

HOW NOT TO GIVE

R. STANLEY

(Edited from his TV Talks by his daughter, Evangeline Jonas)

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How not to Give

Unless the foundation of Christian Doctrine is strong, cracks would develop on the super-structure of life and ministry. To understand the word “foundation,” look at Matthew 7:24-27, which are the concluding words of the Lord Jesus Christ in His great Sermon on the Mount. “Whoever hears **these sayings** of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and banged against that house. It stood because it was founded on the rock.” By the word “foundation” Jesus meant “His sayings.” He contrasts this house on the rock with another house which was built on sand. The teaching of Christ, or the Word of God, is the solid rock and anything else is sinking sand.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord has dealt with several Christian disciplines (Mt 5,6,7). He first told them how “not to” do a thing before teaching them how “to” do it! For example, relating to charity, He says, “When you do a charitable deed, do **not** sound the trumpet as the hypocrites do in the streets and in the Synagogues” (Mt 6:2). Instead of primarily motivating them for charity, He was correcting their wrong practices in almsgiving. This is not an isolated example. He taught similarly on prayer. He said, “When you pray, you shall **not** be like the hypocrites... do **not** use vain repetitions as the heathen do” (Mt 6:5,7). Yet another example: “When you fast, do **not** be like the hypocrites” (Mt 6:16). This has been the consistent pattern of the teachings of our Lord. He adopted this pattern because unlearning is a prerequisite for proper learning, though it is more difficult than learning.

Have you noticed that in the Sermon on the Mount the first discipline Jesus dealt with was giving? Praise God for the revival of giving all over Christendom. I remember as a young boy, on Sunday mornings, children would run across the streets to the neighbourhood to collect “coins” for the Church offering! That situation has of course changed now! I believe it’s the fruit of the revival we are experiencing. When there are rains, tares also sprout along with the grains. Likewise, when God pours out showers of blessing through the Holy Spirit, false doctrines will also flood in along with sound doctrine.

Unless our giving is proper and acceptable to God, our loss will be dual: we lose our money here on earth and our reward up there in Heaven. Ingrain this on your minds as you read further on.

1. Do not separate life from Giving.

As ministers and ministries are unduly anxious to raise huge sums of money for their needs, they do not warn the givers sufficiently against unholy living, for fear of offending them. Jesus never had that kind of an apprehension when He presented such hard truths. When He talked about riches on one occasion, He said, "It would be easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God" (Lk 18:25). The rich would have been definitely offended at this illustration! But Christ was presenting an eternal truth. The Bible repeatedly teaches that holy living and acceptable giving are inseparable.

God said, "Hear, O earth, behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words nor My law, but rejected it" (Jer 6:19). In the next verse He throws a challenge: "What purpose to Me comes frankincense from Sheba and sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable nor your sacrifices sweet to Me" (v20). People rejected God's Word, but offered expensive gifts to Him. God firmly said, "If you are not ready to obey Me, I am not interested in your gifts. Your gifts may be costly but that would not attract Me. Your sweet cane is not sweet to Me!" Our lives should not be divorced from giving. If we reject God's Word, He will reject our offering. If we close our ears to His Word, even our prayers are an abomination Him (Prov 28:9).

We all have a tendency to appease God, especially when we disobey Him. There is a solemn example from the life of Saul the first king of Israel. God told him, "Go and attack Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have and don't spare them" (1 Sam 15:3). Saul obeyed God partially. We read, "Saul and the people spared Agog and the best of the sheep and they destroyed only worthless things" (v9). When the king was confronted by the prophet, he put forth an excuse: "The people took of the plunder, the sheep and oxen and they kept it to offer it as a sacrifice unto God" (v21). An eternal truth emerges here for us as a rebuke: "Then Samuel said, Has the Lord great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (v22). To obey is better than all our offerings and sacrifices and whatever we try to do unto God. The ideal example to follow is none other than Jesus. "Be followers of God, dear children; walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God, a sweetsmelling aroma" (Eph 5:1,2). The next verse says, "But fornication, uncleanness and covetousness should not be even named among you" (v3). Holy living is the sweetsmelling aroma before God. An unholy life is abomination before Him.

Preachers have a tremendous responsibility here. See how Paul conducted himself in this area. He wrote to the Corinthian believers, "For the third time I am ready to come unto you; I will not be burdensome to you; I do not seek **yours**, but **you**" (2 Cor 12:14). What a challenge! The believers had their priorities set right based on this teaching. About the Macedonian Christians Paul could testify, "This they did not as we had hoped; **but first** gave themselves to the Lord, and **then to us**, by the **will of God**" (2 Cor 8:5). This order should never be changed. Even when the believers wanted to offer something to the Apostles, it was "by the will of God" and not according to their whims, fancies and sentimentalities. This truth must be restored to our pulpits and pews.

Just like we examine ourselves before partaking of bread and wine, we must examine ourselves before offering anything to God. That's what the Scripture teaches. For example, Malachi 3:3, "You will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will **purify** the sons of Levi, purge them as gold and silver, so that they may **offer** to the Lord, an offering of righteousness." This carries no ambiguity. Words cannot be clearer! The Bible demands that our hands which we lift up in prayer must be "holy" (1 Tim 2:8). In the same way, if our offerings are to be accepted, they must be given by "holy hands!"

We should get not only right with God but also with our fellowmen. Jesus stressed it in Matthew 5:23,24, "If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go your way. **First** be reconciled with your brother, then come and offer the gift." The question of who should take the initiative, whether the offender or the offended, is usually raised. According to this passage, you are the offender. But Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother sins against you, you go." That means, in the matter of reconciliation, whether you are the offender or the offended is immaterial. Whoever comes to offer anything to God must take the initiative.

It is because life cannot be separated from giving, we must not solicit contributions for God's work from unbelievers. God accepted the offering of Abel with delight because it was offered in "faith" on the living God. But He had least respect for the offering of Cain because his works were "evil" (Gen 4:3-7; 1 Jn 3:11).

If only this truth about the inseparableness of holy living and acceptable offering could be restored to our Churches, we will have more of righteousness than riches! Strangely, righteousness and riches don't go too well together. When Paul admonished Timothy to flee the love of money, he added that, instead, he should follow after righteousness! (1 Tim 6:10,11).

Does God, then, accept offerings only from perfect people? While there is none who is perfect, you are to confess all to your known sins unto God. Be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Make reconciliation and restitution wherever necessary and possible. Walk in transparent fellowship with God. Then your offerings will not only be accepted but also applauded before the Holy God.

2. Do not earn by ungodly means.

Apostle Paul predicted centuries ago, "The time will come when folks will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers and turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim 4:3). These times are already upon us. With so many sermons and meetings, there is an unprecedented famine for the **Word** of God. This was prophesied by prophet Amos also: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or thirst for water, but of hearing the **Word** of the Lord" (Am 8:11). There's so much talk from the pulpits about "bread and water," which refer to material prosperity and physical health. The famine is for the "Word of God." It's spiritual poverty amidst material prosperity! This will not happen in isolation in a particular region, but from "sea to sea" and from "north to east" (v12), It's said that people would run to and fro but would not be able to find the Word of the Lord. That's what's happening today. Folks go from meeting to meeting but their spiritual thirst is not quenched. Apostle Paul's prescription for times like this to God's servants is: "Preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2). He gave the same exhortation while writing to Titus also: "As for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" (Tit 2:1).

In this Series I endeavour to bring God's people back to the Bible in basic Christian disciplines. In this booklet we are dealing with the subject of Christian giving. The second lesson on the topic of "How not to Give" is: *Do not earn by ungodly means*.

We live in a corrupt society. The atmosphere everywhere is toxic with corruption, both in the government and non-government institutions, in the world and the Church, in evangelistic organisations and relief agencies. There are crocodiles everywhere in Christendom and some of them are waiting for the next Tsunami! Several pastors and Christian leaders became millionaires following the Tsunami of 2004. God's people should take a firm stand that they would not earn by any **ungodly means** in such a scenario. If we give to God what we earn by ungodly means, it will be outrightly rejected by Him.

The Bible has so much to speak against ungodly means of earning. Take for example, Proverbs 11:1, "A **false balance** is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight." One is detestable and the other is delightful to God. It's either black or white. No grey zones! In the common context, if you are in business, you should not do anything to cheat your customers. Never give a **false impression** about your products. Our standards, as Christians, should excel that of the Indian Standards Institute (ISI). We should go by the Kingdom standards. A Christian business man must be satisfied with a reasonable and decent margin. **Overambitiousness** will lead to trouble. If you are a businessman, don't **hoard** essential food grains and commodities so you could sell them later for a greater profit. No poor man should go to bed hungry. We need to be sensitive to the lamentations of the poor as the God of Heaven and earth. "The people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of the one who sells it" (Prov 11:26).

The Bible also warns us against all forms of **bribery**. Psalmist David took a clear stand against bribery. He testified, "In their hands is a sinister scheme and their right hand is full of bribes. **But, as for me, I will walk in my integrity**" (Psa 26:10,11). Every Christian businessman and industrialist must be able to testify like this. Bribery is undoubtedly wrong as it puts the poor and the underprivileged in a tremendous disadvantage. It displeases the God of the poor.

John the Baptist was preaching a message of repentance. He urged his hearers to bring forth "fruits of repentance." The people wanted him to specifically tell them what they should do. "The tax collectors came to be baptized and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than what is appointed for you.'" (Lk 3:12,13). In other words he asked them to keep their hands off from all forms of bribery. Perhaps, Zacchaeus, the tax-collector, was in his audience, struggling within, over the hard truth. Nevertheless there was a spiritual hunger and thirst in his heart. Taking advantage of Jesus' offer to stay with him one day, Zacchaeus ran to receive Jesus home. Standing at the doorstep, the first thing he told Jesus was, "If I have taken anything illegally from anyone, I will return it fourfold." Jesus replied, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Lk 19:8,9). How many preachers, how many times, in how many houses, quote to the residents the Bible promise, "From **this day** I will bless you!" Hardly anyone speaks forthrightly to the people about such acts of repentance. Cancer cannot be cured by applying ointments! The day of repentance will be the day when God's blessings will begin to flow into your homes.

The Bible urges us not to have business partnership with the ungodly. Proverbs 1:10, 14,15,19, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say ... cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse — My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path ... So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners." Your testimony takes priority over money.

The Bible condemns delayed payment to labourers: Deuteronomy 24:14,15, "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brothers or one of the aliens... Each day you shall give him his wages, and do not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on his wages; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you!" Do not deprive your workers of fringe benefits. Apostle James carries this thought into his Epistle: "Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (Js 5;4). This simply means that if you cheat those who work for you, God will fight against you. How serious!

Beware of **questionable businesses** also. A Christian cannot be investing in **lotteries** or **liquor business** or any such unbiblical practices. For example, see what we read in Deuteronomy 23:18, "You shall not bring the hire of a harlot...to the House of the Lord your God for any vowed offering ... This is an abomination to the Lord your God." There are some Christians in questionable businesses who justify themselves because of the huge sums of money they are able to give to God's work. God's standards are absolutely absolute, and there's no point in arguing with our conscience. Beware of taking advantage of the poor when they approach you to borrow money!

Do you remember what the High Priests and the Elders said when Judas Iscariot threw away in the Temple the thirty pieces of silver he got for betraying Jesus? "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood!" (Mt 27:6).

Do you know what the Jews and Greeks did in Ephesus when they genuinely repented and received the Word of God? "Many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totalled fifty thousand pieces of silver!" (Acts 19:19). Do we think that these books could have been sold to the old books shop and the money given to God's work? This is where I say that Christianity is backslidden!

As Christians we are to work hard, but must not overwork to become rich. The Bible says, "Do not overwork to become rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven" (Prov 23:4,5). Spending too much time in work that leaves us no time for God and family is definitely not God's will for us. These are things we should take into account in the context of earning money.

The common practice of the collected offering in Churches being prayed over does not sanctify the money if it had been earned by ungodly means. The money must be clean “before” it gets into the offering plate!

Suppose you have already acquired and amassed wealth by ungodly means, what should you do with that money? Set matters right wherever possible. The Bible’s admonition is crystal-clear: Ezekiel 33:15,16, “If the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen ... he shall surely live ... He has done what is **lawful** and **right!**” People may argue that this is asking for too much and this is not fair. This was the argument of the people of old also. Read verse 17, “Yet the children of your people say, ‘The way of the Lord is not fair.’ But it is their way which is not fair!” Zacchaeus the tax-collector promised Christ that he would give away half of his treasures to the poor, and retribute matters with the wronged by repaying fourfold. Did Jesus tell him that he need not do all those things? No, He happily endorsed it and blessed him for that (Lk 19:8,9).

Family conflicts resulting from disputes on the partitioning of ancestral properties are commonplace. The children of the same parents become bitter enemies of one another. If you are guilty of any injustice in this area, caused by your avariciousness or the partiality of the parents, retribute matters with the deprived immediately. A little with God’s smile is better than huge wealth with His frown!

Using the office stationery of your workplace for God’s work is to be avoided. Justifying yourself by quoting that the earth and all its fullness belong to the Lord is wrong. If this argument is right, every theft and robbery is justifiable!

Even “having” with us any money earned by ungodly means is condemned. How much more the act of “giving” to God out of it! Beloved, this teaching might not be cherishable, yet, we need to treat it with all seriousness. Giving of our earthly goods to God has eternal consequences.

3. Do not cheat the Government.

Many Christians stop with the initial benefit of the Scriptures mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:15: “The Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for **salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” This blessing makes the believer just a “child” of God. The ongoing benefits mentioned in verses 16 & 17 are not seriously looked into. “All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction** in righteousness, that the **man** of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Contentment with salvation alone stagnates us in the childhood stage. We must grow and mature from childhood to manhood. God’s will is that thro’ His Scriptures each of His children becomes a complete man.

Do you also notice in this passage (2 Tim 3:16,17) that “instruction” comes **after** “rebuke” and “correction.” This means that unlearning precedes learning. Proverbs 22:15 illustrates the function of God’s Word in this context: “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” Wrong understanding gets driven away only by the Word of God which God uses as a rod of correction. The rod will not kill us, but will only correct us and equip us for every good work. Therefore, beloved, never become tired of corrections. The Book of Proverbs presents one other picture to illustrate this truth: Proverbs 25:4, “Take away the dross from silver, and it will go to the silversmith for jewelry.”

The third corrective lesson on Giving: *Do not cheat the Government.*

There are two outstanding exhortations on this in the New Testament, one by Apostle Paul and the other by Apostle Peter. Here’s what Paul wrote to the believers in Rome: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. There is no authority except of God. The authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority, resists the ordinance of God” (Rom 13:1,2). The Apostle gives the reason: “Therefore, you must be subject not only because of wrath, but also for the conscience sake” (v5). Not the consequences but our conscience should be the ruling factor! He gives a practical application of this truth: “Because of this, you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing” (v6). More specifically he says in the next verse,

“Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour” (v7). This is an all-inclusive teaching which gives no room for any exception. The background against which Paul wrote these exhortations is worth considering. He wrote to the saints “in Rome” (Rom 1:7). The Roman culture and the Hebrew customs differed widely from each other. At some points they actually contradicted each other. Obviously there were conflicts. Pagan vs. Christian! O how much these exhortations are relevant to us in a country like India!

Let’s look at what Peter wrote on this subject. His readers were a composite group: “The pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithinia” (1 Pet 1:1). He wrote to them, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good” (1 Pet 2:13,14). If Peter were to write this letter to us today, he would address us as, “For those in Asia, Australia, Africa and America...” He might have been a little more specific to those of us in India, because as Indians we not only face persecution, we are also “spoken against.” Peter’s audience resembled us: “Having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works, which they observe, glorify God” (v12). This only means that no Christian should ever dream of evading any sort of tax.

Where did Paul and Peter learn this lesson of being obedient and dutiful to the Civil Government? Obviously from their Master! Some tax collectors of the Temple once questioned Peter, “Does your Teacher not pay the Temple tax?” (Mt 17:24). The narrative follows like this: “He said, ‘Yes.’ And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated his thoughts and said, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their own sons or from strangers?’ Peter replied, ‘From strangers.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, take the fish that comes up first. When you have opened its mouth, you’ll find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and for you” (vv 25-27). Jesus Christ was the only begotten “Son” of the Father and the Temple was His own Father’s House! Yet He arranged for tax payment. Beloved, though we are the sons and daughters of the King of kings, we should pay taxes and customs to the earthly Rulers, thus avoiding being an offence to others. Jesus specified the “first” fish, which means, payment of tax must take priority.

Another similar instance emphasizes the payment of taxes. The Pharisees sent some of their disciples to ask Jesus if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus asked for a coin and asked them whose image was on it. When they replied that it was Caesar’s, He said, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Mt 22:15-21). The order is important. First to Caesar and then to Christ! First taxes and then tithes! While there is so much of teaching everywhere about tithing, why is paying of taxes hardly mentioned in our pulpits? Jesus and the apostles, never once, taught tithing in the New Testament, but tithing happens to be the most favorite subject for every other Pastor! This is how we have lost the sense of priority in Christianity. We strain the mosquito and swallow the camel. Jesus called such preachers “blind guides” (Mt 23:24). The ignorance of our people is because of the blindness of our leaders. We forget the first things but make the last things first.

Beloved, black money does not become white money just because it’s dropped into the offering box. It, rather, becomes wasted money! God does not record it in His account. The money that must go to the government, if placed in the Church offering, is not accepted by God. It may go into the Church register but not God’s record. The devil knows that the tax money belongs to the Government. If God accepts that money, the devil will accuse God for accepting that which is not due to Him! Beware!

If we cannot be loyal to the Governments of this world, how can we be loyal citizens of the eternal Kingdom? He who cheats the Government cannot honour God. “Fear God. Honour the king” (1 Pet 2:17). Inseparable!

Can we ask the tax or customs officials for favour? You can request a favour, provided no bribery is involved. Favour of men is not anti-Biblical. But don’t resort to bribery even for the sake of God’s work. Don’t evade tax in the guise of Christian ministry. God will not be pleased with it. This will be a stumbling block for the conversion of the tax officials. The non-Christian officials expect a higher standard from Christians, especially from Christian leaders and preachers. Their expectations are right because they

have heard that Christians are to be the salt of the earth and the light of world (Mt 5:13,14). Don't lose your saltiness or brightness, after all, in order to save some money. Jesus has challenged us, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven" (Mt 5:16).

While returning from our first overseas trip in 1979, my wife and I brought along with us lots of electronic goods which were dutiable. We pleaded with the customs officer that these items were meant for God's work and we are preachers. The officer was a Sikh gentleman. We were ashamed when he told us, "As preachers you should have been all the more careful!"

One of the Indian missionaries went to open a bank account in North India. The bank official asked for his profession. He replied that he was a Missionary. The word 'Missionary' did not make much sense to the official and so he wrote 'Saint!'

4. Do not make cheap offering.

As you keep reading this booklet, some of you may be frequently bothered about my negative approach to these subjects. Why teach "How **not to Give**" instead of "How **to Give**"? Though I have briefly explained this in the Introduction, here are a few more thoughts.

Have you noticed that out of the Ten Commandments, eight say, "You shall **not**...?" (Ex 20:1-17). This is not accidental. This was how Solomon the Preacher also dealt with vital subjects. For example, Ecclesiastes 5:1-4: "Do **not** be rash with your mouth and let **not** your heart utter anything hastily before God... when you make a vow to God, do **not** delay to pay it." Yes, both the Testaments in the Bible stress the need to *unlearn* the wrong things before *learning* what's right. Why so? Going our own way is the sin of sins. Isaiah 53:6, "All have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Going against God's ways is "the iniquity." We are filled with our own ways. These are the "transgressions" and "iniquities" for which Christ suffered on the Cross (v5). It's in repentance we deal with our wrong choice of our own ways over God's. 1 Peter 2:25, "You were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." We have now come under a new management. We are to conduct ourselves differently. Our responsibility is to model Jesus Christ. The apostles withdrew from anything they sensed not right and was contradictory to God's line of thinking. They reminded the believers, "You have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4:20,21).

Money is earned by spending so many hours of our precious life at work. Our giving of that money to God cannot be taken lightly. Here's the 4th lesson on How not to Give: *Do not make cheap offering.*

Beloved, **to whom** we give must take priority in our minds rather than **what** we give. Only then, we will give our best unto God. Prophet Malachi thundered, "Cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and makes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. I am a great King, says the Lord of Hosts" (Mal 1:14). How can a cheap offering be made to the great King? When the Queen of England visited Kanchipuram in South India, the weavers of silk sarees wanted to gift their best to her. Some of them wove sarees so fine that could be folded into a matchbox! The Queen did not make note of the gifters to send them an acknowledgement! She would not wear them either! Then why this extravagance? She is "Queen!" That's it! This is exactly what God was challenging thro' Malachi. He further said, "When you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? When you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Would the Governor be pleased if you offer such to him? Would he accept you favourably? says the Lord of Hosts" (v8).

Here are some classic examples of those who gave their best to God. The offering of Abel is one. His offering and that of his elder brother Cain are compared in Genesis 4:3,4. Cain brought "some" of the fruits from his field. But Abel brought the "**best**" from his flock unto God. God had no respect for the offering of Cain while He received Abel's offering as a sweet-smelling aroma. What we give to God and how we give it indicate what we think about Him and how much we revere Him.

King David once numbered the people. The calculation of one's muscle strength does not please God. The anger of the Lord was aroused against him in that He sent a plague among the people.

David's heart was beating with condemnation, and he wondered and cried why the sheep were taken to task for the sin of the shepherd. God sent him a message through a prophet to build an altar and make an offering unto Him so the plague would end (2 Sam 24). When David went to a man called Araunah to request his threshing floor for the erection of the altar, he asked the King, "Why has my Lord the King come to this servant?" David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you." Araunah answered, "**Take** whatever seems good to you. Here are oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing implements and the yokes of the oxen for wood" (vv19-22). The response of David presents an eternal principle: "No, but I will surely **buy** it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing" (v24). This threshing floor is the same place as Moriah, where Abraham went to make the greatest sacrifice, and where the Temple was built later by Solomon (Gen 22:2; 1 Chron 21:23,24; 2 Chron 3:1). See how God honours sacrificial giving! Sacrificial offering honours God, and God honours the one who offers sacrificially!

The believers in Macedonia present another challenging example for sacrificial giving. Here's Paul's testimony about them: 2 Corinthians 8:1-3, "We make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the Churches of Macedonia that in a great trial of affliction their abundance of the joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing." Deep poverty, but abounding liberality! According to their ability and beyond their ability! We must be thus revolutionized in our giving. At this point we are reminded of the poor widow who gave away all she had. Jesus commended her saying, "The rich put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood" (Mk 12:41-44). The world lauds how much we give, but God looks at how much we keep back. God does not care for the amount, but considers the proportion. It would be cheap if the rich stop with tithing. The rich must be rich in giving too. Paul admonished young Timothy to "command" those who are rich to be rich in giving also (1 Tim 6:17-19). A rich man is not the one who has more but the one who gives more.

In a Sunday morning service, in one of the mission field Churches, I was deeply moved to see a poor tribal woman with tattered clothes who came forward with a goat at the time of offertory. She said that she had pledged one of her two goats to God. She went on to say that because the goat she had pledged got sick, she wanted to give to God the other healthy goat, which was all the possession she had! When she testified thus and gave away that goat, I could not continue to preach as I was deeply convicted.

The missionary history of the Church abounds with examples of sacrificial giving. C.T. Studd (1862-1931) was a famous millionaire Cricketer who gave away everything, when he accepted Christ, for charity and religious purposes. He had kept a small amount for his fiancée. On the eve of their marriage, she told him, "If you love God more than you love me, give away to God what you have kept for me also, and we will begin life with nil balance." And he gave away to God that amount also. His conviction was, "If Christ had died for me, no sacrifice I make for Him is too great!"

Friend, when was it that you gave something sacrificially to God? Have you ever felt the pinch of giving to God? O, for a revival of giving in all our Churches! Should we not excel the Old Covenant folks in giving? (Ex 35:4,5,21-26). Perhaps, right now you can think of something you hold precious, to give away to God. It may be a jewel, a fixed deposit, a vehicle or a property. Beloved, God is worthy! If Christ had died for us, no sacrifice we make for Him will be too great!

5. Do not yield to pressures.

Christians are pressurized on all sides by appeals for funds both from preachers and organisations. Beloved, you must give out of an inner burden and not because of an external pressure. Be extremely careful and cautious especially if you are in a problem or crisis. A wealthy woman was diagnosed for a terminal disease and was in death bed. She was a nominal Christian and had been longing for peace. She called two of the local preachers and told them her problem. The preachers asked her, "Have you written a will for all your properties and monies?" When the lady answered that she had not, the preachers asked her to will 50% of her possessions to each of them. She did that at once as she was desperate for peace. When asked how she felt after she had willed, she said, "I feel exactly like being crucified between two thieves!" Beloved, if you are going through problems, beware, lest any preacher manipulate you!

Jesus Christ warned about such a situation because of a common practice in His own time. Referring to the Scribes of His day, He said, "They were devouring the houses of widows and in pretense were making long prayers. They will receive greater condemnation" (Mk 12:40). Interestingly, in the verses that immediately follow we have the story of the poor widow who gave away to God all that she had! (vv 41-44).

You must be aware of sympathy appeals which come to you from preachers. Suppose a TV preacher says that he is in debts and that he might have to discontinue the telecast if people don't give, remember that this is not in line with the New Testament teaching. This is not the apostolic pattern. Preachers must aim at planting a burden in the hearts of people and not create sympathy. Apostle Paul never made sympathy appeals. Read his testimony in Philippians 4:10-13 which is such a great challenge: "I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again. Though you surely did care, you did not have opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, because I have learnt, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in everything I have learnt both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." In today's language he would have said, "If I don't have enough money for travel, I will shut myself in my prayer closet and I will travail in prayer. If I don't have enough food, I will take it as an opportunity for fasting and will go on feasting on the Word of God." Preachers tell people, "If you give, God will open up the windows of heaven and meet your needs!" Why don't preachers apply this faith for themselves? Why should they beg?

Dear preacher friends, a simple presentation of your needs may be permissible. Never bring people under any sort of pressure. Moses of the Old Testament presented the needs for the construction of the Tabernacle in a simple manner before the people (Ex 35). Similarly, Apostle Paul was involved in a project of raising large sums of money for the suffering saints in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29,30). See how carefully he handled this issue while writing to the Corinthian Church: 1 Corinthians 16:1,2, "Concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders for the Churches of Galatia, so you must do also. On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there may be no collections when I come." The truth brought out here is that Paul did not want the congregation to be pressurized even by his physical presence! He was careful not to give in to the desires of the people to personally give their offerings in the hands of the preacher. Why do Pastors expect people give their tithes in their hands? Why not just drop them in the collection box, without writing the names? Why should the Pastor know who gave and how much, unless he has the practice of making official receipts for offerings for the sake of submitting audited accounts to the Government? Even then, the money can be given in the hands of the Accountant or Cashier of the Church! (Read my article, *A letter to my Preacher friends about money*, in my website: StanleyOnBible.com).

Preachers must not beg people to give. Rather, people must beseech preachers to receive. That was the testimony Paul could carry about the believers in Macedonia: "I bear witness, that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, **imploping us** with much urgency, that we would receive the gift and fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (2 Cor 8:3,4). Here it's the people who are persuading the preachers to receive the offering. The revival of true giving is said to have come only when preachers would say, "Stop, we have enough and more!" Such a revival was witnessed in the days when the Tabernacle was being built. The People were offering lavishly for the construction of the Tabernacle. The officers said to Moses saying, "The people brought much more than enough for the service of the work, which the Lord commanded us to do." Moses gave a commandment and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp saying, "Let neither man nor woman bring any more offering for the work, and the people were restrained from bringing! The material they had was sufficient for all the work, indeed too much!" (Ex 36:5-7). Our magazines cry out, "Give, Give, Give!" I am yet to come across a Christian magazine which says, "Stop! Enough!" What a shame! The reason for this deplorable condition is that the Preachers are more anxious in raising money for their projects than teaching the people the principles of giving.

I want to share a personal testimony here. Over the years, I have spoken so much on giving as the chief fundraiser for the Blessing Youth Mission (BYM), which I founded, by the grace of God, in 1971. I spent more time in teaching people the Biblical principles of giving rather than talking about our projects.

In Missionary Conventions I would encourage people to give to any reliable Missionary Organisation of their choice. I would, for example, name the Friends Missionary Prayer Band (FMPB), Indian Evangelical Mission (IEM) and so on. I would say at last, "If God leads you, you can support the Blessing Youth Mission." Yet, in BYM we lacked nothing! Several Indian Missions would use my recorded messages to promote their own ministries! We have written several times in our *Blessing* magazine asking our readers to stop giving to a particular project because we had received enough!

Our giving must neither be a result of the "pressures" of preachers nor by the demands of any law. Tithing is an Old Testament law. In none of the Epistles of the New Testament, the apostles ever taught about tithing. On the other hand, they said that giving must not be out of "compulsion" or "demand" but a "cheerful heart" (2 Cor 9:5b,7). The Law is for the lawless and the beginners. "The Law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. **But after** faith has come, we are not longer under a tutor. For you are all **sons** of God, through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:24-26). Between a father and his son, it's not a matter of law but love! Beloved, tithing can be a good place to start, but should not become a place to stay. We must grow from tithing onto total. Otherwise, our singing, *All to Jesus, I surrender*, becomes a mockery!

If you have not been giving regularly and systematically to God, decide today that you will give atleast a tenth of your income to God. No one is too poor to give this much. Actually, in a country like India if you have two or three full meals a day, you are a rich man. Do you know that nearly 40% of Indians do not have a single square meal a day? If you are already giving one tenth to God, don't stay there; move on to one seventh, one fifth, and thus keep on increasing your proportion. Give, give and give, until it affects you. That's how giving becomes an act of worship.

6. Do not support questionable ministries.

It was the Apostolic pattern to warn people about false doctrine and not stop with just teaching sound doctrine. Look at Paul's testimony in Colossians 1:28, "We **preach** Christ, **warning** every man and **teaching** every man, in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." There is an element of warning that goes along with teaching. The purpose is to present every man perfect, mature and fully grown in Jesus Christ. Christians are not maturing because they are simply "taught" and have not been "warned" of that which is false. Beloved, it won't suffice to say, "Let there be light." It's necessary to "divide" light from darkness (Gen 1:4)! Faith is not complete by itself. Repentance is a prerequisite. Jesus preached, "Repent **and** believe the gospel" (Mk 1:15). To repent means to turn away from all that is wrong in order to get into the right path. That's what we are all commissioned to do as we go out to preach the Gospel. Repentance **and** remission of sins by faith must be proclaimed in the Name of Jesus to all the nations (Lk 24:27). These two sides of the same coin are spelt out in the testimony of the Psalmist: Psalm 119:127,128, "I **love** Your commandments more than gold, yes, than fine gold. I **hate** every false way." Loving God's way gets strengthened by hating every false way! This is the logic behind whatever is presented in this booklet.

Lesson Number 6 on How not to Give: *Do not support questionable ministries.*

Once upon a time, it was the cine world which was the most profitable business, followed by politics. Sadly and unfortunately, it's religion now, as rightly predicted by the apostles. Paul in 1 Timothy 6:5 said that people would suppose godliness as a means of gain. He then warned Timothy, "From such people, withdraw yourself." Who are the questionable ministers? How can they be identified? Here are four categories of questionable ministers.

a) *Material-minded preachers*

On the pulpit or in print, these preachers would use every opportunity to raise money. Their mind and heart is on earthly things. Paul warned the Philippian believers, "Brothers, join in following my example and note those who so walk as for a pattern. Many walk of whom I have told you often and now tell you with weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly and whose glory is their shame. They set their mind on earthly things" (Phil 3:17-19). Paul does not refer to them as the enemies of "Christ," rather they are the enemies of the "Cross of

Christ.” The Cross speaks about suffering, sacrifice, self-denial and death to the things of the world. These preachers may name the Name of Christ, but they don’t bring the Cross of Christ to the focus, because, for them it’s an offense. Their mind is not focussed on eternal things but set on earthly things.

Beloved, there are so many evils associated with Christian ministry. But the love of money is the root of all. Paul warned young Timothy, “The love of money is the root of all evil. But you, O **man of God**, flee these things” (1 Tim 6:10,11). Don’t go after money. Note that Paul was not addressing just a “child” of God but a “man” of God. In other words, here’s a specific warning to God’s servants. “You cannot serve God and money” (Lk 16:13). Jesus has used the word, “serve.” This again tells us that this warning has a special reference to the servants of God. Should then a Christian preacher not have lots of money? The early apostles had lots of money following the birth of the Church. People sold their properties and possessions and gave the proceeds to the apostles. The emerging notable truth is that the money was at the apostles’ “feet” and not in their “fists” (Acts 4:37). We know this because when Peter and John went to the Temple in the hour of prayer, they came across a beggar asking for alms. Peter replied, “Silver and gold, have I none,” meaning, “I” don’t have them, “I” don’t keep them with “me!” To quote Dr. Billy Graham here would be appropriate. He said, “If a person gets his attitude towards money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area of his life.” Yes, material-minded preachers are definitely questionable ministers.

b) Ministers with no accountability

They would normally say, “I am sincere before God. He knows what I am doing. I don’t bother about people.” Beloved, this may sound spiritual but it’s not scriptural. 2 Corinthians 8:20,21 sets the Apostolic principle in handling of money: “We avoid this that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us providing honourable things **not only** in the sight of the Lord **but also** in the sight of men.” In Christian ministry, especially in money matters, we must be right in the sight of “both” God and men. The US government generally does not interfere with religious organizations in the way funds are administered. An US Senator, unhappy at the extravagant lifestyle of some of the Preachers, recently questioned, “Can some individuals, in the name of religion, lead such extravagant lives with public money?” He pointed out six Christian preachers who belonged to very wide popular media ministries. The Evangelical Council of Financial Accountability (ECFA) in America has hundreds of Christian organizations as its members who are expected to operate with a sense of accountability. Billy Graham was instrumental in bringing about the formation of this Council years ago. None of the six preachers pointed out by the said Senator was a member of this Council! Beloved, we need to be extremely cautious in this area. Jesus did not keep the money with Him (Jn 13:29). You may excuse yourself saying that you have not found a reliable person whom you can entrust with finance. If Jesus could trust a thief like Judas, I think none of our excuses would be valid. Why are we so apprehensive? Anyone can run away with our money but no one can steal our anointing! Judas only ruined himself.

c) Ministers with doctrinal deviation

We cannot evade responsibility and say, “After I give away my offering, it’s between that preacher and God. I am not responsible for it.” The Apostles have taught us differently: 2 John 9-11, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, does not have God. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house or greet him, because he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” See how a single chapter Epistle contains such a strong admonition! You are supposed to verify the doctrines of Preachers whom you support. That is your stewardship responsibility. Basically, you are to ask these three questions about any preacher to decide whether he deserves your support—

- ✠ Does he preach salvation by faith on the finished work of Christ or a salvation of works?
- ✠ Does he really exalt Christ in his message or boast of himself?
- ✠ Does he teach the Bible or does he spend time on extra-Biblical revelations and sensational experiences?

This is just to verify doctrinal soundness.

d) Ministers who build their own empires rather than the Kingdom of God

Preachers and ministers of this kind would do everything for the sake of status and prestige. They would desire that their buildings are bigger than those of others. They would go for huge projects without a clear guidance from God. They have taken a heavy dose of competition, imagination and

duplication. God questions everyone of His servants, "Do you seek great things for **yourself**? Don't seek them" (Jer 45:5a). Any preacher who accumulates wealth for generations of his family is not in line with the Bible. Beware of such preachers! John Wesley, that great Revivalist of the 17th century in England, said, "If I leave more than 10 pounds, you and all mankind can say that I died as a thief and a robber!" Does it sound too strong and eccentric? But this is truly Biblical!

What is the safest mode of giving? Give to the local Church and also to the Para-church organizations. The latter complements the former. Don't keep on giving to just one Preacher or one organisation. Distribute to various ministries. We don't deposit all our money in one bank, do we? For safety sake we distribute our deposits, isn't it? Give to Paul who plants. Give to Apollos who waters. Give to Paul who goes to the non-Jews (non-Christians). Give to Peter who goes to the Jews (nominal Christians). Paul represents Missionaries. Apollos represents Pastors. Peter represents Revivalists. Whatever amount you set aside for the Lord may be distributed sensibly as God leads you to these types of ministers. Don't spoil any preacher by thoughtless giving.

7. Do not give to influence preachers.

Corrective teaching may seem critical for some but the difference between criticism and correction makes all the difference. Criticism may be subjective in nature whereas correction is essentially objective in its approach. Experiences of the men of God in the Bible will help us understand this more practically. The Psalmist prays in Psalm 119:135,136, "Make Your face shine upon Your servant and teach me Your statutes. Rivers of water run down from my eyes because men do not keep Your law." This is the dual experience of the Psalmist. As he learns God's ways, he laments over those who are straying. The more he learns, the greater is his lament. Apostle Paul had a similar experience: Philippians 3:18, "**Many** walk of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ." It was not criticism but a concern. Not only in Paul's time, even now those who preach false doctrine outnumber those who teach sound doctrine. Paul predicted, "A time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will **heap up** for themselves teachers who teach wrong doctrine" (2 Tim 4:3). False teachers will be in "heaps" whereas sound teachers will only be a "handful!" Keep this in mind while hearing or reading any sound doctrinal teaching.

The seventh lesson on How not to Give: *Do not give to influence preachers.*

Sadly, religion is highly commercialized these days. Bribery that is prevalent in the secular world is abundant in the spiritual circles also. Foreseeing such a situation, while commissioning the 12 disciples to preach, Jesus said, "As you go, preach, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. **Freely you have received, freely give**" (Mt 10:7,8). Charismatic preachers who operate the gifts of healing should be more careful in this area than their non-charismatic counterparts. In today's context, I would say, "Beware of preachers who offer special prayers for special offerings!" The Lord Jesus came heavily on this practice: Matthew 23:14, "Woe to you, Scribes, Pharisees and hypocrites, you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers." In order to empty (=devour) the widow's purses, these religious leaders were offering special (=long) prayers! God does not give anything according to "our" merit. He always gives us according to "His" riches and our "need." The Bible challenges us, "When God has not spared His own Son but has given Him up for us all, will He not give the other things also to us freely?" (Rom 8:32). Any blessing other than the gift of God's Son is only secondary. And God gives everything "freely!" A Tamil proverb goes like this: "Even if God gives gifts freely, the priest won't!" Unfortunately this is the situation that is prevailing in Christendom.

Trying to influence preachers with money in the guise of offering is sin. The apostles took a vehement stand against this practice. Read Acts 8:17-24. Philip preached the gospel in the City of Samaria where many received the Word. When Apostle Peter, who had come from Jerusalem, laid hands on the converts, the Holy Spirit instantly came on them. A sorcerer named Simon was watching the whole thing. Fascinated by the spectacularity of this gift, he offered money to the apostles, saying, "Give me also this power, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit" (v19). Peter angrily replied him, "Your money

perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!... Your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness... For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity” (vv 20-23). Note the words: “...perish ...wickedness...poisoned... bitterness!” These may sound too harsh but this is how God looks at any one who tries to influence God’s servants, directly or indirectly, with his material wealth.

God is upset not only with those who “give” offerings with an ulterior motive but also with the preachers who “receive” such offerings. God powerfully used Prophet Elisha to perform miracles. Through his ministry Naaman a military commander was healed of his leprosy. He wanted to offer some gifts to the prophet over which Elisha said that he was least interested in it and asked him to give it to somebody else. Elisha’s servant Gehazi was watching this. He could not understand how his master could reject such an attractive offer! He therefore ran to meet Naaman without the knowledge of the prophet. He collected all those offerings and came back as though nothing had happened. When Elisha asked Gehazi where he had gone, he replied “Nowhere!” The prophet sternly rebuked him saying, “Is it time to receive clothing, money and olives? Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever!” (2 Ki 5:25-27). Horrifying! But this is how God judges wrong motives in giving or receiving offerings. Both the giver and the receiver come under judgment.

Do the above incidents tell us that we cannot give offerings to the servants of God who pray for us? No, but what is our motive? God used Daniel to interpret King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2:47,48). The King offered him some gifts in appreciation and gratitude. Daniel accepted it. In contrast, he refused the gift given by his son, King Belteshazzar. Why? When wickedness and iniquity overflowed in the latter’s reign, there appeared a handwriting on the wall. The King was deeply disturbed by that and could not understand what that meant. He called for Daniel and said, “If you can read this writing and make known to me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around your neck” (Dan 5:16,17). But Daniel replied, “Let your gifts be for yourself!” While Daniel accepted the gifts of King Nebuchadnezzar, he refused the gifts of his son. The difference was that in the former situation the gift was given with a feeling of gratitude whereas in the latter, the motive was to influence the prophet (Daniel 2 vs 5). God knows not only our thoughts but also the intentions! The Word of God divides these two! (Heb 4:12).

It’s actually doctrinal error that has birthed the business of special prayers for special offerings. The Bible admonishes us to “pray for one another.” This is wrongly understood. This admonition rightly means that preachers must pray for the people, and people for the preachers! There must be mutual help for mutual need. One group is not superior or inferior to the other. It is the New Testament teaching that anyone can pray for another person, but no one can become a mediator. “There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). See what follows: Verse 8, “Therefore I desire that men pray everywhere.” The word “men,” as a general term, refers to all the people of God, not just to preachers.

The dispensational difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament must be rightly understood. In the OT there was a special category of men called “priests” who were praying to God for others. Today, in the NT, all the people of God are priests, and as such we pray for “one another.” The ministry of the OT Prophets was to pray to God for man. The ministry of the people of God, as the NT prophets, is to plead to men for God! “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us, we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). It’s referring to this change the Bible says, “All things have become new in Jesus Christ. The old things have passed away” (v17). The ceremonial practices of the Old Testament have passed away. All things have become new under the New Covenant. As Christianity is becoming more and more commercialized this dispensational truth (Heb 7:11,12) must be fully recovered lest the situation gets worse!

8. Do not neglect the poor.

We talk about “Dark Ages” in Church history. It was when the Bible was not available to the people. No Bible, no light! It’s now worse. The times are still darker! We have piles of Bibles but the eyes of its readers are perforated. We need a healing. Christ offers us “eye salve” to anoint our eyes so we may

see as we ought to see (Rev 3:16-18). Read on with the prayer that we come across in the Book of Psalms: "O Lord, open my eyes of understanding that I may behold wondrous things from Your Word" (119:18).

It's generally thought that giving to God's work is superior to giving to the poor. The Bible teaches otherwise: Matthew 23:23, "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees and hypocrites, for you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin but you have neglected the weightier matters of the law." Jesus calls charity a "weightier" matter than tithing. All through the Bible this particular truth is presented with all clarity. In Isaiah 1:15 God says, "When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear." He states the reason in verses 16 & 17: "Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean. Put away the evil of your doing from before My eyes. Cease to do evil and learn to do good." What are we supposed to do then? "Seek justice, reprove the oppressor, defend the fatherless and plead for the widow." Seeking justice for the helpless, reproving the oppressors of the weaker sections of society, defending the cases of the widows are "good" deeds God calls us to do as against "evil" doings. Until we do these things our prayers are an abomination before God. He further calls us: "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (v18). This promise is used again and again in evangelistic meetings while calling sinners to repentance and salvation. But the primary application of this passage is to God's people to bring them back to acts of charity. Neglecting charity is a sin "like scarlet" and red "like crimson!" We are good at taking texts out of context for our convenience.

Christ gave practical guidelines on several Christian disciplines in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:2,5,16). Interestingly He first talked about almsgiving, and only then about praying and fasting. Yes, almsgiving is superior to tithing. When we give to God's work, we are "giving" to God. When we give to the poor, we are "lending" to God (Prov 19:17). One of the names of the Jehovah God is, "The God of the Poor." The Psalmist worshipped God saying, "You are the Helper of the fatherless" (Psa 10:14). While calling others to worship, the Psalmist said, "Sing to God...Extol Him...Rejoice before Him. A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation!" (Psa 68:4,5). Which worship leader today refers to this outstanding characteristic of God? This is why I often say that we Christians have lost our priorities.

Beloved, giving to the poor is not optional, it's an obligation on the part of every Christian. If we fail in charity we actually "sin" against God. Deuteronomy 15:7,8,9, "If there is among you a poor man of your brothers, don't shut your hand from your poor brother. You shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficiently whatever he needs." If this commandment would ever be ignored, God says, "It will become **sin** among you." God's commandment to open our hands "wide" to the poor is stated by Apostle Paul as God loves a "cheerful" giver (2 Cor 9:7). This Scripture text is normally quoted by Churches to raise money for carpeting the floors, cushioning the pews, curtaining the altars and conditioning the halls. But the context of the passage is actually regarding charity. Paul begins this subject saying, "Concerning the ministering to the saints..." (vv 1,9,12).

The teaching of the Lord Jesus on this subject of charity is unmistakably specific. Luke 12: 31, "Seek the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you..." We enjoy singing choruses composed on this verse but forget what follows: v33, "Sell what you have and give alms. Provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail." Jesus drove home this truth not only in a general sermon like this, but also in personal conversations. A rich young ruler came to the Lord asking Him, what "good thing" he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus replied that he should keep God's Commandments, he said that he had been keeping them from childhood. He asked the Lord, "What do I still lack?" The reply of Jesus was punching. He said, "If you want to be perfect, sell what you have and give it to the poor, then come and follow Me"(Mt 19:16-22). The young man least expected this sort of reply. He was shell-shocked. His countenance fell and he went away sorrowful.

Christ's emphasis on charity ran throughout His teaching. Once He told the very host who had invited Him for dinner, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor your rich neighbours, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Lk 14:12-14). The question is whether you want to be "repaid" here or "rewarded" There!

What was the sin of the rich man which landed him in hell? Was it theft, murder, adultery, or what? His was not a sin of commission but of omission. He failed to do even the minimum he could have done to alleviate the sufferings of poor Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). Have you noticed that Jesus narrated this story to those “who were lovers of money?” (v14). We cannot grow in the discipline of charity without loosening our grip on money.

A question may be posed: “How much should we give to the poor?” John the Baptist would answer, “50%.” When his baptismal candidates asked him what they should do, he unhesitatingly said, “If you have two shirts, give one to the one who has none” (Lk 3:10,11). To John that was a proof of repentance—“fruits worthy of repentance” (Lk 3:7-11). He was not a New Testament prophet. He was sort of a bridge between the Old and the New Covenants. His message is presented on the opening pages of the New Testament, not without a purpose. He was a minister of Restoration. He came to prepare the way of the Lord so the glory of the Lord would be revealed. The people of Israel had mistreated the poor and the needy. God’s anger was stirred up against them. He said, “I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one!” (Ezek 22:29,30). May be years later God found such a man in John the Baptist! Just like John who came as a forerunner to prepare people for the first Coming of Christ, the Holy Spirit has empowered the Church to prepare people for His Second Coming. One vital step in preparation is to restore the Biblical truth about charity. Unfortunately several of our fasting prayer programmes which frequently use the phrase, “standing in the gap,” hardly make any reference to repentance from our gross neglect of charity (Ezek 22:29,30).

I’m sure Zacchaeus was in the audience of John the Baptist. “Fifty percent to the poor” would have been to him asking for too much! But his heart had been pricking him. He burst out when Jesus came to his doorstep. He instantly promised the Lord, “I give half of my goods to the poor!” (Lk 3:11; 19:8). If John’s teaching is too demanding, why not set aside atleast another tithe for the poor? None of us will go breadless if we do so. Give to relief agencies and charity organizations. Those days the Church took care of the poor, the fatherless and the widows (Acts 6). That’s ideal any day. When local churches have failed to do it, God has raised many para-church organizations to meet the needs of the marginalized and the downtrodden. Let your first tithe go to the local Church and missionary organizations. The second tithe may be distributed to the relief agencies. At the same time, don’t forget Lazarus at your doorstep! (Lk 16:19-31).

To conclude, a striking text from the practical Epistle of James: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their troubles, to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (Js 1:27). Pure religion has two sides: Help the poor; Keep yourself pure. While we dwell so much on personal sanctification, there must be an equal emphasis, if not more, on charity. In fact, Apostle James put charity before purity! And he concludes, “Faith without works is dead” (Js 2:17). By “works” he meant works of charity (vv 14-16). Let not the multiplicity of our spiritual activities blind our eyes of compassion.

Visit my website stanleyonbible.com to read my article, *Christianity is Charity!*

9. Do not publicise your giving.

Treating giving as an important Christian discipline, the very first teaching of Christ was against publicizing our giving. This is what He taught in the Sermon on the Mount: “When you do a charitable deed, do not sound the trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets that they may have glory from men. When you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Mt 6:1-4). The don’t’s mentioned here are (1) Don’t publicise it in the Church; (2) Don’t publicise it in your society; (3) Don’t be puffed up within yourself.

Woe unto those who desire and encourage writing the names of donors on the pews, chairs, tables, fans and other furniture. It’s abominable in the sight of God. People write names even on tubelights, thus preventing light!

The written records about the construction of the Tabernacle or the Temple carry no evidence of any such practice of the names of donors being engraved anywhere. This was unheard of even under the Old Covenant, making it unimaginable in the New!

The Preachers and Pastors of today need to behave more responsibly in this matter. It's they who shamefully encourage the commoners that they would find their names engraved on the walls and pillars depending upon the size of the offering. This is in no way Biblical. A rich man's donation of 1,00,000/- rupees would be a pittance for him while the 10 rupee offering of a poor man would be his all and yet go unnoticed. What the poor man has given is much more than the rich man's, in the sight of God.

Publicising of people's offerings by preachers is actually aimed at enticing donors. Beware of such practices and practitioners! Keep away from preachers who promise to have your names hung on walls or engraved. Watch out, your names can get washed off in the next Tsunami! Neither feed nor cherish a secret desire within yourself for your giving to be known. Receive appreciation gracefully if your large heart is recognised. But as for you, take special efforts to stay hidden and humble. The military official in Luke 7 asked for Jesus to come and minister to his sick servant. The people pleaded with Jesus on his behalf that he had built for them a synagogue and had been patriotic, speaking high of his liberality. People were sort of saying that he deserved a bit of Christ's attention. Note that this was the "people's" approach. When Jesus actually shuffled His itinerary and went over to him, the official confessed that he was unworthy of the Lord coming to him and he managing to have a brief appointment with Christ! (Lk 7:1-7). What an attitude! Non-demanding and humble!

The early Church tasted a terrible judgment pronounced over Ananias and Sappira (Acts 5). To bring the entire proceeds of one's possessions was far from the Apostolic command. It was a voluntary act on the part of the believers. This couple gave ear to the whispers of the devil and lusted after recognition wanting to impress. They only earned God's fury and dug their own pit.

There are still people who donate large sums for God's work hiding themselves behind the screen. It was one family who blessed us with large sums of money to build the headquarters building of the Blessing Youth Mission and the Blessing Annexe in Vellore, and several Missionary Rest Houses. Would you believe they didn't permit even their photographs to be hung anywhere in these structures? Nowhere, in any of these buildings, would you find the names of donors or the ones who dedicated them. A gentleman, in 1996, after handing over an almost new Tata Mobile fourwheeler in our office, left immediately refusing even to be photographed with. These are people who look for God's approval only. They lean on Hebrew 6:10, "God is not unjust to forget your works and labour of love which you have shown towards His Name, in that you have ministered to the saints and do minister." God's promise to remember and record our giving is all we need!

Desiring to personally gift anything in the hands of a popular preacher is another wreckage of Bible ethics. Preachers have the wrong side of their self-esteem boosted by these practices. When Paul raised large sums for the poor he spelt out firmly, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the Churches of Galatia, so you must do also. On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be **no collections when I come**" (1 Cor 16:1,2). Anybody would love to give the offering in an Apostle like Paul's hand. How he gave "orders" not to entertain any such practice! Let's operate at the Bible's wavelength!

Why do we lust publicity? It's because we think we give "our" money to God. Nay, nothing of what we have is ours. We give not ours but from what God has given us. Rejoicing over the generous giving of materials and money for the building of the Temple, David confessed, "Now, therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious Name; Who am I, Lord, but who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all these things come from You and of Your own we have given You" (1 Chr 29:13,14). David woke up to a wonderful revelation! He went on to say, "Because we are aliens and pilgrims before You, as were our fathers, and our days on this earth are as a shadow and without hope" (v15). That is, we are not owners, just users—that too, temporarily! We give back to God only what we have received from Him.

God has given us His unspeakable gift! We cannot outgive Him! Let's agree with C.T. Studd (1862-1931) who said, "If Christ has died for me, no sacrifice I make will be too great!" Let this keep echoing in our hearts, so we may give quietly. Remember God "hears" our motives!

10. Do not give just to receive.

Both the Old and the New Testaments teach us that God does not **need** anything from us. God says in Psalm 50:10-13, "Every beast of the forest is Mine and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountain, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is Mine and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of the bulls and drink the blood of goats?" Should God ever "ask" us for anything when all the world is His? Paul in the New Testament reciprocates the same truth in Acts 17:24,25, when he says, "God who made the world and everything in it, since He is the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He worshipped with men's hands as though He **needed** anything. He gives to all life and health and all things."

While we are doing God no favour by our giving, our giving should solely be an act of worship and a celebration of His goodness. Deuteronomy 16:16,17 confirms this pivotal truth thus: "Three times a year, all your males shall appear before the Lord God in the place which He chooses. They shall not appear before the Lord emptyhanded. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God, which He has given you." God is least interested in the birds, bulls and blood of goats, but yearns for what He says in Psalm 50:14, "Offer to God **thanksgiving** and pay your vows to the Most High."

Referring to the offerings received from the Philippian believers, Apostle Paul said, "Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Ephaphroditus the things which were sent from you, a sweetsmelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18). The sweet smell was personified in the attitude of that woman who poured out her costly perfume on Jesus. The disciples reacted to her style of worship with a string of criticisms but Christ responded calling the act, "an anointing of His body for the anticipated burial" (Mk 14:6,8). She came early and had the blessing of being able to perfume Him before His death. The other women lost the grand opportunity because they did not even get the body. Dear friend, if you desire your giving to be an act of worship, don't lose a minute. Do it now! Only what's done on time is "good work" (v6).

The faith of the Jews in the Old Testament was an oscillating pendulum. One swing of it would cry out to Jehovah and the other would call for Baal at the slightest delay of Moses' return from the mountain. They needed a golden calf to handle their impatience. It was only to entice such fluctuates, God promised them in Malachi 3:8-10, "Will a man rob God? Yet, you have robbed Me. But you say, 'In what have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that they may be food in My house and try Me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it!" The "whole nation" had cheated God (Mal 3:9). They left God for abominable ways. God complained, "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the Lord's Holy institution which He loves; he has married the daughter of a foreign god" (Mal 2:11). Beloved, God's utterances in such scenarios cannot be treated as the norm for the New Testament. Also the blessings which God promised were only material (Mal 3:10).

Recognise the paradigm shift from material to spiritual blessings as we move on to the New Testament. Using the same agricultural language, see what Paul wrote about God's blessings in turn to the liberal givers: 2 Corinthians 9:10, "Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your **righteousness**." Watch out, it's "righteousness," not riches!

See how Paul brings out the spirit of worship in the context of giving: 2 Corinthians 9:11-13, "You are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes **thanksgiving** through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many **thanksgiving** to God, while through the proof of this ministry, they **glorify** God." Thus flows out the lesson: giving is an act of worship and not a means to receive! We don't give in order to receive but because we have already received the gift of gifts, God's "indescribable gift!" (v15).

This does not mean that God would not bless us materially. We can expect God to meet our basic needs, but eternity-consciousness must stand above earthly-mindedness. The following texts teach this truth consistently.

Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not lay for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but lay for yourselves treasures in **Heaven**."

Luke 16:9, "Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, so when you fail, they may receive you into **everlasting** habitations."

Philippians 4:19, "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in **glory** by Christ Jesus."

The fact that God "receives" what I give Him is more glorious than that God "rewards" me for what I give Him! That's why Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35b). Giving is a greater blessing than receiving. If only Christians would understand this truth, commercialisation of religion by the modern brand of preachers would stop instantly!

*** *** ***

His love demands my all!

*When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down,
Did o'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an off'ring far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

—Isaac Watts, 1674-1748