

Chapter 23

WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH

Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:6-10)

Before the nation of Israel entered the land of Canaan, God instructed Moses how the land was to be divided. Each tribe, with the exception of Levi, was to receive a portion of the land of Canaan, or of the former lands of Sihon and Og (Amorite kings who had dwelt on the eastern side of the Jordan) for its inheritance. God chose the tribe of Levi to provide the ministry that had formerly been supplied by the firstborn. They were to receive no earthly inheritance in the land, but were to serve the Lord and receive their provision from the twelve.

Thus God separated Levi from the twelve tribes and numbered the two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, to stand where the tribes of Joseph and Levi had formerly stood. Israel still consisted of twelve tribes, but it also had a Levitical priesthood which was to dwell among

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the twelve.

With this change in the structure of the nation, Levi was to receive forty-eight cities (gifts from the respective inheritances of the twelve tribes), six of which were to be cities of refuge and their suburbs, as well as tithes and offerings from the gain wrought by them from their respective lands. These forty-eight cities were evenly dispersed throughout the lands occupied by the twelve tribes, making the priesthood readily available to all the nation. Thus God made provision for the spiritual welfare of the nation and for the support of the Levitical priesthood so that the Levites could devote themselves entirely to the work of the Lord.

When we come to the New Testament, Paul tells us, *They that preach the gospel, shall live of the gospel and the laborer is worthy of his reward.* Further from the New Testament we have a quotation from the Old which says, *Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.* Each of these statements in their respective contexts has to do with the support of the ministry. These instructions are very much a part of Paul's statement to the Galatians, *Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.*

In view of the purpose of the book of Galatians, to show that law and ritual are not essential to salvation and that the demand for these things in the life of a New Testament believer constitutes the preaching of *another gospel*, instructions regarding the support of the ministry, apart from any legalistic demand, are quite essential. The church is not under the law. Even so the principle of tithing and free-will giving is clearly established in both the Old and New Testaments. In fact tithing is established in the Old Testament Scriptures more than four hundred years before the law.

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Our Lord spoke to the nation of Israel in His sermon on the mount and said:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (Matthew 5:17-18)

Christ did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it and, indeed, it was fulfilled by Him in the minutest detail. Consequently what the law demanded, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His infinite grace, supplied. Therefore the holiness, justice and righteousness demanded of the law was completely met in Jesus Christ, as well as His love, mercy and grace. This has established an important principle: what the law demanded grace supplied. Since there was a provision for the ministry under the law, there must also be a provision for the ministry in God's grace relationship with the New Testament church. Paul merely carried the principle of what law demanded grace supplied into the present-tense thinking of the churches of Galatia in his statement, *Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.*

The word translated *communicate* in this text is a Greek word which means *to share with*. While the church is not under the law of tithing, grace will not supply less for the support of the ministry than law demanded. The simple difference between the two is the basis for giving. Under the law, there was a legalistic demand for at least a tithe. Under grace there is the opportunity to give a freewill offering for the work of the ministry out of a sense of thanksgiving for all that the Lord has provided.

Paul instructed the Galatians by using a rather obvious truth: in the realm of sowing and reaping, you cannot obtain a bountiful crop by sowing sparsely. If we apply this principle to a New Testament believer, we will find that a believer who takes for granted all of the blessings that

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grace has supplied and uses little or none of his resources for the furtherance of the gospel; but uses them for himself alone, this individual is sowing to the flesh, no matter what his conduct is in other areas of his life. In some cases it may appear that he has every material blessing he could possibly want. This is not the blessing of the Lord, but is because he has used his resources for his own self-interest. Even so, our Lord said:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

The things of the flesh and of this world are temporal. They can be stolen, wear out, decay and come to naught. There is nothing eternal about them. Therefore if this is where a believer places all of his time and resources, this is where his heart will be. It is also where he will reap his crop. Since all of the emphasis by this sort of individual is on the here and now, this individual will continue to sow sparsely in his relationship with the Lord and will reap sparsely in the spiritual realm.

On the other hand, if a believer is cognizant of all of the spiritual blessings that are his in Christ Jesus and is motivated by the grace that has been bestowed upon him, he will give of what he has (in terms of time, money and spiritual gifts) for the support of the gospel ministry. God has promised he will not lack in temporal needs, yet he will be laying up for himself treasures in heaven. Therefore Paul wrote:

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath

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dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. (II Corinthians 9:6-11, emphasis mine)

Unfortunately many an evangelist or preacher has distorted this portion of the Word of God and have motivated the people under their ministries to give out of a sense of greed. They have said, *If you want much, you must give much.* Yet the promise is for a sufficiency, not greedy gain. It should be very apparent that God does not use the sins of the flesh to motivate the work of the Spirit. The proper interpretation of Paul's admonition to sow bountifully in order to reap bountifully is that if we sow of our temporal things to the support of the ministry, we shall have sufficiency in temporal matters, and in spiritual matters our seed is multiplied, thus, increasing the fruits of our spiritual labor.

Even though Israel was under the law, in the matter of freewill giving, she is an illustration of the bountiful supply that grace provides. This is seen in the offering for the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness. According to the account in the book of Exodus, the children of Israel were to bring a freewill offering for the construction of the tabernacle. Since it was a freewill offering, there was no prescribed amount for each Israelite to give. Thus in this offering, there was no legalistic demand whatsoever. It illustrates perfectly the principle of giving under grace. This request for a free-will offering had an interesting effect upon the nation of Israel:

And they [the workers constructing the tabernacle] received of Moses all the offering, which the children of Israel had brought for the work of the service of the sanctuary, to make it withal. And they brought yet unto him free offering every morning. And all the wise men, that wrought all the work of the sanctuary, came every man from his work which they made; and they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make.

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And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much. (Exodus 36:3-7, emphasis mine)

As we have previously seen, Isaiah prophesied our Lord was to be called Emanuel. Matthew interpreted this to mean *God with us*. This confirms that the tabernacle in the wilderness, in the typology of Scripture, was a portrayal of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently everything that was supplied for the construction of the tabernacle was by a freewill offering to portray that everything that is supplied for the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ is also by freewill offerings.

Interestingly, some of the items that were freely given for the construction of the tabernacle were materials normally used for the Jews' clothing and for their shoes. Later their generosity was replaced with murmurings and unbelief, yet Moses said: *And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot* (Deuteronomy 29:5).

Despite what we have just considered, it is commonly believed by many who profess to be believers in Jesus Christ that tithing was strictly a demand of the law and has no place in the giving of one under the grace of God. However when Lot and the kings of Sodom were carried away captive by Chedorlaomer, Abraham and his young men pursued them and won a great battle in the slaughter of the kings. It was then that Abraham was met by Melchizedek, priest of the most high God. Abraham gave Him a tithe of the spoils of the battle. This was more than four hundred years before the advent of the law. This was Abraham's freewill choice.

Likewise when Jacob returned to the land of Canaan after serving Laban for twenty years,

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he freely promised the Lord a tithe of all that he would gain from his lands and from his herds. Abraham and Jacob clearly established the principle of a freewill tithe long before the giving of the law. This principle is confirmed by the writer to the Hebrews:

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; to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: but he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him. (Hebrews 7:1-10, emphasis mine)

Thus the matter of Abraham's tithing to the Lord Jesus Christ, in His pre-incarnate form of Melchizedek, was clearly established more than four hundred years before the law. Further Abraham's tithing was charged to the account of Levi, who was not born until *the fourth generation* from God's covenant promise to Abraham, by the principle of federal headship. Even though by law Levi was to receive tithes, under grace and the judicial reckoning of God, he was counted to have paid tithes to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the Person of Melchizedek. Now if Levi, who was of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, paid tithes to the Lord, apart from the law, then we also have the freewill privilege to pay tithes to the body of Christ, because Paul wrote:

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel,

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which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. (Romans 9:6-8)

The principle of tithing is clearly established in the Scriptures, apart from the requirements of the law. Further the principle of freewill giving establishes the fact that, under the grace of God, there is no reason for the believer to limit his giving to a tithe. As Israel has shown us, when she was operating on the basis of a freewill offering and not on the basis of law, she had to be restrained from giving because she brought too much.

What a wonderful problem that would be -- that we would have to restrain our people from giving because every need for the propagation of the gospel to a lost world would have been met! In this church age it will probably never occur that we would have to restrain our people from giving. Even so, if every believer were to lay hold on the extent of the grace and mercy that has been bestowed upon him, so that it would produce in him the sense of thanksgiving all believers should have, it is impossible to say what resources would be available for the propagation of the gospel to this lost world.

Paul went on to say, *let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.* The believer who supports the work of the ministry enjoys the *sufficiency* Paul wrote of now, but the benefits of the spiritual crop will not be fully known until we stand before the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ. At that day we shall receive the fruits of our labors in the body of Christ that were done by faith.

Throughout our commentary we have stressed the difference between law and grace. A

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few pages back, we saw that what the law demanded, grace supplied. We have learned that *The just shall live by faith, and law is not of faith.* We have learned, *Without faith it is impossible to please God.* We have learned that *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* We have learned *Their sins and iniquities will I remember against them no more.* Therefore the judgment seat of Christ will not be a judgment of sin, but of that which was wrought by faith.

That being the case and in consideration of the marvelous grace bestowed upon us by the Lord Jesus Christ, *As we have therefore opportunity, Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.* Is this an admonition for a classic welfare program? Indeed it is not! It is simply an admonition to be involved in the propagation of the gospel, for *they that preach the gospel shall live of the gospel, and the workman is worthy of his reward.* We have a commission to take the gospel into all of the world and to preach it to every creature.

John wrote, *if a man have this world's good* and see his brother in this world in need and shut up his bowels of compassion, *how dwelleth the love of God in him?* Contrary to popular opinion, John was not admonishing us to feed a starving world. John was admonishing us to preach the gospel to a lost world. In this text the word *good* is *bion*. Its root is *bios*. *Bion* means life and is singular. Therefore it is not a reference to sustaining our natural lives, but is a reference to the source of *life*. Thus it is a reference to the preaching of the gospel, declaring that by faith in Jesus Christ there is life. Consequently, as our text declares, we are to share our worldly goods with those who preach the gospel. This in turn will give them the means whereby they can share the Life with a lost world. If we do not share the good news of the gospel to a lost world, *how dwelleth the love of God in us?* Remember, *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he*

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also reap.