

## The Christian Obligation to Give

As I was on my way to the church office the other day, I was, as always, listening to talk radio. The subject on several of the shows centered around the charitable giving of some of the political figures of the day. Gubernatorial candidates, the President and the Vice President, presidential candidates, potential candidates—all were fair game. Many were criticized for the percentage of their income that was claimed on their income tax that was listed as “charitable donations.” According to many of the pundits, the political “leaders” are considered stingy. Some of the talking heads bragged about how much more they gave than the national and state leaders.

Giving is an essential part of a Christian's obligation. We know from the Scripture that Abraham was extremely generous—giving a tenth of all his possessions to Melchizedek, the priest of God. The term “tithing” came from Abraham's example. Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy speak to the need of all Israel to give a tenth (or more) of one's possessions to the priests. The priests of the tribe of Levi were to collect the tithes and store them, using them to help those who were less fortunate.

In the New Testament, giving is not referred to as tithing. Nevertheless, giving is an essential part of our Christian obligation. The two main purposes for giving are to see to it that the gospel is spread and that those who are in need can be assisted. In addition, there are bills to pay: salaries, supplies, maintenance on our facilities, insurance...you get the idea. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians in I Corinthians 16:1ff:

“about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. In the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.”

This instruction from Paul has set an example for us. We have an “offering” or “contribution” taken every Sunday so that there will be enough money to take care of the obligations we have. The amount is something to be determined by each of us, based upon our income. In Romans, Paul said the people of Macedonia and Achaia were “pleased” to be able to contribute the poor Christians in Jerusalem. And Paul was pleased to take it to them. (Romans 15:26-31). Paul told the Corinthians (those same “Achaians” referred to earlier) in 2 Corinthians 9 that he saw them as eager and enthusiastic givers. Then he tells them in verse 7:

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Before you begin to say “There he is again, asking for money-- all the elders care about is my contribution,” understand this: The giving of money is secondary to a Christian cheerfully giving of HIMSELF to the Lord's work. Paul told the Corinthians about the generosity of the Macedonians. This is what he said:

“They gave themselves FIRST of all to the Lord, THEN by the will of God also to us.” The giving of oneself to the service of the Lord—of a person's time, talent, effort, devotion—will naturally lead to the service of giving to the needs of the church. I can confidently say that the

elders care more about your devotion to the cause of Christ than the contribution of your money. They know, and I know, that one will naturally lead to the other.

I've preached sermons lately directed at causing all of us to rethink our devotion to the Lord and the service we owe to each other. Attendance, willingness to work, and yes, our contribution are the kinds of things that need to be thought about and reflected upon. Before long, you'll be asked to tell the elders what you are willing to do in order to serve the Lord here at Columbus Avenue. Carefully and prayerfully consider what you are willing to "give."