

## **GIVING TO SUPPORT THE BISHOP AND CLERGY MINISTER TO YOU.**

**Presented**

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**BY VEN.DAVID NWANKPE**

GIVING money to support those who do God's work is a valid expression of love and worship toward the Lord. This was true of several women who traveled with Jesus and His disciples and were financially supporting them (Luke 8:1-3). Luke tells us these included, "Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means" (Luke 8:2b-3). Jesus and His disciples could afford to pay for their daily needs (i.e., food, shelter, clothing, etc.) because of the gracious contributions of these women. Their financial gifts to support Jesus and His disciples had an immediate and eternal impact on the lives of many and are still yielding results today. That's an impressive return on investment!

It is not a sin to be wealthy, as God sometimes blesses His people with great riches. He certainly gave great wealth to Abraham (Gen 13:5-6), Isaac (Gen 26:12-14), Jacob (Gen 32:9-10; 33:11), Job (Job 1:1-3), David (1 Ch 29:1-5), Solomon (1 Ki 10:1-25), and others. Sometimes this wealth came suddenly, such as when God liberated the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (Deut 5:6), and persuaded the Egyptians to give His people vast amounts of silver, gold, and clothing (Ex 3:22). Afterwards, God gave His people the land of Canaan (Deut 4:1; 9:6), which included cities, houses, wells and vineyards for which they did not work (Deut 6:10-11). The Bible also gives wisdom on making wealth by hard work (Prov 28:19) and investment (Eccl 11:1-2). I know some whom God has gifted with great business acumen. These He has blessed with the "power to make wealth" (Deut 8:18). These same skilled men have been generous in their giving to help others, and in this way, have followed Paul's instruction to "those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to set their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy; and to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" (1 Tim 6:17-18). Being wealthy can be a blessing from the Lord, but how one handles that wealth either honors or dishonors Him. And, "A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, and favor is better than silver and gold" (Prov 22:1).

As Christians, we should see ourselves as stewards of the Lord's resources, whether that's money, a home, car, food, clothing, etc. Biblically, we know that God owns everything, "For the earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it" (Psa 24:1). The Lord declares, "every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psa 50:10), and "The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine, declares the LORD of hosts" (Hag 2:8). When we give to support the Lord's work, it's a test of our

love and loyalty to Him; for what we give is already His. David captures this well when he says, “who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You” (1 Ch 29:14). As God’s people, we are only here on earth for a short time, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave, “For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding” (1 Ch 29:15). And, as Paul wrote, “We brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either” (1 Tim 6:7). What we do in this life touches both time and eternity. Jesus directs us to focus on heavenly investments, saying, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:19-21). The real issue for us is to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt 6:33), and trust God that He’ll meet our daily needs (Matt 6:25-34). Giving to support God’s ministries means taking what resources He’s given to us and giving it back to Him, because we trust Him with all we have and seek His glory above our own security or self-interest. Christian ministers—whether working full or part time—need financial support to help cover the costs associated with ministry, and our monetary support is a barometer of our love for God and what He is doing through them.

### **Tithing is Not Required**

Many Christian churches today make a big deal out of tithing (giving ten percent of one’s income). Though tithing was mandatory for Israel, it is not required of Christians. Under the Mosaic Law, there were actually three tithes the Israelites were obligated to pay to the priests and Levites to support them for their ministry (Num 18:21-24). Two tithes were required every year to the Temple (Num 18:21; Deut 14:22-23), and a third tithe was taken every third year to help the poor, the alien, the orphans and the widows (Deut 14:28-29; 26:12). This last tithe was comparable to a social welfare system for the most unfortunate in society. The Levites, in turn, gave a tithe of the tithe to the priests for their service (Num 18:25-28). For the most part, the tithes consisted of the fruit and grain that came out of the ground as well as livestock (Lev 27:30-32), and the Israelite worshipper and his family could eat a portion of the sacrifice that was brought to the tabernacle/temple (Deut 12:17-19; 14:22-27). Failure to bring the produce of one’s crop or herd was a violation of God’s law (Mal 3:8-10).

Sadly, some pastors have mishandled Malachi 3:8-10 and applied it to the Church, browbeating Christians to make them feel guilty for not giving money to the Church. Some tyrants have even required church members to show their annual tax returns, or publicly posted their annual contributions in order to strong-arm Christians to give. This is more an act of despotic control over one’s flock than loving leadership. Pastors who use Malachi 3:8-10 against Christians display both an ignorance of God’s Word and a spiritual immaturity in leadership. The fact is, Malachi 3:8-10 has nothing to do with the Church. Biblically, the Church is not Israel, and Christians are not under the Mosaic

Law as the rule for life, but under the Law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2). As such, Christians are not required to tithe a portion of their income, but to give voluntarily.

## **Grace-Giving**

Grace-giving means we give with an open-hand, from the bounty of our own resources, to help advance God's work in the lives of others. The apostle Paul was supported financially by Christians who gave to his ministry (2 Cor 9:1-15). Paul explained that giving of one's finances needs to be done with the right attitude, for "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7). It is better not to give at all than to give "grudgingly or under compulsion." As part of God's Word, a pastor should teach people about money and giving to support ministry, always with the hope that they are gracious and open-handed. However, a pastor should never seek to manipulate or coerce people to give, as he violates the Word if he does. The pastor who resorts to gimmicks or pressure tactics to get his congregation to give is, ultimately, concerned more about money than people. In this way, a pastor is no better than Judas, who was "not concerned about the poor", but about the "money box", and this because he was dishonest and "used to pilfer what was put into it" (John 12:6). Giving should be done with the right attitude, and in proportion to what a person has (Acts 11:29; 2 Co 8:12). The one who has little can give little (Luke 21:1-4), and the one who has much can give much (1 Tim 6:17-18). But attitude matters, for God is watching the heart as well as the hand.

## **God's Ministers Should be Supported**

It is biblical that Christian ministers be supported financially for the work they do. Paul said, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?" (1 Cor 9:11), and went on to say, "the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" (1 Cor 9:14). Elsewhere Paul wrote, "The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him" (Gal 6:6), and in another place said, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing', and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'" (1 Tim 5:17-18). In this way, believers help support their pastors for the work they do.

God's ministers should be humble when receiving the kind contributions of others. I was blessed years ago to learn a valuable lesson from a wise preacher. He recounted a story in which he offered money to a young seminarian to watch his house while he was out of town for a few weeks. When the preacher offered the money, the seminarian tried to turn it away, thinking it was too much for what he was doing. (To be honest, it did seem like a lot of money at the time). But the preacher quickly straightened him out, saying (paraphrase), "young man, you're going into ministry, and others are going to want to show you kindness for the work you do, and this will, at times, come in the form of a financial gift. You'd better learn to accept their kindness and not turn it away. Just say, 'Thank you', and move on." That was good for me to hear, for I've often struggled over

the years to accept the kindness of others, especially when it comes in the form of a monetary gift (I know it's my pride). On another occasion, the same preacher helped me understand there are times when God the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of others to teach them to be kind and giving, and that I may be the object of their lesson. If I turn away their gift, I may be hindering the work of God in their life, and that's no good. God's been working on me and I'm getting better. I think of the preacher almost every time someone blesses me with a gift, and I've learned to say "Thank you" and just move on.

## **God Blesses Those Who Give**

The Bible teaches that those who give to support God's ministers will themselves be honored and blessed by the Lord. The apostle Paul commended the Christians at Corinth for their "participation in the support of the saints" (2 Cor 8:4), and went on to say, "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:6-7). Furthermore, Paul said, "Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor 9:10-11). Sowing and reaping is a biblical concept. Ryrie states, "Generosity will be rewarded by additional grace. This undoubtedly includes sufficient material provision for the giver as well as development of his character. In other words, God gives or 'begraces' the giving Christian with sufficient money and character in order that he may continue to want to and be able to give."<sup>21</sup>

## **Beware of False Teachers**

Sadly, there are false teachers in the church today who, through their ministries, rake in tens of millions of dollars, live in luxurious mansions, and fly around the world in private jets. These give a bad name to Christianity because of their greed and false messages that mislead people. Peter warned Christians that just as "false prophets arose among the people", that "there will also be false teachers among you" (2 Pet 2:1a). Peter said these false teachers "will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned" (2 Pet 2:2), and "in their greed they will exploit you with false words" (2 Pet 2:3a). Many of these false teachers try to bring Christians back under the Mosaic Law—or at least portions of it—because it serves their own greedy agenda. Tithing becomes a whip they can use against their flock. These false teachers are driven by greed, not truth or love or faith, and their Bible teaching—if it can be called that—serves their own evil agenda.

## **The Minister's Choice**

However, a wise pastor may refuse financial compensation if he thinks it's an impediment to ministry. Paul is a good example, for he wanted to give "no hindrance to the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor 9:12) to those he preached to in Corinth, so he forfeited his right to compensation and presented "the gospel without charge" (1 Cor 9:18). He repeated this in his second letter to the Corinthians, reminding them he "preached the gospel of God to you without charge?" (2 Cor 11:7). And when Paul preached the Word in Ephesus, he told the Christians there, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me" (Acts 20:33-34). And to the Christians living in Thessalonica, Paul wrote, "For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God" (1 Th 2:9), and in his second letter to them, said, "we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example" (2 Th 3:8-9). I think much of this is born out of Jesus' instruction to His disciples when He told them to preach to the lost sheep of Israel, saying, "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. **Freely you received, freely give**" (Matt 10:7-8). That is, Jesus' disciples were to preach and engage in ministry to others freely, without charge.

Christians who receive free teaching from their Pastor-Teacher should also freely offer their support for the work he does. But if they don't, the Pastor is obligated to continue his ministry, and that because he is under divine orders to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2). Like Jonah (Jonah 1:1), and Jeremiah (Jer 1:5), Paul was commissioned by the Lord to preach His Word to others (Acts 26:16-17; Gal 1:15), and this without charge. Understanding his divine commission, Paul said, "I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). Paul's marching orders were to preach, even if others did not recognize his calling or support him. And Paul faced many hardships, saying, "To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now" (1 Cor 4:11-13). Paul was committed to his ministry calling, no matter his circumstances. By faith, he even trusted and worshipped God when in jail (Acts 16:25). It is ironic to me that pastors will tell others they are "called by God" to preach His Word, but then condition their ministry on the financial support of others. Such men are no better than the corrupt priests and prophets in Micah's day who "instruct for a price" and "divine for money" (Mic 3:11; cf. Jer 6:13). Nonsense! Preach the word! Have faith! God will provide!

The pastor who does not like to hear this should check his attitude, for he who teaches others to be content with "food and covering" (1 Tim 6:8), should himself be content with the same. If he teaches others not "to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Tim 6:17), he should himself

be the role model of this attitude to others. This does not mean a pastor cannot or should not enjoy support and prosperity if the Lord gives it, but that his commission as a minister should not rest on it. Paul said, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:11-12). A pastor can and should make ministry needs known, which affords others the opportunity to give their support freely. This is valid. However, he must never condition his ministry on the financial support of others. In addition, he must never resort to pressure tactics such as guilt or shaming, as this coerces people to give grudgingly or by compulsion, and that is wrong.

Unfortunately, good shepherds are in short supply these days. The requirements to be a good pastor are high, and most are unwilling to put in the time and study necessary to be properly trained. The reality is that a good Bible teacher is the product of many great sacrifices. Once he responds to the call of ministry, he forfeits a more lucrative career for that of a Bible teacher, which often does not pay very well, and he accepts this. The good teacher will spend years of time in Seminary studying God’s Word, learning the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, ancient history, philosophy, hermeneutics, theology, and invest a great amount of personal time and money toward his academic training and library. My own education, which includes a Bachelor of Science, Master of Divinity, and Doctorate, cost me about \$105,000 (which does not include my investment in books and electronics). I come from a very poor family, so I had to work a regular job (waiter, welder, trash truck driver, etc.) in order pay for school. Thankfully, God is good and provided work for me, and also blessed me with some scholarships that helped along the way. Currently, I work a full-time job as a Case Manager for a local nonprofit that helps the infirmed and elderly in my community, and then in the early morning hours devote myself to studying God’s Word so I can teach it on the weekends, or write articles for my blog. My ministry, for the moment, is strictly voluntary. I have no student debt (paid off in 2020), and no major expenses except my mortgage, and I’m content to serve the Lord in my current place until such a time that He opens up something more for me. I have Paul as my example, for had a tentmaking profession that earned him money (Acts 18:1-3), until God made other resources available (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:15-16). I also appreciate Peter’s words when he wrote to church elders, directing them to “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under [human] compulsion, **but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness**” (1 Pet 5:2). To shepherd the flock of God *voluntarily* should be at the heart of every preacher, who performs his ministry *according to the will of God*.

In summary, it is valid to support God’s ministers who are helping to do His work in the world. Though such giving is not obligatory, it is a barometer of our love for God and appreciation for those who are doing His work and who should be compensated for their labor. God has blessed us by grace, and our giving to support His work is also done by grace, and God will bless those who give, either in this lifetime or in the eternal state. But we must beware of false teachers who seek to exploit us with false words and avoid

them. Lastly, a minister may refuse compensation if he feels such compensation may be a hindrance to his ministry; and he should always be willing to serve the Lord and others voluntarily, according to God's will, and not for profit. He is thankful when others give to support him, but does not condition his teaching or ministry on it.

David Nwanekpe