

Grace Giving Part III

New Testament Giving

By Denise Bostic

The knowledge and understanding of grace is an absolute necessity in the life of every believer in Christ. God has designed grace to permeate every area of our lives, including the way we give, yet there are so many today that do not have a true revelation of God's grace due to being fed heavy doses of *legalism* within their Churches. Legalism does not originate from God however; it is false doctrine that is taught and practiced by fleshly and fallible men that have been deceived by the devil. I say "deceived" because it is a deception to think that we can earn the things of God based upon our own merits instead of simply receiving God's grace and having faith in what Jesus has already obtained for us through the atonement.

In Jesus' day, legalism was an overly strict interpretation of the Law of Moses but in the New Testament Church, legalism is clearly defined as a *perversion* of the Gospel of Christ. (*Galatians 1:7*) Because legalism does not come from God, it will pervert or distort our view of Him. Legalism misrepresents God and makes Him out to be someone that He is not. It does not give us a clear or accurate picture of His nature or character and what He is truly trying to communicate to us. Legalism also puts unrealistic conditions upon the children of God that they cannot live up to and is an assault on the unconditional love that God has for them. Unlike men, God is incorruptible and infallible. He is love, grace, mercy and truth personified. This is how He desires His children to see Him.

Although legalism may take on different forms, today it most often dished out to believers through the context of the Old Testament Law or otherwise known as the Law of Moses. This is not a new thing but has been a problem since the formative years of the New Testament Church. Those in the first-century Church that were newly born again and baptized in the Spirit were saved by grace and faith in Christ alone and were to continue on this path but legalism began to invade the Church and cause many, even whole congregations to fall away from grace. In what way did they fall from grace? They were returning to the *works* of the Old Testament Law. As a result, some began trying to obtain God's spiritual blessings by the works of the flesh instead of receiving them by the free gift of grace, as God intended. (*For further in-depth study, read the books of Galatians and Hebrews*)

I have often taught that the believer's salvation is more than eternal life in the hereafter with God; it is also a complete package of all that Christ obtained for us through His all-sufficient atonement. In other words, the Gospel of Christ is not limited to only the saving of one's soul from eternal damnation, but it includes all the blessings (*earthly and heavenly*) of Abraham that we have inherited in Christ. The Lord earned for us what we couldn't earn for ourselves. When we understand this, we can stop trying to work for what we can't possibly earn by ourselves and begin to apply God's grace to every area of our lives, including the way that we give. We must understand that grace is more than the undeserved, unmerited pardon of the death penalty brought on by our sins. Grace is a supernatural endowment that God gives us to help live the life of Christ in power on a daily basis. Legalism could *never* help us to do that.

This teaching goes directly contrary to the message of the legalists today. Ministers that have an Old Testament, legalistic mindset will teach others in the Church that they must work for their blessings from God by performing rules and regulations of the law or the traditions of men. They clearly state that this is the only way that God will bless them, i.e. for example you must tithe. This message however is not in line with the truth of the Gospel of Christ.

Live By Grace and Not Law

Since we cannot obtain God's blessings by works of the law then why are so many believers today trying to obtain God's blessings by their own human effort? It is because they have believed the lies of legalism. Those who are trying to be justified through their works are actually frustrating or setting aside the grace of God and so are unable to obtain the true riches in Christ! Many in the Church need to have a true revelation of the grace of God. To understand the great importance of receiving and living by the grace of God, let's look at what Paul wrote in *Galatians 2:21* in two different translations:

"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." (KJV)

"I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (NIV)

As New Covenant believers in Christ, we should not be working *against* God and His grace, but *with* God and His grace. We can't do that properly though, if we are weighed down with the chains of legalism. First we must have the revelation that the Lord died to set us free from the law. Why did He set us free from the law? It was so we could serve Him in an entirely new way. We are not to serve God in the old way of the written code (or the law). How did Israel serve God under the written code? *They served God in the power of their flesh.* They were but servants *in* God's house but we are God's sons and *are* His house because He now lives in us! Now we are to serve in the new way of the Spirit. (*Romans 7:6*)

We must realize that if we are trying to find favor and be right with God through works of the law (*including tithing*) faith in Christ holds no value. (*Romans 4:13-16, Galatians 5:2 NIV*) To treat the sacrifice of Christ as insufficient instead of all sufficient would be an insult to His Spirit of grace. (*Hebrews 10: 29*)

Christ, Our Authority

Hopefully, all that has been brought forth in this teaching so far will provide a stronger foundation to your understanding of the doctrine of grace giving and its validity in the New Testament scriptures. Many in the body of Christ need to cross over from the Old Covenant to the New. Some need to stop mixing law and grace. We need to be the New Testament Church that the Lord has called us to be. God is only pleased with our faith, not our legalistic works. (*Hebrews 11:6*) Where should our faith be? It should be in His Son and what He has already spoken to us and done for us. (*Hebrews 1:1-2*) So to understand how we are to give under the New Covenant then, we must look to Jesus, the Head of the Church.

If we truly say that we believe in Jesus and that the writers of the New Testament were under divine inspiration, then we will receive what is written as *infallible*. I have previously taught the supremacy of Christ and the New Covenant to help others in the body of Christ to understand *to whom* and where we are to look to as our final authority. Some in the Church today may understand this powerful truth but there are so many others that do not. They may be looking to the Law of Moses, the Pope, their denomination or their pastor as the ultimate authority on Church matters. *We must all understand that if we are not looking to Christ and the New Covenant as our final authority in all things however, we are looking in the wrong place.*

This statement is very strong, but true. We should have no problem with this statement however, if we are submitted to the Headship of Christ. If we truly want to know how God desires us to give then, we must look to the teachings and commands that Jesus gave to the Church through His divine messengers or apostles that wrote the New Testament. Please note I said "to the Church" and *not* to what Jesus said to the Jews in the Gospels. We must know that they were still under the dominion of the Law because Jesus had not yet went to the Cross; therefore, they were still obligated to give according its rules and regulations, i.e. the first, second, third tithe, first fruit and Hebrew festival offerings commanded under the Law.

This is very important to know. One basic rule of studying the Bible is to know to whom God is speaking. For example, was it the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant or is it the Church under the New Testament? There is a great difference. If we understand that New Testament believers are not under the dominion of the Law due to the sacrifice of Christ, then we can also understand that it has no valid authority in our lives. Under the Old Covenant, Israel obeyed the law as their authority, under the New Covenant; Christians are to obey Christ and His Spirit as our authority. Now, let's go on to learn what the New Testament teaches us

about giving. Most of what we will be learning will be coming from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapters eight and nine; for it is there that we will receive a wealth of information concerning "grace giving."

A Radical Departure from Giving According To the Law

Next we will go to *Acts 2:32-37* where we will again find the newly formed Church meeting together in complete unity and harmony and we will find some excellent examples of how brethren gave within the Church from the very beginning. In *Acts 2:41-47* we find this infant Church already swelling in numbers because the Lord was adding saved souls on a daily basis. God had been pouring out His Spirit in a great way and these joyful and devoted disciples were so on fire spiritually that they were meeting everyday to learn from the apostles teaching, eating and fellowshiping with one another and also *giving* to one another. Being that the Church was entirely made up of Jewish people, it is very interesting to note their radical departure of giving according to the rules and regulations of the Law. This wasn't their same old, same old way of giving; there was truly a different *spirit* in the atmosphere.

Next, we will go to *Acts 4:32-37* where we will find again; the newly formed Church meeting together in complete unity and harmony as well as displaying such an unselfish and generous spirit in the area of giving that it was *unnatural*.. Astonishing, as it seemed, the believers that day didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions but shared all that they had with those present. Everyone's needs were taken care of and no one lacked anything. How was this possible? Verse 33 gives us the answer: "...and much **GRACE was upon them all.**" So we find that their giving was in fact, *supernatural* and that it had

come from God, who now dwelled in His people. The loving and giving nature that they were now displaying could only be attributed to them having received a new nature and Spirit of Christ! These new believers had received a supernatural endowment of God's grace.

A Radical Change in the Priesthood

In this passage we find another powerful lesson when it comes to giving. Again, we are shown the radical departure that these Jewish believers had taken from the rules and regulations of the Law of Moses when it came not only to giving, but also the priesthood as well. In verse 36 we find a man named Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, who the apostles called Barnabas. Barnabas had sold a piece of land that he owned and then did a very surprising thing. He "**brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.**" Now to us this may not seem so unusual, but to the Jewish community this meant something truly significant.

Under the Law of Moses, the Levites collected the tithes and offerings from the people. They did not personally pay tithes to the common people; they only tithed to the High Priest. (*Leviticus 18:25-29*) Yet we find this Levite giving an offering to the Lord's newly appointed apostles of the Church who had never before functioned in the capacity of the Levitical priesthood in the Temple. (*Most of the apostles had previously been fishermen or tax collectors.*) This public act of Barnabas also teaches us another lesson: By bringing this generous offering to the apostles, he was also recognizing the new established order and leadership of the New Testament that had been ushered in by Jesus Christ. Barnabas was a "sold-out" believer that Jesus was indeed the true Messiah!

This profound truth of a change in the priesthood is due to the sacrifice of Christ. We find in other New Testament passages, particularly in the book of Hebrews, the explanation for such a radical change. Under the Law, those who officiated in the priesthood (*including the High Priest*) were weak, mortal men that died so they were unable to perfect those they were serving. Under the New Covenant however, we have a new High Priest that has been made a priest forever after the eternal order of Melchizedek by God the Father. Jesus' priesthood was not based on the ancestry of the Levitical Priesthood but on the basis of His perfection and the power of an indestructible life (*His life, death, burial and resurrection*). (*Hebrews 7*) Not only has He been divinely appointed to this exalted position by God, but all believers in Christ have all been made priests in the household of God. (*1 Peter 2:4-5*)

I said all of that to prove another major point that is necessary for all believers to know. Because we have all now been made priests and are the house (*or dwelling place*) of God, this explains why leaders of the Church in the first century distributed all offerings among the entire body of Christ. This would have never happened under the Law. All *first* tithes and commanded offerings by God under the Law would have *only* been given to the Levites. Under the New Covenant however, the rules and regulations of the Law had been abolished and

collections received could (*by all rights*) be given to all the saints because they have now also been made priests unto God. This is possible by God's free grace.

Wow! That teaching is a radical departure from what most Churches are teaching today! Please realize though dear brother or sister, *that this is not a radical departure from the truth of scripture*. Many are not teaching according to New Testament doctrine but instead are teaching according to the Law of Moses. The Lord wants this to change. He wants us to receive these priceless truths that He paid such a high price for us to have. He desires us to walk in the liberty of the Spirit, not be in bondage to the yoke of the law. He died to set us free from that! (*Romans 7:4, Galatians 2:19-20, 5:1*)

Ananias and Sapphira

The story of Ananias and Sapphira also teaches us that the Church did not teach or practice tithing. (*Acts 5:1-11*) This couple had sold a piece of their own property, brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Their offering was tainted however because the couple had already privately conspired to keep back some of the money for themselves but yet make it appear that they were giving the full amount of the price of the land. Their deception had obviously vexed the Holy Spirit however, because He gave Peter supernatural discernment in order to handle the matter.

Here, we will learn something very interesting from the insight given to Peter by the Holy Spirit. When Peter questioned Ananias (*who came in by himself first*) about his offering, we find that the Holy Spirit did not judge this matter according to the rules of giving under the Mosaic Law (*that had been taken out of the way by Jesus*), instead He judged it based on their deliberate irreverence towards God (*sin against the Spirit*). Peter said, **"Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied unto men, but to God."**

This couple thought they could lie in the presence of God and get by with it but instead they paid a high price for their irreverence and sin against God. Although that is the major and most important point of this entire story, we do find within it also a perfect example that the Church did not teach or practice tithing. Not only did the apostles obviously believe in *free-will* offerings or giving by grace but God sanctioned it as well as evidenced by Peter's divinely inspired words. If the Church held to the doctrine of tithing, Peter would have certainly brought it up at this time *yet we find that this was not even an issue that day*. In a lot of Churches today, it most certainly would have been. Within the doctrine of tithing in the modern day Church, it is commonly taught that one must give ten percent of *all* their increase and of course many believers have tithed from the proceeds of the sale of their properties today as well.

Most of the time we learn much by what scripture is saying and sometimes we learn *by what it is not saying*. As we continue our study on grace giving, we will find that this biblical rule of study will help us to have irrefutable proof that tithing was not taught or practiced by the early Christian Church as evidenced by the silence on this subject and lack of proof of its practice throughout the New Testament scriptures.

The Lord Wants Change

Through false teaching, many in the Church have radically departed from the doctrine of not only grace, but grace-giving as well. Some have never had the blessing of understanding grace from the very start. Every saint in the Church needs to understand that there is a big difference between how the nation of Israel gave under the Law of Moses and how believers in Christ should give under the dispensation of *grace*. The former gave by command and had to struggle to obey out of the power of their flesh because they did not have the Spirit. The latter give because they desire to of their own free will. Giving is not a struggle because it is now part of their *new nature* that has been given to them in Christ. They give for the right reasons and therefore have a right spirit in the sight of God. These are a people that walk in a spirit of love, unselfish giving and spiritual maturity; they are able to do this because they have received abundant grace from God to do so.

When the Body of Christ truly understands this difference, we will see a dramatic transformation and increase in the Church's *wealth (both spiritually and materially)* and our ability to spread the gospel among the lost will be greatly and *divinely* multiplied. We will no longer be limiting God because we'll be taking the restrictions off of our giving.

At this point you might be wondering how any of us could limit or restrict God. We can restrict God in the Church through our lack of godly love, sincerity, our many divisions, discords and even our out and out selfishness at times. *One major way that we can restrict God in the area of giving though is by rejecting God's empowering grace and performing works of the law instead.*

Believers today need a revelation in the area of giving. Giving is an act that should be inspired by love, the sincerity of our hearts, and a sense of sharing. All of this can be fueled by the supernatural gift of grace. Is this totally lacking in the Church? No, it isn't. But it isn't abundant either. Statistics prove that only a very small percentage of the Church pays tithes. Could it be that people don't really believe that tithing is for the New Testament Church or is it because many are tired of failing to keep the law and so have given up trying? In many ways this entire subject is so much more than about giving \$\$ for offerings, *it is more importantly about the condition of our hearts.* As long as buildings are more important than people, needy people are doing without and personal fame, fortune and success are more important than truth; we are greatly in need of serious self-examination of our motives and learning on the subject of giving.

The Lord is trying to get our attention. He wants sweeping reformation and transformation within the Church in the area of giving. He wants us to examine our beliefs, motives and reasons for giving or lack thereof so that we might go on and excel in this divine grace. There are still too many in the Church today that are being taught to give according to legalistic rules and regulations, to sow merely for material gain or to satisfy the greed of ungodly ministers. How can we have a powerful impact on the world when we are in such spiritual need ourselves?

When we are giving, God is not looking at the amount we give *but what is motivating us.* Are we giving because some Old Testament Law has been enforced upon us, out of fear of being cursed or because we are caving in to the high pressure tactics of ungodly, greedy ministers? Did we fall for some false teaching that we didn't bother to check out or simply because we think that tithing is the only way that God will bless us? If we are giving for one or more of these then we are giving for the wrong reasons.

God desires that we give according to New Testament standards. He has given them to us, we just need to study them, believe them and apply them to our lives in faith. Do you hear the voice of God calling you to come up higher in this grace of giving? Would you like to take the limits and restrictions off of God? Would you like to have His abundant grace not only in giving, but also in every area of your life? It is totally possible with God!

Go To Part IV