

A CHEERFUL GIVER

With the Levitical tithing system, the children of Levi were to take a tenth from their brethren for the support of the priesthood. This was an obligatory demand from the book of Moses and not an exercise of one's own free will. With the dispensation of the old covenant by the coming in of a new covenant under Christ, came a new design of free giving, rather than the old with its obligatory system. Jesus replaced the high priest of the Levite system with a better one, himself, who was after the order of Melchisedec. The Christ did not make an obligatory commandment for his disciples to take tithes from their fellow saints to sustain his church.

Before examining Scriptures for evidence of how Christians are supposed to give unto the church, it is good to have a bit of background on the Jewish priesthood during the first couple centuries A.D. After the Levitical priesthood came to its end in 70 A.D., Hadrian ordered Jerusalem to be rebuilt in 131 A.D., but in 132 A.D., the Jews under the leadership of Bar-Kokheba ("son of a star") revolted and carried on a bloody war for over 3 years. Bar-Kokheba, with an army of over 100,000 men, drove the Romans out of most of the land. Two years later, the Roman army under Hadrian re-conquered Israel and Jerusalem and the final overthrow of the Jewish people occurred when their last stronghold, Bethar, was captured in 135 A.D. Hadrian completed the final destruction of Jerusalem and the land of Judaea when he had the site of the temple ploughed up and decreed that no Jews be allowed to reside in Jerusalem. The final desolation of Judaea occurred as a result of his conquest along with the dispersion of its people. Judaea was like a desert, with about 985 towns and villages laid in ashes, and 50 fortresses leveled to the ground. A heathen colony was settled in Jerusalem and was renamed "Elia Capitolina". Thus, the year 135 A.D. was the year of the total desolation of Judaea and Jerusalem.

Due to this desolation, there was no more Levite order to receive the tithes; by scripture, only the Levites could receive the tithes: ***"And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance."*** Numbers 18:21 to 24. See also Deuteronomy 18:1-5. With the destruction of the Temple and the Levitical priesthood, there was no one to receive the tithing inheritance.

God's love is given freely, and the Son of man, Jesus, also gave all because of his love for us, so our deeds and acts must also be done in the same spirit of love. As we continue with our study, it will be shown that God loves a cheerful giver and that there must be no coercion of individuals into giving. This also includes the support of the Church of God. It must now, under the new dispensation, be given solely in the spirit of charity.

With the changing of the covenant (***"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place had been sought for the second."*** Hebrews 8:6, 7), came a serious problem within the Church of God, especially for some smaller churches in our present era. That problem is the practice of providing for the welfare of the church. Under the liberty of Christ, there are those persons who are using this new liberty as an excuse for not giving to Christ's church at all. The truth is, with the liberty of the individual's free choice in giving, some of us become even more prone to wrong doings than under the old system of tithing. Under the old covenant, there was the law of curses that put the fear of punishment into a person's heart if he or she did not pay the tithe. Under the new order of Christ, we can choose to be selfish and greedy and offer nothing and nothing may happen to us in this present life, but on judgment day, we will be judged by our charitable acts and this will include the support of God's ministry.

With the ending of the priesthood and thus, the tithing system, came the liberty spoken of in Galatians 5:1: ***"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."*** The yoke of bondage spoken of here are those laws written by Moses in a book, which included the curses of death, sacrifices, circumcision and tithing to mention only a few. The liberty spoken of is the performing of our deeds in an atmosphere of a free, loving choice, rather than by a deterrent force. Those who give the false impression that Galatians 5:1 is freeing us from performing charitable acts of love are deceiving themselves and others. For Paul goes on to warn us not to let the lust of worldly desires be the occasion of liberty: ***"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word...***" Galatians 5:13, 14a. That one word is love and let us not put it aside for greediness and selfishness. The apostle Peter also elaborates on people using their new found freedom of liberty from the yoke of Moses' law, as a cloak for wrongful deeds: ***"As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God."*** 1 Peter 2:16. The verses point out that we should not want to be greedy and selfish; it is our responsibility to provide for the upkeep of the church. Read also James 2:12 to 14, 17; ***"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shown no mercy: and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?... Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."***

The liberty that we have gained in Christ does not free us from the responsibility that we should have towards our brethren or Christ's church. It has freed us from the yoke of the laws which forced the Jews to perform deeds, such as tithing, that they did but only out of fear of threat of punishment and death under Moses' law.

If we say we believe in Christ, but have no works of love, that faith is a lie, for the faith of Christ is built upon that charity of a proven love of our giving freely (as he, Jesus, gave freely, even his own life). Our sisters and brethren, who have dedicated their lives to the service of God and mankind, should be provided for by the saints,

including their material and personal needs. Philippians 4:14 to 16: ***"Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity."*** Paul praises the church of God at Philippi for taking care of his needs. And even though the church had its own needs to take care of, this church had the charity (love) to send gifts to their evangelizing brother. These offerings were supplied of their own free will and not by any obligatory system. This is the spirit under which the new covenant church gives, that is, from the heart. And because they are aware of the needs of their brethren and the church, they know of the necessity for the saints to support the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

Read I Corinthians 16:1, 2: ***"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come."*** There are those who say this text is not referring to a regular weekly offering but a special offering for the evangelistic saint's needs and work. This is a mistaken assumption and when the text is read closely, it is clear that Paul does not say he is collecting for himself, nor for the saints at Jerusalem this time. He says he does not want to see the dividing of man's earnings when he comes. It was Paul's manner to preach on the sabbath day and he would not want to see men working, dividing their profits of their daily labour on the holy sabbath day, so the order was given that this should occur ***"upon the first day of the week"***. The first day of the week is what we call Sunday, a day of work and leisure. The word "saints" is used in reference to all the followers of the Christ, and includes Elders, Deacons, Teachers, Prophets and lay people. All those that do the will of God in Jesus are the saints. Concerning the giving to the church, the phrasing of the text, ***"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store"*** indicates a continuous weekly offering and further says ***"as God hath prospered him"*** meaning those who receive and have more should give more abundantly.

In this section, you are asked to read all of chapter 9 of II Corinthians, then excerpts will be used from those texts that relates directly to the points being expressed. To begin with, a few select verses: ***"1. For as touching the ministering to the saints; it is superfluous for me to write to you. 6. But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. 7. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. 13. Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men."*** These charitable offerings were for the support of the church, for benevolent endeavors, missionary evangelism and the support of the central regional area church. All members supported the church, the poor and the rich alike, each giving according to his or her means. There was no more an obligated tenth of one's earnings or income, but each gave freely without obligation and from their heart. But as for the new liberty given to us, there are those who will abuse the freedom, and this is why Paul warns us in verse 6 that ***"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap***

also bountifully." This tells us that we will be rewarded according to the charitable giving of our prosperity. Consider the poor person who, from a monetary standpoint has provided little, but from a relative standpoint has given a large portion of their income; the poor person will be rewarded by God the same as a wealthier person who has provided much bigger sums of money, for that poor person has ***not sparingly given*** of his small income: ***"let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him"*** 1 Corinthians 16:2. Those who will be rewarded from God sparingly, are the selfish who do not support the Church of God from their heart. Remember: ***"as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give"***. A saint's own heart shall be his own judgment of God's measure of reward. God knows the willing and cheerful giver and loves them -- ***"for God loveth a cheerful giver"*** and shall bestow upon the cheerful giver bountiful gifts of reward in the Kingdom of God.

"For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." Romans 13:6. The early ministers of God received their daily needs from the saints of God. Today, just as back then, there is no extravagant living for the Elders of God; they must live humbly and as meekly as their teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. The Elders' riches are not of this world, but will receive the riches of God's Word, and a place in His Kingdom. But as we have seen, the manner in which we give is now as a person has ***"purposeth in his heart"*** and not through an imposed obligatory system. Each person is now accountable for their own self and will be individually judged accordingly to their charitable frame of mind.

Most of the churches of today's society believe and teach that Romans chapter 13 is in reference to only the civil authorities and not the church authorities. We of the Church of God do teach adherents to be obedient to civil authorities as taught from the scriptures, however, the "rulers" in Romans 13 who have been called out and ordained of God to minister in God's service are those who administer to the needs of God's church (ie. elders, deacons, etc), therefore, it is only appropriate for those who are served to give due respect to those that were called to service by the power above. Read all of the Greek version from Romans 13: 1 to 6, and then decide if these verses apply to civil or church authority: ***"1. Let every soul be subject to authorities above [him]. For there is no authority except from God; and those that are authorities, by God have been appointed. 2. So that he that sets himself against authority, the ordinance of God resists, and they that resist, to themselves judgment shall receive. 3. For the rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Dost thou desire not to be afraid of the authority? practise the good and thou shalt have praise from it; 4. For of God a servant it is to thee for good. But if evil thou practicest, fear; for not in vain the sword it wears; for of God a servant it is, an avenger for wrath to him, that does evil. 5. Wherefore necessary [it is] to be subject, not only on account of wrath, but also on account of conscience. 6. For on this account also tribute pay ye; for ministers of God they are, on this same thing, attending continually."*** Verses 1 and 2 speaks of the authority appointed of God, so the person that is against that authority which has been appointed from above, is then against the ordinances of God. Verses 3 and 4 goes on to say that if you do good works, you need not have any fear of those called out and are given authority, for they are the servants of God, whom also preach the wrath of God, and who will avenge all things by the hand of God against those who

resisted whom God has appointed to be authority in the church. Even though they be the servants of the power who appointed them and to them that they serve, the verse also elaborates on their continual ministering and attending of God's ordinances (Word) that they represent the church. It is only appropriate that the children of God give the dues, in tribute, custom and honour to those called out by God to serve them.

No longer do we have to give a specific amount or portion and if we do not give that specified amount of the tithe, we do not have to fear the wrath of God as written in the book of the law by Moses. We should give as we have prospered and give by the heart, proving our faith regularly in God. Those who do not teach the charity of giving from the heart but teach tithing, are not teaching the New Covenant of Christ, but are still propagating the old bondage of the Levitical system, as written in the law of Moses. The saints of Christ should live in the freedom of the new liberty of the new covenant under Jesus, of which now our deeds are performed in a personal willing attitude of a free love for God, Christ and our neighbor.