

SACRIFICIAL AND GENEROUS LIVING AND GIVING

ACTS 4:32 – 5:11

MAIN IDEA

GIVING OF OUR TIME, ENERGY, AND MONEY IS A DEMONSTRATION OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

I. GIVING AS A DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE (VS 4:32-37)

Giving ought to be motivated by love for god, love for one another, and love for the lost.

- A. UNITED IN LOVE (32)
- B. UNITED IN MISSION (33)
- C. UNITED IN GIVING (34-37)

II. GIVING FROM DEFECTIVE MOTIVES (VS 5:1-2)

People give for all sorts of reasons.

- A. EVIL MOTIVES
- B. EVIL PEOPLE
- C. EVIL ACTS

III. GIVING THAT INSULTS GOD (VS 5:3-11)

Giving from faulty motives insults god and harms people.

- A. LYING INSULTS GOD (3-4)
- B. INSULTING GOD BRINGS JUDGMENT (5-10)
- C. JUDGMENT BRINGS WARNING (11)

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One of the marks of a healthy missional church is that it is characterized by sacrificial and generous living and giving. In other words, people in these types of churches enjoy giving; giving of their time, their money, their love, and their energy. For these types of people, giving of themselves is simply a response of thanksgiving to God for how generous He has been to them.

In talking about giving, I think we need to correct some of the false narratives that surround the topic of giving. Some of these false narratives are basically simple superstition. The first false narrative is that if I give money to church, God will bless me with more money. Therefore many people give money and expect to get more money from God. Along with this false narrative is the thought that if I am righteous and holy, God will bless me with health and wealth. Some people even feel they will be rejected by God if they are unable to give. Look, there are times when God may reward us for being generous and upright. However, there are times when we may not be rewarded with material blessings or good health. In fact, we should probably accept this as a more accurate biblical narrative; the closer people are to God, the more they will suffer. The prophets suffered a great deal, Jesus suffered a great deal, and the Apostles suffered a great deal. In fact, all of them except John were martyred. Therefore, if someone is giving to the church or to charitable organizations, thinking they are going to be rewarded by God; they are just plain superstitious. Giving is supposed to be an act of love without expecting anything in return.

The next topics in giving are the questions; how much should I give and is that before or after taxes? The guidelines I am about to give you are generally agreed to by most Bible scholars. In the Old Testament, the Hebrews were commanded to give a tenth of everything they made. That extended to even crops they grew in their garden. They were very careful to bring a tenth of their earnings to the temple. This was called tithing. Many Christians wonder if they should be tithing since we are no longer under the Law.

At this point, we turn to the New Testament. Jesus and the Disciples were sitting in the temple court watching people put their money into the collection jars. People were throwing a lot of money in but they didn't catch Jesus' attention. A widow came along and threw in all the money she had which would have been just about enough to buy her a McDonald's hamburger. That means she would go hungry that day. The point being; she gave 100% not just 10%. Jesus then met a rich young man who wanted to follow Him. Jesus told him to sell everything he had, give it to the poor, and follow Him. The young man could not part with his wealth. Jesus asked this young man to give 100%.

The New Testament makes a few points here. God gave everything so that we could be in a right relationship with Him. He gave His One and Only Son Jesus to die for us. God did not give 10%. He gave 100%. Secondly, God owns everything and everything we have ultimately belongs to God. Giving should be something we enjoy doing because it is something that God enjoys doing. We are free to give anywhere between 10% and 100%. Whatever we give we should give freely out of love. There may even be times in your life where you are unable to give anything at all.

As far as the question of giving before or after taxes, I think we can look at it like this. Before I give any money to the government, I want to give first to God. For me, I give to God before I give to the

government. Again, I don't want people to get legalistic about this. Legalism sucks the joy out of giving.

Next in tithing, most scholars feel that the tithe should go to your local church. In other words, 10% of what you earn should be given to the local church you attend because that is where you are fed spiritually. For example, when you give money to Devon Church, the money is used for the upkeep of the building, to pay for heating, air conditioning, water, electricity, and maintenance. We buy materials for Sunday school and church activities. We help support 5 missionary families and pay Pastor Mike and my salaries. So people should give their tithe to support their local church. Again, if people feel they are blessed by their local church, their generosity may go way beyond 10%. I have friends that used to take part time jobs in order to give more money to the church.

In addition, our generosity should expand to helping the poor, the disenfranchised, and people in need. I know people that give over 90% of their money away.

Having said all that, each person must get together with God and determine freely how much they want to give. That is between you and God. Pastor Mike and I have purposed to never know what people give. We have no idea what any of you give. In our minds, that is between you and God.

With all those caveats, let's get into the text. The main idea this morning is this. **GIVING OF OUR TIME, ENERGY, AND MONEY IS A DEMONSTRATION OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD.** Giving is one of the spiritual disciplines and like the rest of the spiritual disciplines, can help us along in our spiritual journey making us more like Jesus; or it can become a source of spiritual pride and arrogance that carries us further and further away from God. We will see both of these in this morning's text.

I. GIVING AS A DEMONSTRATION OF LOVE (VS 4:32-37)

In verses 32-37 of chapter 4 we come across an act of giving as a demonstration of love. **GIVING OUGHT TO BE MOTIVATED BY LOVE FOR GOD, LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER, AND LOVE FOR THE LOST.** Just prior to this passage, the Apostles John and Peter were arrested and then released. The church got together and prayed. While they were praying, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, the building shook, and they started to proclaim the Word of God boldly. That's where we pick up this morning's passage. We can see in verse 32 that they were united in love. They were united in heart and mind. In fact they felt so much love for God and for one another; they felt as if they were real family. In fact they felt that all they owned did not belong to them personally; but belonged to God and to their family. We could say they viewed themselves as blood relatives; not the blood of ancestors but related through the blood of Jesus.

Verse 33 goes on to say they were united in their mission. They were united by their faith in the saving power of Jesus Christ. They had given their lives in faith to Jesus; that He may use them as He saw fit. They spiritually and materially supported the Apostles as they preached the fact that Jesus Christ was Lord and proved He was God in the flesh by rising from the dead. It is the same person of Jesus Christ that we here are united in and we have dedicated ourselves to proclaiming the truth that God desires a relationship with us through Jesus Christ.

This love for God, His mission, and one another resulted in actions that united them in giving as described in verses 34-37. Verse 34 makes an extraordinary claim. It says there were no needy people among them. To me, that's incredible. They didn't ask the Roman Government for help. They didn't go to the temple and ask the priests for help. This early group of believers looked out for and took care of one another. Can you imagine what that would look like if we as the modern day church could pull that off?

They were able to do it because of their love, their generosity, and their sacrificial giving. It says that people sold their property and houses so that they could take care of one another. One example was singled out here. Barnabas sold a piece of land and brought the proceeds to the Apostles so that they could carry on the ministry and care for the poor among them. It seems that this practice was fairly common and was perhaps mentioned publicly. I would like to point out that there is no official religious stuff going on at this point. People are gathered together because of their love for Jesus Christ and their love for the people of God. This giving isn't out of some religious duty or religious command. It's not being done for notoriety or for prestige. People are giving simply out of love. That's the same way it should be for us. **GIVING OUGHT TO BE MOTIVATED BY LOVE FOR GOD, LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER, AND LOVE FOR THE LOST.**

II. GIVING FROM DEFECTIVE MOTIVES (VS 5:1-2)

As I mentioned earlier, all the spiritual disciplines can be used improperly. Likewise, in verses 1-2 of chapter 5 we see the discipline of giving practiced from some defective motives. **PEOPLE GIVE FOR ALL SORTS OF REASONS.**

There were evil motives involved here. People may have been getting noticed for their generosity and a couple named Ananias and Sapphira wanted that notoriety as well. They sold one of their pieces of property, keeping some of the money themselves, and bringing the rest to church claiming they were giving 100% of the proceeds from the sale of their property. They weren't giving out of their thankfulness to God. Maybe they were genuinely interested in helping the poor; or maybe they just had this need in themselves to be noticed and revered by others.

Mixed motives and pride can turn us into evil people. In bringing this money to the Apostles, they wanted to be noticed and publicly acclaimed for their generosity. We have seen that all throughout history. In our country, ruthless industrialist who abused people and even were responsible for the death of people, donated money to universities so they could have their names put on them. Many of the universities today carry the names of people who got their money ruthlessly. The same is true from many public foundations and charities.

Evil motives in evil people lead to evil acts. Just on the surface, the acts look noble. In fact, even if this couple lied, the money would feed several families. But God doesn't judge like human beings judge. We are awestruck when wealthy people start foundations to help the poor. We think people are good when they give to causes. They may look good to human beings; and their money and generosity may indeed help people; but remember, God sees the heart and judges accordingly. People can look holy and noble on the outside while being evil on the inside. Don't think that people who give are always giving out of their love for God and people. **PEOPLE GIVE FOR ALL SORTS OF REASONS.** That's why I think it is a good idea that Pastor Mike and I have determined

not to know what anyone gives. It enables us to minister to all of you equally. We are neither impressed by wealth nor are we repelled by poverty.

III. GIVING THAT INSULTS GOD (VS 5:3-11)

As verses 3-11 go on to demonstrate, this type of giving insults God. **GIVING FROM FAULTY MOTIVES INSULTS GOD AND HARMS PEOPLE.** When we act religiously and do stuff that impresses people, do we somehow think that we have fooled God as well? Practicing any of the spiritual disciplines with faulty motives, especially spiritual pride, is in reality lying to God. Lying insults God as illustrated in verses 3-4. It's clear that Ananias and Sapphira have wrong narratives of what it means to be part of the church. God values anonymity over notoriety. They wanted to be honored for their generosity. They wanted people to notice them for their religious maturity. Peter made it clear that they may be able to fool them but they could not fool God. The Holy Spirit revealed to Peter what Ananias and Sapphira did. Peter made it clear that when we pretend to be more than we are, we are lying to God. God does not do well with spiritual pride. Jesus' interactions with the Pharisees and other spiritual leaders of the Jews demonstrated that. We need to be careful when practicing spiritual disciplines. Giving is meant to privately demonstrate our love for God. Giving ought to break our hearts for the poor and for the lost. Giving is meant to humble us; not to puff us up with pride.

Verses 5-10 go on to remind us that insulting God brings judgment. These next two scenes ought to scare us and cause us to examine our hearts. Peter first pointed out that there was no religious obligation to give. Ananias could have sold the field and kept all the money for himself. Truly it was a matter between Ananias and God alone. However, when Ananias tried to make himself look good to others by stating that he gave all the money from the sale, he was in effect lying to God; not the church. Immediately Ananias fell dead, was carried out, and buried.

In the meantime, his wife Sapphira entered the church, perhaps expecting a public acknowledgment for her generosity. Instead, Peter gives her a chance to come clean. When asked if she gave all the money, she responded that she did. Peter asked her how she and her husband could ever think they could fool the Holy Spirit. Immediately she died, was carried out, and buried.

Here is what we must remember about practicing the spiritual disciplines; and in particular for this morning's message, giving. Giving is meant to be a demonstration of our love for God to God. Practicing the disciplines is not meant to draw the attention of other people. Practicing the disciplines is meant to demonstrate our love for God and draw us nearer to God. They are tools that the Holy Spirit uses to make us and mold us into the image of Jesus.

This passage is a good reminder for us that we are not to use religion as a way to impress others. When we give, Jesus said we should not let our right hand know what our left hand is doing. Knowing that God knows our hearts should cause us to continually check our motives. **GIVING FROM FAULTY MOTIVES INSULTS GOD AND HARMS PEOPLE.**

I think the Apostle Paul nicely sums up the attitude of giving. He said:

"7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. 'For God loves a person who gives cheerfully'"

2 Corinthians 9:7 / NLT

GIVING OF OUR TIME, ENERGY, AND MONEY IS A DEMONSTRATION OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD.

Discussion Questions:

- How often do you think about how much Jesus gave so that you could be saved and in a right relationship with God?
- How often do you think what God has given you and how often do sit down and just count your blessings?
- Do you enjoy giving? Does counting your blessings cause you to want to give more?
- As you reflect on your giving, would you say that your giving is an accurate reflection of your love for God?