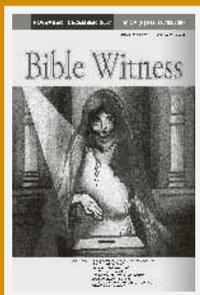


Bible Witness



Articles Inside: Why Should We Give Tithes and Offerings?
How Should We Give?
To Whom Shall We Give?
The Widow's Two Mites
The Generosity of the Early Church
Exercise Caution in Giving
The Lord's Provision Through a Young Boy
Bible Trivia - Genesis 35



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WHY SHOULD WE GIVE TITHES AND OFFERINGS?

What is a tithe? A tithe is a tenth of what we owe to God for all that He has given to us. The tithe is first mentioned in Genesis 14:20 when Abraham gave tithes to the Most High God for granting him victory over his enemies. God later required the Israelites to give a tenth of all their earnings in worship of Him, their Provider (Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:24-28; Deuteronomy 14:22).

Besides the tithe, there is also the offering. The offerings are voluntary gifts or freewill offerings (Exodus 25:2-3; 35:5, 21-29; Leviticus 7:16; 23:38; Numbers 7:2-88) in thanksgiving to God for answered prayers, or for special purposes like the building of God's house (Exodus 35:21; 36:3; Leviticus 7:12; 22:29).

A Command

So why should we give tithes? We give our tithes to God because (1) He commanded us to do so, and (2) the tenth is holy and belongs to Him. Leviticus 27:30, "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD."

Jesus told the people, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). The things that belong to Caesar, the

money that he requires in the form of taxes, give to him. Likewise, we ought to render unto God the tithe that is His. When a man does not tithe, he is said to have robbed God. God is angry at those who steal from Him: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (Malachi 3:8-9). Each time we get our paycheque, let us not forget to put one-tenth of it into the offering bag.

Obedience

Although God has commanded His people to tithe and offer to Him their material goods, yet nothing delights Him more than obedience. Samuel said, "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). How then should we offer our tithes and offerings? The offering of anything to the Lord must be preceded by a godly and sanctified life, or else our gifts would mean nothing to Him at all.

Love and Gratitude

We tithe and offer to God our possessions not only because it is commanded of us to do so, but also because we love Him and are

grateful to Him for all that He has given to us. Everything we have and own comes from the Lord. “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (John 3:27). In Him “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). If God does not provide for us a job, give us good health and strength to work, grant us good opportunities and success, we will not be able to earn and get gain. Therefore, we ought to show how thankful and grateful we are to the Lord by our heartfelt offerings. David expresses such a spirit well when he prayed, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

Sincerity and Truth

When we give to the Lord, it must be done out of a sincere and truthful heart. The Apostle Paul said, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). We must not be like Ananias and Sapphira who gave out of an insincere and deceitful heart. Peter rebuked Ananias, “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:3-4). When we give to the Lord, it must be done with a pure heart of love for the Lord, thinking only of Him and not of self. This is wonderfully demonstrated by the poor widow who only had two mites, but gave them all to the Lord which earned the Lord’s commendation, “Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she

of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mark 12:43-44).

Worship

When we present our tithes and offerings to God, we must do so worshipfully. “Give unto the LORD the glory due to his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chronicles 16:29). When entering into the presence of the Lord, we are told not to appear before Him empty (Exodus 23:15; 34:20). We are to honour the Lord with our substance, and with the first receipts of our profits (Proverbs 3:9).

Privilege

Tithing our tenth and offering to the Lord our gifts is a privilege. We give to the Lord not because He needs our money or goods, but because He desires our worship of Him sincerely expressed in tangible ways. The Lord is a debtor to no man. When we give to Him, He gives back to us even more, not just materially, but even more so, spiritually. “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Malachi 3:10). Above all, know this: “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).



JEFFREY KHOO

HOW SHOULD WE GIVE?

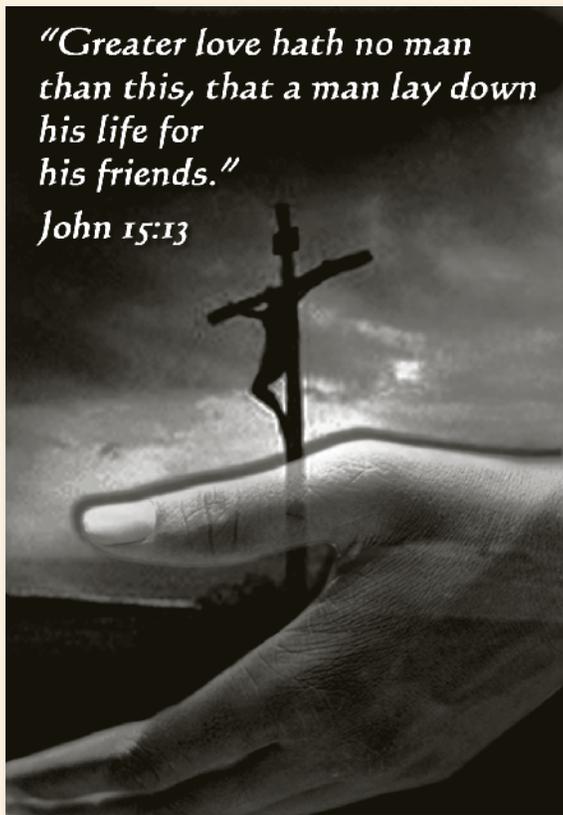
Christmas has come once again. It's a season to reflect and act upon God's greatest gift - the giving of His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for our salvation. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son..." (John 3:16a).

When God, the Father, gave us His Son, the Son of God showed no displeasure against it. In fact, Christ willingly gave Himself to be our redemption just as the Father has intended. "... the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:13-14; cf. Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 5:25; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

The above verse teaches us that the gift of Christ is intended to save us unto good works. Therefore, all who believe in Christ Jesus are capable of growing to be like Christ in giving

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

John 15:13



themselves sacrificially for the benefit of others and for God's glory.

Grounds for Giving – Love

It is clear from John 3:16 that grounds for God's gift of His Son is His love towards us. True love is ready to give for the benefit of others. It is ready to give anything, even one's own life. That is why Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

The Apostle Paul was a man who was driven by the spirit of Christ's love. His love for the church was so overwhelming. Expressing his love for the church in Corinth, he wrote, "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved" (2 Corinthians 12:15). His concern was not how much others loved him but how he could love others.

Genuine love does not seek for itself, neither does it hold back. It always seeks to spend and be spent for others. Love motivates us to give. If we truly love Christ, we must be willing to spend for His cause.

Now consider this, my friends - how well have you been expressing your love for Christ?

The Grand Example of a Giving Church

In Second Corinthians, Paul records for our learning how the brethren in Macedonia were motivated by love to spend and be spent. This record has an interesting background. While Paul was making his way through Europe, he made some effort to collect money for the hurting believers in Jerusalem. When he reached Macedonia, he announced the need of the fellow Christians in Jerusalem. What adds to the significance of this whole episode is that Macedonia was already an economically depressed area. It would be like encouraging some of the mission churches in poorer areas of the Philippines to support those in Ethiopia. This would be a strange appeal today! (Please read slowly and carefully the following words of Paul. Don't skip even a word!)

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

From the above report of Paul about the Macedonian believers, we can learn some important lessons about how we should practise giving:

◆ **Sacrificially:** Macedonians gave sacrificially because they were giving out of their own poverty and not out of wealth. Take note of Paul's report of their financial state when they gave towards the need in Jerusalem – "in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." The Macedonian Christians did not even have enough to feed themselves, when they decided to put together whatever they could find in order to support the needy Jerusalem Church.

According to Paul, "beyond their power they were willing of themselves" to support the brethren. What else could this be but their sacrificial love for the need of the Jerusalem Church?

◆ **Generously:** Have you noticed Paul's words about the Macedonians that they "abounded unto the riches of their liberality"? The word "abound" means "overflow", and thus a reference to their availability to help and bless the needy. Theirs was not a stingy giving. They were not calculating, to say "Look, we are already poor and, moreover, we have to give to our own church. So don't expect us to make another big gift to Jerusalem." There was not a penny-pinching man among them. On the contrary, they were liberal in their giving. How amazing!

◆ **Voluntarily:** Though Paul announced the need of the Jerusalemites, he did not twist their arms behind their backs. Paul wrote: "I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much intreaty that we would receive

the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.” It seems that Paul was so stunned by their liberality that he was unwilling to take their exceedingly generous gift. So they resolved to persuade Paul to accept their gift. They were very happy that they could minister to the need of the saints.

A little later in the same letter, Paul encouraged this spirit of voluntary spontaneity in our giving: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

◆ **Selflessly:** When they gave, they were not giving to make a name for themselves. In fact, no name is mentioned in this passage. Paul did not even mention which of the Macedonian churches contributed to the need. A great proof of Christian giving is anonymity. Unselfish giving does not seek publicity, but prefer to remain anonymous. Jesus said, “But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (Matthew 6:3).

◆ **Obediently:** The final lesson we learn through the Macedonian churches is that

giving is a matter of knowing God’s will and obeying it – “And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.” According to the Apostle Paul, such an unexpected contribution was the result of the Macedonians’ sensitivity and obedience towards God’s will.

The reason why some people groan and moan when it comes to giving is that they are not keeping close to the Lord to know His will. When a need in the Lord’s work is announced, they argue against it and express their unhappiness over such a call even before they take time to consider the matter and pray about it. On the other hand, those who keep close to the Lord and constantly seek to know and do His will, will joyfully make contributions to God’s work. This is not only true in monetary gifts but also giving oneself in service.



PRABHUDAS KOSHY

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TO WHOM SHALL WE GIVE?

9 Honour the LORD with thy
substance, and with the firstfruits
of all thine increase:
10 So shall thy barns be fill

When the issue of giving is raised, it is pertinent to ask, “To whom shall we give?” Although the answer seems straightforward, it is important to examine our understanding of this point. What does the Holy Scripture say as to the beneficiaries of our gift?

We Give to God

The primary subject of all our giving is God that He may be glorified. In fact, he who gives not unto the LORD has not given at all. In the light of the biblical teaching on giving, any gift that is not directed towards God cannot be properly recognized as a gift. God is the creator, possessor and dispenser of all the wealth stored up in heaven and earth (cf. Psalm 50:11-12; Haggai 2:6-8). Though God owns all things, He has given them to us to enjoy and manage for the praise of His gracious benevolence (cf. Genesis 1:26-29; 1 Chronicles 29:12-16). That is why God asks us to give back to Him what rightfully belongs to Him as an expression of our love and gratitude for His infinite goodness.

The LORD instructed Moses to “speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering...”

(Exodus 25:1-8). The gift was “gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen...”, all the expensive stuff (vv. 3-7). The purpose of this giving is clearly defined by the LORD: “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (v. 8). The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for centuries, and were delivered by the mighty hand of God. Now as they were journeying to the Promised Land, God asked them to build Him a sanctuary. The money and materials needed were to come from the freewill offerings of the redeemed people. The response of God’s people to this divine call was astounding. The people brought “much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment...saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing” (Exodus 36:5-6). May the LORD grant His people the same spirit of giving today!

Note that the LORD asked His people: “bring me an offering”, then, He described this offering as “my offering”. Our offerings are God’s offerings. Oh! What a blessed thought! Rulers of this world ask their subjects to

pay taxes. Yet, has any majesty ever asked his subjects to give him love-gifts? Suppose that you prepare the finest gift you could ever afford and attempt to present it to one of the richest person in your nation. Will he appreciate your gift and receive it from your hand? I think that he will be angry with you for despising him as if he were in need of your puny gift! Realize then, the loftiest privilege our heavenly Father has bestowed upon us. He owns all. He lacks nothing. Yet, He calls us to give Him tokens of our love for Him. He has given us the privilege to prove our loyalty and accountability to Him. Let this glorious thought move our hearts to honour the LORD with our substance, and to offer joyfully the best of all our earnings to His cause (Proverbs 3:9). The LORD deserves it!

We Give to God's Needy People

Giving to God involves providing for the needy ones among His flock. The Holy Scripture instructs us, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Showing compassion to the poor and needy is one of the moral duties of God's people. God charged His people that if there is a poor person among them, "thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth" (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). Though we may not always know why people become poor, the Bible affirms that "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Deuteronomy 15:11; cf. Mark 14:7). This is a humbling thought. God is saying that in His government, there will be poor brethren among His redeemed people. The implication here is that this poverty is not the result of their indolence or laziness, but comes by divine providence that can be explained only

by the Creator's wisdom. But our duty is clear: we are urged to open our hands wide unto these poor and needy brethren and provide for their necessities out of the blessings God has graciously bestowed upon us. This good work is described as a well-pleasing sacrifice offered unto the LORD (Hebrews 13:16).

Works of charity done in obedience to God's will is a prerequisite for the acceptance of our prayer and worship in the sight of God (cf. Isaiah 58:6-12). Ministering to the needy is one gauge of the genuineness of our Christian profession: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27; cf. 2:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8, 16). Works of mercy demonstrates God's redemptive power that we have experienced by faith in Christ Jesus (1 John 3:16-18). Thus, the challenge "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (v. 17). Therefore, we are exhorted to express our love in practical deeds of kindness (v. 18).

Remember that God identifies Himself with the poor and the needy, and thus, giving to them is as good as giving to the LORD as it is written, "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again" (Proverbs 19:17; cf. Matthew 25:34-46). God will reward abundantly all who freely and cheerfully practise works of kindness. Though we are not doing it for any return, God bestows both spiritual and physical blessings upon His people who obey His command willingly (Deuteronomy 15:10; Hebrews 6:10; Proverbs 11:25; Luke 6:38). Note that our works of compassion and charity must be extended

to all humanity as we are exhorted to “do good unto all men” (Galatians 6:10).

We Give to God’s Servants

God’s servants are born-again believers whom the LORD has called out from their secular business to be fully engaged in the Christian ministry. Though they have the mental calibre and skills to work and earn their living and also to provide for their families, they dedicate themselves fully to the spiritual care of His people and the preaching of the Gospel because God has chosen them. As a result, they are left without means of sustenance. That is why it is common to see families of God’s servants in distress.

Both the Old and New Testament Scriptures teach that God’s servants in full-time service are provided for by the LORD through the generous gifts of His people. In the dispensation of the old covenant, the priests and the Levites, whom the LORD separated to Himself for the service of His house, were not given any inheritance among God’s people. The LORD declared that He is their inheritance. Therefore, God made provisions for them from the holy things that are offered to Him. Therefore, those ministers were living on the gifts of God’s redeemed people (cf. Numbers 18; Deuteronomy 14:27-29).

The same pattern is adopted in the dispensation of the new covenant, for the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). Jesus Christ charged His apostles to go and preach

the Gospel and minister to the spiritual needs of the people, trusting in His provision for their daily necessities (Luke 10:7; Matthew 10:10; cf. 1 Timothy 5:17-18). He exhorted them to cast themselves upon His gracious hands for their living because the workman is worthy of his wages. God’s provision for the ministers of the Gospel is, once again, channelled through the loving hands of His redeemed people as it is written, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (Galatians 6:6).

Therefore, God’s people have a spiritual duty to show compassion to such ones who went forth because of the name of Christ (3 John 5-8). By caring for the needs of the Christian labourers, they become co-labourers with them in the preaching and defence of the Gospel. When God’s people acknowledge God’s wise arrangement and joyfully support the ministers of the Gospel, their gifts become well pleasing and acceptable unto God as a sweet smelling sacrifice (Philippians 4:18). Moreover, the righteous God will reward those who do minister sacrificially to the needs of His servants for the sake of His name (Hebrews 6:10; cf. 2 Kings 4:8-17; Matthew 10:40-42). Know, therefore, that in all our giving, we give to the LORD, our Creator and Redeemer!



EPHREM CHIRACHO OUCHULA

God asks us to give back to Him what rightfully belongs to Him as an expression of our love and gratitude for His infinite goodness.

THE WIDOW'S TWO MITES



The familiar account of the poor widow who gave her two mites in Mark 12:41-44 with a parallel reference in Luke 21:1-4 provides a relevant and blessed lesson on Christian giving. That it is a real life example of giving by ordinary people lends credence to the lesson's applicability to us. Furthermore, it stems from an actual encounter of the Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching came directly from His lips. The story thus stands as an authoritative and undisputable teaching on God's expectations in the way His people are to bring their gifts to Him.

The Scriptures noted that on a certain day the Lord Jesus sat by the treasury and saw people coming by to render their offerings to God. It was not a lazy afternoon where the Master for want of better things to do, sat by idling, gazing at happenings around Him and chanced upon the incident. It was therefore not a casual, desultory remark made in passing. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus, who was intimately interested in the affairs of men and supremely focused, made an astute observation of the people who came by to give. Nothing escaped His notice, and as the

Master Teacher, He drew a profound spiritual lesson that remains relevant to us today.

Mark 12:41 recorded that Jesus "beheld how the people cast money into the treasury". What interested the Lord was not so much who came by to give or what amount they gave, but how they gave. He, who can look into the very hearts of men and not just the hands that bore the gifts, was able to tell the difference in the way people gave. Herein lies the crux of the matter in Christian giving – it is not how much we give that matters to God but how it is given.

This truth is most eloquently demonstrated by how the rich people and the poor widow, in stark contrast, gave that day. "Many that were rich cast in much" as we read in Mark 12:41b. The rich were many, and by the world's standard, they had given much in monetary value. They had much to give. They had given out of their abundance. On the other hand, there was a certain poor widow – an unnamed and unknown lady, one insignificant person among many in the crowd, but singled out by the Lord. The poor widow gave only two mites,

the smallest coin in public circulation then. Again, by the world's standard of measure, her humble offering was of little value. In the eyes of the Lord, however, the poor widow had given much more than all the rich people, for she had given out of her want. She had indeed given much because as the Lord said, she had given "all that she had, even all her living" (v. 44b).

Is there anything noteworthy beyond the monetary value of the two mites? What spiritual lessons may we draw from and what godly trait may we emulate of the poor widow who uttered not a word yet spoke volumes through her action?

Godliness with Contentment is Great Gain

The poor widow's attitude towards God is worthy of our emulation. To begin with, it can be surmised that her casting of the two mites quietly without any outward display of great sacrifice or groaning of utter loss is indicative of her humble acceptance of her lot in life. She was husbandless and poor, and yet there was no tinge of unhappiness or murmuring as she gave her all. She might well have echoed the sentiments of Paul who wrote, "... for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11b) or, "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). Her testimony serves as a rightful rebuke to any of us if we have moaned and groaned when we had been sidelined for a promotion, missed a lucrative business deal or perhaps, felt our family had been overly cramped in our car or house. Discontentment is the cousin of covetousness. Discontentment left unchecked soon breeds covetousness, a direct violation of the Tenth Commandment. It shares the same nest that festers other sins too. To be discontent with what we have is in

effect to reject His sovereign will and to rile against His authority.

Giving Out of Want

We learn too that the widow's poverty did not prevent her from making her love gift to the Lord. She did not have to join the ranks of the rich before rendering her gift to God. She did not even have to wait until she was financially more able, let alone being rich, before she gave to the Lord. In her present circumstances of poverty, she gave. She gave of her want for which she was commended of the Lord.

Few, if any, of us can honestly say we are living in want like the widow. How many of us dare say that two small coins are all that we have for our living? We do have more. We have money enough to give today, even before we receive the gifts on our next birthday, Christmas or other festival, before the first paycheque arrives, or before we receive the first payment from our business client. We don't have to look to the future for some special occasion to take place or some windfall to come our way before we begin this God-honouring practice. Whether we are young or old, yet in school, gainfully employed or retired from active work, well and hearty or sickly, we can all honour the Lord with our gifts right now.

Driven by the Love for God

Two mites were all that the widow had and she lovingly gave them for God's cause. There might have been some well-meaning folks who would have counselled her to exercise prudence in managing her finances. They might well have cautioned her to consider and plan for her future needs. Might they also have suggested making "partial or deferred payments"? If anyone had, she would certainly not hear any of it. She loved God unreservedly. Even if it meant that she would go hungry the next day, she trusted Him enough to give

away all she had. Her amazing love for God, translated into practical reality, set a worthy example for all to follow.

Her love and devotion to God is all the more exemplary when we consider her circumstances. It was not because some money had dropped onto her lap that prompted her to give. Her giving was not in acknowledgement of God's goodness in blessing her with plenty. Indeed, she had nothing. She gave, mindful that God was still good, and she loved Him even though she was in her present difficulty. What a wonderful perspective and attitude to have of God. May we ever love and honour Him because we know He is good; trials, difficulties and pains in our lives, notwithstanding.

While the story is primarily focused on the poor widow and we read of the Lord's commendation of her gift of the two mites, it should be obvious that the lessons for godly giving applies to the rich as well. The passage, however, does not suggest that the Lord disdains nor reject the gift of the rich when given humbly and sincerely. When the rich gives with the same attitude and motivation as the poor widow, they are surely not denied the blessedness of the Lord's commendation. The promise of 2 Corinthians 9:7b that "... God loveth a cheerful giver" applies to both the rich who give joyfully of their abundance as well as the poor who give cheerfully of their want.



MAH CHIN KWANG

(continued from page 19)

ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever)." Wealth forever comes short of the power necessary to accomplish eternal spiritual blessings. It has always been insufficient, and it will always be. There is no hope that it will ever be sufficient; that by any increase in the amount, man can obtain spiritual blessings.

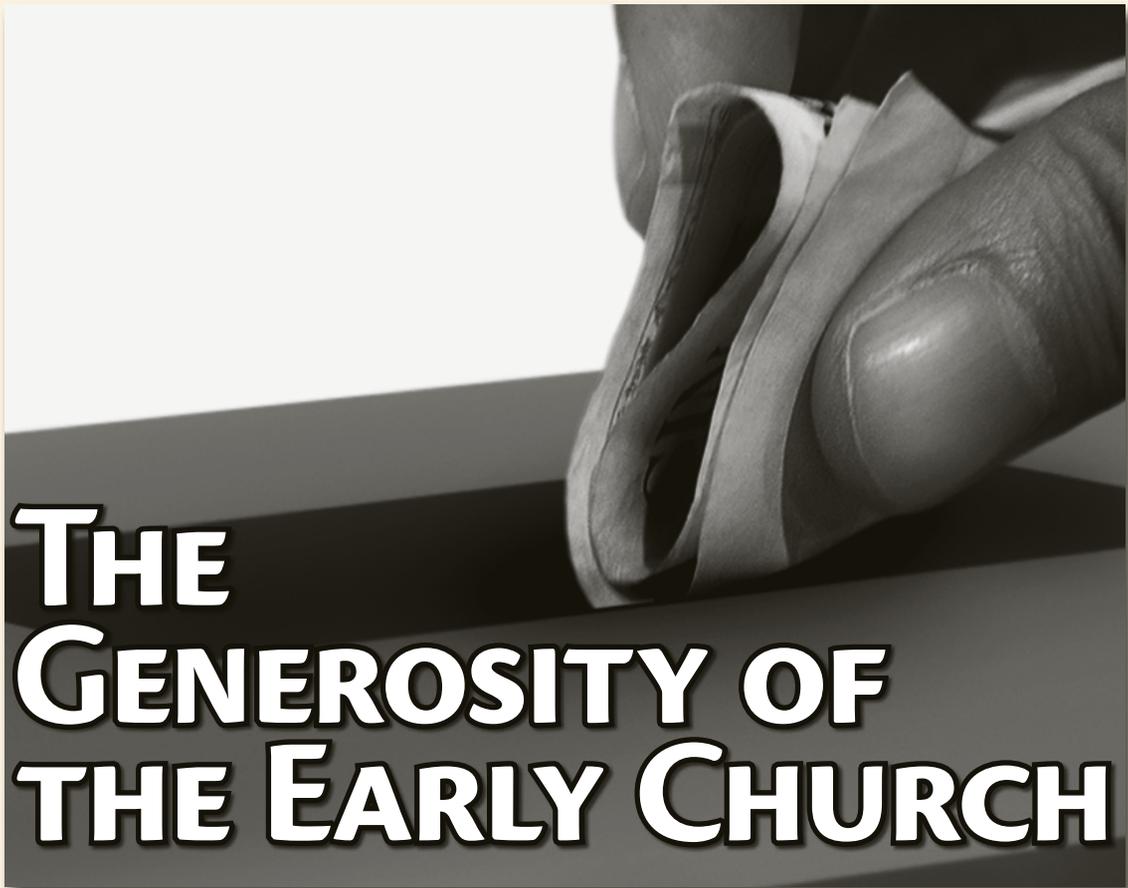
In 1 Peter 1:18, we are told that "... ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . ." We can never pay God enough to purchase our salvation. It is audacious and odious to think that we can bargain with God over the price for His salvation and blessings.

Here is a final warning from Job 36:18-19 – "Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. Will he esteem thy riches? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength."

For More Wealth

It is not uncommon today that people give for purely selfish reasons. They give in the hope of getting more from God in return. It is true that God promises to bless those who give sincerely and obediently (Proverbs 3:9-10), but it does not teach us to treat the ministry as a profitable financial investment programme. Today, covetous men turn the solemn act of giving to glorify God into a "get-rich-quick" scam. May we keep ourselves from every materialistic notion that is being propagated as a legitimate worship. In 1 Timothy 6:5, we are warned to stay away from such men and their schemes. Paul cautions, "Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."

PRABHUDAS KOSHY



THE GENEROSITY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

One of the notable qualities of the early church in the New Testament was their generosity in giving. In Acts 2, the early church is described as one that continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, in prayers, being together, having all things in common and one that has a generous heart to give. We read in Acts 2:42-45, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

In Acts 4:34-35, their generosity is again displayed, "Neither was there any among them

that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." And again in Acts 11:29, "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea."

Today, while we find the church emphasizing on doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, there is a very obvious want in the area of giving. The cheerful and generous giving that best described the early church is just missing in many of today's churches. Yes, that quality of giving that moved the early Christians to sell their possessions and goods to be able to give to the Lord and support the work and their fellow believers is obviously

lacking in our time. Thus the need for today's Christians to learn from the generosity of the early church.

Among the early churches, it was the Macedonian church (comprised the churches in Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica) that was well known in the area of giving. Though known to be poor, they had been generous in their giving and had contributed with great cheerfulness and liberality. In his second epistle to the Corinthians (in chapter 8), the Apostle Paul was trying to encourage the brethren to contribute and give liberally for the relief of the poor brethren in Jerusalem, citing the good examples set by the churches of Macedonia. Consider their generosity:

1. They joyfully and generously gave despite their being poor. The Apostle Paul described the Macedonian churches in 2 Corinthians 8:1-2; "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Even when they themselves were in the midst of great difficulties and deep poverty, their joy abounded to move them to give generously. They did not allow circumstances to hinder them from giving.

Generosity in the midst of poverty! Though being poor is often the reason why many of God's people hold on to what they have and excuse themselves from giving, we ought to realize that it is possible for one to be poor and still be generous in giving.

2. They willingly gave as much as they were able. 2 Corinthians 8:3, "For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;" The churches in Macedonia acted spontaneously and did not

wait to be urged and pressed to give. Paul testified that they gave beyond what could have been expected from them or beyond what would have been thought possible in their condition.

This kind of giving is similar to that of the widow who by giving her two mites did more than the rich men who gave out of their abundance. The Lord Jesus said in Mark 12:43-44, "...Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."

Generosity is best measured not by the sum of what was given but by the sacrifice that comes with it. The Macedonian Christians were willing to forego of that little that they had for the sake of others, trusting the Lord to provide for them.

3. They were determined to give to help meet the needs of others. 2 Corinthians 8:4, "Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." They insisted that Paul should receive their contribution and pass it on to the poor and needy brethren in Jerusalem. They have strong interest and intense desire to relieve the needs of others!

Generosity comes from a sincere and a pure desire of the heart to give. When you have that genuine concern for the brethren, as constrained by the love of Christ, you will naturally want to give and to give generously.

4. They first gave their own selves to the Lord. 2 Corinthians 8:5, "And this they did, not

as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.” Their generosity is founded in true piety and on right priority. They first yielded their own selves to the Lord – an act of total surrender of one’s life and one’s possession to God. Only after they had given themselves unto the Lord, that they gave themselves unto men according to the will of God.

Learn that he that does not totally yield himself to the Lord will neither yield his possessions to Him. But he that joyfully gives himself will keep back nothing that the Lord requires from him. And it is only when we give ourselves wholly to God that we are able to sincerely give ourselves and our possessions to others.

5. They generously gave to support the work of the Lord. Philippians 4:10, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.” Philippians 4:15-16, “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.”

Of all the churches in Macedonia, it seems that the church at Philippi was the most distinguished for its generosity. Paul commended them for their care and concern which obviously included their commitment to support him in the Gospel work, as he mentioned in Philippians 4:18 of “having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.”

Generosity knows no boundaries. They generously gave to the poor brethren in

Jerusalem and went out of their way to send Epaphroditus to bring their gift to Paul who was then inside the cold prison in Rome. This is far beyond today’s “Out of sight, out of mind” attitude pertaining to the manner of giving to support the workers of the Gospel in missions.

Realize that one’s generosity to support the Lord’s work goes beyond the ministries of the home church to missions in regions beyond, and thus accomplishing great things for the glory of God.

Learning of the generosity of the early church, it would be well to examine ourselves. Have we been generous in our giving? Consider what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:7, “Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.” Like the church in general, we should be steadfast in doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers but is found wanting in the grace of giving. May we abound in this grace too!

Generosity is a wonderful blessing, which when acquired, could lead to the receiving of other blessings. “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Remember, God loves a cheerful giver!



REGGOR BARAZON GALARPE



EXERCISE CAUTION IN GIVING

Not too long ago someone asked me, "Must I always give whatever is asked of me?" My immediate answer was, "No. Please exercise biblical discernment when you are asked to give."

The Bible is very clear and emphatic about our responsibility to give generously. Jesus even goes so far as to say, "Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again" (Luke 6:30). So there is a strong presumption in favour of giving when asked as an act of Christian charity.

But there are also some biblical reasons why we should refuse financial aid to some who ask for it. All of God's people, including the donors, are to be good stewards of the resources which God has entrusted them. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). So to be good stewards, donors must exercise discernment as to whether they are giving to a worthy or God-honouring cause.

The following are some very clear Biblical advice on when to refuse giving:

Do not support false teachers and their enterprises. The word of God clearly tells

us that we should refrain from helping those who teach doctrines that are contrary to the Scripture. The Apostle John warned in 2 John 10-11, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." Let nothing be done which could be construed as encouraging them as religious teachers. Let not the money God has given us be used to promote error.

Do not support materialistic preachers or their so-called "ministries". In this fast-moving, greed-laden world, many who are greedy of filthy lucre have hijacked Christianity for their own benefit. The Apostle Paul warns us that these are "... men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness" (1 Timothy 6:5). In the same verse, Paul also instructs us, "from such withdraw thyself".

In these days, many in the ministry peddle the Word of God for profit. They would preach to please their hearers by diluting the truth of God's Word because money is their ultimate desire for being in the ministry. Their worship services are more like entertainment rather than a solemn, God-fearing gathering of the people.

Paul wrote of such men that they “serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:18). In Philippians 3:19, he exposes them as men “whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things”. They are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4).

Today, they use high-pressure fundraising techniques or gimmicks to raise money for their so-called “ministry”. Then with the money they have exploited from unsuspecting people, they maintain lavish lifestyles.

Dear reader, it is true that the labourer is worthy of his hire, but a true servant of Christ will have a servant's attitude when it comes to material possessions. So never channel your money to support materialistic preachers.

Do not support those who use your gift to engage in sinful and unedifying activities. If it is evident that your gift will promote sinful habits (e.g., drunkenness, drug addiction, gambling, etc.) in certain men, do not give your hard earned money away to such. Matthew Henry wrote, “Prodigality is very bad husbandry. Those are not only justly branded as fools among men, but will give an uncomfortable account to God of the talents they are entrusted with, who are wasters of their estates, who live above what they have, spend and give more than they can afford, and so, in effect, throw away what they have, and suffer it to run to waste.”

Do not support those who are lazy and will not work diligently, because the Scripture says, “He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster” (Proverbs 18:9). A slothful man who neglects his work would only let all the provisions go to ruin.



Paul warned the Thessalonian believers that “this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). It is not the duty of the church nor Christians to care for lazy men.

Be very cautious about those who solicit by mail, telemarketing or e-mails. Do not give in to pressure exerted by some of these modern soliciting methods. Be absolutely sure that they are worthy of your support before you make any contribution.

Finally, do not cite any of the above reasons to excuse yourself from giving generously to God-honouring purposes. God warns against the attitude of looking for excuses not to provide for the needy. Deuteronomy 15:9 warns, “Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee.” Probably the best diagnostic question to ask is, “Why am I withholding what has been asked of me?” The important thing is to refuse only for biblical reasons, not for selfish ones.

PRABHUDAS KOSHY



The Bible speaks of wrong motives for giving and the following are some of these in the light of Biblical instructions. In order that our giving might be acceptable to God, we must eradicate all of these from our heart.

For the Praise of Man

This is one of the worst motives for giving - the desire to be seen by other people. Jesus warns us not to seek recognition from man for our giving because it forfeits any reward that we would receive from God. In Matthew 6:1-4, Jesus said, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."

For Covering Up One's Greed

Some greedy people want others to think of them as generous people. In order to achieve this end, they deliberately create a scene of sacrificial giving. God hates this heinous plot. His hatred for such giving is clearly demonstrated when He killed Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the apostles and the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 5:1-11).

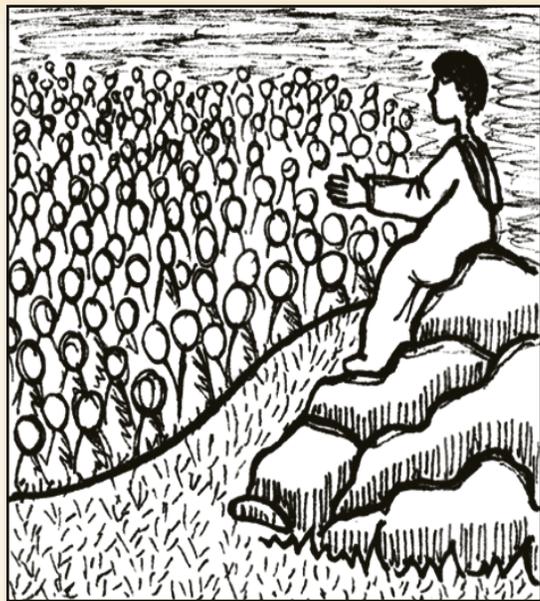
God disapproves any effort to glorify the giver, rather than God Himself. Gifts that function as personal advertising are contrary to the will of God. It is especially so, when giving is used as a cover-up for one's greed.

For Earning Salvation and Other Spiritual Blessings

Lastly, some people give with the hope of earning forgiveness, salvation, etc. The Bible is very clear that salvation and all its accompanying blessings cannot be earned with money or precious things. According to Psalm 49:7-8, "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a

(continued on page 13)

THE LORD'S PROVISION THROUGH A YOUNG BOY



This is an exposition of the story of Christ's miraculous feeding of the five thousand. This event is very rich in spiritual lessons for every child of God. Perhaps that is the reason why this miracle of Jesus is recorded in all the four Gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13).

There were more than five thousand people who were as hungry as hunters, and there was no way of providing enough food for all of them. To make things worse, it was also not possible for the people to get back to their homes quickly, as they had come from very far to be with Jesus.

The disciples felt helpless and anxious about the situation. But our blessed Master was not ruffled by this enormous need of the crowd to have food to eat. He was compassionate and concerned, yet calm and confident. So John recorded, "When Jesus then lifted up his eyes,

and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do" (John 6:5-6).

The Lord Jesus Christ knew exactly what He ought to do to feed that huge hungry crowd. He knew what He would do to solve that desperate situation. He had all the knowledge and power to feed everyone in the crowd and send them home, full and satisfied.

Then, a very canny Philip tried to answer Jesus' question, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" He quickly did a calculation of the cost of food for such a large crowd, and said to Jesus, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little" (John 6:7).

Why did he mention that two hundred pennyworth of bread would not be enough? In fact, it was a large sum of money, which was about eight months' wages. (One denarius was a day's pay for a common labourer; two hundred denarii therefore represents about eight months' wages.) It was sufficient to provide for a large family for more than eight months. But even such a large sum was not enough to feed this huge crowd.

Philip could not think beyond the mundane activities of the market place. He was totally lost, and he had no idea how they could carry out their Master's wish to feed the hungry crowd. Philip needed to believe that the Lord is able to do that which seems impossible in his mind.

Suddenly, the Lord's work of provision began to unfold. "One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto Him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" (John 6:8-9). Andrew brought to Christ a boy who had five barley loaves and two small fishes.

This was so much lesser than Philip's mention of two hundred pennyworth of food. The boy's food was extraordinarily disproportionate to the need. Then why did he mention the boy's five loaves and two small fishes?

It must have been an amazing intervention of God's providential hand. Against all logic, as it appeared, Andrew talked about what he had found.

Again we must wonder, "How did he find the boy in the crowd?" "Who was that boy?" "Was he a peddler who tried to make some money after having sold all he had except the five loaves of bread and two fishes?" "Or was he a hungry boy in the crowd who was about to eat the food packed by his mother?" We have no answer to these questions.

Nevertheless, we see the providence of God helping Andrew meet this boy in such a huge crowd and then bring him to the Lord. Is it not also amazing that the boy was willing to part with his food? Let us, therefore, believe in His providence. To meet the needs of His work, the Lord can even use a little boy.

The boy was willing to part with his food. There is no doubt that he gave the food to the Lord, for we read that "And Jesus took the loaves" (v. 11). The boy was not selfish, but generous. If the lad had considered his own need as most important, he would not have given that food to Jesus. But now because he had given his food to Christ, it became a blessing for him as well as the thousands who were around him.

Until the boy expressed his willingness to give his food for Christ's use, he was an unknown lad to most people. So Andrew introduced him to Jesus, saying, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes" (v. 9). But his anonymity was not a hindrance to his contribution.

So, may you be rest assured that if you are willing to serve God, you need not be afraid that obscurity will ever prevent you from doing it. Do not say, "Nobody knows me, I don't think I can be of any help to the huge challenges before us." Just come forward to do what you are capable of for His glory. If you would avail yourself to the Lord, God would use you for great purposes.



The boy's gift appeared very trivial. Andrew commented, "What are they among so many?" Likewise, some

may judge your contributions to be very small too. Now, I dare say, don't let anybody, even Satan, discourage you from giving of yourself to the Lord. You may hear voices such as, "What is the use of you trying to do anything?"

You cannot serve God." Do not let any such discouraging voices affect you.

God will honour your loving and ready gift to Him, even though man might first despise it. You may face the derision of men, but afterwards you will be used of God.



Let us take note that though some considered the boy's gift as rather insignificant, the Lord Jesus Christ thanked God for the boy's food and then commanded it to be distributed to the people who were seated. His blessings made the small gift of the boy sufficient for all the people who were gathered around Christ. The miraculous provision continued until all the five thousand were fed and twelve baskets full of bread were left over.

Jesus cares for the hungry and needy through every contribution that comes out of a willing heart. He manifests His goodness and glory through our gifts to bless the humble and the needy. Praise the Lord!

PRABHUDAS KOSHY

WHAT SHOULD WE KNOW ABOUT NOT GIVING?

PRABHUDAS KOSHY

We Rob God

Malachi 3:8 warns us, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." Keeping back what God expects us to give for the need of His work, is robbing God.

We Rob Fellow Brethren

John questions, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17). When we love money, we think of ourselves and forget those who are in need. When we have no love for others, we deny them the privileges they could have enjoyed.

We Rob Ourselves

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty" (Proverbs 11:24). In other words, stinginess will lead to poverty. According to the above warning, if we do not minister to others even when we have more than what we actually need, then poverty can soon visit us. Being stingy is robbing ourselves.

Psalm 19:7-9

Janice Lai

G C G D

The law of the LORD is per - fect, con - ver - ting the

G C G D7

soul: the tes - ti - mo - ny of the LORD is sure, mak - ing wise the sim -

G C G D D7

ple. The sta - tutes of the LORD are right, re - joic - ing the

G C G D7 G

heart: the com - mand - ment of the LORD is pure, en - light - en - ing the eyes. The

17 C G D G

fear of the LORD is clean, en - dur - ing for - e - ver: the

21 C G D7 G

judg - ments of the LORD are true and right - eous al - to - geth - er.