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Giving

Today in our Basics class we get into financial principles. Surprise, surprise, God has something to say about finances and how we manage our finances because He's the Lord in every area of life and He hasn't left us without revelation. There is no area of neutrality, either we submit to Him in an area of life or we rebel. So we shouldn't be surprised God speaks to economics. Point 14 relates to the pocketbook and I'd be willing to bet there are not many churches that have a policy on giving like this one because if you observe there is a very interesting word missing. See if you can find it...

14. We believe that the Scriptures teach that the work of God should be supported by the people of God alone (Gen. 14:21-24), and that those not Christians are to hear the Gospel freely. The Scriptural way of raising money for the support of God's work, whether in the Gospel or for the benefit of His saints, is by voluntary offerings by believers, all schemes violating this principle being wrong (2 Cor. 8:3-5; 9:7).

What's the word? "Tithe." Why don't we have the word "tithe" in the statement? I thought Christians were supposed to "tithe." Well, tithing was a national tax levied upon every male over 20 years of age in the nation Israel. It was obligatory and we don't hold that we are the nation Israel so quite obviously the "tithe" is not pertinent to us. So here's another point that indicates a distinction between Israel and the Church. In Israel there was the obligatory "tithe," in the Church there is the voluntary "giving." And that's a big difference. There are similarities to be sure and we will highlight those but understand right off the bat, there is no "tithe" for Christians.

The first text I want to take you to is the very provocative one mentioned in our statement, Gen 14:21-24. Here we find “tithing” prior to the nation Israel even existing. This is in the time of Abraham after the Flood. And it was after the Flood when God first established human government, civil authority. Before the Flood you had no such thing as human government, you had angelic government. But after the Flood you have God institute human government and kingdoms formed and these kingdoms were governed by human kings. And in Gen 14 we have four kings in an alliance who have subjugated five other kings. And this went on for twelve years until the five kings had had enough of it and they decided to make an alliance among themselves and rebel against the four kings. Now the four kings didn’t like this so much; they were making a lot of money from these five kings and their kingdoms. The four kings attacked the five in order to teach them a lesson and as they did they plundered and looted along the way and Abram’s nephew Lot and his family happened to be along the way so they were taken hostage along with all their possessions. Now this came to the ears of Abram and he’s got to rescue his nephew so he sets off with 318 men born in his house, which gives you an idea of the size of these kingdoms, (they weren’t very large, the population at the Flood was reduced to just eight people so these kingdoms are just getting started). And Abram pursued them, divided his forces at night, defeated the five kings, brought back all the goods and rescued Lot and his family. So now Abram has come into possessions, war booty, economic assets and then he meets two very different kings: you see Melchizedek in this chapter, he was “king of Salem” and you meet the “king of Sodom,” he was the king where Lot lived.

And if you’ll pick up in verse 17, “Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley). ¹⁸And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High.” Melchizedek is a strange figure, he has no genealogy given in Genesis and Genesis is full of genealogies, so a strange person, his name means “king of righteousness” and he was a priest of God Most High, very strange combination since later priest and king were kept separate. But at this time you had the office of priest and king in one person, Melchizedek, and this looked forward to Christ who is said in the Book of Hebrews to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, so Christ is both a priest and a king as well, like this man. Another interesting thing about this man is the city he

was king over; Salem, which we think is short for JeruSalem and notice what he brought out to the meeting, “bread and wine” so he has some concept of the substitutionary blood atonement. And verse 19, “He blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” So Melchizedek recognizes the blessing of God rests on Abram, he blesses him and this is passing the torch so to speak, the torch of truth is passing from this class of men who were priest-kings to Abram who is the father of the nation Israel. And so he blesses him and then Abram does something, “He gave him [Melchizedek] a tenth of all.” And that’s the word for “tithe” which means a tenth. So of all the war booty he had acquired in recovering Lot he gave a tenth to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High. And the text makes very clear that the tenth of the war spoils went to Melchizedek because he was the priest-king of God Most High. Now that’s interesting because the lesser always gives to the greater.

Now as for the rest of the war spoils, there was 90% left so let’s look at those; what is Abram going to do with that 90%? Verse 21, “The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.” So the suggestion is that we split things up, you take this, I’ll take that. Verse 22, “And Abram said to the king of Sodom,” (this is a classic, this is a CLASSIC about giving money or receiving money), “And Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have sworn to Yahweh El-Elyon the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, ²³that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’” See, some of those goods belonged to the king of Sodom, they were taken from his city, but Abram says, I refuse to take anything that belongs to you. Why did he reject the possessions? Why didn’t he just take them and use them for ministry? Because if he did then when Abram is successful the king could say, yeah, but I made him rich. And then you could argue that believers aren’t supported solely by God but by outsiders, by unbelievers. And that’s not the argument of Scripture. Scripture is making the argument that God is going to support His work from the inside, from believers and so Abram, in a tremendous example of trusting the Lord, in verse 23, refuses to accept financial support from outsiders, “You can keep your money” is basically what he’s saying because “My God’s big enough to supply all my need, I don’t need what the world system has to offer.” The priest Melchizedek, king of Salem, received the tithe from Abram because he was within the system, he

was a fellow believer, but Abram does not receive anything from the king of Sodom, won't take it. Abram has distinguished those who are believers from those who are unbelievers and he will give to those who are believers but he will not receive from those who are unbelievers. That's the model we're picking up on in the first portion of our doctrinal statement, we will not receive from the world system. You hear that every Sunday in the opening announcements as there is always something about telling visitors we don't want their money, and at times we've received grief about that, but the principle we're operating on is the one found in this passage, namely we do not want to give outsiders the opportunity to say, Fredericksburg Bible Church is supported by us unbelievers and they wouldn't have a leg to stand on if it were not for us. No, we believe that God will supply all our needs from those within the Church of God. Now you say that nicely from the pulpit - you just say we are happy you have joined us for worship today and you are our guest, so we want you just to sit back and enjoy the word of God, there are no strings attached, so don't worry about giving us any money, just enjoy the service, enjoy the Lord. So the first point about *tithing is that it is a recognition that God provides all our needs and it's a faith operation.*

A second passage on tithing is Gen 28:20, and the principle here is that tithing acknowledges that all our possessions belong to God. This is the passage where Jacob has the dream of the ladder going up into heaven and angels going up and down on it and the Lord repeats the Abrahamic promise to Jacob. In response to the promise Jacob in verse 18, "rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head" (that was the pillow back in those days, aren't you glad you live in America?), "and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. ¹⁹He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. ²⁰Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, ²¹and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. ²²"This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." Several things here but the main one we are interested in is the promise to give God a tenth. And the reason he's promising that is because he's responding to the promise; the promise of God says I will give you a land, I will give you a seed, I will make you a worldwide blessing and Jacob thinks about this and he reasons that, well, if God gives me everything then all my possessions really belong to Him. And therefore I

ought to exercise faith by pledging a tithe in return. It's all His stuff anyway and He gave it to me, so I give some back. So the second principle is that *tithing acknowledges that all our possessions belong to God.*

The third passage is Lev 27:30 and things are more formalized here in the nation Israel. Here we have the tithe most people think about and since it means a tenth they think all Christians are required to give 10% of their income and if they don't they're robbing God or something. Now actually the nation Israel had three tithes which averaged out to 23 1/3% per year. And I'm going to show you these. So 10% is out the window right off the bat. If you really want to follow the OT and you think the Church is Israel then you better start giving 23 1/3%. And most people say well I don't want to do that because the government already steals that much. And I say, yeah, I agree, we're not Israel, we're America and we pay national taxes just like they did. So the giving you do to the church has nothing to do with a taxation system, it has to do with grace giving, voluntary giving, so already we see a sharp difference starting to come into view.

Now just to prove this to you take a look at Lev 27:30, this is the first tithe or tenth of the nation Israel. It was an annual tithe of 10% of your total income, which in an agricultural society came through the agricultural produce of your land. Everybody had land, it was divided up among the tribes, among the families and so forth. This 10% went to the Levites, they were the tribe chosen to be priests. Remember, at the Exodus the twelve tribes went out of Egypt and God began to give legislation for how they were to operate in the Promised Land. And each of the twelve tribes, except Levi, was given an inheritance in the land, a portion of land and this was an asset. You'll notice in our text the land was not taxed, the only thing that was taxed was the produce. So everyone received some assets, except the tribe of Levi, they didn't receive any land, they were going to carry out certain functions at the tabernacle and later the temple. So their chief job was to serve YHWH on behalf of the people, they didn't have land, they didn't raise crops. So since they don't have any assets, then the other tribes were to give an annual 10% of their produce to support the Levites. Notice verse 30, "Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree," see it's all agricultural, it was an agricultural society, all of this "is the LORD'S; it is holy to the LORD." The presupposition under tithing, just like Jacob recognized in Gen 28 was that all my possessions belong to the Lord. They're not mine,

they're His. And God says in verse 30 that I should give 10% to the Levites. Verse 31, "If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. ³²For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD. ³³He is not to be concerned whether *it is* good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. It shall not be redeemed." In other words, as an example, the procedure would be to start separating the flock into two pens, so you're running them through from one pen to another, every tenth animal that went through was the LORD's and you'd separate it from the others, but sometimes the tenth animal that went through was a pet, something dear to the family, so the man said, I don't want to send this goat down to Jerusalem to get its throat slit. Fine God said, you can redeem it, just make sure you add 20%. God is very gracious even in these provisions. But that's the first tithe, it was an annual 10% based on the production of the land, not the value of the land itself, that was untaxed, only the produce. That way you never had to lose your land, and the 10% went to the Levites because they didn't have any land to make produce. Now there are no penalties stated but it's inferred that there were penalties, we just don't know what they were, although Malachi said not paying this was robbing God.

Alright, the second tithe and for this one turn to Deut 14:22. This was also an annual tithe, another 10% but watch what this tenth is for? Verse 22, "You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year." Now this is ten percent of your entire year's produce. And what are you going to do with it? Verse 23, "You shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name," which was Jerusalem, "the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always." Alright, you're going to take 10% of your income and go up to Jerusalem and have a big feast, just eat and drink to the LORD, it was a big celebration, a party. Now most people would naturally cringe at that kind of expenditure, talk about a waste, 10% of my income I'm going to drop for one party? That's right, but the Lord wanted them to do this for what? To learn to fear Him, fear precedes trust and what you are trusting is that God will provide an abundance of production so I can go spend 10% of my income on one big party, just to enjoy Him. See, the Lord knows how to have a good time. Too often people think God is like a big stone statue sitting

in heaven all stone faced and cold. Baloney, these people need to read the Bible. God is a lot of fun. Verse 24, "If the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring *the tithe*, since the place where the LORD your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the LORD your God blesses you, ²⁵then you shall exchange *it* for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses." In other words, if you live a long way from Jerusalem and you don't have an 18 wheeler to load all this up and truck it down to Jerusalem then just sell it in your hometown for gold and silver, take the money down to Jerusalem and buy the equivalent there. God's real nice, He's not putting you out. Verse 26, "You may spend the money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household." So this was a real splurge, buy whatever you want but remember to do all this to the Lord, rejoice in Him, He gave you the abundance now give thanks. Now it's interesting that when you get to the NT this very same attitude is found in the context of giving. What kind of a giver does God love? God loves a cheerful giver. And God wanted them to give thanks while they were dropping 10% of their income, enjoy it, don't sit there and hold on to your wallet, let it go, it belongs to the Lord anyway, enjoy it, enjoy the Lord. So the second tithe was another 10%, we're up to 20% now of your annual production, not assets, assets were not taxed, it's a very good system.

Now if you come to Deut 14:28 you see the third tithe. This one was not an annual tithe but a tithe every third year. So another 10% every third year which averages out to 3 1/3% a year. It says, "At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit *it* in your town." So this one does not go to Jerusalem, it stays in your hometown. ²⁹"The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do." So we see what this one is for, the "Levite, "the alien" or sojourner among you, the orphan and the widow." Now some have gotten social welfare out of this. This is not social welfare, these are not necessarily poor people, the welfare was not given on the basis of poverty and this shocks people. But if you pay attention to the text this welfare was given on a judicial basis. The person could be rich, they could be a stranger among them who was a businessmen and made millions of dollars

a year. But they would still receive a portion of this 10% because judicially they could not have a title to land, they were not allowed by the law to hold land titles. So they had to make a living some other way, and so every third year they would get a portion of the 10%. And notice the motive at the end of verse 29, “in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.” In other words, once again you had to trust and when you did God would make you prosperous, the Lord would miraculously bring you increase. So there are your three tithes for OT Israel and if you do the math then they average out to 23 1/3% annually. Now don't you think that's a very interesting system? It was a national tax system that was obligatory on all citizens! Is that the system we're supposed to follow in the Church? Are we really under that? Where are all the NT passages discussing this if we are under it?

So summarizing the OT message on tithing because there are principles here, we can find several principles that are reiterated in the NT and we wouldn't want to throw those out so let's highlight those. First of all, in the OT the term tithe referred to a tenth and Melchizedek received a tenth from Abraham. Abraham was a believer and Melchizedek was a believer so there's no problem. This signifies that the people of God are to support the people of God. In the same passage Abraham refused to accept financial support from the king of Sodom, an unbeliever. So it signifies that believers should not allow outsiders to support them, they should rely on God alone to support them. That's why we've got in the first line of our statement the work of God should be supported by the people of God alone (Gen. 14:21-24) and that's why the elders say every Sunday, if you are visiting with us and you are an unbeliever, don't worry about giving, just receive the word of God freely. Further, you don't want to confuse money with salvation. You can't buy salvation and yet over and over unbelief has tried to buy salvation, whether it was Simon the Sorcerer in the Book of Acts or indulgences in the Church of Rome. Money has constantly been confused with a way of buying salvation or cleansing people's conscience and we don't want to play into that here. So we just say, hey, hold on to your wallet, we don't want in there, we just want you to freely hear the word of God. Salvation is a free gift. Second, tithing presupposes they understood that everything they had was given to them by God and was really His. And I think that principle holds today, that's why we should be thankful when we give. God loves a cheerful giver and that holds for both Israel and the Church. Finally, tithing in OT Israel was 23 1/3

percent, 10% to the Levites, 10% for an annual party to celebrate the Lord and 3 1/3% for the Levites, aliens, orphans and widows. The parallel in the NT is that the Christian is responsible to help support the widows and orphans. James says, true religion is to help orphans and widows in distress. So there's somewhat of a parallel there but still it's different because it's not a national tax, we get enough of that from the government.

Now we come to the NT Church and here we're talking about voluntary giving. Isn't it interesting the word "tithe" is nowhere used for the Church? Something radically different and that makes perfect sense because the Church is not a national entity. It's composed of people in every nation, it itself is not a nation. And the primary section on giving for the Church is 2 Cor 8 and 9. Turn there. Our statement says, The Scriptural way of raising money for the support of God's work, whether in the Gospel or for the benefit of His saints, is by voluntary offerings by believers, all schemes violating this principle being wrong (2 Cor. 8:3-5; 9:7). That last part means we don't do garage sales to raise money to support this ministry, we don't do fundraisers, we don't brew beer, we don't do any of those schemes that may draw in the money of unbelievers because then the world can turn around and say, "Well we support them." No, we depend entirely upon voluntary offerings of believers who are responding to Bible doctrine! The motive to give is God's grace provision in Bible doctrine! 2 Cor 8:3, "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, *they gave* of their own accord," they being those of verse 1, the churches of Macedonia, churches like Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, et. Al...these were poor and persecuted churches yet they gave beyond their ability. We're not told how much they gave but it's not the amount that mattered, it was the sacrifice they were making in response to God's grace. Verse 4, and watch the attitude, "begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints. What attitude do you see there, "begging us," is this the nod to God crowd? Or are these people wanting to give because they recognize God's grace provision and want to be a part of the Lord's work? It's the proper attitude, they are thankful and they want to support fellow believers in the propagation of the gospel. And seeing as they were poor and persecuted, as verse 5 indicates, this shocked Paul, he says, "and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." As Philip Hughes notes on this passage. "The meaning of this paradox is that, because of their extreme poverty, the amount collected by them was not huge in quantity; a


man possessing only ten pounds cannot be expected to contribute a hundred pounds, for ten pounds is the absolute limit of his ability. In this sense, the Macedonians had given 'according to their ability'. But the proportion of his goods which a person gives is generally determined by a twofold consideration: (i) a reckoning of the basic necessities for his own immediate existence, and (ii) prudence in setting aside at least something as a measure of security against future needs and emergencies. Such circumspection is justifiable and reasonable. The Macedonians, however, poor though they were, had shown a complete disregard of their own requirements, both present and future. It is in this sense that, impelled by love and compassion for brethren in Christ whom they had never seen, they had given 'contrary to their ability'. And this was a noteworthy token of their refusal to take anxious thought for the morrow because of their confident dependence on God, who as the Heavenly Father, knows His children's needs even before they ask Him and will not fail to supply those needs from the boundless storehouse of His grace."¹

It is very important to understand that the amount we give is not what is most important; it is the recognition that everything we own belongs to God and we are trusting Him to provide all our needs. Turn to 2 Cor 9:7, "Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." He's using a metaphor from farming and if you plant a little you will reap a little, but if you plant a lot you will reap a lot. Verse 7, "Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart," it has to be something you decide, it has to be a genuine response to God, "not grudgingly or under compulsion," not because someone else thinks you should, not because of social pressure, that's why we don't even pass a plate, we just say, there's a little wooden church in the back of the church, if you are thankful for the Bible doctrine and you want to give, give, there's no pressure to give, we're not going to pass the plate five times. That kind of procedure is done you know, they'll pass it and pass it and pass it until they get enough, baloney, giving is a private transaction between you and the Lord, you put it back there in the little church in the back of the church. We have two men who are isolated on this, they are the only one who sees anything, I never see it, never have, never will, I don't want to. Why not? Because it affects you, it destroys my ability to be able to do my job, then I have a tendency to twist things in those people's favor, to distort the Scripture so that I don't step on those people's toes and then they don't hear the word of God and God doesn't

work in their life. So it's very important I never look at that, because I'm a man too and I'm capable of falling to temptations and I want to be free of that, I don't want to get up here and destroy my ministry so the best thing is for me just to stay completely away from the money.

Verse 7, "Each one *must do* just as he has purposed in his heart, for God loves a cheerful giver." He loved a cheerful giver in the OT and He loves a cheerful giver in the NT" Verse 8, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹as it is written, "HE SCATTERED ABROAD, HE GAVE TO THE POOR, HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS ENDURES FOREVER." That is, as you give God will provide ways for you to continue to give, it may not be in vast amounts, that's not the point, don't buy into the prosperity gospel, God is not going to make you rich if you give a ministry \$10,000. They're just ripping you off and selling you a line of bull. You give as you have purposed in your heart and with joy and God will provide a way for you to give again in some capacity. Verse 10, "Now 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; ¹¹you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God." Enriched in capacity to give, not necessarily rich, that's not what the text says, enriched in everything for all liberality, meaning freedom to serve in numerous capacities for increased spiritual growth. Verse 12, "For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. ¹³Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for *your* obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, ¹⁴while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.

Now what if you don't have enough to give, what if you can't even pay the bills? Don't give, for the Scripture says, if a man does not provide for his own he's worse than an unbeliever. So you take care of the bills first and then you give out of what you can, out of gratitude. You can give to a missions organization, you can give to a local church, you can give to widows and orphans, you can give to a couple who ministers to others, you can give to a pastor-teacher, these are all valid ways of giving, you give as you have



purposed in your heart, as God has prospered you and out of gratitude for God's grace provision, for God loves a cheerful giver.

ⁱ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (2 Co 8:3). Galaxie Software.

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