, but the bottom line is this…

God establishes every government…

And governments are established by God to keep law and order..

That is their role in the world..

Now obviously, all governments are made up of sinful men…

Some are more sinful and evil than others, but even in sinful governments, Christians are to submit themselves to government as long as that government doesn't clearly command them to sin..

In that case, Christians must obey God and not government..

However for the most part, believers are to live in subjection to their government…

They are called to pray for and honor their government leaders and obey the laws of the land..

And Romans 13:1-5 clearly teaches that….

And because of what we see in verses 1-5, we read this in 6-8…

6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Though I know many Christians who come up with lame excuses not to pay taxes, they do so in violation of this verse of Scripture..

God commands His people to pay their taxes, which amount to the OT model of commanded giving…

And notice what verse 6 says…

Pay your taxes for government rulers are servants of God…

Now, you may say how can Hitler be called a servant of God or Saddam Hussien or any of a long list of cruel men..

Well, the idea is not that they are willing servants of God, but instead God uses all governments to serve his needs…

The biggest need is keeping order in the world, but sometimes, God puts rulers over a nation as judgment upon that nation…

And though they may be atheist or Muslims or Hindus or any number of false religions, government leaders serve the need of God in their roles…

So you pay your taxes not in a sense to the government but to God who is one who establishes all governments…

And though governments may use your money wrongly and they often do, you have rightly by obeying the word of God.

Jesus said the same thing way before Paul wrote this letter to the Romans..

Matthew 22:15…

15 Then the Pharisees went and [g]plotted together how they might trap Him [h]in what He said. 16 And they *sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and [i]defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. 17 Tell us then, what do You think? Is it [j]lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus perceived their [k]malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? 19 Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a [l]denarius. 20 And He *said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They *said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He *said to

***them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."
22 And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.***

In case you want to twist God's word in the book of Romans to say that you dont have to pay your taxes, it is hard to twist Jesus' words here..

Jesus said to pay your taxes…

Since Caesar had a coin made in his image, if he asked for it back, you should give it back to him..

And since God had made you in his image, if he asked for your life, you should give it back to him…

There is no wiggle room in these commands to the Christian to pay their taxes..

And look, yes, your taxes may be missed and they often are, but they can also be used for good things as well..

In the end, we simply obey God and pay our taxes and leave the use of that money up to Him..

That is one simple way a NT Christian is to give his money…

He is to pay his taxes as a form of required giving…

That is how God has designed the world and we are simply to trust his wisdom and not our own…

Obey God and give to Him by paying your taxes to the government that He has put over you…

I think that helps simplify that aspect of giving…

A second way Christians are the give according to the NT is voluntary or what some call freewill giving…

This is not the idea of a tithe…

A tithe is not mentioned anywhere in the NT as binding on the Christian..

A tithe was the OT idea of required giving according to a percentage..

Tithing would be like paying your taxes, and surprisingly the tax code deals with a percentage of your income..

Freewill giving was never attached to percentage or the word tithe in the OT and it is not attached to a percentage or the word tithe in the NT…

Freewill giving is not government taxation, it is giving to the work of God in the world today..

II. Giving to God's Work (2 Corinthians 8-9)

Now there a number of passages on the pattern for giving in the NT, but no passage contains as much help as 2 Corinthians 8 and 9…

Now, I want us to look at these two chapters to simplify our thinking in terms of how we are to voluntarily give to God as believers in the church…

You don't need a book on how to give to God or 25 sermon on giving to the church…

You simply need to read and understand 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 and then apply the principles of this passage to your life..

And so, lets look at these two chapters in the NT and grab a few simple principles of giving and live by them in terms of how to give to God…

Now, we are going to start on these chapters but we wont finish them until next Sunday night, so don't settle in for a long winter's nap…

But let me give you a little background on chapters 8 and 9 to help you see what was the context for this instruction about giving…

The Corinthian church was a difficult church at times…

They lived in a very ungodly and sinful culture that often bled over into their congregation…

Well, Paul went there on one of his missionary journeys to spread the gospel….

Well, some people in Corinth believed the gospel and a church was started there….

But this church was very wishy-washy…

Once Paul left there, the church fell into sinful habits, so Paul wrote his first letter to them to call them repentance and answer some questions that the church had for him..

Well, that letter was received by the church and probably proved useful until false prophets arrived in Corinth trying to attack Paul's ministry there…

Unfortunately, they were successful in causing the church to question Paul's character…

Some church members even openly attacked Paul as well..

Well, Paul was disturbed and tried to head back to Corinth to speak with them face to face…

On his way back, he got news that the church had come to her senses and had repented of their attacks on Paul and the gospel…

Upon hearing the news, Paul was filled with joy and wrote a second letter to the church at Corinth to tell them of his joy at hearing of their repentance..

But the second letter was also instructive as well…

In it, he reminded the church of his credentials as true minister of God, while also reminding them to be on the constant lookout for more false prophets…

And a final part of the letter was to remind them of the need to continue to give their money to help the very poor church in Jerusalem…

You see, Paul had a heart for the Christian church in Jerusalem, and the reason was simple..

The Christians in that church had paid a high price for their loyalty to Christ…

Most of the people in that church were former Jews who had been disowned by family to remain faithful to Christ..

Their loyalty to the church also made their financial life difficult as unbelieving Jews often persecuted believing Jews by making life difficult for them…

There is also evidence of a famine in 40s AD in and around Jerusalem…

So you simply had a very poor church in Jerusalem, and Paul had a great heart for that church….

So as he traveled around on his missionary journeys, he would encourage the churches in these areas to do what they could to give financial support for the church in Jerusalem…

And when we get to chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians, Paul is simply reminding the church there to get back to collecting an offering for the church at Jerusalem..

You see, these churches collected an offering for two purposes..

Part of the collection was to the used locally…

To support their pastors and elders and their facilities and needs in their local church…

But part of their giving was to leave their church and go to help the church in other places in the world..

That is what this Jerusalem offering was for the Corinthians…

It was a foreign missions offering in a sense…

Because it enables the church at Jerusalem to keep going and spreading the gospel there..

Because that church was the original sending church for the gospel to go all over the world..

So, Paul was simply encouraging the Corinthian church to get back to work giving now that all their in-fighting has come to an end…

And we simply pick up what he said about giving to that offering in chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians…

So, let's look at this and draw some principles of giving from it…

Verse 1..

8 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much

urging for the favor [a]of participation in the [b]support of the [c]saints, 5 and this, not as we had [d]expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. 6 So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

As Paul begins this section of the letter reminding the Corinthians to give, he doesn't come out and ask for their money…

Instead, he uses the example of how other churches had given to the Jerusalem church as a motivation for the Corinthians to follow their example…

And in this opening section, he simply tells the Corinthians to note how the Macedonian churches gave to God…

So let's make a few notes here to help us think about how we are to give…

First of all, take note of this…

A. Giving is sacrificial.

In using the Macedonians as an example of how to give, he says that though they were in deep poverty, they were rich in joy in terms of their giving..

In other words, the churches in Macedonia, which would include the Phillipian church, the Thessalonian church, and the Berean church, were also in much poverty…

Yet the joy in their caused them to give what they could to the Jerusalem church..

Note what Paul says in verse 3..

They gave according to their ability and some even gave beyond their ability…

Sacrificial giving is pleasing to the Lord…

And why do we sacrifice to give?

Because our hearts of full of gratitude and joy to the Lord for what he has given us..

And our joy is so full, we can't help but give…

Look at what the churches in Macedonia did…

Paul says in verse 4 that they even begged to be a part of the offering for the Jerusalem churches..

Evidently, Paul and others may have told them that there was no need for them to Jerusalem since they were in poverty as well..

But they would not hear of it…

But we also see 2 other principles of giving here…

Not only should giving be sacrificial,..

B. Giving is proportional.

Yes, some gave beyond their ability, but some also gave according to their ability..

God does require every act of offering to put you into poverty..

Some people can only give enough at times because the rest is used to feed them and their family…

Now the question is that how can giving be both beyond our ability and within our ability…

Well, that leads to principle #3 of giving which is also seen here….

C. Giving is Personal.

The very last line of verse 3 says that the people in Macedonia gave of their own accord…

In other words, they decided in their heart if they needed to give based on their ability or either beyond their ability and then they gave and God was pleased with both.

This is why telling you what percentage to give or when to give is in violation of what the Bible teaches about giving…

Paul didn't tell the Macedonians what amount to give…

He told them of the need in the Jerusalem church, and the he left it up to God to use His Holy Spirit to direct the hearts of the churches in Macedonia….

And Paul was overwhelmed with what they gave…

That is the model for NT giving…

It may according to ability…

It may be beyond ability…

But it is always between the giver and the Lord…

And all Paul does is tell the Corinthians of the example of the Macedonians, in verse 6, he simply says, you have an opportunity to participate in this act of gracious giving as well…

Then he adds to that in verses 7-8….

7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the [e]love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. 8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

We see another very principle of giving here as well i what Paul says in verse 8…

I am not speaking this as a command…

And this is the idea that…

D. Giving is Volitional

As we have said before, the model of giving in the Bible is that part of our giving is voluntary..

It is a freewill giving to God…

You see, my role and Paul's role and others role in regards to your giving is this…

We can make you aware of needs…

We can encourage you to give..

But ultimately, your giving is a voluntary act…

I don't have a Bible verse that tells you to give 10% or 50% or 100%..

All I can do is make you aware of needs…

Encourage you to help people in need..

And then leave it to the Holy Spirit as to whether you give or not and if you do give to determine what that amount is in your own heart…

One final principle of giving is found in verse 9…

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

E. Giving is Reciprocal

A simple reminder on why we give is the fact that Jesus gave his life for us…

Why are Christians generous?

Because we are those who have received the generosity of God in salvation…

Jesus gave everything away for us..

He gave away his place in heaven to take on human flesh..

He gave up a life of reality on earth to live in poverty..

He gave up his life as our Substitute on a cross though he did not deserve death..

The life of Christ is a life of giving…

So the life of a Christian should also be a life of giving..

We give up our lives to serve the Lord..

We give up our money to support the work of the Lord..

This is who we are…

Giving is reciprocal…

We give because God has given so much to us…

There should be no such thing as a stingy or greedy Christian..

If God were stingy, we would all be in trouble..

Giving is simply a response to everything that has already been given to us many times over…

Conclusion

So there you have what I hope is a simplified look at how you should give to God as a NT Christian…

#1 - Give as commanded in the form of taxes in obedience and subjection to the government that God has placed over you..

#2 - Give voluntarily in the form of freewill offerings to further the work of God in the world..

And these offerings should be sacrificial, proportional, personal, volitional, reciprocal…

And we will add to that list next week…

Before finishing up with where you should give voluntarily and other pitfalls of giving as a believer in this age…

Let me pray for us tonight.