

Offerings – Part Three

“To whom do we give?”

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1). We’ve covered quite a bit that last few weeks concerning “giving,” and I am well aware that we’ve only just scratched the surface of the topic. And even though you’ve tried to jump ahead of me a few times concerning today’s topic, we pretty much stayed on track in our discussions concerning our last two parts – WHY do we give, and WHAT and HOW MUCH do we give?

a) The *why* of giving was simply spelled out, and it basically comes down to 2 things:

i/We give our stuff away in order to meet another person’s physical needs, thereby showing and living and abiding in the love of God in this simple action.

ii/And we should give our stuff away because God wants us to stay focused on Him, His promises, and His amazing plan for us in the age to come and not be focused on the pleasures and fleeting security that the world’s goods can give. God’s plan for us to rule and reign with His Son requires no less than our complete sanctification, which is accomplished as we pour out own self-will and allow God’s will to replace it. This we know takes much hard work, determination, and complete reliance on God to meet every single one of our needs.

b) So we’ve discovered that God expects us to give, or more aptly *share* our stuff with others, period. As we studied in Part Two, there really is no distinction made by God in the item of giving, for the item itself is immaterial. He wants us to give willingly, no matter what it is, and every single act of giving that we perform must come from a willing heart, for with this God is pleased.

c) To give (or do anything “for the Lord”) in a mechanical way, just to follow His commands and ordinances in outward form alone is *worthless*, and with such things God is not pleased –

Mark 7:5-9

5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" 6 And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART

IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." 9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

2) As we noted, the nation of Israel was to offer sacrifices and tithings and offerings of every sort - daily, weekly, monthly, annually. They were to give their time, their money, their goods... everything. The intricacies of the Mosaic Law were complex, yet Intelligently designed.

a) Because of the inherent dangers of being a chosen child of God in this world ruled by Satan, God's sworn enemy, God designed a mechanism that would guard and protect His kids as they grew up into the full knowledge of Him, His plans, and His purposes. The Law served as a "tutor" to lead Israel to Christ, so that they would fully grasp and understand that justification comes by *faith* (Gal. 3:21-25), and not simply by actions alone.

b) God wanted (and still wants) to teach His children that He should come first in everything. And when you're focused on Him, everything else should grow dim –

Hebrews 12:1-2

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith...

c) God wanted His firstborn son, Israel, to follow His commandments and His law in order to show Him that they loved Him. He promised that if they did that, He would in turn take care of them. God wanted their whole hearts, their minds, their souls, and their strength. He wanted them to love mercy, to act justly, and to walk humbly with Him. The Law was the tutor that was to teach them how to do just that. It was the actions of a kind Parent, who desired to grow up His son to the status of "the head of the nations," to be the reflection of Him amongst all nations of the earth... and so He implemented a system that would teach them, from Pre-K to College, so to speak.

d) But here's the kicker: if they gave of their "stuff" simply because they were blindly following the Law, they were missing out on something greater that God had for them. It was never about the animals, or the firstfruits of the land, or the 10% on top of the 10% on top of the 10%. As God's chosen people followed the Law, they would have grown up into maturity to understand the weightier things of the Law - the things which spoke of all that which Christ came to offer - love, mercy, and justice - a

righteousness that surpassed even the Pharisees – those who “sat in Moses’ seat - who kept to every dot and tittle of “the Law.”

e) However, as time passed, the great majority of the nation of Israel decided that they knew better than God. They decided that they would follow the letter of the law and still keep their hearts from Him, for they misunderstood that which the giving was supposed to teach them. That the ACT and the HEART must be in tandem – one without the other is worthless –

Matthew 23:23

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Psalm 51:15-19

15 O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. 16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. 18 By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

f) Israel got so far away from where they should have been, that when the fulfillment of the whole Law came – God Incarnate, Who offered a “new and living way” in direct contrast with the **form** of the Law, Israel *totally* didn’t get it... nor did they want to -

Matthew 23:37-39 [Jesus speaking]

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38 "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39 "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

g) They missed it; they *willingly* missed it by having their senses dulled by complacency and arrogance –

Acts 28:27

FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH

THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN,
AND I WOULD HEAL THEM."

h) And so the Church was created -

Matthew 16:16

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...

Matthew 21:43

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [Israel] and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

Romans 9:30-32

30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone...

i) And the question was: Would the Church understand that which Israel didn't? Would they understand what God really required from them, as His children? Would they learn it and would they live it?

Romans 12:1-2

1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Matthew 16:23-27

23 But He [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." 24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 "For the Son of Man is

going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

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.

3) And so here we are, Church. We are here, now, over 2,000 years after those first Jewish men – men who knew the Old Testament Scriptures and understood that which God was teaching them – started the first groups of “Christians.” Groups that were made up of both Gentiles and Jews –

Romans 9:24

...even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

a) The groups of Jews who accepted their Messiah would have had a pretty good idea about what God was requiring of them, although for most of them they needed to be taught the spirit of the Law and convinced that the form of the Law was not to be followed anymore.

b) And those first Gentiles-turned-Christians who believed in Jesus as their Savior were once without a God, and were then suddenly with a God... a God that they knew only through either the words spoken to them by Jewish men, or words spoken to them by the Perfect Jewish Man –

Matthew 12:17-18

17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 18 "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.

Romans 15:15-21

15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again... 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit... 18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed... 20 And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's

foundation; 21 but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND."

c) So many "newborns," so to speak, needing to be taught how to act appropriately... and needing to be taught how to drop all of their man-made customs and previous pagan ideals and traditions. They were taught the pure milk of the Word... and they were to move on to the strong meat of the Word.

d) In fact, God gave them the apostles to do just that, and the letters in the New Testament are our glimpse into that time period of transition and teaching (e.g. Will the Church understand and live out that which Israel didn't?). The letters in the NT are the writings of Jewish men - men who understood the weightier matters of the Word, men who grasped the Spirit of God and the mysteries to be found within the Word itself - and these men were charged with teaching everyone how to live in such a way as to please God.

e) In Corinthians we read about Paul trying to bring up an immature group of Christians who were having a big problem with sin inside their group. In this city of Corinth the main problem appeared to be in keeping the oppressive worldliness out of the Church, a Church comprised mainly of newly converted Gentiles.

g) In Galatians we read about Paul struggling to get the Church - primarily Jewish converts - to understand why the Law doesn't have to be followed to the letter, but it still has to be followed *in spirit*. (And remember, most people aren't getting that it's all about the inside and not the outside. Remember the state of the nation of Israel at this point and what was being taught - a complete overhaul was necessary [as it is here, now, presently, in the Church].)

h) And in Ephesians we read about Paul encouraging and exhorting a mature group of Christians who seemed to grasp the strong meat (after he taught it to them for 3 years), and we see Paul warn them about falling away from what they have learned.

i) And it goes on... each letter is different because each group that Paul is talking to is different. And when we get to Hebrews we see that the writer is clearly addressing Christians with a Jewish background and knowledge of the Scriptures, and the writer has to succinctly teach them what the OT was *really* teaching -

Hebrews 4:2-9

2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His

works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; 5 and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." 6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

j) AND, the author of Hebrews has to warn these Christians (who were once mature and were now slipping) that they could still miss it; they could still fall away; they could still fail to reach the end.

k) And finally, in Peter and Jude, we read about a corruption that has snuck in to the teaching, and a bunch of false teachers who have arisen from among them that were leading everyone astray. People with ideologies that sounded nice and tickled the ears, but had nothing to do with the Truth of the Word.

4) So what's my point in giving you an overview of Exodus to Jude? Israel (the corporate majority) didn't hear and understand the truth that God was trying to get them to see. They didn't understand what the Law was really all about because their hearts were *far from Him*, even while their actions appeared to be in line with what He wanted them to do. Hence the repetition of the same words over and over again -

Psalm 51:16

16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

a) And so a new nation was born - the Church. And guess what? Do you think they (the corporate majority) will see and hear and understand the truth of what God is trying to get them to see?

Revelation 3:14-17

14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: 15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of

nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked...

b) So let me ask you, are you holding on to ideologies that belong to Churchianity's religion, or are you truly seeing the Truth that CHRISTianity shows us? What are the odds that the current teaching on tithings and offerings are really based in the Truth of God's Word, given the glaring example of how Israel ended up after the same amount of time had passed? Think on that a bit.

5) So again I ask you, Why do we give? Simply, because God wants us to. Why do we want to do what God wants? Because we love Him and we want to belong to *Him* - body, soul, and spirit. We want to be taught, and disciplined, and matured, don't we? So we do whatever He wants because He knows what is best. His will is to be our will, period.

a) So again I ask you, How much do we give? The truth of the matter is that we are to let it *all* go because nothing here is ours. Nothing. Why do we differentiate between giving money and giving time? Why are they in any way separable and distinguishable as far as "offerings" go?

b) God has brought us into this world; He is sustaining us; and He will take us out of this world. He provided us with our bodies, He provides us with breath. He provides us with parents, sometimes siblings, food, shelter, clothing, money, and our jobs. He provides the 24-hour days and 365-day years, the rain, the snow, the sunshine. He provides us with animals as companions, with people around us, with our relationships. He gave us our emotions and our intelligence and our talents; He gives us hardships, struggles, trials, joys, victories, challenges, and opportunities... Shall I go on?

c) What do we have that He has NOT given us? What do we have that is NOT His?

d) So what should we be *willing* to give...just money? And how much should we be *willing* to part with...just 10%? It's almost a silly question now, isn't it?

6) But there's still the main aspect of the question, TO WHOM are we to give? TO WHOM are we to give that which isn't even ours? It may seem, at this point, that that shouldn't even matter...Like there's a list or something of who is worthy to receive OUR stuff that isn't even ours, yet we control it like it is?

a) But it's a legitimate question because we do have choices to make concerning our offerings, and we want those choices to be God-centered, in accordance with His Word, don't we? So instead of randomly sending out envelopes of cash in the mail and hoping

that they reach, by supernatural intervention, the appropriate destination, we actually do have to do some thinking and studying and praying concerning the recipients of our offerings. We have to take it seriously, because God expects us to. After all, it's God's "stuff" we're dealing with here, right?

b) So now let's do some methodical study here to take a look at specifics in answer to this question, TO WHOM do we give? Scripture gives us some pretty clear examples of how God wants us to give, so let's spend the rest of today answering this question.

c) PLEASE NOTE: The unequivocally clear overall scope of giving is that we give to God Himself. Please don't forget this major point. However, since God Himself is not (that we know of) in need of money, food, or clothing, we give to others as though we are giving to Him. Since I am assuming that we all know this, I am dealing strictly with WHO the earthly recipients of our material goods should be, since we obviously have numerous billions of people to choose from.

7) I am just going to take for granted that you know that you must first use your stuff to meet your own needs, and those of your children/family, first. And this is the verse that comes to mind concerning this -

1 Timothy 5:8

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

a) It's like the demonstration they give you on the airplane - put your own oxygen mask on first because if you don't, how will you be conscious to take care of those others in need of assistance? It's a no-brainer. So let's move on.

8). Another seemingly "no-brainer" is the giving to widows and orphans, as we've been talking about the past couple of weeks. TO WHOM are we to give? Widows and orphans. Seems clear, right? But *which* widows and orphans? The ones on the street? The ones just in your church? The ones in Haiti? The ones that come to you or are you supposed to go find them?

Deuteronomy 26:12

"When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

Exodus 22:20-24

20 "He who sacrifices to any god, other than to the LORD alone, shall be utterly destroyed. 21 "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were

strangers in the land of Egypt. 22 "You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. 23 "If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; 24 and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

a) I would just like to answer that question of *which widows and orphans* with a non-answer. "You shall not wrong a stranger [or] afflict ANY widow or orphan," because if you do, and they cry out to God, God will hear them and He'll turn His anger on you. Because of the severity of that statement (though directed to Israel but pertinent just the same), I'll let you decide whether *you* should take care of only Christian widows and orphans, or ALL widows and orphans.

b) And I'll also leave you to decide what God meant by the "strangers," and consequently which "strangers" you are to give to (though there is much more on this topic if you're interested). You obviously can't give - nor should you give - to ALL strangers and you can't give to ALL widows and orphans. But the suggestion to take care of them is still there in God's Word, so it can't be ignored. However, don't forget -

James 1:26-27

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

9). I want to look for a minute at one of the first pictures of "giving" we see that seems to be oh-so-popular in Christian circles, and that is the event we talked about last week, where we see Abraham give "a tenth part of all" to Melchizedec -

Hebrews 7:1-2

1 For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; 2 To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all...

a) And it's recorded in this way -

Genesis 14:17-24

17 Then after his [Abraham's] 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). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;

20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all.

21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself." 22 Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, 23 that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, 'I have made Abram rich.' 24 "I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."

b) Notice the way the event is recorded, as well as its commentary from Hebrews. First, there is a battle between kings in which Abram/ Abraham is victorious, though his victory was won on his behalf by God Most High. Abraham's first response is to give a portion of his goods (though whether that was 10% of just the booty from war or 10% of ALL of his goods is unknown) to the priest - the representative - of God Most High who came to him to bless him (speak well of him) on behalf of the Lord Himself, who is the "Possessor of heaven and earth" (and at this point you need to remember Abraham's promises, for the interchange here is directly related to that). Abraham's response is a simple acknowledgment of this.

c) Abraham's second response is to the king of Sodom (i.e. the world), and his actions here are directly related to what he just did with Melchizedec. Abraham, via God, has just been victorious in his "worldly" battle and he's just given some of his worldly goods away to the Priest of God. And subsequently he refuses to take any more bounty, for that would mar his reputation regarding his relationship with the Lord. *Notice who Abraham considers himself a servant of, and how he realizes that his profit of material goods speaks volumes concerning this.* Abraham is content in giving, rather than receiving.

d) So what's the application for you and me? It certainly has nothing to do with the amount (10%) or the circumstances (been to war lately?), but everything to do with Abraham's focus, and how his material goods follow that focus.

e) Abraham gives to the Priest of God Most High who blesses him, in direct context concerning the promises that God made to him about inheriting the "heaven and earth." Abraham fully believes and trusts that God will one day give him the world (Rom. 4:13), and he gives his "stuff" to the man who also fully believes and trusts in that promise.

f) You and I need to fully believe and trust that God will one day deliver on His promises to Abraham's descendants (you and me), and we need to give to those who minister to us regarding those very promises.

10). Let's now move on to the Mosaic Law (picking up from last week) and take note of WHO received all of those offerings and sacrifices and tithes that the nation of Israel parted with on a daily/weekly/yearly basis, and WHY -

Numbers 18:20-24

20 Then the LORD said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel. 21 "And to the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting. 22 "And the sons of Israel shall not come near the tent of meeting again, lest they bear sin and die. 23 "Only the Levites shall perform the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the sons of Israel they shall have no inheritance. 24 "For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said concerning them, "They shall have no inheritance among the sons of Israel."

a) In the same way that Melchizedec was a representative of God Most High, and ministered to the recipient of the promise for God Himself, we see that the Levites - the priests of God - were acting in the same capacity, for the very same reasons.

b) And interestingly enough, the priests are mentioned to NOT have a portion of the earthly inheritance (land), and it is specifically this reason why the rest of the nation of Israel was to take care of them; *their offerings were the priests' inheritance*. So the deal was that the priests were to dedicate their whole lives to serving God Most High, and part-and-parcel with serving God Most High they were to serve His chosen people. So as a result of dedicating their lives to serving God and Israel through the work of serving in the tabernacle/tent of meeting, they couldn't work in the capacity necessary to take care of their own material needs. Their needs were to be met by gifts from the very ones they served.

c) Please don't forget that this was all in relation to the goal of the nation - that Israel was to be the light to all other nations, blessing them while in the land and receiving rest from all their enemies, while God Himself dwelt among them. This is/was but a glimpse of the future perfect picture which will come about one day, but reality-wise this was the training and maturity ground for the nation themselves. The priests took care of the management of the Law.

d) Translate this to today. We're not in our land, nor do any of us have our inheritance. We don't have one, single, physical tabernacle in which God dwells, nor do we have the litany of sacrificial laws that were to be kept. So what does this picture teach us?

e) How about the simple fact that we are to take care of those who serve and minister to us on behalf of the Lord? We are to give offerings to the men and women who see to our spiritual needs, who dedicate their lives to providing service to us on behalf of God Himself. And let's take note of one more thing in this same scripture passage –

Numbers 18:25-

25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 26 "Moreover, you shall speak to the Levites and say to them, 'When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present an offering from it to the LORD, a tithe of the tithe. 27 'And your offering shall be reckoned to you as the grain from the threshing floor or the full produce from the wine vat. 28 'So you shall also present an offering to the LORD from your tithes, which you receive from the sons of Israel; and from it you shall give the LORD'S offering to Aaron the priest. 29 'Out of all your gifts you shall present every offering due to the LORD, from all the best of them, the sacred part from them.' 30 "And you shall say to them, 'When you have offered from it the best of it, then the rest shall be reckoned to the Levites as the product of the threshing floor, and as the product of the wine vat. 31 'And you may eat it anywhere, you and your households, for it is your compensation in return for your service in the tent of meeting. 32 'And you shall bear no sin by reason of it, when you have offered the best of it. But you shall not profane the sacred gifts of the sons of Israel, lest you die.'"

f) Just quickly note God's vantage point on "giving." He says that the Levites take their tithes from the Israelites, but that *He has given the tithes to the Levites from the Israelites*. The Israelites gave, but God sees it as *Himself giving it*. Interesting, isn't it?

g) Anyway, the point to be grasped from this passage is that even the Levites were to give a tenth of the tenth that they received. And their offering of the offerings they received were to go upward, to Aaron, who ministered *to them* on behalf of the Lord Himself.

h) You and I are to give to those people who serve our spiritual needs. And even those who serve others' spiritual needs have someone who serves *their* spiritual needs. We all are to give. And we are to give to those who minister to us according to God's will, His Word, His plans. *Everything to do with our salvation – past, present, and future*. (That surely limits us in this day and age, doesn't it?)

11). Let's move forward through the Bible to the early church, and add to this picture something that Paul spoke about that is directly relative to the topic at hand -

1Corinthians 9:1-14

1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? 7 Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? 8 I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? 14 So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

a) Notice how emphatic Paul is, and how he ties in his work relative to the gospel with the work of those who ministered in the temple. Both have the scriptural right to get their living from those they minister to. And implicit in this argument is that they - the church - were to support those who ministered to them.

b) But notice Paul's position on this -

1Corinthian 9:15-19

15 But I have used none of these things. And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. 18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. 19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

c) Paul refused to take money to minister the gospel because he wanted to *freely minister the gospel, with no strings attached to anyone* except God Himself. (Is there not a huge lesson in that, in this day and age????!!!)

d) And he's not saying that he wants to be taken care of – he doesn't! But he's stating a scriptural truth: It's okay for ministers of the gospel to earn their living from it. But in his case, he didn't want to. And in his case, *as it was with Abraham*, it was for the express purpose of having NO ties to anyone of this world who could claim mastery over him. Paul, as Abraham, was truly *free* to serve the Lord as he saw fit.

e) And we can definitely see the correlation between giving to the spreading of the gospel (the WHOLE gospel) for the express purpose of building the spiritual temple of God, with the giving of that first generation in order to build the first tabernacle in the wilderness, can't we?

12). So the question is, Why support *specific individuals* who minister the gospel? You may think we all minister the gospel in some shape or form, so why not just support yourself? Here's the answer –

Ephesians 4:11-13

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

a) Are we all pastor-teachers? Are we all evangelists? Are we all doing the work of the apostles? No, no, no. But we all work together to equip each other (the saints) *for the work of service*, in order to build up the body of Christ. And each part will have different needs...needs that should be met by the body itself.

b) But the purpose here is the same as we see with the Levitical priesthood – it's for the maturity of the nation in order to bring truth to the multitudes who are without a God.

And as it was with Israel, so it is with us – we have been saved for a purpose and we are to unify *for a purpose*: to come to the full knowledge of the Son of God, *in the faith*. And Paul clearly states that it is so we will not be carried about by every wind of doctrine.

c) So does it matter which Christian organization you give to? You bet it does. In this day and age, with lukewarm Christianity surrounding us on every side, with false doctrines surrounding us on every side, we need to be extra careful who we support and which *doctrines* we support. And on this subject, I will say no more... I think you get my point.

13). Going back to the picture of the early church and its giving, let's address this idea of giving to one central "church" organization, rather than individuals themselves –

Acts 4:32-35

32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

a) This is probably one of the places in the Bible where we have drawn our current believe system of individuals pooling their resources/material goods in order to distribute corporately to those who are in need, and to distribute corporately to the needs of the ministers of the gospel. If we want to stay within the scriptural picture of giving, there is nothing that directly contradicts the present day idea of a corporate pooling of money. And historically speaking, we can sure see how this type of setup made a whole lot of sense, since it was the apostles' themselves needing to physically travel from place to place in order to spread the gospel, and it was the apostles themselves who had the full knowledge of the gospel in which to share. And it sure was a lot harder back then to get specific goods to specific people within a reasonable amount of time (they didn't have PayPal or online banking back then!).

b) But remembering that we live in the Laodicean era, can we be absolutely sure that those we give our money/goods to will distribute them as godly and accurately as the apostles did?

c) Is the leadership in charge of the corporate account you give to made up of "those who believe [being] of one heart and soul"? I do believe that it should.

d) And are they spreading the *whole* gospel?

e) And I just want to close with this, and then I'm done harping on the subject of giving. Church, we need to evaluate ourselves when we give, and to whom we give, and make sure we're not settling for the simple corporate giving because we're just too lazy, or just too busy. I'm not at all making a judgment call, but I am presenting a challenge. Imagine these two scenarios:

One, you write a check and send it somewhere where they deposit it in a bank account, and you wait for the monthly or yearly report on how it was spent.

Or two, you get some cash/food/material goods and you search for what's important to both you and God...and you travel on down to the place where the individuals in need are, and you physically hand over your offering to the very person that will use it. You get to see their eyes; you get to hear their story. And you get to share yours.

Or you do both. These two options are not mutually exclusive.