

Introduction to Christian Ethics
Course Developed by Ron Habinski for

Unit #8 Key Apostolic Ethical Themes
8E Christian Principles for Giving

- The topic we are going to explore next is the teaching of the New Testament on the subject of giving.
 - Early Christian believers, like believers in every generation up to the present, have needed guidance on this subject.
 - The Old Testament contains a lot of teaching on this subject, including very detailed regulations about prescribed offerings that were to be given to God at various times in the year and on special life occasions.
 - An important part of this teaching was the principle of tithing, or giving a tenth of every type of garden produce and a tenth of the annual increase in every type of edible animal.
 - Earlier in this course (**Unit 7G - *Slavery, Freedom and Stewardship***) we took a detailed look at the Old Testament's teaching about tithing, so I don't propose to examine it again now in detail, but I would like to remind you of two points that we discovered when we examined that teaching.
 - First, the Old Testament teaching about tithing was never applied in the Old Testament to income in the form of precious metal or money, even though it was not uncommon for labourers to be paid in money in the form of coins.
 - Those who suggest that financial income should be tithed have to overcome the silence of both Testaments to justify this idea, and I can't imagine how they can do it.
 - Secondly, tithing, as it was taught and practiced in Old Testament times, ***was not just about giving to God and His servants.***
 - It seems clear from the teaching of the Old Testament that in every third year the tithe was stored up in the towns and villages of Israel, for local distribution over the next three years to any who were needy and unable to support themselves.
 - I have never heard it proposed by anyone that the financial givings of Christians should be distributed in this way.
 - As far as I know, no one who teaches tithing by Christians says that they should give one third of it to the needy, and two thirds of it to a local church.
 - For these two reasons, I can confidently assert that no one alive in the world today practices tithing as it is taught in the Law of Moses, and the New Testament does not authorize any other sort of approach to tithing.
- Q: What do you suppose the apostolic leaders and teachers of the**

primitive Christian church thought about the large body of Old Testament teaching about offerings and tithes?

- Did they see any of this Old Testament teaching as binding upon Christians?

A: Of course not.

Q: Is there any proof for that statement?

A: Yes, there are at least three proofs.

- **First**, the teaching of the New Testament to the early Christian churches about giving does not repeat the teaching of the Old Testament on the subject of giving, and it does not mention even once the idea that Christians should tithe.

- If Christians were *required* or *expected* or even *encouraged* to tithe it is remarkable that they are *never* encouraged to do so in the New Testament.

- There is never a hint or acknowledgement that it was expected of them, and it is unbelievable that it could have been expected of them if the requirement was never mentioned to them.

- **Second**, tithing was a part of the Mosaic Law, and the apostles told all the Churches that they were not required to observe that body of law.

- However, they mentioned four teachings of Moses that they encouraged believers to respect.

[READ Acts 15:1f, 5f, 10f, 22-29]

- Note that *what is said about these four exceptions falls short of being a command*.

- That is a good thing, since Paul elsewhere says very clearly and emphatically that *there is nothing wrong with eating meat that has been sacrificed to an idol, if we recognize that it comes from God and are thankful for it* (1 Cor 8).

- Very clearly, the Old Testament teaching about tithes and offerings is not included in this list of four Mosaic teachings that Gentile believers were encouraged to observe.

- That means that the Churches were not encouraged to tithe any more than they were encouraged to keep the Sabbath or avoid eating pork or shellfish.

- **Third**, the New Testament includes instructions to the Churches about giving, instructions that are quite extensive, comprehensive and sufficient for our guidance, when collected and studied, especially in Paul's Corinthian letters and Romans.

- As we examine them together their sufficiency for our guidance should be crystal clear.

- When we have examined this body of teaching it should also be clear that when giving was being discussed in detail, tithing was not considered a significant part of what needed to be said on the subject.

- As we examine what the New Testament *does* teach about giving, I encourage you to consider it with an open mind as if you have never heard any of it before.
- Preparing this lesson has made me re-examine my approach to giving, and this self-examination has not been a comfortable experience for me.
- But I believe it has been worthwhile, and I hope you will find that true for yourself as well.

13 New Testament Principles for Christian Giving

- I think that as we go through these principles we will find that the emphasis of the New Testament is *remarkably different* from that of the Old Testament.
- The Old Testament speaks about what people should give and how much they should give.
- The New Testament generally avoids talking about *how much* we should give or *what* we should give; instead it focuses on *how* we should give.

1. Love God.

- To a follower of Jesus, it is entirely reasonable to introduce this basic principle into the examination of almost any ethical question.
- Jesus made it very clear in His teaching that the most important command in the Law and thus the most important principle for our ethical guidance, was loving God with all our heart and soul and mind, or in other words, with our all.
- If this principle is to guide and govern us in our relationship with God, then clearly it should guide our giving to Him, as well.
- If our giving to God is not inspired by love, if it does not flow from love, then it is an empty and worthless mockery of the worship God deserves from us.

Q: When the plate is passed, how do you and I give? Do we give out of love to God, or to those made in His image?

- And if we do, what results should follow if that motive inspires and guides our giving?

2. Another important principle is that first of all we are to give ourselves to the Lord.

(2 Cor 8:5. Cf. 1 Cor 6:20 “You are not your own, you were bought with a price.”).

- If we grasp and accept this concept, it can radically change our attitude toward our personal property.

Q: What sort of impact would a reasonable person expect it to have?

A: [DISCUSS]

3. We are to give cheerfully 2 Cor 9:6-11; 8:10 e.g. 2 Cor 9:5

- This is very similar to saying that our giving should flow from love for God.

Q: Could any other kind of giving to God possibly please Him?

- On the basis of this principle, some offerings are, no doubt, best left in people's purses or wallets.

- It has been said, that, "*God loves a cheerful giver, but He will accept donations from a grouch.*"

- The money given may be useful for God's purposes in either case, because in itself money is neither good nor bad, but useful.

- However, it is only the cheerful giver whose giving attracts God's love and blessing.

- The "*not under compulsion*" principle is important to note here.

- It is hard to give cheerfully if we are required, forced or commanded to do it.

- But we are not required, forced or commanded, or this *not under compulsion* principle would be silly and meaningless.

- If we were required to give a fixed percentage, then obedience to that standard or rule would be very important and that would involve compulsion.

- But if we are *not to give under compulsion*, the idea of a fixed portion that we are required, counselled or expected to give is ruled out.

- Clearly we are not held to the standard of giving a specific portion of our income or wealth.

- Verses 6 and following remind us that giving to God is like sowing seed.

- We can expect to reap what we sow or rather *the amount that we sow*.

- If we really believed this, we might well choose to give more, but we would not be doing it because God tells or requires us to do so, but because we are sure it is worthwhile to give to our Lord.

- I do not say it pays in money or in the things this world tends to value, but it pays, nevertheless.

- Jesus once said something that fits well in this context: John 4:23.

- When our giving comes as the outflow of a truly worshipful spirit that wants to give to God, we do not need to be told how much to give.

- And whatever we freely choose to give to God is *all that we are capable of giving to Him properly*, because gifts that do not come from a willing heart are not pleasing to Him.

- Summing up this point then, *the amount that we should give to God is the amount that we can give freely, cheerfully and because we really want to,*

and not one penny more.

- If you give only what you really want to give, and you do it with a cheerful heart, you are doing it well.

- We can let our trust in His faithfulness encourage us to give more, but even that is left up to us.

- This is pretty radical and unsatisfying thinking to people who want to be told in specific terms how much they ought to put in the offering plate.

- Jesus said that God wants, and is actively seeking for, worshippers who will worship Him *willingly and genuinely*, not in Jerusalem and not with any specified percentage of our wealth or income.

Questions or comments?

4. Give thoughtfully 2 Cor 9:7 [READ]

Q: What does this really mean, do you think? What would be the opposite of giving thoughtfully?

A: The opposite of thoughtful giving would be impulsive or sporadic giving, giving only when the impulse strikes us when we think of it or feel like it.

- This principle implies that the subject of our giving deserves serious thought; there is room for serious personal deliberation and decision where my giving is concerned.

- A believing husband and wife should discuss it seriously and agree upon their joint course of action.

- Clearly this principle implies that there is no amount that is required or fixed or right or proper.

- If there were, such personal deliberation would be superfluous.

- If responsible giving involves contributing a tithe plus a little extra, what is there to think about?

Q: Why is Paul wasting our time with all these touchy feely principles like first giving ourselves to God, and giving cheerfully and thoughtfully?

- Hasn't Paul heard about tithing?

Why is he making everything so complicated and vague?

A: I think part of Paul's reason is that he realizes that our giving to God and to the needy is not primarily about raising the maximum amount of money.

- If he thought that, he could have encouraged tithing or recommended sacrificial giving.

- I think Paul realized that giving is about learning how to grow in our desire and willingness to show our love in practical ways, to living lives guided by love.

- This is not just about commands, but about encouraging the growth of a generous inner spark in us that wants to please God and loves to serve

others.

- That's why understanding who we belong to is essential.
- It is why giving in a cheerful and thoughtful way is more important than being encouraged to give a lot.
- Typically Christian teachers and preachers are 99% wrong in what they teach about the Christian's responsibilities in giving.

- Of course, everyone's situation is different.
- In some cases, a tithe may be far too little, in others, more than a person can handle.
- Someone might argue that tithing and prescribed offerings were God's requirements for unspiritual people, so Christians should begin at the tithe and work up from there.
- This line of argument has often been put forward, with the best of motives, no doubt, by people looking for arguments to persuade Christians to give more.

- But *the New Testament does not draw any such conclusion from the Mosaic law of tithing. It just ignores tithing entirely.*

- And this apparently spiritual argument amounts to trying to sneak the principle of tithing back in by the back door.
- A similar approach would say that we are now allowed to eat pork and shellfish, even though the Law of Moses condemns eating them; however, if God said not to eat them back then, He must have had a good reason, they must be bad for us, so we probably shouldn't eat them now even if we are allowed to do so.
- Using this sort of argument we could go on to reinstate practically every Mosaic law, on the basis that God must have had a good reasons for giving all of them, so we should live by them even if we are not technically or legally required to do so.
- We should give thoughtfully.

Q: Have you ever sat down and thought seriously about how much you would like to give to God?

- I deliberately avoided saying, **how much you should give.**

Q: If you are married, have you and your partner ever discussed seriously how much you can give cheerfully and without reluctance, and how much you would like to give?

- Notice that the scriptures do not mention making this decision *prayerfully*, as if to suggest that we should be seeking God's will in this matter.
- *God leaves this very important subject entirely to us and to our awakened consciences, to decide for ourselves.*
- This should not involve looking in our wallets on a Sunday morning to see

what we happen to have and then deciding how much of it we can spare or how much of it we can justify keeping for ourselves.

- There comes a time in the growth of our children when one of them says to mom or dad, ***“Do you want or expect or require me to do such and such a thing?”***

- And we as parents respond, ***“I am not going to tell or advise you what to do. You are old enough to decide for yourself what is the right thing to do and act accordingly.”***

- I remember saying speaking such words to some of my children, and I remember them going on to make a responsible decision based on what they believed was right.

- I also remember some grumbling, because when they were asked to take responsibility for doing what they thought was the right thing to do, they then felt that they had to do the very thing they didn't want to do.

- Doing the right thing was easier for them to resist when it came as a rule from mom or dad than when it came as the prompting of their conscience.

- Remarkably, God is saying exactly the same thing to us in this portion about giving.

- ***“You take responsibility for deciding what you will give, don't expect commands and orders on this from Me.***

- ***I am not impressed by gifts that I have to command people to give me.”***

- Spiritual children may need a specific rule, like 10 percent, but God wants us to be spiritual adults, deciding for ourselves how much we will give Him.

- Consequently, He has entirely removed that ancient and honourable principle from the New Testament's instruction on giving.

- This puts the responsibility of being responsible in our giving on our shoulders where it belongs, and where God wants it to be.

- Christian teaching on giving is different from Old Testament teaching on Giving.

- It is teaching for grownups, and that is what God wants us to be.

5. Give systematically 1 Cor 16:2

- Things like eating and sleeping and paying bills, most of us make a matter of regular practice, custom or habit.

- That is what we do with things that we consider important or worthwhile.

- Sensible people do not say to themselves, ***“I don't think I'll bother eating or sleeping this week; I don't feel led in that direction.”***

- We do these things systematically, because we see them as too important to be left to the impulse of the moment or to do without consistency and self-discipline.

- Systematic giving involves self-discipline, regularity and a deliberate

decision on what amount or portion of income we will give on a regular basis.

- By now, a practically minded person may be getting quite impatient with the lesson I am teaching.
- You may be thinking, “*For crying out loud, tell me how to determine how much I should give. What would God like me to do about this?*”
- **If that is where you are, you will have to get used to the fact that the Scriptures do not provide the kind of answer you think you need.**
- We are not told what our giving system should be; in fact we are not even given any suggestions or hints on this subject in the New Testament.
- I believe this comes under the heading of our liberty in Christ.
- We can and must decide for ourselves how much to give.
- If you really want an answer, just ask fellow Christians.
- Sooner or later you will meet one who thinks he has it all figured out and will give you the kind of answer you are looking for it.
- His answer may be base on a numerological analysis of the book of Enoch, but if that is good enough for him, why not for you?
- Apparently God really wants us to make up our own minds on this matter, and has left us to do so.
- Having us grow up spiritually seems to be more important to Him than separating us from our money.
- As our Father He is concerned about our spiritual growth and maturation.
- He is not a Roman tax collector trying to maximize what He collects at our expense.
- We must be remember that God does not need our money.
- He could finance every imaginable good work forever and not notice the expenditure.
- He lets us have a part in financing worthwhile things because it is good for us.

A: Have you any thoughts or questions on this?

6. The giving of spiritual people must also leave room for the leadership of the Holy Spirit Gal 5:18 [READ].

- Paul makes the very important point in this verse that our emancipation from the requirements of the Law of Moses is based on the reality of the Holy Spirit’s leading in our lives.
- There are two different words meaning *if* in Greek, and the one used here supposes the truth of the if statement. It has much the same meaning as the English word “*since*.”
- But if our responsiveness to the Spirit’s leading in our lives is *assumed* here as a fundamental given in the life of the believer, we must *ensure* that it

is a reality in our lives.

- Doing that means that every area of our lives must be open to His guidance and direction.

- We have no right to say to Him, *“You can lead in these parts of my life but I exempt this one and that one.”*

Q: So what does all this mean for our giving?

A: I think it means that whatever we decide freely and cheerfully to give to God on a regular basis, we should also be responsive to the Spirit’s day-by-day guidance in our lives where giving is concerned.

- From time to time we learn of special needs that money can help to meet.

- These may be needs in God’s work, and needs of people who find themselves in situations involving hardship.

- We are unlikely to be able to respond to every appeal directed to us.

- But when the Holy Spirit brings an appeal home to our feelings and our consciences we should be ready to respond.

- ***We should not be immune to appeals based on need.***

- If we never give in to a generous impulse in response to a need that we take to heart, we probably deserve to be seen as callous and hard-hearted people instead of loving and Spirit led.

- Spiritual people consider giving a natural way of responding to needs that they become aware of and concerned about; and they are open to considering such needs.

- When the Christians in Judea were going hungry because of a famine, Paul let the Gentile Churches elsewhere know about their urgent need for help

1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:13-15 [READ].

- The churches with predominantly Gentile memberships responded very generously. **2 Cor 8:1-4 [READ]**

- In this way, they set a good example for us, and we should be ready to follow it.

- We should have no difficulty doing this, if we accept the Spirit’s leading in our lives.

7. When there is a serious need, it is good to give generously Rom 12:6-8 [READ].

- It is very important, I think, to realize that Paul is speaking here about giving generously in the context of spiritual gifts.

- In verse 8 he has made it quite clear that there is a spiritual gift for contributing to the needs of others.

- I believe that the whole point of this gift is to excel in serving God in this way, and to serve as an example to other believers.

- People with this gift may not have much of this world’s goods, but they

find ways of sharing with and helping others (part-time jobs, creative fund raising, challenging others to give, etc.).

- I once heard about a Scot who had a well-deserved reputation for being a very thrifty penny pincher.

- A couple of men who were collecting for a charitable cause happened to call on him, although they did not expect to get much.

- To their surprise, he gave very generously.

- When they expressed their surprise at the size of his gift, he remarked that his habits of thrift enabled him to respond to needs.

- There is a spiritual gift of giving, and each of us should consider the possibility that we have received this gift.

- There are three important things to bear in mind about a personal spiritual gift:

❖ recognize that you have received it;

❖ cultivate it through personal effort ;and

❖ practice your gift as a way of serving others.

- Generous giving to needy people does not involve asking how much we have to give or should give.

- It involves **choosing** to be generous, and cultivating a generous spirit.

- We have already been reminded of how generously the Macedonian believers gave to the relief of Judean believers affected by famine

2 Cor 8:1-4 [READ].

- This is a way of loving our neighbours, and when the needy people we share with are fellow believers, it is a way of loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

- Giving to others in need, especially when they are fellow believers, is a very important part of our giving to our Lord.

- The proof of this is what Jesus said on the subject **[READ] Mt 25:31-46.**

- ***Jesus is telling us in the strongest possible language that He insists on taking personally the way we treat fellow believers in situations of crisis or in need.***

- The needs He is speaking about involve giving of our time and personal involvement, and not just our money.

- Consider the very emphatic and deliberately warning tone of Jesus' words here.

- They seem to point out the seriousness of giving to needy believers and doing what we can to comfort and help them.

- Such acts of love probably play far too small a part in our lives.

- Another of Jesus' teachings reinforces this one about giving generously to help needy believers.

- Jesus said, ***“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you***

love one another.” (Jn 13:35)

- If you examine the teachings of the New Testament on giving, you will find that almost all of this teaching is given in connection with the support of the needy, especially among believers or in sister churches.
- You will find no corresponding emphasis on giving for the other financial needs of the local congregation.
- This emphasis on giving to meet the needs of the needy should guide our personal approach to giving and how we allocate our givings.
- We tend to think of benevolent fund giving as an extra or an add-on in our approach to giving, but the emphasis of the New Testament indicates that it should be a basic and essential part of our giving.
- By the way, generous giving to needy believers *does not have to mean bringing ourselves to the point of personal hardship*.
- Look with me at what is said in **2 Cor 8:13-15** [READ].
- On the other hand, *a generous and loving spirit may lead us to voluntarily bring ourselves voluntarily to the point of personal hardship*.
- Look with me at **verse 4**.
- **Verses 7 and 8** underline the idea that we should aim to excel in the grace of giving, but the point is emphatically made that this advice to give generously when there is a real need *is given to us as an encouragement, not a command*.
- **The use of the word “grace” in verse 7 implies what Paul says more plainly in Romans 12:8, that such generosity in giving is a spiritual gift.**
- The word for a spiritual gift <*charisma*> means the result or product of grace (God’s grace in us).
- When Paul refers to “*this grace*” he means the grace of God working in and through us as God moves us to give.

8. Our giving should be consistent with God’s blessing in our lives 1 Cor 16:2 (Cf. Lk 12:48 [READ]).

- In principle this seems a very obvious point.
- If God gives us more we should pass more of it on to His work or to the needy.
- But people can easily become blind to what should be clear and obvious to them.
- I remember conversations I had with Christian teenage fellows in my youth, when we discussed the fact that in our congregation there were families that were quite wealthy, and others that were in difficult financial circumstances.
- We noted that the families that had more seemed to think that it was given to them so that they could spend more on themselves, because they did.

- We thought it was obvious that what they had received was entrusted to them, and that at least some of it ought to be used with the needs of others in mind.
- As far as we could tell, these well-to-do families didn't realize this.
- Our youthful bursts of insight were not based on any magical knowledge of how much families in our congregation were giving to God's work or to the needy, but only on the obviously affluent life style of some.
- We were jumping to conclusions about others that may have been unfair and unjustified, but, all the same, I think we had grasped an important Biblical principle.
- ***People who have more should give more and share more.***
- Our giving should be consistent with God's blessing in our lives.
- Those who have more have it because God has enabled them to earn or get more.
- Possibly those who are materially blessed need to appreciate that God's greater blessing in this area is a trust that should be shared with others.
- Paul says quite plainly that **our giving should be consistent with God's blessing in our lives.**

9. We should give in accordance with our personal ability to give 2 Cor 8:12 [READ].

- The point this verse makes is similar to the point we have just finished examining.
- But the context shows that a different situation is being addressed.
- The previous passage was addressed to individuals some of whom had received material blessings from God, so some could give a lot, and did.
- But this verse seems to be addressed to people who don't have much to share with the needy, and feel badly about their inability to give.
- This would be the situation of a believers with limited financial means or a Christian woman married to an unbelieving husband who objects to giving any significant portion of family income to God's work or to the needy.
- ***This verse comforts people who can give little or nothing by saying, "If you are willing to contribute to the needy or to worthy causes, but are unable to do so, that is all right.***
- ***When you are willing to give but cannot, it is all right not to give.***
- ***In fact it is more than all right.***
- ***Your willingness to give counts for as much with God as your giving would if you were able to do give."***
- When we are willing to give but unable, we get as many points in Heaven's accounting book as if we had actually given what we would like to give.
- What this passage shows is that God who asks us to take a spiritual and

non-legalistic approach to giving is personally doing the same thing in His record keeping concerning our giving.

- He is looking at our hearts, and not just at the number of dollars we put in the plate or give to needy people we learn about.
- Jesus was making the same point when he commented on the offering presented by the poor widow who gave two of the smallest copper coins then in existence.
- He said that she had given more than anyone else.
- ***Our willingness and desire to give counts for more with God than the size of our offering, and God wants us to know this.***
- That's why this point is mentioned here in His word.

10. Give according to your commitments or pledges 2 Cor 9:5 [READ].

- I believe we should be very cautious about encouraging people to make formal written pledges about what they will give to a cause.
- But there is a place for undertaking a financial commitment to support an important cause or respond to a vital need.
- A vow is like a trap that people can fall into and then be unable to get themselves out of.

Q: Can you think of occasions when it might be proper to do this?

A: [DISCUSS]

- I am really uncomfortable about pressuring people to keep their pledges, but a gentle reminder is in keeping with what Paul is doing in this verse.

11. Give confidentially Mt 6:1-4 [READ].

- The metaphor Jesus is using here is very clear.
- Jesus knows that of itself, a hand has no consciousness and knows nothing.
- It is the mind that knows things, not the hand, and the mind knows about both hands.

Q: So what is the point Jesus is making by using this metaphor?

A: [DISCUSS] Even those near to us should not be told about our giving.

- I don't suppose He had in mind keeping such things from a spouse.
- But ***it is very important to keep our charitable givings and actions a secret.***
- Jesus gives us two good reasons for this.
- First, He says not to do it, and His word is our law.
- This is one of the explicit few commands Jesus ever gave.
- Second, He makes it very clear that telling others about our giving deprives us of the expectation of any reward from God.
- We must choose between the praise of men and God's reward.

- Both of these are desirable things.
- But we can only have one or the other, not both.

12. Be open to the possibility of sacrificial giving [READ] 2 Cor 8:1-3, 7; 9:1-4 (Cf. Mk 12:41-44 Cf. Jesus' example: 2 Cor 8:8f; 9:15).

- The woman that Jesus held up as an example of excellence put two of the smallest copper coins in existence at that time into the offering box.
- But Jesus said that she had given all she could give, all she had.

Q: Why do you suppose she did that? The Law certainly didn't require or suggest it.

A: [DISCUSS]

- If she had had nothing to put in, she would have received the very same credit in heaven's fair ledger, because she was willing to give her all.
- There have been Christian leaders who have urged people to do what she did.
- But sacrificial giving is never commanded in Scripture.
- In fact it is never even urged upon us.
- Still, God wants us to know about examples of sacrificial giving.
- He wants us to be encouraged and challenged by the example of people who have excelled in this kind of service.
- That is why Jesus drew the attention of the disciples to this woman's offering, and why Paul speaks about examples of sacrificial giving.

13. Give so that God will be thanked and praised for the generosity of His people 2 Cor 9:12-14, Mt 5:16 [READ]

- It is human nature to do things that make us look good in the eyes of others.
- This passage appeals to a very different and uncommon desire, the desire to make our God look good to others.
- The point is to let others see the loving and generous impact that God has in our lives.
- This motive supposes personal love for God and loyalty to Him.
- The possibility of bringing praise and glory to God by our giving should motivate us to want to give more so that He will get the credit for the generosity He inspires in us.
- Such giving is a way of giving feet to the prayer, "*Hallowed be Thy Name,*" or *May your name be regarded more highly than any other.*

14. Make giving to the needy a high priority in your giving, especially when the needy are believers Gal 6:10; [READ].

- Over and over again the passages we have examined about giving in the

early church were speaking about giving in the context of meeting the needs of the poor, rather than meeting the budgetary needs of a local congregation.

- This biblical emphasis seems at odds with the idea that believers should make their local congregation's financial needs their first concern and commitment.
- Possibly the limited mention of giving to meet congregational expenses can be explained by the situation of the early Christian congregations.
- It seems that in the early days very few of them had a congregationally owned building to pay for, maintain and heat, and some, at least, did not have paid pastors.
- During early times of persecution by the Roman government congregational meetings had to be kept secret, and this precluded having a publicly-recognized congregationally-owned building set aside for worship and instruction.
- Over time the growth and development of local congregations led to the need for buildings set aside for worship and instruction, and this, in turn, led to growing congregational expenses.
- No one doubts that such expenses are proper ones, and that Christians have a responsibility to meet them.
- But the reality of such needs should not blind us to the fact that the emphasis of the giving teaching in the New Testament is on giving to help the needy.
- This is also implied in Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 6:1-4** [READ].
- In this passage He speaks about keeping our acts of righteousness (mitzvahs) confidential.
- Such acts were often concerned with ministering to the needs of the poor and needy. (e.g. daily food distribution to Christian widows – Acts 6:1).
- Possibly such giving has come to seem less important in some congregations simply because we expect our government to meet many such needs through its social welfare systems.
- In Matthew 6:2-4 Jesus speaks very specifically about giving to the needy <i.e. Doing an *eleémosuné* – a compassionate gift or act>.
- Elsewhere Jesus makes the point that we will always have poor people to minister to (Mt 26:11).
- That being the case, it follows that we will have ongoing responsibility for helping to meet their needs, and clearly the emphasis of the New Testament shows that we should recognize this as a personal responsibility and priority.
- The Macedonian congregations begged to be allowed to share in this ministry **2 Cor 8:3f** [READ].

- They also participated in it to the point of personal sacrifice and hardship.
- It should not have a smaller place in our hearts.

Q: What will be the result if these 14 Biblical principles guide our giving to God and to the needy?

A:

- ❖ We will grow in our personal maturity and responsibility.
- ❖ God will be pleased with us;
- ❖ the needy and worthwhile causes will be well supported;
- ❖ God will be praised by all those who are blessed in one way or another by our compassionate deeds; and
- ❖ the detailed Old Testament laws about tithes and offerings will never be missed.

Q: Have you any other thoughts on Christian giving?

[DISCUSS]