

Mark 12:38–44 — What Does Love For God Look Like?

March 15, 2020

Open your Bibles and turn to Mark 12. Today we finish this chapter. Next week, we begin Mark 13. Mark 13 is Jesus' prophetic word about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. Things are about to get exciting in the Gospel of Mark so take the time to read ahead. Mark 13 is the most difficult chapter in this Gospel. When you read ahead and find yourself confused, take the time to pray for your pastors as we prepare to preach it. Today we are in an easier portion of Mark's Gospel as we finish Mark 12. We will start in verse 38 and read to the end of the chapter.

And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." Mark 12:38–44 (ESV)

Since Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, the Jewish leadership of the Sanhedrin had it in their hearts to eliminate him. First, we saw them attack Jesus in public. When that didn't work, they tried to undermine Jesus by sending three disguised delegations. They appeared to ask honest questions but were trying to trap Jesus. First was a delegation of Pharisees, then a delegation of Sadducees, and finally a lone scribe. Jesus was not trapped by any of them. Each of the delegations left looking foolish instead of Jesus looking foolish. Last week, the

tables turned. Jesus went from being questioned to asking questions. As we saw in that study, many common people in the day of Jesus were beginning to conclude Jesus was the long-awaited Son of David, the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus quoted from Psalm 110:1 and provided irrefutable biblical proof that the Messiah, the Christ, was much more than just a human being. He is the man that is God. That is why he has authority and why Jesus does not need to look to the Sanhedrin to find authority.

This morning, as we continue in this Gospel, we see two pictures of devotion to God. The first picture is of the scribes. They appear to be greatly devoted to God but Jesus showed us they were the poster children for what counterfeit love for God looks like. The other picture is a poor widow. She is a picture of what true faith and devotion to God looks like. So our message will begin by looking at what fake devotion looks like in the lives of the scribes, then we will transition to what genuine love for God looks like in the life of the widow. Lastly, we will apply this to our lives.

The scribes were examples of fake love of God.

There have always been, and will always be, false Bible teachers. Some of the popular ones today are Kenneth Copeland and Joel Osteen, just to name a few. In the days of Jesus, the false Bible teachers were the religious leaders that were in power. That is scary. They pretended to love God but Jesus said the truth was they were producing people that were twice as much children of hell as they were.¹ That is not a compliment. If there is anyone unsure if the the Jewish

¹ Matthew 23:15

leaders were false teachers, remember that while they were claiming to honor God, they were working hard to murder God. That shows us their true colors.

We have already seen the Sanhedrin, which was the spiritual leadership of the nation, was composed of 70 men. Most of those men were Pharisees or Sadducees. Some of the Pharisees were also scribes. The scribes were the highly educated theological lawyers among them. They were the big brains. They looked like lollipops. They were brains on a stick. In this passage, Jesus tells the truth about the scribes, and it isn't pretty. While there are only a few verses that record Jesus' condemnation of the scribes in Mark and Luke, in Matthew's Gospel, almost all of Matthew 23, an entire chapter, is a record of what Jesus said to the scribes that day. Jesus wasn't holding back any punches. He threw them under the bus big time. We won't have enough time to get in-depth on Matthew 23, but one verse from that chapter is helpful for us to understand the big problem Jesus had with the scribes. They were more concerned with how they looked in front of other people on the outside of their lives instead of how they genuinely looked in front of God on the inside of their lives.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. Matthew 23:27 (ESV)

While they look good on the outside, they were filled with pride, greed, and corruption on the inside. Their hearts stunk like rotting human flesh. Their desire was to look good in front of other people but their hearts were stinking rotten in front of God. That is the being problem Jesus had with the scribes. That helps us understand why Jesus was so critical of them in the Gospel of Mark over their

fastidious attention to pointless external things. Let's see how Jesus described them.

And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts..." Mark 12:38–39 (ESV)

They liked walking around in long robes.

The term used to describe the robe referred to in this verse is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe royal kingly garments. We are talking some serious fancy and colorful robes, the kind a king would wear. The scribes loved wearing their long, beautiful, colorful robes that paraded their high status in public as religious leaders. If you want to imagine what this looked like, picture someone walking around public in a graduation gown. I am not talking about a cheap plastic graduation gown, the kind we sometimes see for high school graduations. I am talking about the fancy expensive gowns the school makes you purchase when you finish your

doctorate. They wore their graduation gowns around in public all day long so they could get attention. Attention and admiration is what they wanted!



Not mentioned in this text is another thing that was notable about them, that was their prayer shawls. They put these small rectangular rugs over their heads. They attached tassels to the four corners of this shawl. Numbers 15 says all Jews were to have little blue tassels on the bottom of their robes to identify themselves as Jews who were devoted to God. As centuries passed, the people in esteemed religious

positions, like the scribes, decided to use the tassels on their prayer shawls as a way to show off their super spirituality. They started making their tassels longer and fatter to appear more spiritually impressive to the general public as they walked around in their fancy graduation gowns.

[They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long... Matthew 23:5 \(ESV\)](#)

You need to picture this in your mind. You have these guys walking around in colorful graduation gowns with rugs over their heads that had massive tassels on the corners that looked like fabric baseball bats slapping around their bodies as they walked in public. If we saw them, we would laugh at them. When the average Jew saw them, he or she admired them. Jews assumed by their dress that they were great men, holy men. The problem is, while they had great big tassels on the outside, they had no holiness and genuine relationship with God on the inside. So these guys had a dress-for-success mentality. They wanted to look spiritually impressive when in reality they were not.

[They liked being greeted in the marketplaces.](#)

The Jewish Torah says that a person of lesser Torah knowledge must greet someone with greater knowledge of the Torah with respect. These guys loved going to the marketplace where people addressed them using titles of respect. They were called Master, Father, or Rabbi. They were always being addressed with terms of honor and respect. In our culture, we do this with doctors. We address them as Doctor along with their name. This is what they did in their culture but there was with far more reverence that came with a scribal title.

The Torah also specified that when a scribe walked down the street, everyone, with the exception of day laborers, was expected to rise before them out of respect. Can you picture these guys walking down the road in their fancy graduation gowns with the blankets on their heads and the big tassels banging around and a wave of humanity standing, then sitting as they walked down the road?

The scribes loved this attention. Can you imagine the ego these guys developed as they strutted around town like peacocks in their fancy colored robes being admired by everyone? Some historical documents tell us they loved to be called, “Great One,” which really stroked their egos.

We still see this happening in some churches today where scribal titles and traditions are echoed into modern day life. Some churches address their religious leaders as, “Father such and such.” They do that as a form of respect. I am not saying it is always wrong to address somebody with the title “Father” but you can see how that could lead to spiritual pride.

In the evangelical tradition, Christians often address their religious leaders as Pastor. I remember the first time somebody addressed me as their pastor. It really freaked me out. I was fresh out of seminary and still wearing tie-dye and flip flops when somebody addressed me as Pastor. At first, I looked around, wondering who they were talking to, until I realized it was me!

Incidentally, if you want to address me using the title, “Pastor,” that is OK. I certainly don’t feel I need that title. If they addressed Jesus just using the name

Jesus, and they addressed Paul just using Paul, it is completely appropriate to address me by simply using my first name. That is good enough for me.

They wanted the most important seats in the synagogues.

In synagogues, they had a bench opposite the ark that faced the congregation. That front bench was opposite the people looking down at the people. It was reserved for the senior elders, honored guests, and scribes. It was a great honor to sit on the bench that looked down at the people. You were elevated above the people. You were no longer one of the people. You were special. These scribes love their reserved seating and that they were the only ones allowed to sit in those seats.

This reminded me of the church where I grew up. We had a choir loft that was behind the pastor. When I was in high school, the choir was down in numbers so they recruited from the high school youth group. For a few weeks, I sang in the choir. After they heard my singing, they quickly removed me, but it was a good experience while it lasted. While in the choir, I remember the freaky feeling of watching the back of our pastor's head as he preached to the congregation. It was also weird looking down at the congregation and being seated above the congregation.

Once I became a pastor, I have had the chance to preach in churches where they have chairs or benches on stage. Only the pastors sit in those stage seats, which I have always found uncomfortable. When you are sitting on stage in front of the congregation you can't slouch, check your watch, or anything. You need to have perfect posture for the entire service until it is your time to preach. A

few times I preached in churches where they gave me the opportunity to wear a robe. It felt like wearing drapes. While I don't condemn those things, I can see how even spiritual leaders today can easily fall into the trap of pride because they see themselves as better than the people or above the people, like the scribes did in the days of Jesus with their special clothing, special titles, and special bench.

This is one of the reasons I love CrossWinds. I don't have to sit on stage. I get to wear blue jeans. I don't have to worry about a title. We can humbly study the Word of God and follow Jesus together.

They loved the place of honor at feasts.

In the first century, since they didn't have the Coronavirus canceling public gatherings and killing the NBA season, people would get together in large groups for banquets and feasts. These feasts were like a massive wedding reception. The scribes were always fighting about who was honored enough and great enough to sit at the head table. Instead of humbly taking a place of lower honor and being asked to move up, they fought with each other to get the place of greatest honor. These guys were like peacocks strutting around trying to look good and be super popular, but in their hearts, when it came to their relationships with God, they were empty as garbage cans. There was nothing more than a big hole inside.

There is a little lesson here. When people are spiritually empty, you will see a lot of symbolism and ritual develop in their lives. The less spiritual reality on the inside of a person's life, the more symbolism they will be interested in

following on the outside of his or her life. That is what we see with the scribes. They were dressed to impress. They wanted symbols and titles but they were empty when it came to knowing and following God.

They prayed long prayers.

...who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation. Mark 12:40 (ESV)

When asked to pray in public, they offered especially long prayers. They didn't really want to talk to God or have anything to say to God but they loved praying long prayers in public because it made them look spiritually impressive.

Matthew 6 tells us they would pray in public right on street corners, talking out loud to God to be seen by people. They didn't bother praying privately at home. They prayed publicly in front of others. Matthew 6 also tells us that when they prayed much of their prayer was meaningless repetition thinking the more words they used, the more likely they were to be heard by God. Sometimes, we still see this today when people pray. For some people, it is easy to fill the air with words and have every other word in their prayer be, "Jesus" or "Yes, Jesus" or "Praise God." I am not saying it is always wrong to say those things but it is easy to start to feel spiritually significant by constantly filling the air with those kinds of things.

The scribes were all show. They were all fake. They turned prayer into a performance to draw attention to themselves. It only looked like they were pursuing God. In reality, they wanted the applause of men. They were actors. Even worse than being spiritual peacocks, they were spiritual parasites who lived by sucking the life out of others until they killed their host.

They devoured widows' houses.

Widows and fatherless children were some of the most vulnerable and defenseless members of society. The Bible is full of instruction to care for them as well as warnings about taking advantage of them. God loves them and promises to protect them. Here are some verses that remind us of God's care for widows.

You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry... Exodus 22:22–23 (ESV)

He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Deuteronomy 10:18 (ESV)

What does it mean to have scribes that devoured widows' houses? They abused the generosity and hospitality of old and vulnerable widows. They took advantage of their kindness and preyed on them. It was forbidden for scribes to be paid for their profession so they lived off subsidies. Extending hospitality to a scribe was considered a great act of faith. It was considered particularly pious to completely relieve a scribe of his entire livelihood. Lonely widows whose husbands had passed away and children moved away would sometimes offer scribes a room in their empty home and offer to pay their expenses. This kind of kindness made sense. The widow didn't live alone in the house and it felt good to do spiritual good by taking care of a man of God for the kingdom of God. Unfortunately, many scribes took advantage of those kind widows by sponging off of them, literally eating them out of house and home. They took the widow's credit cards and maxed them out at the store leaving them poor and in debt.

Another way scribes took advantage of widows was by offering to help a widow take care of the legal matters for her estate. A scribe would mismanage

the widow's property, sometimes putting his name in the will so he could take over the estate after the widow died. They were especially evil toward widows that were old and did not have all their mental powers. They treated those vulnerable widows with the same kind of trickery and evil intent as telemarketers do today.

Josephus tells us of one scribe that successfully persuaded a high standing widow named Fulvia to make a substantial gift to the temple in Jerusalem. The problem was that he didn't bring the money to Jerusalem but embezzled the money and ran off with it. That scandal was in the Roman news and was fresh in people's minds.

So these guys were peacocks that lived to parade in front of people, and they were parasites who destroy the weak and vulnerable.

They will be judged harshly.

Jesus ended by saying the scribes would receive the greater condemnation. They would be severely punished. Last week, we saw Jesus define true religion as loving God and loving our neighbors. These guys didn't love God. They just wanted to look like they loved God. They didn't love their neighbors. They destroyed their most vulnerable neighbors. These crooked scribes were just like modern day prosperity preachers. They were interested in being popular and using people than they were with serving God and loving people. They were about taking money from the weak and vulnerable, just like modern-day prosperity preachers do today.

The Jewish Mishnah tells us there were 13 offering boxes in the court of the women known as Shofar-chests. Shofar is Hebrew for trumpet. Each of these boxes was for a different type of offering. The boxes had trumpet-shaped horns on top of them. The horns functioned like a spiral wishing well you drop pennies in at Wal-Mart. In those wells, the money goes around a bunch of time before it drops into the bottom. That is similar to what it was like to drop your offering in the shofar-chests.

So we have a bunch of rich people putting their money into these metal horns. Since it was a horn, a lot of money made a lot of noise when that amount of metal went down the funnel. Everyone knew who all the big givers were because you could hear the money rolling around the horn before it dropped into the offering box.

The poor widow put in all she had to live on.

And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.
Mark 12:42 (ESV)

In Greek, it says she put in two lepton. Lepton literally means “tiny thing.” The lepton was a tiny copper coin that was in circulation in Israel. The denomination was so small they didn’t even use it in Rome. Some translations, like ours, say the lepton was worth a penny. That is not quite right. Technically, it was worth about 8 minutes’ work at minimum wage. At \$3.50/hour, that would be about \$0.50. Either way, the point is the same. This amount of money is insignificant, it isn’t even enough to purchase a Pepsi.



Jesus' lesson — God cares about the size of the sacrifice more than the size of the gift.

And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on. Mark 12:43–44 (ESV)

Jesus was more pleased by the sacrifice of the widow's gift, than the size of rich people's gifts. Jesus said that woman's tiny offering exceeded all that was given by the wealthy. She gave all she had to live on but the rich gave only a small percentage of their wealth that didn't inconvenience them in the least. The rich were still rich after their gifts. This woman was even poorer than she was before her gift. How would she make it? She needed to trust the Lord to provide for her needs, just like she did every day.

All of a sudden, we realize what true love for God looks like. True love for God is seen in the size of the sacrifice one is willing to make in gratitude to God. False devotion is about trying to look religious in front of people, like the scribes. True devotion doesn't care what people see. It cares what God sees and is willing to make great sacrifices out of love and gratitude for him.

The same is true for us. When it comes to our love for God and the truth about our hearts for God, God isn't impressed with fancy seats, fancy titles, or fancy clothes. God isn't even impressed by the size of what we give him. True love and gratitude to God is seen in the size of the sacrifice of what we give him.

What are we willing to sacrifice because our hearts are filled with gratitude to God? Let's turn that diamond a bit and look at the many facets of that concept. For some of us, we may need to give up some of our friends. We may

have friends we like but they are friends that are pulling us away from Jesus. Out of gratitude to Jesus, are we willing to let those ungodly friends go?

For others of us, it is a career. Maybe we have a lucrative job but the field where we work is not honoring to God. The hours we work and the company we keep is pulling us away from our God and our families. We need to make a choice. Are we willing to give up lucrative jobs so we can take jobs that pay less but allows us to love God better and love our families more?

For others of us, what we are called to give up is our money. Like the poor widow, genuine love for God involves giving some of our wealth to God.

Observations

I want to change gears and head us in a slightly different direction. I want to make some observations from these stories and a practical application of these stories.

These pictures represent ends of the spectrum.

The scribes provide us an extreme example of people who are into themselves and empty in their relationships with God, like modern televangelists. We don't see many people that are so far gone. In the same way, the widow, who put in all she had to live on in the offering plate, is also an extreme example of devotion and generosity. This story does not tell us every one of us should take all we have to live on and put it in the offering plate so we can trust God for our next meal. The example this widow gives is that someone who loves God will allow that love to influence his or her life in a radical way. Over time, each of us

should become less like the scribes, who just care about what people see, and more like the widow, who cares about what God sees.

We are to move away from the life of the scribe and toward a life of trust and generosity like the widow.

There is a link between our faith and our finances.

What we spend, what we keep, and what we give say massive things about who we are. There is no way a disciple of Christ can say Jesus is Lord of his life but his financial world is not included. We cannot say we trust God with our lives but don't trust him with our money.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 1 John 3:17 (ESV)

Our faith will result in helping others.

But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. 2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIV)

Just as we are to grow in our faith and knowledge of God, we are to grow in our giving to God. We cannot be growing spiritually with faith and information and not have a change in our giving that results in transformation.

What we spend shows what we value.

If we value food, we are willing to spend a lot of money on high quality food. If we value entertainment, we are willing to spend a lot of money on quality entertainment. If you value clothing, you will spend a lot of money on clothing.

In a similar way, we cannot say we value God if we are not willing to give to God. We give to what we love. If we love God, we will give to the work of God.

Giving to God is an opportunity. It allows us to show him that we value him and trust him to provide for our needs.

What are some practical tips on giving to God?

Let's take some time to talk about giving to God in practical ways. Do not hear these words and think giving is something we have to do. Giving is something we get to do. Jesus taught us it is more blessed to give than to receive. Giving is always better than getting. Giving to God is better than winning a bunch of stuff on The Price is Right. It is better to give prizes than to get prizes.

As we talk about giving, don't see this as me trying to get something from you. See this as God trying to give something to you. There is joy that comes with generosity. God also promises to bless those who are generous to him. I want you to have the joy of generosity. I want you to have the blessing of giving.

Let's talk about four different kinds of giving we see at CrossWinds.

1. Some Christians attend CrossWinds but we have no record of their giving to CrossWinds.

At CrossWinds, 44 percent of those who are regular attenders do not give. If they give, we have no record of their giving. A little more concerning is 27 percent of CrossWinds members do not give. That number concerns me because members made a promise to give to their church family when they joined the church. The membership covenant includes the following line.

To give regularly, proportionately, generously and cheerfully for the work of the Lord. Malachi 3:8–10; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7

Many pastors are afraid to talk about money. I am not afraid to talk about money. Let me tell you why. Giving to the church and to Christ's kingdom is not a

financial issue. It is a spiritual issue. In fact, to not speak about giving as directly as I just did would be unloving. If we claim to have a relationship with Christ that does not impact the wallet, that is fake faith. If someone claims to love Christ and is either a member of CrossWinds or a regular attender at CrossWinds but has no desire to give to Christ and his kingdom, he or she needs to check the state of his or her spiritual life. Something is wrong. When we come to Christ, he changes every part of our lives. He changes the way we speak, what we value, the way we parent, he changes the way we spend our free time, and yes, he even changes the way we use our money. If we claim to be walking with Christ for a length of time and have no desire to give to our church, we need to check our faith. This widow's love for God compelled her to worship God through radical giving.

As soon as we talk about those who know Christ but are not giving to Christ, the topic of wealth and poverty comes up.

I realize some of us will say, "I would love to give but I don't have enough money to give." Some of us are on especially tight budgets. The honest truth is that many times the issue is not the budget. It is an issue of not willing to trust God to provide for our needs. The Bible tells us our giving should be first-fruits giving. In other words, the first check we write after our paycheck should be our giving check. We then trust God to stretch our resources so we can live off the rest of the check. If our giving check is the last check we write based on what is leftover, there will never be anything. We give to God our first and our best, not

our last and our leftovers. When we give to him first, we trust him to provide for our needs. It is amazing how God comes through on this one.

For others of us, giving is not a matter of putting God first in our budget. It is a matter of worship. I like to think of it this way. Giving is a way of saying, "I am willing to give up what I would do with this money because giving this money to God is more important than a vacation. He is more important than a new truck." The money I give to God instead of spending on myself is a way of saying, "God you are more important to me than these things." One way to start our giving and to look at our giving is to say, "God, you are worth more to me than these things." I am willing to give up Hulu because God is worth more to me. I am willing to pack my lunch one day a week instead of going out to eat one day a week. God is worth more to me than a meal at Jimmy John's. When we do that, we find ourselves with \$25 we chose to not spend on ourselves that we intentionally said, "God, you are worth more to me than these things." When that happens, worth has begun. That is what God wants from our hearts.

2. Some of us give sporadically not proportionately.

The Bible tells us the foundation of our giving should be planned and proportionate giving. We are told to set aside an amount we have purposed in our hearts and to give that amount on a regular basis.

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. 1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)

This talks about our giving being regular and in proportional to our income. I know some of us find it difficult to give weekly. Some of us give monthly or other quarterly. That is OK. It is the same principle. Our giving should be regular and

planned. It should be in proportion to how God has blessed us, as Paul said, “as he may prosper.”

I should mention that electronic giving is a great help on this area. You can sign up for a Realm account at [CrossWinds.tv](https://www.crosswinds.tv). Realm allows us to give directly from our banks or through debit cards. Even better is we can set our giving to be done automatically as a recurring gift in Realm. That is very helpful. I encourage you to use that form of giving. As you know we also have electronic giving at the coffee bar and text giving directions in the bulletin.

3. Some Christians at CrossWinds give a tithe.

For some of us, tithing is considered the holy grail of giving. Tithing is giving 10 percent of our income. If anything, tithing is intended to be more of a floor to our giving, not the ceiling of our giving.

There is a lot of misinformation going around about tithing. While tithing is mentioned a number of times in the Old Testament, there is no New Testament passage that says Christians must give 10 percent of their income to the church. In ancient Israel, tithing is what allowed the Levites, who were operating the temple, to survive because they were given no land to earn income. There were actually multiple tithes given in the Old Testament times so the total giving of the people was around 23 percent. Their tithing didn't just cover the Levites and temple operations, but their tithes covered the operation of their government and their welfare system.

As Christians, we are under a new paradigm. Paul didn't say we are to use tithing as the guideline for our giving, but we are to give in response to our

gratitude for God's grace. One of the best places we find this talked about in the New Testament is in 2 Corinthians 8-9. As we grow in our understanding of what God has done for us in Jesus and as we grow in our understanding of how God has made us the most blessed beings in the universe, one way we express our growing gratitude is through our giving.

Another thing Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 8-9 is that our giving is like planting seeds.

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 2 Corinthians 9:6 (ESV)

We need to choose what kind of impact we would like to have for Christ and what kind of blessing we would like to receive from Christ. If we want a small blessing, we give a little and harvest a little. If we are in a position to plant more seed, by giving more to God's kingdom, we should give more. When we give more there will be more good for God's kingdom done through our lives.

Another principle that should guide our giving is the attitude of our hearts when we do our giving.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)

Whatever percentage of our income we give to God, we should be able to give it joyfully, not begrudging. If we cannot give it joyfully, it is too much. When it comes to what percentage of our income should I give, the question is, "What can I give generously and joyfully?" The other question is what kind of impact do we want to make for God in this world and what kind of blessing do we want to receive from God in this life?

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV)

Another wonderful principle found in Scripture is when we give to God, we can be confident that God will provide for our needs. God promises to meet the needs of givers. God will not leave us in a position where we can't do the good works he planned for us to do because we run short on resources.

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 2 Corinthians 8:12 (ESV)

This is a principle that is similar to what we saw with the widow giving her offering in the temple. God is pleased with the size of our sacrifice more than he is the size of our gift. The size of our sacrifice indicates the depth of our heart's desire to worship God.

So the New Testament doesn't stipulate 10 percent giving. For some people, a tithe is generous giving. It is the right amount. It is the amount they can give that is sacrificial and joyful. For other people, a tithe isn't sacrificial at all. They should consider giving more because they can joyfully give more and create a richer harvest for God's kingdom by planting more seed. Still, for other people, things are financially tight. A tithe is not something they can give cheerfully and joyfully. Then the question becomes, "What can they give cheerfully and joyfully?" That amount, even if it is a small amount, is the right amount for them. To not give is the wrong answer. It is to not grow spiritually. It is to not trust God to provide for your needs. It is to separate the wallet from spiritual life when no bifurcation exists. To not give is to say, "Even after God

gave his own son for me, there is nothing I can give as an expression of thankfulness and gratitude to him. My money is mine, all mine.”

4. Some Christians at CrossWinds give beyond the tithe.

God calls us to grow in the grace of giving.

But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. 2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIV)

We are called to grow in our giving, not to be satisfied with our giving. Some of us have grown beyond a tithe. Some of us are giving 11, 12, or more percent of our income in worship to God. Growing in joyful giving is the goal. I know that sounds impossible in today’s economic climate but I want to remind you of this verse.

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 2 Corinthians 9:10 (ESV)

...give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. Luke 6:38 (ESV)

God is capable of not just supplying our resources. He is capable of multiplying our resources. He is capable of providing us with resources we didn’t expect. God’s job is to provide for us. Our job is to worship him and trust him to provide for our needs. If we can trust Jesus to save our souls, we can trust him to provide what we need to give and live in this life.

Conclusion

Living in the 1800s, Sam Houston was a soldier and a politician. He is best known for his role in bringing Texas into the United States. He surprised everyone when he became a Christian. He surprised everyone even more when

after he was baptized he offered to pay half of his local minister's salary. When someone asked him why, he said, "My wallet was baptized too." A call to believe the gospel and a call to give cannot be separated.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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