

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 9, 2014

## Honor God In Your Giving

by Dan Trygg

“Honor Yahweh from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; <sup>10</sup> so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.” Proverbs 3:9,10

“Three times in a year they shall appear before Yahweh your God..., at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before Yahweh empty-handed.” Deuteronomy 16:16

“But King David said to Ornan, ‘No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for Yahweh, or offer a burnt offering which costs me nothing.’” I Chronicles 21:24

**I do not often write or teach about giving**, because so many people have been badgered or pressured by preachers or religious groups about money. **There are times, however, when it is necessary and appropriate.** Paul said he did not shrink from declaring to those he taught *anything* that was beneficial to them, nor did he hold back from communicating the *whole counsel of God* (Acts 20:20,27). I have some new believers I am working with, and there are some who have been Christians for some time, who need to be instructed or refreshed in what the Bible teaches in this regard. **Money is a big deal. We spend much of our waking time either trying to *earn* it, or deciding how to *spend* it.** I have been told that ***one out of every 13 verses in the Bible is about money.*** Of course, **this is a much broader subject than just giving.** It includes wise counsel on *saving, investing, managing* it well, and *avoiding pitfalls or poor choices.* Books have been written on all of that, and ***there is much that is valuable to learn from what God teaches us in the scriptures.*** He wants us to be *wise* about life, and His counsel is *for our benefit and blessing.* What we have comes from Him (Deut. 8:17,18 ; I Chron. 29:11-17). **We are entrusted with material resources as tenants, not just for our enjoyment, but as stewards responsible to God.** They are not *ours*; they are *His.* He allows us to utilize them, but *we are accountable to Him* for how we use what He entrusts to us.

I want to focus on how we can honor God in our giving. **God is interested in more than just that we give, He is interested in why we give, and how we give.** He doesn't want us to give *grudgingly, or under compulsion* (II Cor. 9:7). He doesn't want us to give just because someone told us we *have to.* **He wants us to give with intelligence. He is looking for willing givers; people who give freely, from their hearts.** He wants our giving to be *actions of love and worship, voluntary investments* in His kingdom work because we *agree* with it and *want to do our part* to help it grow. He wants us to see giving as *a privilege, a blessing* to be able to participate in (II Cor. 8:2-4). **He wants us to be excited, cheerful, even hilarious givers. He wants us to learn to give in faith.** He desires that we grow into *confident, courageous, and even sacrificial* givers, willing to unhesitatingly take risks in Spirit-led faith-ventures.

Obviously, we do not all start out at this level of open-handed, open-hearted faith. **Like any other aspect of our spiritual lives, the area of giving grows and develops as we mature in Christ.** We must *renew our minds, change our ways of thinking* about money, possessions, and God. Then *we must stretch ourselves to take new risks to obey* the teachings of scripture and the promptings of the Spirit. It is important to recognize, however, that ***ignorance, unbelief, disobedience and selfishness*** are underneath the symptoms of being **grudging givers, limited-givers or non-givers. These same root problems also underlie other areas of irresponsibility and obedience regarding money management.** Some people do not want to be bothered with what God says about saving, credit, co-signing or other issues of money management. They just blow it off, and do what *they* want. Other people would rather give all their money away, because that is *simpler.* They may even get a “fleshly payoff” by doing “good things” with their money, or helping others. It *looks* magnanimous, but it is *irresponsible.* Sorry, **God wants us all to grow up. He wants us to learn His counsel, and develop skills of self-control and wise management of what He gives us.**

**Our giving is a measurement of our love and our commitment to God.** People get all huffy and defensive when you say that, but there is no escaping it. **If we truly *did* love God and He had *first place* in our lives, we would not have a giving problem. We truly *would* honor Him, not only in how we give, but in how we live.** We would be good stewards of what He entrusts to us. **If He were *first* in our minds and hearts, we would live with integrity, graciousness and generosity toward others, as well.** Why? Because if He truly *were first*, we would *want to* live in ways that honor and faithfully represent Him. **We would generously support His Kingdom work, because His cause would be our cause.** We would *delight* to see others hear about Him, find Him, and grow in their faith, ...and we would be *committed supporters* of that kind of work. **Because these things are important to us, we would learn to order our lives to free up resources to invest in the things that honor God.** Let's just be honest about it. **It is because God is *not* as important to us as our other interests in life, we give very little to honor Him.**

**So, how do we change our hearts?** If you truly are a born-from-above Christian, what I am saying rings true for you. Inside, you *do* want to honor and live for God. You already know how wonderfully God demonstrated His love for you, and your heart has responded with gratitude and the desire to know Him more. **The problem is that sin and fleshly, selfish thinking rules your life and consciousness.** Jesus said that those who continue in, or live in His word are His true disciples. They will come to experientially apprehend the truth, and will find freedom from sin and selfishness (Jn. 8:31-36). **The first step would be to acknowledge the problem to God, and begin to regularly, purposefully apply yourself to learn the teachings of His word. This puts God, and your relationship with Him, in front of your conscious mind on a regular basis.** You want to be drawn into relationship with Him. ***It is important to develop that love relationship with Him, not just learn a bunch of rules and principles about giving.***

Paul said that the Law was *not* given for the righteous, but to expose unrighteousness (I Tim. 1:8-11). **If your heart is good, and you are led by the Spirit, you will find yourself fulfilling what the Law had taught, anyway.** That said, the Bible also teaches that the Law was a child custodian, a protector and guide to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:23-25). We are not under the Law, but we can learn much from it regarding God's heart, and practical wisdom. **In some ways, the Law can be like training wheels for a child learning to ride a bike. They give us some guidance, but they are not meant to take the place of riding freely, and without restraint.** In fact, the training wheels eventually get in the way, as the child becomes confident about his balance and riding ability. The time comes to take them *off*, and cast them aside. *We are looking for the heart change, ...not looking for rules and religious duties.* Nevertheless, **we can learn from the instruction and training of God's people under the Law. I want to propose three principles from the OT that the Spirit can use in the reshaping of our minds to grow us up into people who truly honor God in our giving.**

**The first is, give systematically to put God first.** The passage from Proverbs 3 above communicates this clearly. **Honor God first, before every other claim, obligation or selfish interest, by giving Him the first portion. Set aside the first portion to God immediately.** Use this as an occasion to express your heart to Him. Tell Him that you are choosing to honor Him by keeping Him in first place in your attention and intention. **How much should you give? That is between you and God, and part of the growing faith adventure.** In the OT, this was represented in several ways. **Firstfruits.** People were taught to offer the *first* of the crops or herds to God, as a sign that it was *all* from Him, and dedicated to Him. It would be like offering the first sale of the day, or first dollar earned, the first portion of a windfall or tax refund. This offering of the "firstfruits" was different from the tithe. **Tithing.** The tithe was 10% of the increase (profits or growth) that came at harvest or payday. Jesus said that our righteousness should *surpass* that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). They were very diligent tithers. I take that as a "faith challenge" and, **to me, it means that I can give at least a tithe, and I can expect God to take care of me.** If they could give 10% under the old covenant, I can do at least that much. It may mean I will have to make some adjustments in my spending, but God will help me with covering my needs, if I honor Him first. **Special offerings.** There were special offerings people were encouraged to give in *thanksgiving*, or as a *peace offering*, or just as a way of *expressing love*.

**Secondly, give intentionally, in agreement with God's heart and Spirit.** Discover and choose to give where God is leading you. For example, *the tithe in the OT was to be set apart entirely for the support of those doing ministry.* Other *offerings* were given *for special needs*, or for the maintenance of the place of meeting. **Giving to help the poor is an area of special concern to God.** God made numerous provisions to protect and care for the poor in the OT. We honor Him by choosing to help those in need. **We need to follow through on these commitments. Don't allow good intentions to be eroded away by extra financial pressures or selfish interests** (II Cor. 8:10-12; 9:1-5). Another example of intentionality is found in the passage from Deuteronomy 16. **We are to plan to come before God with something to give.** Again, **it is a way to show Him honor, to not take Him for granted, or those who serve Him.** To repeatedly take up time, food, or resources from church gatherings or meetings with ministers, and never contribute to help out, is irresponsible. This can produce a hardened heart, and an attitude that disregards God and the sacrifices of others. Those who are sincere are *always* welcome, but don't abuse the grace of God. In the passage, this was at a feast time, a time when there was abundance. To *not* have something to offer to God could only happen if there was a serious mismanagement of resources and a consequent disregard of Him. **Plan to have something to give, if you can. Don't be picking through what is left over, after you spent foolishly on yourself.**

**Third, give sacrificially.** Give until it *costs*. Don't take what *others* have paid for and provided, just so you look good, or so you can participate. That is what a child does. He takes what the parent gives, to be able to have something to share. It may teach you something about needing to give, but it is not a genuine sacrifice *from you*. If the goal is to honor God, then you need to bring from your *own* resources, in order to really be invested in God yourself. In the book of Malachi, people were trying to offer inferior or defective gifts. This was rightly rejected as a mockery, not honor. **We need to give God the best.** He is the King of all. **Honor Him in your giving.**