

Devoted To Giving

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
December 5, 2004
AM Worship

Introduction:

Today we take a look at one of the all time most frightening topics upon which to preach—Giving. Why do I fear this subject? Whenever you begin to preach about money, some people start getting tense. Their hand begins to tighten around their wallet; their eyes begin to burn holes right through the preacher. Often, the more of our money which gets taken away or that we are told we should give away, the more resentful we become. It is frightening to preach about because my intentions can be so easily misunderstood. Regrettably a sermon on giving can be seen as self-serving, that is, some believe the only reason I am preaching on this is to increase my own salary (which is not true!). It is frightening because preaching on giving often produces the exact opposite result of what is intended. Instead of helping others be more purposeful and generous in their giving, Christians become more restrictive in their giving as they resent what they perceive to be someone else telling them what to do with their money. Giving is frightening to preach about because I have heard so much begging for money from charlatan preachers that I fear the mere mention of money will turn everyone off from even wanting to hear the rest of the sermon. Now you know my fears and yet despite all of that, giving is still worship, to which we must all be devoted.

While some use cash for giving, most of us write checks. To aid in our understanding of the spiritual principles of giving, I want to use the face of the checks we write in order to outline our look at giving.

Discussion:

I. The date.

- A. Every week the actual date we write on this line will change. However, these dates always correspond with the first day of the week. This line reminds us that God has provided a pattern regarding worship. Giving is to take place on the first day of the week (**I Corinthians 16:1-2**).
- B. This line reminds us that the money we are giving is not about the preacher or elders. It is about serving God and doing only what He has authorized. That number will never correspond with a Monday or a Wednesday because we are not willing to disregard God's established pattern, demonstrating our submission to the Almighty Lawgiver and the Supreme Standard Maker.

II. The payee.

- A. On this line, we write the name of the church: Franklin Church of Christ.
 1. This line demonstrates our commitment to one another in this collective. It reminds us that I am committed to you and you are committed to me. We are jointly part of this family and are pooling our resources to do Christ's work together. Consequently, it reminds us that God has not left us alone to do His work by ourselves, but that we can work together and add strength to one another.
 2. It demonstrates our dependence upon one another. While I do not believe we can scripturally claim it is a sin to travel and give your contribution to another congregation, this line teaches us that there is a group that depends on us and what we supply to the collective. This congregation makes its plans based on the amount it expects to receive from each member. Thus, common sense and courtesy tells us to keep our unspoken commitment and give our contribution here.
- B. As we write the church's name on this line, we are reminded again of whose church this is. It is Christ's church. When we give, we are giving to Christ. When the church has received these funds, it is only a steward of what is Christ's.
 1. This line reminds us that we are submitting not to man but to God. It is a recognition that every good and perfect gift comes from God (**James 1:17**).
 2. This line reminds us we are simply stewards of God's possessions. Too often we think what we own belongs to us and we are trying to decide how much to give to the Lord. We need to recognize it all belongs to Him and He wants us to use it in the ways which most glorify Him. As such, we want to be faithful stewards with this "unrighteous mammon" so God will entrust us with heavenly riches (**Luke 16:11**).

3. This line remind us that we owe Christ...for everything. Not that we are trying to pay God off in weekly installments. We can never do that, but we do offer Him our worship, praise and thanksgiving through this sacrifice in recognition of our unpayable debt.

III. The amount.

- A. This line is the most misrepresented line on the entire check because people continue to enforce the Old Testament rules on giving. The law of the tithe, or 10%, was instituted in **Numbers 18:21-24**. This tithe was a tax to support God's priests, but it was only a part of God's law on giving. God also commanded free will offerings (**Leviticus 23:37-38; Deuteronomy 16:10**). Why do so many focus on this one aspect of giving under the Old Testament? Some simply misunderstand. Others teach it, I believe, because if people gave 10%, they would be rolling in money. Allow me to demonstrate using this congregation as an example. According to our directory, we have about 72 households. I am going to round down to 70 to make the math easier and provide conservative numbers.
 1. According to the U.S. Census Bureau about 12% of American families live at or below poverty level. The average poverty level threshold for a family of three was \$14,680 (<http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/threshld/thresh03.html>). If all 70 households were at this poverty level income and gave 10%, our annual contribution would equal \$102,760.
 2. According to the Social Security Administration, the average Social Security income for a couple in which there is a retired worker and a spouse, not counting pensions, capital gains, or other income, is \$16,669 (http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat_snapshot/). If all 70 households were on Social Security income alone and gave 10%, our annual contribution would equal \$116,683.
 3. According to the 2000 census, the median household income for Franklin, Tennessee was \$56,431 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franklin,_Tennessee). This does not include the perks like paid insurance, pension plans, 401k investment matching and the payment employers make for you into Social Security. This is just income. For sake of argument let's say, as with our nation, 12% of our families are below poverty level and didn't give at all. But the other 62 households gave 10%, our annual contribution would be about \$349,872.
 4. Can you see why preachers keep preaching 10%? I must admit, there are times when I wish 10% was a command. Our contribution for 2004 is on track to be about \$168,584.
- B. Having said all of that, the New Testament does not mandate a percentage amount to govern our giving. However, this line is just as important under the New Covenant as the others are.
 1. According to **I Corinthians 16:2**, our contribution is to be based on how we are prospered. If God has blessed us with more, He expects more in return (**cf. Luke 12:48**). Notice this is based on what we are prospered, not on what is left over. We do not wait until we have bought our house, car, clothes, meals, etc. and then determine how much we will give. Rather, we give based on what we have been prospered and then we live on the rest.
 2. According to **II Corinthians 9:7**, what goes on this line is to be purposed in our heart. God has not imposed a tax-like requirement. Under the New Covenant giving is entirely a free will offering. However, it is not something we do on the spur of the moment, we are to plan our free will offerings to the Lord.
 3. **II Corinthians 9:6** says our giving is to be bountiful. We can pinch pennies when it comes to buying groceries, paying for utilities or buying our cars. But when it comes to giving, God wants bountiful. Yes, we are left to our judgment on that. But bountiful is God's standard.
 4. Also, the amount on this line is to be sacrificial. The first acts of giving were just that...sacrifices. Jesus' illustration of the widow's mites in **Mark 12:41-44** demonstrates sacrificial giving. If it is not costing us something, we are not giving biblically.
 5. Finally, notice **II Corinthians 8:7-9**. Paul says the amount on this line is not a commanded number or percentage but rather an indicator of the sincerity of our love for Christ. Then he reminds them what Jesus did for them. In other words, this line and what we write on it is an indicator of our thankfulness for Christ's sacrifice. Keep this in mind, if those under the Old Covenant, which had sacrifices that could not really provide grace, had a baseline of 10% with free will offerings on top of that, where should we, who are under a better covenant with better promises, be with our giving (**cf. Hebrews 8:6**).

IV. The memo.

- A. On this line, if you write on it at all, you probably put something like “contribution” or “giving”. But we need to understand this is more than a charitable donation.
- B. If we broke it down into what this money is actually for, we could write down numerous things.
 - 1. Benevolence: doing good for saints. If you remember, 12% of Americans are at the poverty level, which means we will have members in need at some time and we can help them.
 - 2. Evangelism: this includes local preacher support, foreign preacher support, Dial-A-Devotion, materials used to teach the gospel, advertising, etc.
 - 3. Edification: this includes the building in which we assemble for encouragement and edification, materials for Bible classes, preachers we invite to conduct special series to help us grow, songbooks, pew Bibles, etc.
 - 4. If we wanted to be most accurate, we would write “saving souls.” In all accounts our collection is for the purpose of converting the lost, strengthening the saved and helping our brethren in need, it is all about getting everyone to heaven.
- C. Far too often, people back off on their giving because this line is empty for them. To them giving is not for anything; it is just something we are supposed to do. They recognize a need when there is something special like a building project. Filling in this line helps us see there is a need. Our need is not just to meet our budget. We have some plans, but imagine what we could do if we were at the 10% figure we learned about a few minutes ago. How many preachers could we support in Russia and Africa with another \$180,000 every year? We could support another full-time worker here. We could host a preacher training program. We could conduct a radio or television program. We could do so much. The work this congregation can support will always be limited by the sum total of what each of us gives. As each of us becomes more devoted to giving, our work ability increases. Do not leave this line blank.

V. The signature.

- A. This is the final part of writing the check. It may seem like an unimportant line. But we learn from this line as well. When we put our signature on the line, we are entering into a contract with God. We are saying that everything else on this check is about us and our personal devotion to God and to worship.
- B. What is on this check is between you and God. It is not you saying anything to anyone else. It is your personal contract with the Lord that you are giving back to Him based on His blessings to you. How thankful are you for what God has done for you?

Conclusion:

While this topic is a fearful one for me, we must learn about it. Giving is worship. It is sacrificing to God. It is honoring God. It is thanking God. Certainly, I am partially motivated because there is so much we could do as a congregation if our contribution was higher. But the main motivation to preach this lesson is our spiritual growth as individual Christians to be more devoted to God and to worship. God does not need us to give. We need to give to be like God and to honor God.