

# Old School Giving & Not Robbing God

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Well, if you're new to the church, each year about the third weekend of January we have an annual business meeting. And on that Sunday, I believe for the entire history of our church, I have sought to bring a message concerning giving money, wealth, possessions... because the truth is that there is not a lot of preaching from this pulpit concerning giving. From the very early days, I purposely did not want to say much about money, nor ever take an offering, because I never wanted people to feel like they have to give to come and hear the truth. In coming here to the East side, I didn't want people to feel like we were here to make money or to extort money from people. Because the truth is lots of pastors and lots of churches have that kind of reputation. And in fact, there are numerous churches here on the East side, and I've heard testimony from some of you who have come from those churches, that they talk about money every single meeting. And in fact, sometimes they take offerings and then they take another offering because not enough came in. I've even heard of the doors being locked and nobody allowed to leave until they raised a certain amount of money. Carlos, you told me a story like that. So, I recognize that religion and money is sensitive, and yet at the same time, Scripture has a lot to say about money. And so we want to be biblical, (incomplete thought) It can be really hard to preach on 1 Corinthians 9 about your responsibility to take care of those who preach to you because it can seem very self-serving. And yet, if we're going to be biblical, Scripture speaks about things like that. And so, this is the one Sunday (incomplete thought) where I'm going to kind of let all the reservations go and speak very plainly. And we'll pray as we dive into this.

Father, I just want to thank You. Thank You, thank You that there is such a thing as salvation. Thank You that You did so love the world to send Your Son to rescue folks like us. Thank You, Lord. To rescue sinners like us. Broken. Backward. Depraved. Thank You. Father, I do want to ask You, Lord, may You heal Papa. We pray that You'd take this sickness away from him. Father, I pray, Lord, give all of us ears to hear from this message the part that we need to hear. And I pray for that in Christ's name. Amen. Ok.

Maybe before we open up our Bibles - a couple different things happen. I sat with a fellow pastor before the holidays, and he asked me whether I believe that tithing - well, maybe he was making a statement about tithing, and I said I didn't really believe that was the New Testament standard. But he asked me this question. He said, "do you believe it's still possible to rob God?" I said absolutely. Some of you may be aware that John Piper has said on more than one occasion that he believes that middle-class Americans are robbing God all the time by only tithing.

Then, I had another interesting conversation. Do you all know what it means to call something "old school"? It's an expression used to describe the way we used to do something. The way in former times; the way it used to be; that which is characteristic of an earlier time. That's how we use it. Old school. So, I recently stopped by the home of one of our deacons. And I wanted to find out - this was back before the holidays, and we were kind of monitoring things closely with the financial situation. I stopped by his home to find out the current status of

our church's financial situation. The truth is that this deacon and myself, we rarely talk about what specific individuals give. Typically, our conversation is about the overall giving. Like, hey brother, how's the current financial situation? Questions like that.

But you know, as we discussed things that day, he told me about two categories. He made an interesting observation. It's that we have in the church those who are old school when it comes to giving. And of course, the other category is those who are not old school, and maybe he called them "new school." He was referring, since this deacon was here from the very first day that our church existed, and was one of the first deacons, he has been able to monitor the giving all the way back from then. And what he was referring to by "old school," is he saw something. You know what a bread winner is? Breadwinner is the person in the family who brings home the paycheck. Somebody who - it doesn't have to be the husband, but whoever it is that has a way of producing income. That's a breadwinner. And what this brother/deacon was observing was that in the earliest days of our church, I can tell you when we first started, we had four breadwinners in the church. There were 12 members when we started the church. And there were four breadwinners. What he was referring to is he saw back in the early days of the church, he saw a level of sacrifice at that time that he refers to as "old school." And what he was observing - he actually made this statement to me - he said if the givers in the church now - if the body of believers that meets here now gave "old school," - if they all did, he said, we would have no financial problems. Interesting observation. As the conversation went on, I don't even know what came to his mind or what was happening in our conversation for a certain individual in the church to come up, and he said, oh, that guy - he's "old school." And when I hear him say that, I thought that and robbing God - is it possible to still rob God? That was kind of swimming in my mind about what to address you all about.

What this deacon expressed is something that I myself have sensed. And it seems like what's happened is this. That as the church has grown, the percentage of "old school" givers has decreased. It doesn't mean God isn't still adding some. But the overall percentage proportionately, there's fewer today than there were when the church was young. And look, I'm not talking about people that just tithe. I'm talking about people that may give 15%, 20%, 25%, 30% of their income. And I've asked myself why. Why is this? And to start out here just by way of introduction, I want to give you some factors that I think are responsible for that decline. Perhaps there's a number of factors.

The first one is this: Do you know when we were small? There was a real awareness of the needs. Why? When you have 12 original members plus whatever smattering of children were in there, you know, we might have had 20 people meeting in the church. There was a closeness. And there was close communication. And so there was an awareness of the needs. You know, if we were going to support James Dally or Pat Horner, there was communication among us. And you know the reality is that if the church is small and you have four bread winners or six bread winners or eight bread winners in the church, and you want to support a pastor or buy a building or support a missionary, it's pretty simple math to say, ok, if we want to support a pastor at \$30,000 a year; we want to buy a building for \$80,000 which is going to have a certain amount of monthly mortgage payment, and then we also want to be involved in supporting Pat Horner and James Dally. You know if there's only six bread winners in the

church, it doesn't take incredible amounts of calculus to figure, oh, if we're going to actually do that, we've got six people or eight people that are paying into the treasury.

Well, you kind of get an idea. Wow, we're going to have to divide that out and that's going to take some pretty significant sacrifice, if we actually want to see that happen. But you see, as the church grows, I think people just become unaware. Another deacon was telling me just recently, when we went through the financial straits at the end of last year, he said he had people in the church saying they didn't even know there were needs in the church. And you know what, brethren? Over the years, I have wanted to boast in the Lord when He has allowed us to meet all of our commitments. And you know what some people have thought? Because the Lord has always been faithful to allow us never to miss a commitment in the life of our church? What some people think is, oh, well, we must be well off. There must be funds there. No, brethren. When I'm thanking the Lord, what I'm thanking the Lord for is not that we have some big \$100,000 in the savings account. What I'm thanking the Lord for is that He's stirring up individuals in the church to give to meet those needs every month. The reality is, brethren, if we're going to have a building and we're going to have lights on and we're going to have air conditioning, and we're going to actually support pastors and church planters and missionaries, brethren, the government doesn't support this endeavor. You do. And when we're small, it's easy to grasp that. As it grows, it can be easy to not know. Or to disappear in the crowd and think, well, other people are going to take up that responsibility.

Here's another factor for why perhaps there aren't as many old school givers in the church anymore. It has to do with spiritual gifts. Now, you know what? We know every single Christian is in a place where Christ says, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Don't lay them up here. Everyone. Every Christian has it said to them, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor." But there is a gift. In Romans 12, there's a gift. There's a gift of giving. And it says, I think, in proportion to your faith kind of modifies everything there. But in proportion to your faith, those that have the gift of giving, they should give liberally. And here's one thing that could be a factor. It's that when the church was young, God saw to it that we had people with the faith and the giving gift, which was really necessary when we were small if we were going to try to do the things that we wanted to do. It may be that not as many have that gift or that faith as the church has grown bigger. What's the remedy for that? Well, Jesus gives gifts to men. I would ask, Lord, that You would give us sacrificial people. That may be another factor here.

Here's a third one: A personal interest in what we support. You know what I find? I take us back to the days at Hackberry. James Dally stood in our pulpit. Prim Wegmeyer stood in our pulpit. Pat Horner stood in our pulpit. Who else? Richard Denham stood in our pulpit. Andy Hamilton. Trevor Johnson. You know what happened in the early days? These men that we ended up supporting actually came, they ate with us, they fellowshipped with us, and we knew them personally. We did things with them sometimes. I visited Andy over in China. Carlos and Craig and I visited Trevor Johnson over in Indonesia. But there were close ties. Maybe that's part of it. There's not as much of a burden. Brethren, Andy Hamilton years ago did a series on how to have a greater burden for missions. And one of the things that he said is you need to be informed. You will never be burdened for that which you're not informed about. And it was easy when we were small to have everybody informed, because these guys were visiting and they were able to rub shoulders with us. But a lot of these guys haven't been here in quite awhile.

That may be a factor. How do we address that? Maybe it's the responsibility of each of us as individuals. Maybe it's the responsibility of us elders to bring higher visibility or to make greater efforts to get these guys back here so we can get to know some of these guys on a more personal basis. Or maybe those are the kind of people that we should be supporting mostly are the ones that we can get here and are willing to come and get to know us personally.

I've also considered this. As the church has grown, perhaps it might be that proportionately that our church has acquired folks who are not as well off financially. But even if that's the case, that doesn't keep you from giving old school. Because not having much - that's not the issue. You may think about the Macedonians there in 2 Corinthians 8. Extreme poverty, yet they were old school. Remember the widow with her two mites? She threw in everything she had. That's old school giving. Even though it doesn't amount to much, but oh, it pleases the Lord.

How about this? This is another reason why perhaps we don't have as many old school givers. An erroneous thinking concerning debt. We have some individuals in the church who have come to some sort of conclusion that as long as they have debt, they don't have to give. That God doesn't require them to give. Now brethren, that simply cannot be sustained from Scripture. In fact, I would say this, that even though I'm not up here to proclaim the tithe to you, do you not hear what Malachi 3 says? What God says is this: He says test Me. Prove Me. In other words, tithe, and I will pour out blessing upon you, and I will withhold, or I will restrain the devourer. You see what He's saying? Give. I will restrain the devourer. In other words, if you give, I will actually improve your financial situation.

Do you recognize Scripture speaks that way? There is a person who gives more than it seems than they ought to give. He gives freely. Yet, Scripture says he grows all the richer. And yet there is the other guy who withholds what he should give and only suffers want. You know what it says there in 2 Corinthians 8? One of the things that Paul is really trying to bring home to the Corinthians is this: Listen to this. "The point is this." I like how he starts that. "Whoever sows sparingly, will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." I always felt this way. When I had a mortgage; when I had certain debt for my wife's business, I felt - it's another thing in another place in another time to talk about debt and whether we should ever enter into it or there's sometimes to enter into it. But that's not the issue. What I'm talking about is this. I found myself when in debt - well, for one, I had a desire to give, but I fully believed that trusting the Lord and giving was the best path to eliminating my debt. In fact, I believe this. Whoever sows sparingly, reaps sparingly. I would conjecture from Scripture that if you're not trusting the Lord in giving, a big problem with your indebtedness is probably that God's blessing is not on your financial situation. And you can substantiate that from Scripture, brethren. This idea that if you're in debt, you shouldn't give - that's just the opposite way you should be thinking. There's absolutely no support for that mindset in Scripture at all.

How about something else? Maybe another reason we don't have as many old school givers. Young people. You know in the beginning, none of the bread winners were young people. But what's happened over the years is God has brought us a lot of young folks. Teenagers and twenty-somethings. You know, we've been a church long enough - 17 years - that we're watching people grow up before us, but relatively speaking, we've been a pretty young church. And perhaps as the church has grown, a lot of young people have come in and

what's the deal with young people? Well, they typically don't have the highest paying jobs, or they're in college and so they're trying to prepare for life or they're trying to get a foothold in some kind of career. But again, just as it is if you don't have much money, I would say to young people, that in no way keeps you from being an old school giver. You can still be sacrificial even if you don't have much to give with. How about this? There are those who feel that God wants them to give, but for some odd reason, they just don't feel like they're supposed to give to the church.

Now look, let's be honest. Let's be fair. Does Scripture talk about supporting the poor? Yes. Widows, orphans? Yes. Is it specifically saying that that should be done by way of the church? Well, it doesn't have to be, but remember this. In the New Testament, when the church is now formed, what do they do? They sold their lands, and where did they take the proceeds to? They laid them at the feet of the apostles. Do we have a precedent? Do we have an example in Scripture that even when it's money for those who are poor, that channeling it through the church is very much a God-given means for that to take place? Certainly. Certainly. And brethren, think about this. When you go to 1 Corinthians 9, do you know what Paul says to the Corinthians? If we have sown to you spiritual things, what? Should we not reap of your material things?

Brethren, I'm not really certain how somebody can think, I'm supposed to give, but I don't really have a responsibility to give to the church even though I attend that church regularly. I take. I take from the preaching. I take from the singing. I take from the place being lit and cooled or heated. I take. But I don't have any responsibility to give. That isn't what Paul says. Paul says if we've given spiritually, isn't there actually a right? Doesn't he talk about not muzzling the ox? Does he not talk about the way the priests were paid in the Old Testament? He's using those as examples. That mindset is just foreign to Scripture. I'm not saying all your giving has to be confined to the church. But this idea: where in the Bible does it say we need to give by way of the church? Well, certainly we have examples. Certainly, we have precedent and we have command. We have Paul's words to the Corinthians. Listen, those of you that have that kind of mindset, if everybody had that kind of mindset, you would have no paid ministry. Maybe you think we shouldn't have a paid ministry. Paul thought that those who ministered spiritual things were worthy to be supported. You know what? If everybody thought like that, we wouldn't have a building. Maybe you feel like we shouldn't. Maybe you feel like we should just be like the Brethren, and there should be no ministry and we should just meet in people's homes. Some people think that way, but I don't believe that's what Scripture would teach.

How about this? Perhaps another reason is that as the church has increased, we've just multiplied people - not everybody, but we've multiplied people who are spiritually sick and we've multiplied tares - professing Christians who really don't know the Lord. That could be a factor as well. Brethren, do you remember what happened when God laid hold on Zacchaeus? Brethren, it's really what happens when somebody gets converted. What happens? He's going to give half of everything he had to the poor. And if he defrauded anybody, fourfold. That's what happens to people when they get converted.

How about another thing? Perhaps as the church has grown, we're taking on folks who just plain and simple come from bad teaching, bad backgrounds, bad examples in former churches, and they just haven't yet recognized the spiritual sacrifice of New Testament giving.

Brethren, you know what probably the reality is? That each one of these is to some degree a factor. It's not just one. It's probably all of them contribute to this reality. But you know, there was a situation just recently that my wife was trying to address in a brother somewhere. And as the two of us were talking about the situation, my wife said, oh, well, maybe the problem is deeper than what I addressed. But I addressed it the way I addressed it, and so she was going to leave it with the Lord. But it occurred to her, maybe the problem is deeper. (Incomplete thought) I believe that a whole number of these are a problem. The gifts? That's providence. But a number of these are problems. They're problematic. And I think if you really want to find and address and help, we need to go to the root of the matter. We need to go deep - as deep as we can go to try to remedy the situation.

So the question that I ask is this: at the root - you go deep, what happens in the life, in the mind, in the heart, in the soul of a joyful old school giver that's lacking in the new school giver? Because there's a difference. There is a difference. What's the difference? What constrains one person in this church to be much less willing to make a significant financial sacrifice than another? I mean, brethren, in a people like us - you say, like what? Saved by grace. In a people whose salvation does not depend on works, what motivates one person to be significantly more sacrificial than another? See, that's the question. Brethren, I'm going to give you the answer and I hope it resonates with all of you, because it's a reality. Do you remember what Jesus said when He was calling us to lay up treasure in heaven and not upon the earth? Do you know what He said? He said no one can serve two masters. You will either love the one - you remember how He said that? Isn't that the issue? You know what, brethren? We don't love God enough. Now, brethren, that's not just the problem in our giving. That's the problem in our lives altogether. And brethren, that's not just new school problem, although it may be more exaggerated there. We sing the song, "More Love to Thee." Do you feel that? Do you just sing the words on that or do you feel that? I need that. Brethren, you know what it is that looses sacrifice? It's love. That's it.

I mean, think about this, you either hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. He will either hate the one and love the other. Brethren, think about love. Do you know what John said in his first epistle? By this we know love. How? Anybody remember what's said there? By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us. Brethren, do you see the sacrifice? By this we know love. When I look at God's people, and I find people that don't sacrifice, do you think that says something about love? It says volumes about love. By this you know love. How? Do you know what Christ did? There He was in the eternal glory. And He looks down. He looked down upon our tragedy. Our brokenness; our hopelessness; our helplessness. And you know what it says there in Philippians 2. He didn't count equality with God - He didn't say I've got the right to not go down there. He didn't cling to His rights. Why? Because brethren, don't you see? By this we know love. How? Love can be measured. How? By the level of sacrifice. And it's always true. What you love the most, you will make the most sacrifices for without fail. He looked down. He saw our predicament. And what did He do? He didn't argue His rights. He came down. He saw us under God's wrath. He saw the condemnation, the damnation. He saw our situation. And what did love do? It constrained Him though rich to give and to become poor; to empty Himself. Brethren, that's what love does. He saw it all. And He came.

Did Jacob have a son that he loved more than the others? Did he? How do we know? Do you have something in this world you love more than anything else? Are we not to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength? Is that not the first and the greatest commandment? Is that not what God wants? Does God not want our heart? Do you not hear Jesus? You will hate the one and love the other. Brethren, where your treasure is, that's where your heart is. And this isn't the idea of, oh, I have treasure in heaven, so my heart's there, like seeing all the gold bars. Brethren, the treasure in heaven is God Himself. God wants our heart. And that's the issue in all of this. Jacob's love - it can't be hidden. Why? Because love always expresses itself. It always does. There's a coat of many colors. You see, that's proof. That's what John's saying. By this we know He loved; by this, love was manifest. How? Because look what Jesus did. By this, love is manifest. Look what Jacob did. Brethren, that's always the case. Always the case.

I would ask you this. Take Abraham. What did Abraham love more? Did he love Isaac more or did he love God more? And I'll tell you this. It's proven. To say, oh, I love God, but that doesn't mean that there needs to be any visible proof of it. You're creating that in your own imagination, because it's not true. Brethren, when we fall in love with the Lord Jesus Christ, and we love Him supremely, your purses, your bank accounts, your wallets - there's proof. It will manifest itself. There's no question about it. There was a woman who Jesus said was forgiven much. She loved much. She loved much. Does that just exist in a vacuum? Or was there proof of it? You see, He turns to Simon the Pharisee, and Jesus Himself vindicates her love. How? Simon, you didn't wash My feet. You see, we heard the message earlier. Jesus gives gifts to men. Pastor-teachers. And what? You're going to be a part of the church and not give? As much as you do it unto one of the least of these, My brothers, you do it unto Me? You see, what happens is, when we fall in love with the Lord Jesus Christ, we're willing to wash His feet with our tears and wipe His feet with our hair and take the alabaster ointment. We're willing to give our best. And brethren, there's no getting around it.

Listen. Those who would say, well, I'm in debt. I don't need to give. I would say this: Try that on your wife. Do you remember how the Lord said in Malachi? He said try that with your governor. Isn't it amazing how we'll do things with God, that we would never do to the governor or to our wife, or to our children. You know what? I just suspect that those who would say, well, I haven't given to the church because I'm in debt, have you taken your wife out to dinner during that same season? You see, that's just playing the hypocrite. And what it's really saying is I love my wife, but I don't love God so much. Because brethren, when we give; when we're giving to the things that concern Him; when we're giving to the brethren, when we're giving to the needs, when you're giving to His preachers, when you're giving to the maintenance of His church, this is speaking about not just your attitude towards other people; it speaks about your attitude and your love. Brethren, I know this for a fact. There are people who can give. There are people who can give a lot, and they can do it without love. That's true. Some do give and they give large amounts from selfish motive. But hear me. No one who loves can refrain from giving. Why? Because love must express itself. It always does. God created love like that. That it's never complete until it breaks out; until it expresses itself. God so loved... how? How do you measure it? By what He did. That's always the case.

Do you give less than 10% of your income to this church? Think with me. Is Piper right? Are middle-class Americans robbing God? Piper says this: He says, "We Americans have

become so accustomed to our Western prosperity and its ways of life that we think 5% or 10% is generous." Brethren, listen to me. Do I want to see sufficient funds come in to take the Gospel to the end of the earth? I do. I do. Do I want to support more missionaries? Yes. Do I want to plant more churches? Yes. Pastors, evangelism? Yes. But brethren, my primary objective - I'd rather have half the money coming in and have us all like the Macedonians. What I want brethren, more than enough to support our financial goals - I want a church that is in love with God and pleases Him deeply. That's my greatest desire. That's the primary aim: Not your money, but you. Brethren, what I don't want is God robbers in the church. Because it says a lot about how you feel about God. That's exactly what Malachi's all about. Look past the tithing there. Whatever you think about that. What God is saying is this: "I'm a great God. And I deserve your honor. I deserve your trust. I deserve your love." You see, that's a big issue. This is the issue behind robbing God. In fact, why don't you all turn there. Malachi 3. We haven't opened our Bibles officially yet, so let's open them to Malachi 3:8. Malachi 3:8 "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me, but you say, 'how have we robbed You?'" Typically, we don't like to admit it when we do it. "...In your tithes and contributions." Now look, brethren, I'm not advocating tithing as a strict standard for New Testament giving. I don't believe the New Testament does. The New Testament says lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. It says sell your possessions; give to the poor. It says that if people are sowing to you spiritual things, you have a responsibility to return with material things. The New Testament talks about sow sparingly; reap sparingly. The New Testament talks about God loving a cheerful giver. We see that people sold their lands and they came and brought the proceeds. They laid it at the feet of the apostles. They took care of the needs. You know that they were taking care of the needs of the widows in the church; visiting the widow and the orphan in their affliction. We see the New Testament. We see that when Zacchaeus gave 50%, Jesus didn't say, whoa, that's 40% too much. He didn't say that. When the widow threw in her two mites, He praised it. He didn't tell her, you need to walk by the law.

Brethren, the realities that come into the New Testament is this: We're released from the law. We died to that which held us captive. That's what Scripture says. We serve in a new way of the Spirit. Not the old way of the written code. In other words, brethren, we're constrained by something beyond law. Listen to it. "You're cursed with a curse, for you're robbing Me, the whole nation of you." I don't want to be in that place where I'm doing things with my money that brings a curse. And that's what happens when you rob God. "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in My house and thereby put Me to the test," says the Lord of Hosts, "If I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil and your vine in the field." Do you think God can keep your refrigerator running twice as long as what it otherwise might? I absolutely believe that. Well, He could keep the thing running eternally if He meant to. But the reality is there's a blessing (incomplete thought). Look, when God says, "you're robbing Me," there's a blessing that comes upon people that give, not because God needs your money. That's not how we rob God. It's not like He needs more money in His pocket. When you rob somebody, you're taking from somebody what is theirs. The reality is our money is His and He could take the whole lot of it from us at any time.



What is it to rob God? How can somebody do that? How can somebody steal something away that belongs to Him? Brethren, I'll tell you this. You come into the New Testament. You remember the guy there in Luke 12? God said to him, you fool, this night your soul's required of you. What had he not done? He had not been rich towards God. You think in the New Testament it's possible to rob from God? You better believe it is. That man was not rich towards God. Do you see what God wants? God wants us to be rich towards Him. But it's not because He needs our stuff. And the reality is, He doesn't even need us to give our stuff to others to help others in their need. He could use ravens and He could bypass human instrumentality just as He's done numerous times throughout Scripture. But brethren, God wants us to love one another. He wants to use us as means to take care of financial needs. The thing is in all of this, the way God is robbed, is we're not trusting Him. We're not loving Him. We're not embracing Him as we ought. Brethren, I'll tell you this, when you don't give, it's typically an indication that you're trusting that money and you're serving that money, more than you're loving God. And that's what Jesus was hitting on.

Brethren, James was recently commenting on a sermon by Charles Leiter where Charles just got alone and he was thinking, how would my life change if God was as real to me as He ought to be? But I would ask you this. How would your giving change if you loved God - if God was real to you? And with the reality, with the knowledge of God, you saw Him as lovely as you ought to see Him? And lovable and desirable as you ought to? How would that free up your giving?

Brethren, think with me. Jesus said, "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of God." Now, you think about that. What does that mean? I can show you they tithed. Remember the guy in Luke 18? You've got the tax collector. You've got this Pharisee over here. And the Pharisees boasting: I tithe of all that I have. And you know what? Jesus didn't deny that. Jesus said to those Pharisees, "You tithe your annis, your mint, and your cumin." They did. So what does it mean? Well, my righteousness better exceed theirs. Does that mean give 11%? Brethren, all that's doing is just seeking another law to govern your life by. Have you never read in Scripture? "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." And you know where that text comes from? I believe it's from Hosea 6:6. I love the reading there because you know what it says? It says that God desires maybe lovingkindness; the Septuagint says "mercy." I desire mercy and not sacrifice. A knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. I like that. A knowledge of God. Brethren, this is where we're at with our righteousness exceeding the Scribes and the Pharisees. It comes down to a knowledge of God. What does God desire? Brethren, God desires the heart. It's not you saying, well, I'm going to give 12% and make sure I'm one step ahead of those Pharisees. Brethren, you're right there in the camp with them if you think like that. What He wants you to do is give out of love. He wants you to give like you gave to your wife when you first met her and you were courting her. Why? He wants you excited about Him. He wants your heart. He wants your trust. He wants us to be compelled by mercy. He wants us to be compelled by pity and compassion. He wants us moved upon for things like that.

Brethren, think with me here. God's interested in your giving. And you know how I know that? Jesus Christ. Well, there's lots of ways we could prove that, but Jesus Christ watching that widow give. He gathered His disciples around and He gave them a lesson. Look at her give.

Look at all the others give. Look at her give. He said she gave more. Why? Because it was 100%? That isn't it. It's not just the quantity that takes us out of the realm of robbing God. Brethren, it's when we don't love Him. It's when we're not compelled and moved. Do we know God? This is the thing. In our giving, yes, mercy before sacrifice, but a knowledge of God before burnt offerings. Do you know your God? Are you aware of Him? Do you know what He says? In the letter to the Hebrews, "do not neglect to do good and to share what you have. For such sacrifices are pleasing to God." I can tell you this. If I know that liberal giving is pleasing to my Father, and I love Him, I'm going to give. Because He delights in it. You know what? It's from Him - the Father of lights every good and perfect gift comes. And we've been made in His image. This new man being fashioned in righteousness, in godliness. It's being fashioned like Him. If we're going to resemble our Father, we too are going to be givers like He is a Giver. But you imagine, Jesus watching that widow. I hear this in my own ears. I kind of take the account of the widow and the account of Peter and I can snowball them together. You remember Jesus' words? "Peter, do you love Me?" That was a hard one, because he had just gotten done denying the Lord. But he said, "Lord, You know."

But I hear those words to us. Can you see the Lord? He's near to all of us. He watches what you give. Hear His voice as you walk out of here. Put your name in there instead of Peter. "Do you love Me?" Lord, You know I love You. Are you taking care of your poor brothers and sisters? Do you know money that comes in that box helps brethren in the church that need help? Do you know it supports Matt Wilkinson? Not just do you have a love for Mexicans, do you have a love for Christ that the name of the Lamb who was slain would be proclaimed there and that He would have the reward of His suffering? That's the real issue. Love for people will not keep the missionary endeavor going. It's a love for God above all things. Do you hear His voice? Do you love Me? As much as you've done it unto the least of these My children, are you taking care of the preachers? Are you taking care of Tawfiq, the church planter? Brethren, do you know the kind of poor people in China that are helped by the money we send over there? Do you know the poor Papuans that are helped by the money we send over to Indonesia? Do you know the Syrians - the darkness of Islam? And Dan is over there seeking to set forth the light to those who sit in darkness. Sometimes we can just be disconnected and think it all goes on whether I support or not. Brethren, do you realize that God in the whole outworking of this kingdom of Christ, He uses means and He uses money to accomplish so much of the Gospel endeavor. And Scripture talks this way: Not muzzling the ox. There is a place for this. Do you love Me? Do you love Me? I recognize this for myself. I recognize this for all of us. Whether you're old school or new school, a greater fire, a greater passion, a greater love for God. That is the thing that we need above all else.

Brethren, I'll just say this as we end. One of the greatest incentives of all to love God more is to dwell much on His love for you. I mean, brethren, think about what He's given for you. That text ought to blow our minds that He would not spare His own Son. He didn't spare His Son. Would you give your child? He didn't spare His Son. See, the thing here is not just to say, oh yeah, loving God is good. But brethren, we need to take our minds to places; we need to take our hearts to places where that love will be stirred up. Do you realize how hopeless you were as a condemned sinner? Do you realize how certain hell was? We're a hellbound race. And He doesn't save many. Can you imagine this? I'm one of the elect! When few there be that

find it. Lord, why me? I look at my family members. I was worse than a lot of them. I look at the friends that I went to high school and college with. I was the worst. The people that I work with. I look at all the guys I went to high school with. None of them have been saved. I've taken the Gospel to them. God has not been pleased to save a single one of them. He plucked me out. And you're in the same place if you're a Christian. He plucked you out at the cost of the life of His Son. He didn't spare Him. Not just His life - He crushed His own Son. God was actually put in the place where it was His own hand that executed His Son. He didn't just turn His back: "I can't watch this. I can't bear to see what they're going to do to My Son." God did this. God handed Christ the cup. The cup. It's a cup that's black with damnation and the horrors of an eternity.

And you recognize, Jesus took that cup and He put it to His lips and He drank it dry - every single drop, so that we might be forgiven and stand before God. You think about God. His kindness. Think about the kindness that after the things we've done, He would do such things as He has done. I mean, brethren, it's falling in love with the One who has loved us this way. And loving God like that will release all manner of sacrifice, to the laying down of our lives, not just our wallets. And then God comes and He give us money. And He says now, if you will take that which I've given you, it's not yours, you're just stewards. If you will take that that I've given to you, and you will actually use it for purposes that honor Me; show that you love Me and you trust Me; to show that you really desire My kingdom to come and spread; you will store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. There will be eternal reward. I'll make your eternity all the more blessed for taking what's Mine - what I gave to you, and you use it in ways that please Me. And remember that text there in Hebrews 13. Very pleasing to Him when we look at the needs that concern Him, His people, His kingdom, and we give. Pleasing. If you love Him, you want to please Him. You hear Christ's voice. Do you love Me, John? Do you love Me, Mary? Do you love Me? Do you love Me? Lord, You know I love You. What does our life indicate? That's the story.

Father, we pray that You'd give us... Oh, Lord, we know that it's a work of the Spirit of God to give us the heart; to give us the love. We know that the first of the fruit of the Spirit is love, and we know that the first of all loves is not for our fellow man, but it is that we might love God with all our heart and our mind and our soul and our strength. Lord, please forgive us that our love is often so cold. Forgive us when our love is challenged by other things. Forgive us when our love is challenged by greed or covetousness. Lord, I pray that You would grant us such liberality in sacrifice; men and women who not only bring all their monetary assets to the altar, but their own lives also. Lord, I pray that we would be a people whose love manifests itself as we see love must express itself. Lord, give us such love and such expressions of it. Lord, I want You to be pleased with this church. Please. Lord, remove the God robbers. Those who would rob You of Your glory; rob You of our hearts; rob You of our trust. Remove that. Not by taking individuals away, but by giving us the grace to rise to where we should be. I pray in Christ's name. Amen.