

CHAPTER 14

THE LAW OF GIVING AND RECEIVING (e³)

"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,' says the Lord of Hosts. 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,' says the Lord of Hosts." (Malachi 3:10-11).

In the following paragraphs we will address the "Law of Giving and Receiving" by exercising faith in the promises of God. God, however, is sovereign, and He could "if the Spirit wills" grant you a financial blessing through a manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, a manifestation similar to the miracle the widow of the prophet received, when God greatly multiplied her jar of oil (2 Kings 4:1-7). Most Christians, however, will go through life and never experience a manifestation of a gift of the Spirit in the area of finances; they can, however, receive the financial blessings promised by the word of God "by faith" at any time.

Through the centuries much of organized religion has considered material prosperity a worldly pursuit which would hinder a Christian's spiritual development. But in the latter part of the twentieth century, God began to refresh His people through the "Charismatic Renewal" which was followed closely by the "word-faith movement" which taught the importance of the "word of God" in the development of faith, and the importance of faith in receiving the promises of God. Kenneth E. Hagin, founder of Rhema Bible Training Center, is considered to be the father of the modern word of faith movement. Hagin taught that God is not glorified by poverty, and He doesn't want His people or His preachers to be poor, and he has authored several books on the subject of biblical prosperity. But near the end of his life, Hagin began to observe that many preachers were distorting the biblical prosperity message by teaching what I refer to elsewhere in this book as a "hyper-prosperity gospel," to support a lifestyle of greed and selfish indulgence. Four years before he died Hagin called many of the prosperity teachers to a conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in which he attempted to correct many of these abuses. A year later in 2000 he published *The Midas Touch - A Balanced Approach To Biblical Prosperity* (1), a book in which he attempted to present a balanced, biblical view concerning money and the prosperity message, and condemned many abuses and extreme teachings used by the "hyper-prosperity gospel" preachers.

MANY CHURCHES TEACH PROSPERITY

The prosperity message taught in many churches emphasizes tithing and the giving of offerings to the work of God. Some also teach that the purpose of God's prosperity is to expand the kingdom of heaven in the earth; and many of these churches teach their people how to develop faith in God's promises to prosper them. All of these teachings are important and they are certainly in line with God's Word, but I believe most churches by emphasizing the tithe have omitted some very important New Testament principles concerning giving and receiving.

God's Old Testament people, the Israelites, received the "blessings of Abraham" by keeping the law, and the tithe referred to by the prophet in Malachi 3:10&11 is the law. The New Testament says very little about tithing and there is considerable disagreement in the church as to whether it is actually a New Testament doctrine. But if it is God's primary purpose in the earth to save the lost and populate heaven, and it is our desire to please Him, why would we object to giving ten percent of our income to

win the lost to Jesus? Perhaps the more important question should be "is the place I give my ten percent actually winning the lost to Christ?" Jesus, referring to giving and receiving, promised that "... with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

PAUL HOWEVER HAS A GREAT DEAL TO SAY ABOUT GIVING

The Apostle Paul, however, had a great deal to say about New Testament principles of giving and receiving in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. He emphasized that we are not to give because of a commandment or out of compulsion (8:8; 9:7), or even according to what others give, but in a manner that does the will of God from our heart (8:5). He encouraged believers to give: abundantly (9:6); as a 'grace' (8:7); out of love (8:8); out of a sincere desire (8:8;8:10;8:11); willingly (8:12, 9:7); joyfully (8:2); generously, even beyond our ability (8:3;8:12); in response to Christ's gift to us (8:9; 9:15); and as evidence of the reality of our confession of Christ (9:13). From the above scriptures, it is clear that the Lord is more concerned with the condition of our heart, than the amount of our gift. Paul assures us that if we give bountifully and cheerfully as we purpose in our heart, and not grudgingly or of necessity, that God is able to make all grace (the entire corporate power of heaven) abound toward us, so that we will always have enough to meet every need (9:8-9). He is able to make us rich in every way, so that we can be generous on every occasion (9:10-11). I personally love the preceding scripture, and it is a promise that I have spoken before heaven and hell many times throughout my business career.

MANY CHURCHES TEACH TITHING AS THE LAW

The tithe is taught in many churches as a mandatory law, a minimum requirement, which precedes free-will giving. But if we give to keep a mandatory law, we are violating the New Testament principles concerning giving taught by Paul, as well as the following scriptures which clearly teach that sons and daughters of God are to be led by the Spirit of God. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14). "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (Galatians 5:18). Don't misunderstand me; I have not pointed these scriptures out so that you can avoid the giving of the first ten percent of your income to God. If you will yield to the Spirit of God, He may well ask you to give much more than ten percent. God delights in giving good gifts to his children just as we delight in giving good gifts to our children; but when He blesses us financially, He wants us to freely share those blessings with his ministers and others.

SOME NEVER EXPERIENCE THE PROMISED INCREASE

Earlier in this book I remarked that in the thirty years in which I have been a born-again Christian, I have observed a number of Christian men and women who have tithed and given offerings faithfully for years, some perhaps for most of their life but have never experienced anything extraordinary in the way of financial increase. Most of the individuals I have heard testify of God's blessing and increase were not working for a salary; they were generally involved in outside sales, operated some sort of business, or were in a ministry that taught tithing and giving to other Christians. I have wondered about this disparity for years; perhaps you have also, as it is particularly startling in light of the promises of both the Old and New Testaments.

Unfortunately many Christians, particularly young immature Christians, who have heard teaching on Malachi 3:10-11, have been left with the impression that God is going to open the literal windows of heaven and rain down a financial blessing upon them that they cannot contain. But Malachi 3:10-11 does not teach that God will open the windows of heaven and pour out enough grain, fruit, and herds to fill the farmer's barns. No, it teaches that He will pour out a blessing on the seed the farmer plants and herds the farmer tends, and He will cause them to increase.

God spoke the words recorded in third chapter of Malachi to the people of Judah, an agrarian society, most of whom were farmers and ranchers. When they heard the words of the prophet Malachi, they understood precisely what he was saying; but to the twenty-first century urban dwellers, the meaning of his words bounce off their minds like rifle bullets off an armored vehicle.

FARM BOYS LEARN TO FARM BY OBSERVING AND DOING

As a child, the Jewish farm boy would carry food and water to the fields where he watched the harvest crew's work. As he grew older his father taught him how to tend the herds, how to prepare the soil, plant the crop, and how to cultivate and harvest the crop. By the time he inherited the land from his parents, he was a seasoned farmer. He understood that after he had paid the tithe, the rest of the increase was available for him and his family to use--everything, that is, except a portion of the newly harvested seed (usually the best seed) which would be required to plant the next year's crop.

His father had also reinforced in him the "Law of Moses": he understood that it required him to give "a tithe" of the harvest to the Lord. He believed that his obedience to the law would cause God to bless the produce of his ground and the increase of his herds (Deuteronomy 28:4), cause Him to give rain to his land in its season (Deuteronomy 28:12), and to protect his crop from the curse of the law: the locust (Deuteronomy 28:38), the worm (Deuteronomy 28:39), and your enemies (Deuteronomy 28:31).

Therefore, the Israelite must have shuttered when he heard the prophet Malachi proclaim, "You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation." He knew that the curse had removed God's protective shield from his land, and had allowed the devourer (the devil) to bring drought, hail, windstorms, rain storms, floods, insects and blight to devastate his crop, and cause his harvest to fail.

THE JEW HAD TO ACT IN FAITH ON GOD'S LAW

When the Jewish farmer heard the word of the Lord concerning giving a tenth of his increase to the Lord, he had to fight the same mental battle that you and I fight. "I hardly have enough to live on now; if I give ten percent of my harvest (my income) to the Lord, how will we make it to the next harvest (the next paycheck). He knew that the Word of God promised prosperity, but the circumstances he observed with his physical senses disagreed with the law. Like you and me, the Jew had to believe and act on God's Word to receive the promise. He had to believe that if he gave the tithe to God, God would bless the seed which he planted and the herds which he tended, and bring him an abundant increase the following year. Like everything that man receives from God, the Jewish farmer had to exercise faith in God's promise to receive it.

Unlike some Christians, the Jewish farmer understood that God was not going to literally pour down grain and herds out of heaven; he had to prepare the soil, plant the seed, harvest the crop, and tend the herds. God's part was to send rain in the proper season and to protect the crop from the devastating effects of weather, predators, insects and disease.

MOST OF US LIVE IN THE CITY

In the twenty-first century few of us actually live and work on a farm. We live and work in an urban environment and are employed in industrial, technological, professional or service types of jobs. Most of us get a paycheck every couple of weeks instead of a crop every season.

Most average American Christians work hard, earn a good salary, live in a nice house, and own a late model car; but they are in debt up to their eyeballs. They have adopted a worldly lifestyle that devours their seed. After they have given their tithes and offerings and paid their bills there is no seed left "to plant," or as we would say in our urban world "to invest." Unlike the Jewish farmer who taught his son to save the best seed to plant as next year's crop, most American fathers have failed to teach their sons and daughters how to save a portion of their paycheck to invest in order that they may harvest a crop in the urban financial environment. Their fathers didn't teach them, because their fathers hadn't taught them. We have turned the job of teaching our children over to the public school system, and they have done little to prepare this generation for the realities of the world financial system. Giving to God is not a magic, get-rich scheme to replace study, skill and hard work, any more than it was for the Jewish farmer.

When the average person graduates from high school or college, he has no knowledge of the financial realities of life. Today's graduates don't understand how to read or prepare a financial statement; they don't understand the difference between principle and interest. They simply don't understand the basic realities of personal finance. They think as long as they are making their monthly payments to the finance company then they are succeeding in life.

PROSPERITY MESSAGE IN MOST CHURCHES DOESN'T GO FAR ENOUGH

The prosperity message taught in many churches is good, but it doesn't go far enough. Have you ever heard a sermon on the pitfalls of fulfilling the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life using excessive consumer debt? Have you ever heard a sermon on saving a portion of the harvest (the paycheck) for seed? Have you ever heard a sermon on the necessity of sowing seed (investing), in order that God might have something to bless, something He can cause to increase? Perhaps most importantly have you ever heard a sermon which taught that it is just as important for a Christian man or woman to become financially literate, as it was for the Jewish farmer to learn how to plant and harvest his crop or tend to his herd?

In Part V of this book entitled "Developing Wisdom for Wealth," we discuss some of the fundamental financial principles necessary to the creation of wealth. We also instruct you on how to prepare and read a basic financial statement, we caution you on the pitfalls of consumer debt, and we discuss some basic investment principles and guidelines for planting your seed (investing) in the urban environment.

The creation of wealth requires some start-up capital (the seed) and the knowledge of how to use that capital to bring increase. But the factor which turns these ingredients into wealth is faith! Anyone who wishes to participate in the free enterprise system has to be willing to work first, and then **believe** for a reward.

The same is true in the kingdom of God! The New Testament principles of giving and receiving are built upon faith, and anyone who wishes to participate in that system has to be willing to give first and then believe for a return. However, our primary motivation for giving should be because we love God and want to please Him by being obedient to His Word and helping Him to fulfill the great commission.

THE LAW OF USE

There is another kingdom law that relates closely to the "law of giving and receiving," and it is sometimes called "the law of use." Jesus illustrated the law of use in a parable about a rich businessman traveling to another country. He said that the kingdom of heaven was like this rich man who distributed his financial resources to his three managers and told them to "do business until I return" (Matthew 25:14-30). Two of the managers invested the resources they had been given, while the third did not. When the rich businessman returned, he asked for an accounting. He praised the two managers who had invested his money wisely and rewarded them richly for their diligence. But the rich businessman was very angry toward the manager who operated out of fear and insecurity, and did nothing with his money. He called him a wicked and lazy servant, took his property away from him, and gave it to the manager who had invested his resources wisely. As Jesus completed this parable, He announced a law of the kingdom: "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away."

This parable and others like it make an important point; Jesus expects His sons and daughters to deal wisely with money and the material things of this world while He is gone. Many other scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments confirm this principle.

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