

## OFFERINGS – Part One

“Why do we give?”

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1). You may think that the question concerning *why* we give probably doesn't even need to be asked, but in the spirit of re-addressing our current Christian concepts of all things “doctrine,” it is a subject that needs to be thought-out and spelled-out scripturally, in order that we each make sure that our belief system concerning ALL things is truly grounded in the Scriptures, and not in man-made traditions and ideas.

And so, as we talk about “giving,” both in a material sense and a spiritual sense, I'll do my best to lay out the biblical argument as I currently see it (which is far from complete), using word definitions, specific context, and general context. This week we will explore the WHY of giving; next week we will explore the WHAT of giving, and the following week the TO WHOM of giving. In this short series we will hopefully get a better understanding of the biblical picture of gifts, offerings, tithings, and sacrifices – *all things we, as Christians, give* – as well as get a practical understanding of what our own personal lives should look like with respect to that.

I urge each one of you, as should be the case when broaching any familiar or unfamiliar biblical territory for the first time, to please rid your minds of all pre-conceived notions concerning giving/tithing/offering, and ask the Lord to show you His truth as it is laid out in His Word, regardless of whether it matches up with your own beliefs and practices. There is no doubt that this will require *much faith*.

Since today we are focusing on the “why” of giving, the “what” is not necessarily important right now (also, the “how much” of giving is taking a back-seat as well). But to give us some sort of framework in which we are operating when we say “give,” we are talking about giving *tangible* things away (our personal property), e.g. money, material goods, etc. The exploration of giving away material things will inevitably lead us to explore the concept of giving away spiritual things, but for today let's stay within the scope of the former.

2). To begin, why do we (Christians) give our stuff away? Whether it is money, food, clothes, Bible materials, whatever... why do we consciously make an effort to offer our personal property to someone else?

a) Most of us would say that first and foremost, on a most simplistic level, we are supposed to give some of our stuff away because God commands us to. This is probably enough to settle the matter for any Christian who is desiring to be faithfully

obedient to the Word of God ("It says to do it, so do it..."), but for this group, we would also need to grapple with the oh-so-ubiquitous question, "Why does God's Word tell us to do that?!"

b) Let's explore that question of "Why?" by first asking another basic question that should actually precede it, which is, "Does the Word of God even *tell* us to give some of our own 'stuff' away?" Remember, right now we're not differentiating between what and to whom quite yet; so, since we all give or have given stuff away on one level or another, does God's Word tell us to do it?

c) Let's look at the following passages -

1 Timothy 6:17-19

17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

Ephesians 4:28

Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.

James 2:15-16

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use [literally, "profit"] is that?

Proverbs 22:9

He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor.

d) The first two passages literally say to "share" some of our stuff, but the idea is the same as when we think of "giving." The verses use the Greek word 'metadidami,' which means "to give or distribute," or "to impart." It is an amplified version of the word "didami," which is the common way of saying "give" (as in "give us this day our daily bread," and "ask and it shall be given to you," and "it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," or "what will a man give in exchange for his soul..." and so on.) Attached to "didami" ('give') is the word "meta," which is most commonly translated as "with."

e) These verses are clearly telling us to give, as in SHARE, *what we have* WITH others who are in need.

f) One could also argue that all of these passages seem to be more of a suggestion than a command – meaning, if a person gives some of their stuff away *it will go better for them*. Still, God is making a point about giving your tangible goods away, and this point of obeying an imperative vs. a suggestion will be addressed later.

g) I think that for many Christians the idea of sharing or giving their material goods to another may seem among the highest degree of “faithful obedience” one can perform (E.g. “I give away 10% of all my money” or “I built an orphanage with x amount of my own \$\$.”, etc); however, it may be important to note that there are only a few places in the New Testament where either the simple words “give” or “share” are used contextually regarding giving one’s *material goods* to another – and I have noted almost all of them here. In fact, believe it or not, God just doesn’t seem to spend much time talking about giving our *stuff* away.

h) Actually, when it comes to “giving” away one’s material stuff (e.g. money and goods), I think once I’m done with this series we will find that it is *quite low* on the totem pole of expected sacrifices and offerings. Exponentially more often is found the command to share *suffering* with one another, share *joy* with one another, share *the gospel* with one another, and so on. But I’ll talk more on that next week. This week, as I keep saying (and I keep saying that so that you’ll not jump ahead of me at Bible study time tonight), is about WHY we give... not WHAT AND TO WHOM. So let’s stay on track ☺.

3). Getting back to the few passages in the beginning about “sharing our stuff” with others, you’ll notice that in the context the *why* of giving our stuff away is pretty much spelled out.

a) First (and not necessarily first in order of *importance*), we need to give in order to keep ourselves from getting focused on money (and “stuff”) and becoming conceited with worldly things. The reason we need to not be focused primarily on worldly things is that we need to keep our hope focused firmly in and on heaven, particularly *things that have to do with the future*. This is how Paul put it (the full context of that first scripture passage on p. 2) –

1 Timothy 6:3-11, 17-19

If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in

controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain [meaning *material gain*].

6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain [meaning, *not material gain but spiritual gain*], when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. 11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

b) It is clear from the context that our “sharing with others who are in need” will put our focus where it needs to be, and will help keep us from falling into temptation – a temptation and snare that riches can bring, e.g. ruin, destruction, all sorts of evil, ultimately culminating in wandering away from the faith.. And consequently, sharing with others and being rich in good works rather than seeking after worldly riches, will enable us to grab hold of *that which is life indeed*, by storing for ourselves “the treasure of a good foundation *for the future.*” This is about our eyes (and consequently our whole person) being focused on the kingdom *which is to come*, and not on the realities of the physical world *now*.

c) This is exactly what Jesus dealt with when He encountered the rich young ruler – a man who desired to inherit *life in the age to come*, but felt unable to do what was required of him *now* in order to receive it *later* –

Matthew 19:21-27

21 Jesus said to him, "If you [this specific young man, not “you” in a general sense] wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property. 23 And Jesus said to His

disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 25 And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" 26 And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." 27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?"

d) Hence the reason for Jesus to then go on to state how difficult it is for a rich man/person to get into the kingdom. Worldly riches in the here and now can so easily take our focus off of the future age.

4). Another practical reason we see in the Scriptures to "give our stuff away" is to meet the needs of another person. Which, of course, works to *take your focus off of yourself!*

a) When we focus on meeting the needs of another person, we essentially put their needs above our own needs. And when we do this, our beginning Scripture passages tell us, we will receive something as well – a blessing for ourselves (Proverbs 22:9) and a "profit" (an increase, a return on) on our faith (James 2:15-16).

b) After hearing that, it may seem to many of you as though God is giving us some rather self-centered reasons to give our stuff away, because Look, I will get life; I will get my hope realized; I will receive a blessing; I will make a profit on my faith. However, that is not the case.

c) Notice the fact that *even the disciples* realized that the giving away of their material goods would benefit them in some way (Matt. 19:27 "[immediately following the encounter with the rich young ruler] Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" To which Jesus answered, essentially, "You get to rule all of Israel.").

d) The benefits received from the Lord in return for us giving our stuff away goes much deeper than simply getting something for something. In other words, it's not a business transaction –

I John 3:17-18

17 But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

e) Our giving our stuff away in order to meet the needs of another is just one of many ways to express love for our brother, which God says is a perfect expression of our love for Him. It doesn't get much bigger than that, does it? And if we can't, or don't, part with our own stuff in order to meet the needs of our brother, then notice what the above scripture says, *our heart is closed against them*. And if our heart is closed against our brother, then our heart is closed against God and His love does not abide in us. (And for further commentary on this, see John 15 regarding what happens when God does not abide in us and us in Him.)

i/ However, what I believe God is talking about is not the outside form of the action, but the inward choice that THEN results in the outward action. Both must be come from a place of love -

1 Corinthians 13:3

And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing (remember James 2:16?).

f) Furthermore, may I suggest that, really, ALL of our actions of faithful obedience stem from an individual choice to do something that emanates from ME for a specific reason that benefits ME. ALL of our actions begin with a conscious decision for ME to do something... and the rationale is always going to be, What is the benefit or what is the loss, as it pertains to me? I don't say this to trivialize our actions, but every choice begins with ME. The difference is this:

I obey God so that He'll give me something (the focus is ultimately on me)...

OR

I obey God because it pleases God and I desire to please God (the focus is ultimately on God). And it pleases God for me to desire all that He desires, and to want His will as my own -

Matthew 6:5-13

5 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. 7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

8 "So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. 9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. 10 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 'Give us this day our daily bread. 12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

g) God's desire and God's will, relative to you and me, is for His kingdom to come... for His will to be done on earth just as it is in heavens. That is, God's will is for man to rule *with Him, doing His will over all the earth* (that's essentially what the kingdom is for). And so God's reward to man for putting God's will first is that He receives God's will for him. And since God has spent millennia telling man exactly how to accomplish this, and for you and I to desire this - to desire to do exactly what God wants us to do in order to achieve that which He created and SAVED us for - is NOT in any way selfish. It is righteous and it is godly.

h) So there must be a reciprocal relationship to giving; we give to others to show love to others by meeting their needs, thereby putting their needs above our own, which is a scripturally correct way *to love God*. This love and obedience of God honors God's name, rather than our own. Our focus is taken off of ourselves and the here-and-now, and by this very act of honoring God, we ourselves ultimately benefit from the act (which, strangely enough, also honors God).

i) Isn't this what happens each and every time we obey God? He is glorified as we are sanctified, and as we are sanctified we are that much closer to being glorified. The reciprocity is necessary.

5). However, a warning is needed here. To just *give away your stuff* for the sake of blindly following God's commands can be problematic ("He says to do it, so I'll do it"). Now, it may be a good idea for the Christian who finds himself unable to discern spiritual matters, or perhaps finds himself at a loss as to how to obey God. It may even be a good idea if a Christian is simply starting out on their journey and just desires to do what God has said. In any of these cases it would be good for that person to just give away something to someone in need...even if, especially if, they don't want to. In this case, the action itself can help the person into maturity, because in this scenario the person's heart desires to do God's will... it's just unsure of what God's will is.

a) This, I believe, is how God teaches us. We begin as children with a desire to please God, but with little or no concept as to how to do that. We read some words on the

pages of the Bible and we think – hey, God likes it when we help others, so I’m going to help others. We simply do what our Father wants us to do.

b) However, maturity must come into play. To continue to do something because you are simply following the “letter of the Law,” so to speak, puts you in danger of becoming a performer of religion on the outside *only*, while keeping the inward man far from God’s abiding love and the Spirit’s work.

c) To give stuff away to others in need may begin with the childlike desire to please God. But it could, eventually, become a detached action that then begins to emanate from the mind or body, rather than from the heart. It ceases to be pleasing to God because it exists in form only, rather than in heart-desire. So, what appears to be “good,” or what starts out as being “good,” isn’t always “good.” (The same would be true of marriage.)

d) It is absolutely necessary for the maturing Christian to evaluate their heart in the course of every action they take, and to measure their actions in accordance with the will of God rather than their own will. This is all part of the journey and part of the process we call ‘sanctification.’ For every Christian who desires to find himself together with Christ in the age to come, he or she must take careful account of their actions AND their motives.

6). So, having said all of that, with respect to giving, God is crystal clear. He desires that ALL types of giving, whether to a brother in need or to Him directly, come from a willing and joyful heart, because it’s not so much about the recipient as it is about the transformation of the giver. Take careful note regarding how God wanted His first dwelling place with man, the tabernacle of Moses, to be built –

Exodus 35:4-35

4 Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying,

5 'Take from among you a contribution [literally, “an offering, a present, a gift”] to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD'S contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, 6 and blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goats' hair, 7 and rams' skins dyed red, and porpoise skins, and acacia wood, 8 and oil for lighting, and spices for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense, 9 and onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. 10 'Let every skillful man among you come, and make all that the LORD has commanded: 11 the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets; 12 the ark and its poles, the mercy seat, and the curtain of the screen; 13 the table and its poles, and all its utensils,

and the bread of the Presence; 14 the lampstand also for the light and its utensils and its lamps and the oil for the light; 15 and the altar of incense and its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the doorway at the entrance of the tabernacle; 16 the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; 17 the hangings of the court, its pillars and its sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court; 18 the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court and their cords; 19 the woven garments for ministering in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests."

20 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses' presence. 21 Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the LORD'S contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. 22 Then all whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came and brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so did every man who presented an offering of gold to the LORD. 23 Every man, who had in his possession blue and purple and scarlet material and fine linen and goats' hair and rams' skins dyed red and porpoise skins, brought them. 24 Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the LORD'S contribution; and every man who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought it. 25 All the skilled women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun, in blue and purple and scarlet material and in fine linen. 26 All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats' hair. 27 The rulers brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece; 28 and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. 29 The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring material for all the work, which the LORD had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD.

- a) I would just like to point out that nowhere does it say *how much* each person was to give in order for it to be accepted as a proper contribution. The amount was irrelevant.
- b) Also, each person's contribution (*gift*) of a particular item was just as necessary and just as valuable as the next person's willing contribution (*gift*), though invariable they were of different monetary value.
- c) Furthermore, the chapter goes on to read about the skilled workmen who were to contribute their *gifts of skill* in the building of the tabernacle, and no differentiation exists between the value of the goods offered willingly vs. the value of the time and effort offered willingly.

d) What does God care about? The willing heart *behind the gift*. It begins with a command from the Lord, but the response must emanate from a “stirred heart,” with willingness to give that which you have to give. (And it is no small thing to note that each individual who had some material contribution to make to the building of the tabernacle was actually giving something that had originally been given to them. When the children of Israel left Egypt, they left with articles of silver, gold, and clothing that they “plundered” from the Egyptians, that the Lord allowed them to have [cf. Ex. 12:29-36].)

e) It all came *from the Lord*, and it was to go *back to the Lord*.

7). It is important to note, even though it may seem obvious to us, that money and riches are not bad, *but they have the ability to be tempting*; therefore, material goods *can be dangerous*. Think in terms of alcohol. Alcohol isn’t bad, but to certain people it is *when it’s misused*. Does everyone misuse alcohol? No. But to the person to whom it is a snare, it’s dangerous to have around. It’s individually particular (hence the episode with the rich young ruler).

a) You’re probably sitting there, listening to me (or reading along, whatever) and you’re thinking, “Yeah, I know this. Duh. Money isn’t first; God is. I get it. This is elementary.” You probably tithe regularly and you give to organizations that you believe in and you’re thinking you’re doing alright. And you may be. Perhaps this doesn’t challenge you. However...

b) Do you judge others by their stuff? Do you judge others on how they spend their money? If they seem to have *too much money*...if they seem to *squander* money? No? Okay, do you judge others by how much they give? Do you judge others by *what* they give? Do you judge other by what they DON’T give? (Are you being challenged yet?)

#### James 1:26-2:20

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion [literally, “ceremonial observance” or “worship (in the outward manifestation sense of the word)"] is worthless. 27 This is pure and undefiled religion [ceremonial observance] in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. 2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4

have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

c) Did you notice that v. 27 encompasses the whole idea behind God's commands to give? Visit widows and orphans = meet others' needs. Keep oneself unstained from the world = don't get too focused on and wrapped up in material goods. THIS is pure, undefiled *ceremonial observance*. And notice the context from v. 26 = *it's about deceiving your own heart*. And what does v. 8 say is the fulfillment of the "royal law"? What would be the exemplification of *pure religion*, i.e. taking care of widows and orphans and staying unstained from the world? = LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. This is how we are to speak; this is how we are to act.

d) So don't judge another person by anything having to do with material goods, and furthermore, don't judge another person's giving away of their "stuff," either. As we will see next week, there is no "right" amount of stuff to give away and there is no "wrong" amount of stuff to give away. There is no "right" *type of stuff* to give away and there is no "wrong" *type of stuff* to give away. Because, if all that matters is the loving of your brother and the meeting of his needs (and thereby the loving of God), and giving your stuff away is God's way of keeping you from getting too focused on the here and now and the comforts of the stuff of this world, then material goods can't be a barometer for any such judging. At all.

Luke 21:1-6

1 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. 2 And He saw a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins. 3 And He said,

"Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; 4 for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."

c) We'll talk more about this scripture next week, but for now I want to ask you to think about something. This widow is commended for *the value of her gift*; a value which has nothing to do with the world currency valuation. It doesn't say she gave 10%, it doesn't say *how much* was enough for her commendation. This simply says that she gave *an amount that was clearly a physical sacrifice on her part*. It says a lot about her heart, doesn't it? And isn't it cool that we have this physical record of the Lord's words concerning the true value of her gift? Because, if it was you and me witnessing this same act apart from the Lord's verbal commentary, would we see the same thing with our physical eyes? Or would we just see a poor woman? Or even worse, would we only see two coins that can't buy much stuff?

8). Before I wrap this up, I would like to just briefly touch on a commonly misunderstood reason for giving (not amongst us, of course). Within some Christian circles there is an expectation that we will somehow be further "blessed" *here and now* with much **material prosperity** if we give just a little bit of our stuff away now.

b) I read this quote about this idea of *materially* prospering *now* - "God wants to pour out his blessing and prosper us in every way."

Error #1 = that material goods have any bearing on being *blessed* or not

Error #2 = that material goods have any connection with God's idea of *prospering*.

c) And one of the scripture passages given in support of this is the following -

Deuteronomy 28:1-12

"Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you will obey the LORD your God. 3 Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. 4 Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. 5 Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 6 Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. 7 The LORD will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way and shall flee before you seven ways. 8 The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

9 The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you will keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in His ways.  
10 So all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of you. 11 And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. 12 "The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow."

d) This scripture has to do with Israel, not the Church.

e) This was and is about Israel dwelling in her land in fulfillment of Abraham's promises.

f) This was a promise to Israel which was dependant on her continual obedience.

g) None of this has come true for Israel, and none of this will come true for Israel until the Seventh Day.

h) None of this will literally come true for the Church in this present age.

9). And exactly what is a "blessing," according to God? Is it your current affluent status in the hierarchy of our capitalistic lifestyles? If I'm rich, I'm blessed, but if I'm poor (materially) then I am not blessed?

a) The word "blessed" simply means to be spoken well of, or to have found favor in God's sight -

Genesis 2:3

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Genesis 12:3

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Numbers 23:11

Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have actually blessed them!"

Acts 20:33-35 [Paul speaking]

33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. 35 In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

b) And do you think God speaks well of us, or shows us His pleasure in us by giving us an abundance of material goods to satisfy our every desire? Do you think God speaks well of us, or shows His pleasure in us by giving us the freest country on the planet to live in? Of course not, right? You know this. But do you use the word "blessing" in its proper sense? Or do you think of yourselves as "blessed" because you live in the United States, or blessed because of the house you own, or blessed because of the freedoms you have with the amount of money in your bank accounts? In other words, does your physical, material status convey that God has blessed you, that He has shown His favor to you by your stuff? Would this be the proper way to think of being "blessed?"

c) Or, do you think that perhaps your physical stuff is simply stuff, and God expects all of His children – whether they live in the USA or elsewhere – to have the same mindset concerning stuff as He does. Which is, it's a potentially dangerous temptation, yet it surely can be a tool that He uses to ultimately effect His will.

Luke 6:20-26

20 And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. 22 Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 23 Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."

24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. 25 Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way."

e) Do you think that the "poor" or the "hungry" or the "rich" people mentioned in this passage – those that are "blessed" or not – really has anything to do with how much money they had? Or does the mention of these types of people get down deeper, to the heart of the individual, whether that person is content with the stuff in the here and now... or is yearning and desiring the riches which are to come in the age to come?

10). So, as was said before, it IS okay to give *knowing* that we will receive something precious from the Father in the age to come. When we give we are “blessed” (spoken well of), but only if our “giving” is in accordance with how God expects us to give. We must give solely out of love, with a willing heart, in response to the promises of God, in response to future treasures and rewards –

Matthew 6:2-4

"When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing 4 that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

Luke 12:13-34

And someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you?" 15 And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' 18 "And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' 21 "So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

22 And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. 23 "For life is more than food, and the body than clothing. 24 "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; and they have no storeroom nor barn; and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! 25 "And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? 26 "If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why are you anxious about other matters? 27 "Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. 28 "But if God so arrays the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you, O men of little faith! 29

"And do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying.

30 "For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. 31 "But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. 32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. 33 "Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. 34 "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

11). What I see in God's Word as I study through the few mentions of "giving our stuff away" is that God is trying, through His word pictures, to get us to see that there is nothing in this world that is our own, there is nothing in this world that takes precedent over Him, and there is nothing in this world that should take precedent over our brothers and sisters.

a) Having "stuff" has always been for a purpose - to serve as a tool to meet the physical needs of God's people during their pilgrim journey on this earth, and to be the medium through which we can express gratitude and love (perhaps mercy and justice) to one another and to God (whether by building a tabernacle, feeding widows and orphans, providing sustenance to the priests as they minister to us, etc.). And whether it's my stuff or your stuff or whatever, it's a tool to be used for God's greater purpose, that which culminates in the coming age, and that in which, when it comes, we will have absolutely no need for any such stuff.

b) Our needs for now are simple. Yes we need to eat, and we need clothes, and we need shelter. God promises us that He will meet those needs, but in many cases those needs will be met through your brother's or sister's gifts. What we really need is to learn how to love one another, because by doing so, we will learn how to love God. And our "stuff" can help us to accomplish this.

c) So just let it all go. If you *really let it go*, then it shouldn't matter how much or what or to whom... just let it go. And then, once you let it go, let God tell you what to do with it.

Which is the subject for the next two weeks. Until then.