

# GOD AND MONEY

## Part 4- A Godward Reflection on Giving

TEXT: LUKE 11:37-42 (ESV)



Rev. Russ Ramsey  
March 7, 2010

Oak Hills Presbyterian Church,  
Overland Park, Kansas

### GIVING DATA

I am committed to at least two sermons per year to the topic of money. Early on, I assumed preaching on money would be received with suspicion and should be done sparingly. Over the years, however, I've been surprised and challenged to hear many of you express a desire to discuss this more. And this is right. The Bible has much to say about the relationship between wealth and faith. We **should** talk about it.

Today we're going to focus on our giving habits. While I'll only scratch the surface of all there is to say here, my prayer is that what we do discuss will be used by God to help us understand why we give as we do. I will tell you right now, I don't know what anyone at Oak Hills gives or earns, and because I don't, I can't make a judgment about the faithfulness of anyone's giving except my own. But today I want to invite you to examine your own giving practices. Why do you do what you do? That's the question I want us each to take before the Lord today.

There is a statistic called the "80-20 Principle"—80% of the average church's revenues come from 20% of her givers. This is a tricky statistic without context, since it may simply mean 20% of the givers in the church actually account for 80% of the church's collective income. That could be. I recently saw some of Oak Hills' raw statistics (*averages and percentages—no names or specific dollar amounts*) which showed that Oak Hills does a little bit better than the 80-20 Principle, but not by much. Why that is, I don't know. But if nothing else, it shows we are typical.

One recent study caught my eye. The Barna Group studied the national charitable giving for 2007. Their study showed 84% of evangelical Christians gave to churches or non-profit ministries over the course of a year, but only 27% gave with any regular, intentional plan. The contributions of those who gave in 2007 averaged \$1,308 per giving unit for the year. I don't know if Oak Hills fits this data, but it raises an interesting observation: most evangelicals give, but few do so with much consistency. Why do you think this is?

I grew up in the golden age of prosperity preachers swindling people out of their money, buying airplanes and then getting busted. Though I know many faithful pastors who teach on the topic of money and giving from the pulpit, I don't know many who don't feel at least a little nervous about it. I think that's one of the devil's little wins—if he can't remove God's instructions and wisdom concerning money from Scripture, maybe he can at least get us to avoid talking about it. But the Lord has so much to say and so much of it deals with our hearts before the Lord.

Church leaders have a responsibility to actively teach what Scripture says about wealth. But how we do it matters. If all we do is occasionally chastise congregations for being poor givers, we should expect short term increases in giving motivated by guilt followed by the seeds of distrust sprouting up in these congregations as they wonder where their pastors got their information. Guilt is as poor a reason to give as greed is not to. Both flow from a heart trying to run from the Lord, not to Him.

Today we're going to look at Godward giving by studying an encounter Jesus had with some meticulously reliable tithers, and unpack what He said about the heart behind their giving. I pray we'd be liberated from the bondage of fear that comes from trusting in money and be brought into the joyful freedom of trusting the Lord. After all, we have only ever had one Provider.

### LUKE 11:37-42

<sup>37</sup>While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. <sup>38</sup>The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. <sup>39</sup>And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. <sup>40</sup>You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup>But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

<sup>42</sup>"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

### SO RIGHT AND YET SO WRONG

What do we do and why do we do it? These two questions are so revealing. Jesus accepts an invitation to dinner. A Pharisee—an expert in God's Law—opens his home to Jesus and Jesus goes in and takes a seat. The Pharisee is astonished to notice that Jesus didn't wash first. This is a reference to a customary washing observed by Jews at the time. Scripture describes this custom in other places, (*Gen 18:4, Judges 19:21*) though it is never commanded. Whether the Pharisee said anything to Jesus, we can't say. But Jesus knew what was on his mind: Jesus ignored a ritual cleansing, and Jewish men didn't do that, especially rabbis.

In my mind, what happened next is I see Jesus reach over and pick up a cup. He thoughtfully begins to examine it and then says what Luke records: "You Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup well. But inside it is full of greed and wickedness." With this, now they're both focused on washing—the Pharisee on the ritual cleansing Jesus ignored and Jesus on what's inside His host.

Jesus goes on, "Fools, don't you know the One who made the outside made the inside too?" Jesus knows the distance between what we put on display for the world to see and what is really going on inside of us. The Pharisees were masters of making sure their outward behavior and appearance were both immaculate. But Jesus knows their legalism has filled them with self-confidence, though their hearts are far from God. They are hollow inside.

Verse 41 is difficult. Some translate it, “Give alms to the things within your reach, and everything else is clean for you.” What does this mean? My best analysis is Jesus is commenting on both the Pharisees’ lack of charity and their confusion about how a person is made clean in the sight of God. In the next verse Jesus rebukes them for neglecting justice and love (*alms*) while viewing their meticulous law-keeping as a means to appearing clean to others. I think Jesus means, “Look, if you’re sincerely engaged and invested in the needs in front of you, don’t worry about how you look.”

The Pharisees love attention, but they are like unmarked graves filled with a death veiled from those around them. (Lk 11:43-44) They seem to do everything right but they are so wrong about why they do it. There is nothing Godward in their obedience. It serves only them. One practice they do right wrongly is tithing. Let’s define what we mean by “tithe,” which means “tenth.”

The Old Testament law of tithing said 10% of what the people earned was to be given to the on-going ministry of their place of worship—the tabernacle. (Lev 27:30, Num 18:21-24, Neh 12:44, Mal 3:10) This began when the 12 tribes were settling in the Promised Land. One of the tribes, the Levites, were set apart to oversee Israel’s worship and tabernacle. The tithes from the other 11 tribes funded the ministry of the temple and provided for its ministers’ families. The church today essentially provides for the same things in the same way—by the contributions of the people. Giving to other specific causes was seen as *in addition* to the tithe—hence the expression “tithes and offerings.” (Mal 3:8)

The Pharisees were precise tithers. Even down to their herbs, one mint leaf out of ten went to the temple. Notice Jesus doesn’t tell them to stop. He tells them they ought to tithe, but they should do this **without** neglecting justice and love. They were great rule-keepers. But in matters of justice and love, the Pharisees were nowhere to be found. You might say they were all tithe but no offering—they fulfilled the letter of the law but never ventured beyond it. They gave without generosity. They loved to look good, but they didn’t love people. Jesus was shining the light on this. The problem wasn’t *how much* they gave. They gave one tenth. **The problem was why they did it.**

The Pharisees litigated and parsed technical obedience so they could boast in their own self-righteousness. But all their efforts combined didn’t glorify God because they weren’t meant to. They were meant to glorify the Pharisees. Our hearts should break here. These were the Bible Scholars. They were supposed to love God. Instead they saw religious rites as means of elevating themselves above those around them. And they were joyless in this. Remember, we’re talking about men who got upset over hand-washing when they had the Lord Jesus Christ in their home! What we give is empty if the reason why we give it is to need God less and exalt ourselves more.

## TWO QUESTIONS ON GIVING

Is the tithe still in effect today? It’s hard to offer a conclusive “yes” or “no” either way. On the one hand, we don’t live in the same colonized society as the original recipients of the Old Testament Law, we don’t maintain a common temple and on this side of the cross we don’t believe in a generational priestly succession, but instead a priesthood of all believers. On the other hand, you see Jesus uphold at least the concept of the tithe even with people who misuse it. Jesus could have easily said here, “Your tithe means nothing,” but He didn’t. And we also see Paul gathering money from the churches in Asia Minor for the survival of the famine-oppressed church in Jerusalem. (Rom 15)

A lot has changed since tithing was first introduced. I don’t know that I could insist the Old Testament rule is still in effect for New Testament churches. Maybe the Lord is calling you to give 5%. Maybe 25%. What I can say with Biblical certainty is that Christians are called to give, and if our approach is to try to figure the lowest we can get by with, we’re like the Pharisee in this text who figured 10% was the lowest he could go. Remember the point here is not how much we give. God doesn’t need our money. Do we see our whole lives as belonging to God for the purpose of redemptive, God-glorifying ends? That is what matters. Giving is and always will be a matter of the heart. Let’s see it. God’s desire is that our giving be:

- **IN PROPORTION TO OUR INCOME:** “according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” (2 Cor 8:12)
- **INTENTIONAL AND CONSISTENT:** “as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.” (1 Cor 16:1-2)
- **GIVEN FREELY AND JOYFULLY:** “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor 9:7)
- **OFFERED IN LIGHT OF WHAT CHRIST HAS GIVEN US:** “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among you, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” (Phil 2:4-7)

If our giving habits are in order to protect ourselves—either by legalistic tithing we believe will somehow buy God’s favor, or by neglecting to give at all for fear that we won’t be able to provide for ourselves—we deny God’s place as our true Provider. Godward giving knows our provision comes from the Maker and Lover of our souls, not personal wealth. Godward giving also recognizes that if “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil,” (1 Tim 6:10) we do well to interrogate our hearts when it comes to what we do with our money and why we do it.

Going back to that statistic from the beginning, of the 84% of evangelicals who give, only 27% do so with regular consistency. There could be a million explanations for this. But today I want to encourage you to find yourself in this statistic and ask why you are where you are. Don’t worry about anyone else. Just yourself. What are your giving habits and attitudes, and why?

Are you like the Pharisees in our text: rigorous in tithing but legalistic about it? Are you one who has prayerfully thought this through and delights in worshipping God through intentional, consistent and joyful giving? Are you one of the 16% who never give anything? Have you thought through why this is? Are you one of the 57% who give, but only sporadically? Do you know why this is? I’m not asking you to tell me or anyone else, for that matter. I’m not even asking you to give more. I’m asking you to answer why you give what you give, and to do that before the Lord. He already knows, but do you?

What are your giving habits, and why do you have them? Those are the two questions I want you to take home with you. May the Lord work in all of us so that our giving would be proportional, intentional and consistent—joyfully and freely offered in response to what Christ has done and what He means to make of our lives as His witnesses in this world. May He liberate us from both the fear and the love of money. And may we connect our time, talents, resources and even our very lives to God’s purposes for them and know the joy of trusting in Him alone for all we need in this life and in the life to come.