

Thus we see that God has recorded and commended free will gifts from His servants of various percentages in the divine record. It ought, therefore, to be the case today that children of God, who seek to give freely, cheerfully and bountiful to Him can ascertain according to their prosperity – whether little or much - a proper gift between ten and one hundred percent. Knowing that, “*to whom much is given, from him much will be required*” (Luke 12:48).

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BULLETIN BRIEF

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THE JOY OF GIVING

Jim E. Waldron

In a small town in the state of Tamil Nadu, South India, there lives a widow who lost her husband more than fifty years ago. Not only did she face that sorrow, but in 1963 she was diagnosed with cancer and had to travel more than a thousand miles by train to find a hospital that could treat the illness; thanks to God the disease was arrested. At the time of her husband's death she was living in north India in Delhi, but later she sold her home place and immigrated to the south. On her arrival she located in the district of Erode; where she began to work and make her own living. That work consisted of making rice dumplings at home and selling them to her neighbors. Later she became an aid to a lady doctor. From the funds she had gained from the house sale she placed Rupees 5,000\-* (\$111) in the post office savings bank. Later through hard work and thrift she was able to add another Rs 3,000\-* (\$67) to that account.

Bear in mind that the figure of Rs 5,000\- is the equivalent of two and one half month's wages for a well paid construction laborer in India and such jobs are scarce – very scarce. As the doctor's helper our sister made about Rs 500\-* (\$11) a month.

From her youth she followed the religion of her ancestors and in 2002 she was well past seventy when she was taught the gospel and baptized into Christ to become a New Testament Christian. She has two children that are grown, but they live in another area and do not share her faith. Upon her conversion she not only began to worship regularly, but to be active in doing other things such as cleaning the meeting hall on a regular basis. Since she had gotten too old to do much other work the church began to help her a little each month. She now lives in one small room that is about 9'x12' with no bath or indoor water tape. She cooks on a small open fire. The use of the room is donated to her by a kind neighbor.

The second story hall in which the church meets is rented, but the congregation, which is now above eighty in number, is outgrowing the space. Thus the preaching brother, who serves with the congregation, announced in November ('05) that they had to begin thinking of buying property for their own building.

This spurred our sister into action so she came forward and presented the church with Rs 16,500\-, (\$367 – eight months wages for a male laborer in construction) saying it is not enough, but I am coming first to help. The brothers were overwhelmed by her offer and refused to receive it, insisting that she must keep the money for her own needs; but she insisted even more so, saying, “I planned to give this to the Lord, please take it,” and “use it properly,” “don’t waste it.” “God gave it to me and I am giving back to Him to eternal life.”

She explained that the funds, which had been in the post office savings account, had matured and had more than doubled and she wanted to contribute it toward the needed building. The brothers agreed, but said you must take some of it. She said, very well, I will take Rs 400\- (\$8.90). Not only so, but she had on a gold ring, which she has worn all of her adult life. Women at times receive such at their weddings and treasure it a lifetime as their means of having a bit of wealth of their own in a society where they seldom own land or other valuables. This she took off and gave it also to help pay for the building. It is worth Rs 2,500\- (\$55.56).

This is a powerful and beautiful story of a poor widowed sister in Christ in the 21st century giving beyond measure to the cause of our Lord and His kingdom. She has set an example for all as one who is seeking “*first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matt. 6:33). Her sacrifice is amazing, yet many times it is the case that those who are poor or those who knew such in their youth are often the most loyal in their service to Jesus; even as James wrote, “*listen my beloved brethren: has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him?*” (James 2:5).

The poor often do not have the education, skills, eloquence, charisma or similar advantages of the more affluent. Yet, those without such or those who had to struggle against poverty or disability early in life often set the pace of service and giving to God and His cause. One might be moved to ask, why is such zeal for sacrifice and giving found among the poor or among those who knew deprivation in their youth? The answer to that question may be found in the stirring words of Paul, which he wrote about the giving of the Christians of Macedonia,

“Moreover brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the Macedonians: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their 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 (to give), imploring us with much urgency that we would receive (their) gift and fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave themselves to the Lord ...” (II Cor. 8:1-5).

Struggling for one’s material needs in life often brings out the best in the human spirit, while opulence seems to do the opposite (there are exceptions). The answer to sacrificial giving to Christ is found in the statement, they “*first gave themselves to the Lord.*” As James indicates, the poor, time and again, demonstrate the richness of their faith and service to God. This was surely the case with the church at Smyrna for the Lord said of them, “*I know your works, tribulation and poverty, but you are rich*” (Rev. 2:9).

Such personal dedication of one’s life to the Master is clearly a prerequisite for truly giving to God as He desires. The system of giving, laid down by Christ and the apostles for Christians, was designed to bring out the very best in the individual whether poor or rich; because it is free-will giving. Under the Law of Moses the Jews were given the opportunity to make free-will offerings to the Lord (Deut. 16:10); an example of which was giving for the tabernacle, which they did abundantly (Ex. 36:3-7). Yet, there was also a strict tax of tithing (ten percent) on all their produce, whether of the field or their livestock (Lev. 27:30-32).

Although many clergymen in denominational churches (e.g., pastors, priests, bishops, etc.) seek to enforce the rule of tithing on the followers of Jesus it was a part of the Old Law, which was abolished when Jesus died on the cross. We read for example that “*the priesthood (of the Old Testament) being changed, of necessity there is a change of the law (Heb. 7:12)*. In other words when the Levitical priesthood of Moses’ Law gave way to the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus (Heb. 7:11-12) it was necessary for a change from the Law of commandments to the New Covenant of Christ. In fact we read that Jesus by His death on the cross “*abolished in His flesh*” ... “*the law of commandments in ordinances*” (Eph. 2:15). We also read that the actual repeal of the Old Law took place at Calvary for we are told, “*And He (Jesus) has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*” (Col. 2:14).

We have governments that rule over us and if they require a tax of ten percent or other it is rigidly enforced and we are expected to obey (Rom. 13:1-7), yet citizens are often bitter in mind about taxes for they are not a matter of choice, but of legal obligation and strict necessity. Under the New Testament of Jesus, however, God has not bound a tithe on His people. Therefore no preacher, priest or pastor has any right to bind tithing on members of the church. Tithing is no more a part of the law of Christ (Gal. 6:10; cf., Rom. 8:2), than the Jewish festivals (new moon, Passover, Pentecost, etc.) or

Sabbaths are (Col. 2:14-16). Yet, Christians have been ordered by the Spirit through Paul:

“On the first day of the week (Sunday) let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper...” (I Cor. 16:2).

Note that this requirement for Christians to give names no percent of their income; it simply says *as they prosper*; that is, a free-will choice. Note also what the same apostle, using the analogy of sowing and reaping, wrote to the same congregation concerning the quality *and* quantity of their giving:

“But this I say; He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (II Cor.9:6-7).

Again this scriptural order gives no percent that is bound on Christians, but makes it clear that the giver under Christ is to see the wisdom and joy of giving cheerfully and bountifully to God in a free-will manner. This is why our sister named above counted it a joy to give all her savings to God.

Yet, some are perplexed in mind in trying to ascertain a standard or goal as to what is a proper amount under the system of free-will giving found in the New Testament. The way to answer such an inquiry is by observing examples of free-will giving by God’s servants in the Bible; “*for whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*” (Rom. 15:4).

1) One such example is that of Abraham, who lived under the Patriarchal system more than four hundred years prior to the giving of Moses’ law at Sinai. This great man of faith freely gave a tenth to Melchizedek the priest of God (Gen. 14:18-20).

2) A similar example of free-will giving was that of Jacob, grandson of Abraham, two generations later. Although unemployed at the time and prior to owning any possessions, he freely committed to God ten percent of all of which God would bless him (Gen. 28:20-22).

3) In the New Testament we read of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, whom God had blessed with much, saying to Jesus, “*Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor*” (Luke 19:8). This is an example of a free-will gift of fifty percent to God and His service.

4) Luke also records for us another spectacular example of free will giving: “*Then He (Jesus) looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than they all; for these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty has put in all the livelihood that she had*” (Luke 21:1-4). That lady gave freely one hundred percent to God, because of her love for Him.