

A REVELATION OF.....

GIVING TO GOD

**OUR GIFTS TO HIM, IN RETURN FOR
WHAT HE HAS GIVEN US**

**ONE OF A SERIES OF REVELATIONS ON VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF SCRIPTURE, AS INSPIRED BY THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

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A NOTE FROM DAVID.....

In Christianity, we hear an awful lot about what God has done for us, but much less of what He desires from us in return!

There is a saying that 'salvation is a free gift, but discipleship costs us everything!' For as Jesus sacrificed His life for us on Calvary's grim hill, so we, in turn, are to model Him, and sacrifice our life for God and for others.

In this study we are going to look at the ways in which we are to offer God the sacrifices He so much desires from us - Praise and Worship, Prayer and Fasting and Tithes and Gifts.

My God sacrificed His son Jesus, for me! Surely, the first thing I can do for Him is to offer back the sacrifices He desires of me. Is that too much to ask?

In theory we would probably agree, but the practice of our lives often tends to fall short of our good intentions!

I trust that this study will encourage you, as it has me, to give back to God what He desires of each one of us.

May God bless you, and you bless God.

His servant and yours,

David Tait

PART 1: THE BACKGROUND

DEFINITION OF TERMS

PRAISE. In the OT the words for praise mainly used are *hāḥlal*, the root meaning of which is connected with making a noise; *yaḥdaʾē*, which was originally associated with the bodily actions and gestures which accompany praising; and *zaḥmar*, which is associated with the playing or singing of music. In the NT eucharistein (lit. ‘to give thanks’) is the favourite word, implying on the part of the person who praises the attitude of one more intimate with the person praised than in the more formal eulogein, ‘to bless’.

The whole of the Bible is punctuated with outbursts of praise. They rise spontaneously from the ‘basic mood’ of joy which marks the life of the people of God. God takes pleasure and delight in his works of creation (Gn. 1; Ps. 104:31; Pr. 8:30-31), and all creation, including the angels, expresses its joy in praise (Jb. 38:4-7; Rev. 4:6-11). Man also was created to rejoice in God’s works (Ps. 90:14-16) and fulfils this purpose by accepting God’s gifts (Ec. 8:15; 9:7; 11:9; Phil. 4:4, 8; cf. also W. Eichrodt, *Man in the Old Testament*, 1951, p. 35).

The coming of the kingdom of God into the midst of this world is marked by the restoration of joy and praise to the people of God and the whole creation (Is. 9:2; Ps. 96:11-13; Rev. 5:9-14; Lk. 2:13-14), a foretaste of which is already given in the ritual and worship of the Temple where praise arises from sheer joy in the redeeming presence of God (Dt. 27:7; Nu. 10:10; Lv. 23:40). The praise of God is rendered on earth for the works both of creation and redemption (Pss. 24; 136), this being an echo on earth of the praise of heaven (Rev. 4:11; 5:9-10). Praise, therefore, is a mark of the people of God (1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 1:3-14; Phil. 1:11). It is the mark of the heathen that they refuse to render it (Rom. 1:21; Rev. 16:9). The act of praising implies the closest fellowship with the One who is being praised. ‘Therefore praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation . . . In commanding us to glorify Him, God is

inviting us to enjoy Him' (C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 1958, p. 95).

Yet praise to God is frequently commanded from men as a duty and is obviously not meant to depend on mood or feeling or circumstances (cf. Jb. 1:21). To 'rejoice before the Lord' is part of the ordered ritual of the common life of his people (Dt. 12:7; 16:11-12), in which men encourage and exhort one another to praise. Though there are psalms which express the praise of the individual, it was always felt that praise could best be rendered within the congregation (Pss. 22:25; 34:3; 35:18), where praise not only gives honour and pleasure to God (Ps. 50:23) but also bears testimony to God's people (Ps. 51:12-15).

Elaborate arrangements were made for the conduct of praise in the Temple by the Levites. The Psalms were used in the liturgy and in sacred processions with 'glad shouts and songs' (Ps. 42:4). The singing was probably antiphonal, involving two choirs, or soloist and choir. Dancing, from earliest times a means of expressing praise (Ex. 15:20; 2 Sa. 6:14), was also used in the Temple to this end (Pss. 149:3; 150:4). Ps. 150 gives a list of musical instruments used in the praise. (*Music and Musical Instruments.)

The early Christians continued to express their gladness by attending worship in the Temple (Lk. 24:53; Acts 3:1). But their experience of new life in Christ was bound to express itself in new forms of praise (Mk. 2:22). Joy was the dominant mood of the Christian life, and though the formal worship and praise which it inspired is not explicitly described or prescribed, this was because it was so much taken for granted. As those who experienced and witnessed the healing and cleansing power of Jesus broke out spontaneously into praise (Lk. 18:43; Mk. 2:12), so also in the apostolic church there are frequent examples of such spontaneous outbursts, as men began to see and understand the power and goodness of God in Christ (Acts 2:46; 3:8; 11:18; 16:25; Eph. 1:1-14).

The Psalms were undoubtedly used to express the praise of the early church (Col. 3:16; cf. Mt. 26:30). There were also new Christian hymns (cf. Rev. 5:8-14), referred to in Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:26. We have examples

of such inspiration to new forms of praise in the *Magnificat, *Benedictus and *Nunc Dimittis (Lk. 1:46-55, 68-79; 2:29-32). Elsewhere in the text of the NT there are examples of the formal praise of the early church. It seems likely from its literary form and content that Phil. 2:6-11 was composed and used as a hymn of praise to Christ. Probably there are echoes of, or quotations from, early hymns in such passages as Eph. 5:14 and 1 Tim. 3:16. The doxologies in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:4-7; 5:9-14; 15:3-4) must have been used in public worship to express the praise of the congregation (cf. A. B. Macdonald, *Christian Worship in the Primitive Church*, 1934).

The close connection between praise and sacrifice should be noted. In the sacrificial ritual of the OT a place was found for the sacrifice of thanksgiving as well as of expiation (cf. Lv. 7:11-21). Gratitude was to be the fundamental motive behind the bringing of the first-fruits to the altar (Dt. 26:1-11). In the sincere offering of praise itself there is a sacrifice which pleases God (Heb. 13:15; Ho. 14:2; Ps. 119:108). In the priestly self-offering of Jesus this aspect of thanksgiving finds its place (Mk. 14:22-23, 26; Jn. 17:1-2; Mt. 11:25-26). The life of the Christian should, correspondingly, be a self-offering of gratitude (Rom. 12:1) in fulfilment of his royal priesthood (Rev. 1:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:9), and the fact that such a sacrificial self-offering can be made in a real way in the midst of suffering, links suffering and praise together in the Christian life (Phil. 2:17). Thanksgiving sanctifies not only suffering but all aspects of the life of the Christian (1 Tim. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:30-31; 1 Thes. 5:16-18). Whatever else be the burden of prayer, it must include praise (Phil. 4:6).

Bibliography. H. Ringgren, *The Faith of the Psalmists*, 1963; C. Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, 1965; A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 1972, 1, pp. 31-36; H.-G. Link, *NIDNTT* 1, pp. 206-215; H. Schultz, H.-H. Esser, *NIDNTT* 3, pp. 816-820. r.s.w. 1

WORSHIP — homage rendered to God which it is sinful (idolatry) to render to any created being (Ex. 34:14; Isa. 2:8). Such worship was refused by Peter (Acts 10:25,26) and by an angel (Rev. 22:8,9).

WORSHIPPER — (Gr. neocoros = temple-sweeper (Acts 19:35) of the great goddess Diana). This name neocoros appears on most of the extant Ephesian coins 2

WORSHIP. The vocabulary of worship in the Bible is very extensive, but the essential concept in Scripture is ‘service’. Heb. *ʕab_ôEd_a* and Gk. *latreia* both originally signified the labour of slaves or hired servants. And in order to offer this ‘worship’ to God his servants must prostrate themselves—Heb. *hisûtah\awa* or Gk. *proskyneou*—and thus manifest reverential fear and adoring awe and wonder.

In the OT there are instances of individual worship (Gn. 24:26f.; Ex. 33:9-34:8). But the emphasis is upon worship in the congregation (Ps. 42:4; 1 Ch. 29:20). In tabernacle and Temple worship ritual was prominent. Apart from the daily morning and evening sacrifices, the celebration of Passover and the observance of the Day of Atonement would be highlights in the Jewish religious calendar. The ritual acts of shedding of blood, presenting incense, pronouncing the priestly blessing, etc., would tend to emphasize the ceremonial to the detriment of the spiritual aspects of worship, and even tend to introduce a sense of tension or conflict between the two attitudes (Pss. 40:6; 50:7-15; Mi. 6:6-8). But many in Israel would be able to take the public praise (e.g. Pss. 93; 95-100) and prayers (e.g. Pss. 60; 79; 80), and use them to express their love and gratitude to God (Dt. 11:13) in a real act of inward spiritual worship.

This highly-developed public worship offered in the tabernacle and Temple is a far cry from earlier times when the Patriarchs believed that the Lord could be worshipped wherever he had chosen to reveal himself. But that public worship in the Temple was a spiritual reality is clear from the fact that when the sanctuary was destroyed, and the exiles found themselves in Babylon, worship remained a necessity, and to meet this need the synagogue service, consisting of (1) the Shema^ô, (2) prayers, (3) Scripture readings and (4) exposition, was ‘created’. But later in the second Temple the daily services, the sabbath, the annual festivals and fasts, and the praises of the hymn-book (book of Psalms) of this second Temple ensured that worship remained a vital factor in Jewish national life.

In the NT Temple and synagogue worship are again found. Christ participated in both, but he always inculcated the worship that is the love of the heart towards a heavenly Father. In his teaching the approach to God through ritual and priestly mediation is not merely unimportant, it is now unnecessary. At last 'worship' is true *latreia*, a service offered to God not only in terms of temple worship but of service to one's fellows (Lk. 10:25ff.; Mt. 5:23f.; Jn. 4:20-24; Jas. 1:27). At the beginning, however, the church did not abandon Temple worship; and probably Christians continued to attend the synagogue services too. And when the break between Judaism and the church finally came Christian worship may have been modelled on the synagogue service.

The great contributory factor in the break away from the Jewish sabbath, Temple, ritual, etc., was the bitter antagonism of the Jews against the church. But so far as the NT is concerned our notions of Christian worship are very vague.

Clearly the main day of worship was the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7), although we do hear of daily services at the beginning (Acts 2:46). There is no mention in the NT of services commemorating the Lord's resurrection and the Spirit's coming at Pentecost. Worship would be conducted in believers' homes. In such circumstances official ministrants would be unnecessary. Simplicity would be the keynote of these house-church worship services, consisting for the most part of *praise (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), *prayer, reading from the Scriptures and exposition. In the church at Corinth we hear of 'speaking in tongues' (1 Cor. 14). The love-feast, followed by the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-28), were also common features of Christian worship. But the emphasis throughout would be upon the Spirit, and the inner love and devotion of the heart.

Bibliography. J. V. Bartlett in ERE: R. Martin-Achard in J.-J. von Allmen (ed.), *Vocabulary of the Bible*, 1958, pp. 471-474; R. Abba, *Principles of Christian Worship*, 1957; R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1974. j.g.s.s.t. 1

PRAYER —is converse with God ; the intercourse of the soul with God, not in contemplation or meditation, but in direct address to him. Prayer may be oral or mental, occasional or constant, ejaculatory or formal. It is a “beseeching the Lord” (Ex. 32:11); “pouring out the soul before the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:15); “praying and crying to heaven” (2 Chr. 32:20); “seeking unto God and making supplication” (Job 8:5); “drawing near to God” (Ps. 73:28); “bowing the knees” (Eph. 3:14).

Prayer presupposes a belief in the personality of God, his ability and willingness to hold intercourse with us, his personal control of all things and of all his creatures and all their actions.

Acceptable prayer must be sincere (Heb. 10:22), offered with reverence and godly fear, with a humble sense of our own insignificance as creatures and of our own unworthiness as sinners, with earnest importunity, and with unhesitating submission to the divine will. Prayer must also be offered in the faith that God is, and is the hearer and answerer of prayer, and that he will fulfil his word, “Ask, and ye shall receive” (Matt. 7:7, 8; 21:22; Mark 11:24; John 14:13, 14), and in the name of Christ (16:23, 24; 15:16; Eph. 2:18; 5:20; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:5).

Prayer is of different kinds, secret (Matt. 6:6); social, as family prayers, and in social worship; and public, in the service of the sanctuary.

Intercessory prayer is enjoined (Num. 6:23; Job 42:8; Isa. 62:6; Ps. 122:6; 1 Tim. 2:1; James 5:14), and there are many instances on record of answers having been given to such prayers, e.g., of Abraham (Gen. 17:18, 20; 18:23–32; 20:7, 17, 18), of Moses for Pharaoh (Ex. 8:12, 13, 30, 31; Ex. 9:33), for the Israelites (Ex. 17:11, 13; 32:11–14, 31–34; Num. 21:7, 8; Deut. 9:18, 19, 25), for Miriam (Num. 12:13), for Aaron (Deut. 9:20), of Samuel (1 Sam. 7:5–12), of Solomon (1 Kings 8; 2 Chr. 6), Elijah (1 Kings 17:20–23), Elisha (2 Kings 4:33–36), Isaiah (2 Kings 19), Jeremiah (42:2–10), Peter (Acts 9:40), the church (12:5–12), Paul (28:8).

No rules are anywhere in Scripture laid down for the manner of prayer or the attitude to be assumed by the suppliant. There is mention made of kneeling in prayer (1 Kings 8:54; 2 Chr. 6:13; Ps. 95:6; Isa. 45:23; Luke

22:41; Acts 7:60; 9:40; Eph. 3:14, etc.); of bowing and falling prostrate (Gen. 24:26, 52; Ex. 4:31; 12:27; Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:35, etc.); of spreading out the hands (1 Kings 8:22, 38, 54; Ps. 28:2; 63:4; 88:9; 1 Tim. 2:8, etc.); and of standing (1 Sam. 1:26; 1 Kings 8:14, 55; 2 Chr. 20:9; Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13).

If we except the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ (Matt. 6:9–13), which is, however, rather a model or pattern of prayer than a set prayer to be offered up, we have no special form of prayer for general use given us in Scripture.

Prayer is frequently enjoined in Scripture (Ex. 22:23, 27; 1 Kings 3:5; 2 Chr. 7:14; Ps. 37:4; Isa. 55:6; Joel 2:32; Ezek. 36:37, etc.), and we have very many testimonies that it has been answered (Ps. 3:4; 4:1; 6:8; 18:6; 28:6; 30:2; 34:4; 118:5; James 5:16–18, etc.).

‘Abraham’s servant prayed to God, and God directed him to the person who should be wife to his master’s son and heir (Gen. 24:10–20).

‘Jacob prayed to God, and God inclined the heart of his irritated brother, so that they met in peace and friendship (Gen. 32:24–30; 33:1–4).

‘Samson prayed to God, and God showed him a well where he quenched his burning thirst, and so lived to judge Israel (Judg. 15:18–20).

‘David prayed, and God defeated the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:31; 16:20–23; 17:14–23).

‘Daniel prayed, and God enabled him both to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream and to give the interpretation of it (Dan. 2:16–23).

‘Nehemiah prayed, and God inclined the heart of the king of Persia to grant him leave of absence to visit and rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 1:11; 2:1–6).

‘Esther and Mordecai prayed, and God defeated the purpose of Haman, and saved the Jews from destruction (Esther 4:15–17; 6:7, 8).

‘The believers in Jerusalem prayed, and God opened the prison doors and set Peter at liberty, when Herod had resolved upon his death (Acts 12:1–12).

‘Paul prayed that the thorn in the flesh might be removed, and his prayer brought a large increase of spiritual strength, while the thorn perhaps remained (2 Cor. 12:7–10).

‘Prayer is like the dove that Noah sent forth, which blessed him not only when it returned with an olive-leaf in its mouth, but when it never returned at all.’; Robinson’s Job. 2

PRAYER.

I. Introduction

In the Bible prayer is worship that includes all the attitudes of the human spirit in its approach to God. The Christian worships God when he adores, confesses, praises and supplicates him in prayer. This highest activity of which the human spirit is capable may also be thought of as communion with God, so long as due emphasis is laid upon divine initiative. A man prays because God has already touched his spirit. Prayer in the Bible is not a ‘natural response’ (see Jn. 4:24). ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh.’ Consequently, the Lord does not ‘hear’ every prayer (Is. 1:15; 29:13). The biblical doctrine of prayer emphasizes the character of God, the necessity of a man’s being in saving or covenant relation with him, and his entering fully into all the privileges and obligations of that relation with God.

II. In the Old Testament

Köhler (Old Testament Theology, 1957, p. 251, n. 153) finds ‘about eighty-five original prayers in the OT. In addition there are about sixty whole psalms and fourteen parts of psalms which may be called prayers.’

a. The patriarchal period

In the patriarchal period prayer is calling upon the name of the Lord (Gn. 4:26; 12:8; 21:33); i.e. the sacred name is used in invocation or appeal. There is, consequently, an unmistakable directness and familiarity in prayer (Gn. 15:2ff.; 18:23ff.; 24:12-14, 26f.). Prayer is also closely connected with sacrifice (Gn. 13:4; 26:25; 28:20-22), although this association appears in later periods too. This offering of prayer in a context of sacrifice suggests a union of man’s will with God’s will, an abandonment and submission of the self to God. This is especially so in Jacob’s conjoining prayer with a vow to the Lord. The vow, itself a prayer,

promises service and faithfulness if the blessing sought is granted (Gn. 28:20ff.).

b. The pre-exilic period

1. In this period one of the main emphases in prayer is intercession; although this was also a factor in patriarchal times (Gn. 18:22ff.). Intercession was especially prominent in the prayers of Moses (Ex. 32:11-13, 31f.; 33:12-16; 34:9; Nu. 11:11-15; 14:13-19; 21:7; Dt. 9:18-21; 10:10). Dt. 30 is also largely a prayer of intercession, as are also the prayers of Aaron (Nu. 6:22-27), Samuel (1 Sa. 7:5-13; 12:19, 23), Solomon (1 Ki. 8:22-53), and Hezekiah (2 Ki. 19:14-19). The inference seems to be that intercession was confined to outstanding personalities who, by virtue of their position assigned to them by God as prophets, priests and kings, had peculiar power in prayer as mediators between God and men. But the Lord always remained free to execute his will; hence we hear of unsuccessful intercession (Gn. 18:17ff.; Ex. 32:30-35). In Am. 7:1-6 'the Lord repented' concerning a certain course of action in answer to the prophet's intercession, and in the next verses (7:7-8:2) Israel is to be led away captive after all. Jeremiah is even forbidden to intercede with God (Je. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). On the other hand, success attended the intercession of Lot (Gn. 19:17-23), Abraham (Gn. 20:17), Moses (Ex. 9:27-33; Nu. 12:9ff.), and Job (Jb. 42:8, 10). It is the strongly personal relation with God in which those mediators stood that underlies these intercessory prayers.

2. It is surprising that among all the legal enactments of the Pentateuch there is nothing about prayer apart from Dt. 26:1-15. Even here it is formulae for worship rather than prayer that are being emphasized. In vv. 5-11 there is thanksgiving, and in vv. 13-14 there is a profession of past obedience, but only in v. 15 is there supplication. However, we are probably right in assuming that sacrifice would often be offered with prayer (Ps. 55:14), and where it was not it might be reprov'd (Ps. 50:7-15). On the other hand, the almost total absence of prayer in those parts of the Pentateuch where sacrifice is regulated suggests that sacrifice without prayer was fairly common.

3. Prayer must have been indispensable in the ministry of the prophets. The very reception of the revelatory Word from God involved the prophet in a prayerful relation with Yahweh. Indeed, it might well have been that prayer was essential to the prophet's receiving the Word (Is. 6:5ff.; 37:1-4; Je. 11:20-23; 12:1-6; 42:1ff.). The prophetic vision came to Daniel while he was at prayer (Dn. 9:20ff.). On occasion the Lord kept the prophet waiting for a considerable time in prayer (Hab. 2:1-3). We know from Jeremiah's writings that while prayer was the essential condition of, and reality in, the prophet's experience and ministry, it was often a tempestuous exercise of the spirit (18:19-23; 20:7-18), as well as a sweet fellowship with God (1:4ff.; 4:10; 10:23-25; 12:1-4; 14:7-9, 19-22; 15:15-18; 16:19; 17:12ff.).

4. In the Psalms there is a blending of pattern and spontaneity in prayer. Alongside the more formal 'sanctuary' prayers (e.g. 24:7-10; 100; 150) there are personal prayers for pardon (51), communion (63), protection (57), healing (6), vindication (109) and prayers that are full of praise (103). Sacrifice and prayer also blend in the psalms (54:6; 66:13ff.).

c. The exilic period

During the Exile the important factor in religion for the Jews was the emergence of the synagogue. The Jerusalem Temple was in ruins, and altar rites and sacrifices could not be performed in unclean Babylon. A Jew was now no longer one who had been born into the community, and was residing in it, but rather one who chose to be a Jew. The centre of the religious community was the synagogue, and among the accepted religious obligations such as circumcision, fasting and sabbath observance, prayer was important. This was inevitable because each little community in exile now depended upon the synagogue service where the Word was read and expounded, and prayers were offered. And after the return to Jerusalem, just as the Temple was not allowed to displace the synagogue, nor the priest the scribe, nor sacrifice the living Word, so ritual did not displace prayer. Both in Temple and synagogue, in priestly ritual and scribal exposition, the devout worshipper now sought the face of Yahweh, his personal presence (Pss. 100:2; 63:1ff.), and received his blessing in terms of the light of his countenance shining upon him (Ps. 80:3, 7, 19).

d. The post-exilic period

After the Exile there was undoubtedly a framework of devotion, but within it freedom was secured for the individual. This is exemplified in Ezra and Nehemiah, who, while insisting upon cult and law, and upon ritual and sacrifice and, therefore, upon the social aspects of worship, yet emphasized also the spiritual factor in devotion (Ezr. 7:27; 8:22f.; Ne. 2:4; 4:4, 9). Their prayers are also instructive (Ezr. 9:6-15; Ne. 1:5-11; 9:5-38; cf. also Dn. 9:4-19). We may also note here that concerning posture in prayer there were no fixed rules (Ps. 28:2; 1 Sa. 1:26; 1 Ki. 8:54; Ezr. 9:5; 1 Ki. 18:42; La. 3:41; Dn. 9:3 and v. 20 where we should read 'towards' instead of 'for'). So also in the matter of hours for prayer: prayer was effective at any time, as well as at the stated hours (Ps. 55:17; Dn. 6:10). In the post-exilic period, then, we find a blending of orderliness of Temple ritual, the simplicity of the synagogue meeting and the spontaneity of personal devotion.

Prayer being what it is, it would be manifestly impossible to systematize it completely. Within the OT there are certainly patterns for prayer but no binding regulations governing either its contents or its ritual. Mechanical prayer, prayer hemmed in by coercive prescriptions, did not come until towards the close of the intertestamental period, as the Gospels make clear. Then, alas, both through Temple sacrifice in Jerusalem, and in the diaspora through the praise, prayer and exposition of the synagogue service, and through circumcision, sabbath observance, tithes, fasting and supererogatory deeds, worshippers in both Temple and synagogue sought to merit acceptance with God.

III. In the New Testament

There are certain clearly-defined areas where the NT teaching on prayer is set forth, but the fountain-head from which all its instruction in prayer flows is Christ's own doctrine and practice.

a. The Gospels

1. As to Jesus' doctrine of prayer, this is set out principally in certain of his parables. In the parable of the friend who borrowed three loaves at midnight (Lk. 11:5-8) the Lord inculcates importunity in prayer; and the ground on which the confidence in importunate prayer is built is the

Father's generosity (Mt. 7:7-11). The parable of the unjust judge (Lk. 18:1-8) calls for tenacity in prayer, which includes persistence as well as continuity. God's delays in answering prayer are due not to indifference but to love that desires to develop and deepen faith which is finally vindicated. In the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Lk. 18:10-14) Christ insists on humility and penitence in prayer, and warns against a sense of self-superiority.

Self-humiliation in prayer means acceptance with God, self-exaltation in prayer hides God's face. Christ calls for charity in prayer in the parable of the unjust servant (Mt. 18:21-35). It is prayer offered by a forgiving spirit that God answers. Simplicity in prayer is taught in Mt. 6:5f.; 23:14; Mk. 12:38-40; Lk. 20:47. Prayer must be purged of all pretence. It should spring from simplicity of heart and motive, and express itself in simplicity of speech and petition. The Lord also urged intensity in prayer (cf. Mk. 13:33; 14:38; Mt. 26:41). Here watchfulness and faith combine in sleepless vigilance. Again, in Mt. 18:19f. unity in prayer is emphasized. If a group of Christians who have the mind of Christ pray in the Holy Spirit their prayers will be effectual. But prayer must also be expectant (Mk. 11:24). Prayer that is an experiment achieves little; prayer which is the sphere where faith operates in surrender to God's will achieves much (Mk. 9:23).

2. On objectives in prayer Jesus had singularly little to say. Doubtless he was content to let the Holy Spirit prompt his disciples in prayer. What aims he referred to in prayer are to be found in Mk. 9:28f.; Mt. 5:44; 6:11, 13; 9:36ff.; Lk. 11:13.

3. As to method in prayer, the Lord had two important things to teach. First, prayer is now to be offered to him, as it was offered to him when he was on earth (e.g. Mt. 8:2; 9:18). As he insisted on faith then (Mk. 9:23), and tested sincerity (Mt. 9:27-31), and uncovered ignorance (Mt. 20:20-22) and sinful presumption (Mt. 14:27-31), in those who petitioned him, so he does today in the experience of those who offer prayer to him. Secondly, prayer is now also to be offered in the name of Christ (Jn. 14:13; 15:16; 16:23f.), through whom we have access to the Father. To pray in the name of Christ is to pray as Christ himself prayed, and to pray to the Father as the Son has made him known to us: and for Jesus the true focus in prayer

was the Father's will. Here is the basic characteristic of Christian prayer: a new access to the Father which Christ secures for the Christian, and prayer in harmony with the Father's will because offered in Christ's name.

4. As to the Lord's practice of prayer, it is well known that he prayed in secret (Lk. 5:15f.; 6:12); in times of spiritual conflict (Jn. 12:20-28; Lk. 22:39-46); and on the cross (Mt. 27:46; Lk. 23:46). In his prayers he offered thanksgiving (Lk. 10:21; Jn. 6:11; 11:41; Mt. 26:27), sought guidance (Lk. 6:12ff.), interceded (Jn. 17:6-19, 20-26; Lk. 22:31-34; Mk. 10:16; Lk. 23:34) and communed with the Father (Lk. 9:28ff.). The burden of his highpriest prayer in Jn. 17 is the unity of the church.

5. Since the *Lord's Prayer is treated more fully elsewhere, it will suffice to point out that after the invocation (Mt. 6:9b) there follow six petitions (9c-13b), of which the first three have reference to God's name, kingdom and will, and the last three to man's need of bread, forgiveness and victory: the Prayer then closes with a doxology (13c) which contains a threefold declaration concerning God's kingdom, power and glory. It is 'like this' that Christians are bidden to pray.

b. The Acts of the Apostles

The Acts is an excellent link between the Gospels and the Epistles, because in Acts the apostolic church puts into effect our Lord's teaching on prayer. The church was born in the atmosphere of prayer (1:4). In answer to prayer the Spirit was poured out upon her (1:4; 2:4). Prayer continued to be the church's native air (2:42; 6:4, 6). There remained in the church's thinking a close connection between prayer and the Spirit's presence and power (4:31). In times of crisis the church had recourse to prayer (4:23ff.; 12:5, 12). Throughout the Acts the church leaders emerge as men of prayer (9:40; 10:9; 16:25; 28:8) who urge the Christians to pray with them (20:28, 36; 21:5).

c. The Pauline Epistles

It is significant that immediately after Christ revealed himself to Paul on the Damascus road it is said of Paul, 'Behold, he is praying' (Acts 9:11). Probably for the first time Paul discovered what prayer really was, so

profound was the change in his heart which conversion had effected. From that moment he was a man of prayer. In prayer the Lord spoke to him (Acts 22:17f.). Prayer was thanksgiving, intercession, the realization of God's presence (cf. 1 Thes. 1:2f.; Eph. 1:16ff.). He found that the Holy Spirit assisted him in prayer as he sought to know and do God's will (Rom. 8:14, 26). In his experience there was a close connection between prayer and the Christian's intelligence (1 Cor. 14:14-19). Prayer was absolutely essential for the Christian (Rom. 12:12). The Christian's armour (Eph. 6:13-17) included prayer which Paul describes as 'all prayer', to be offered at 'all seasons', with 'all perseverance', for 'all saints' (v. 18). And Paul practised what he preached (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; 1 Thes. 1:2); hence his insistence upon prayer when writing to his fellow-believers (Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2).

In his Epistles Paul is constantly breaking out into prayer, and it is instructive to glance at some of his prayers because of their content.

1. In Rom. 1:8-12 he pours out his heart to God in thanksgiving (v. 8), insists upon serving Christ with his spirit (v. 9a), intercedes for his friends in Rome (v. 9b), expresses his desire to impart to them a spiritual gift (vv. 10f.), and declares that he too is depending upon them for spiritual uplift (v. 12).

2. In Eph. 1:15-19 Paul again thanks God for his converts (vv. 15f.), and prays that they may receive the Spirit through whom comes knowledge of God and illumination of heart (vv. 17-18a), in order that they may know the hope of God's calling, the wealth of God's inheritance, and the greatness of God's power which had been demonstrated in Christ's resurrection (vv. 18b-19).

3. Again, in Eph. 3:14-18 the apostle pleads with the Father (vv. 14f.) for his fellow-Christians that they might be increasingly conscious of God's power (v. 16), to the end that Christ might indwell them, and that they might be rooted in love (v. 17), that each together, being perfected, might be filled with the fullness of God (vv. 18f.). Both of these 'Ephesian' prayers are well summed up in Paul's threefold desire that Christians

should receive knowledge and power issuing in the love of Christ, through which as individuals and a group they should achieve perfection.

4. In Col. 1:9ff. Paul again prays that the believers should know God's will through spiritual wisdom and understanding (v.9), that practice might agree with profession (v. 10), that they might have power for their practice (v. 11), and be thankful for their immense privilege and position in the Lord Jesus (vv. 12f.).

But perhaps Paul's greatest contribution to our understanding of Christian prayer is in establishing its connection with the Holy Spirit. Prayer is in fact a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:14-16). The believer prays 'in the Spirit' (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20); hence prayer is a co-operation between God and the believer in that it is presented to the Father, in the name of the Son, through the inspiration of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Hebrews, James and 1 John

The Epistle to the Hebrews makes a significant contribution to an understanding of Christian prayer. 4:14-16 shows why prayer is possible: it is possible because we have a great High Priest who is both human and divine, because he is now in the heavenly place and because of what he is now doing there. When we pray it is to receive mercy and find grace. The reference to the Lord's prayer life in 5:7-10 really teaches what prayer is: Christ's 'prayers' and 'supplications' were 'offered up' to God, and in this spiritual service he 'learned obedience' and therefore 'was heard'. In 10:19-25 the emphasis is upon corporate prayer, and the demands and motives which it involves. The place of prayer is described in 6:19.

The Epistle of James has three significant passages on prayer. Prayer in perplexity is dealt with in 1:5-8; correct motives in prayer are underlined in 4:1-3; and the significance of prayer in time of sickness is made clear in 5:13-18.

In his first Epistle, John points the way to boldness and efficacy in prayer (3:21f.), while in 5:14-16 he establishes the relation between prayer and the will of God, and shows that efficacy in prayer is especially relevant to intercession, but that situations do arise where prayer is powerless.

IV. Conclusion

The heart of the biblical doctrine of prayer is well expressed by B. F. Westcott: ‘True prayer—the prayer that must be answered—is the personal recognition and acceptance of the divine will (Jn. 14:7; cf. Mk. 11:24). It follows that the hearing of prayer which teaches obedience is not so much the granting of a specific petition, which is assumed by the petitioner to be the way to the end desired, but the assurance that what is granted does most effectively lead to the end. Thus we are taught that Christ learned that every detail of His life and passion contributed to the accomplishment of the work which He came to fulfil, and so He was most perfectly ‘heard’. In this sense He was ‘heard for his godly fear’.

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FAST—The sole fast required by the law of Moses was that of the great Day of Atonement (q.v.), Lev. 23:26–32. It is called “the fast” (Acts 27:9).

The only other mention of a periodical fast in the Old Testament is in Zech. 7:1–7; 8:19, from which it appears that during their captivity the Jews observed four annual fasts.

(1.) The fast of the fourth month, kept on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, the anniversary of the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans; to commemorate also the incident recorded Ex. 32:19. (Comp. Jer. 52:6, 7.)

(2.) The fast of the fifth month, kept on the ninth of Ab (comp. Num. 14:27), to commemorate the burning of the city and temple (Jer. 52:12, 13).

(3.) The fast of the seventh month, kept on the third of Tisri (comp. 2 Kings 25), the anniversary of the murder of Gedaliah (Jer. 41:1, 2).

(4.) The fast of the tenth month (comp. Jer. 52:4; Ezek. 33:21; 2 Kings 25:1), to commemorate the beginning of the siege of the holy city by Nebuchadnezzar.

There was in addition to these the fast appointed by Esther (4:16).

Public national fasts on account of sin or to supplicate divine favour were sometimes held. (1.) 1 Sam. 7:6; (2.) 2 Chr. 20:3; (3.) Jer. 36:6–10; (4.) Neh. 9:1.

There were also local fasts. (1.) Judg. 20:26; (2.) 2 Sam. 1:12; (3.) 1 Sam. 31:13; (4.) 1 Kings 21:9–12; (5.) Ezra 8:21–23; (6.) Jonah 3:5–9.

There are many instances of private occasional fasting (1 Sam. 1:7; 20:34; 2 Sam. 3:35; 12:16; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 1:4; Dan. 10:2,3).

Moses fasted forty days (Ex. 24:18; 34:28), and so also did Elijah (1 Kings 19:8). Our Lord fasted forty days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2).

In the lapse of time the practice of fasting was lamentably abused (Isa. 58:4; Jer. 14:12; Zech. 7:5). Our Lord rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocritical pretences in fasting (Matt. 6:16). He himself appointed no fast. The early Christians, however, observed the ordinary fasts according to the law of their fathers (Acts 13:3; 14:23; 2 Cor. 6:5). 2

FASTING. Fasting in the Bible generally means going without all food and drink for a period (e.g. Est. 4:16), and not merely refraining from certain foods.

I. In the Old Testament

The Heb. words are *s'ua* (verb) and *s'oa* (noun). The phrase *ÔinnaÆ nap_sûoÆ* (to afflict the soul) also refers to fasting. First, there were certain annual fasts. Thus the Hebrews fasted on the Day of Atonement (Lv. 16:29, 31; 23:27–32; Nu. 29:7). After the Exile, four other annual fasts were observed (Zc. 8:19), all of them, according to the Talmud, marking disasters in Jewish history. Est. 9:31 can be interpreted as implying the establishment of yet another regular fast.

In addition to these there were occasional fasts. These were sometimes individual (e.g. 2 Sa. 12:22) and sometimes corporate (e.g. Jdg. 20:26; Joel 1:14). Fasting gave expression to grief (1 Sa. 31:13; 2 Sa. 1:12; 3:35; Ne. 1:4; Est. 4:3; Ps. 35:13–14) and penitence (1 Sa. 7:6; 1 Ki. 21:27; Ne. 9:1–

2; Dn. 9:3-4; Jon. 3:5-8). It was a way by which men might humble themselves (Ezr. 8:21; Ps. 69:10). Sometimes it may have been thought of as a self-inflicted punishment (cf. the phrase 'to afflict the soul'). Fasting was often directed towards securing the guidance and help of God (Ex. 34:28; Dt. 9:9; 2 Sa. 12:16-23; 2 Ch. 20:3-4; Ezr. 8:21-23). Fasting could be vicarious (Ezr. 10:6; Est. 4:15-17). Some came to think that fasting would automatically gain man a hearing from God (Is. 58:3-4). Against this the prophets declared that without right conduct fasting was in vain (Is. 58:5-12; Je. 14:11-12; Zc. 7).

II. In the New Testament

The usual Gk. words are *νηστεύω* (verb), and *νηστεία* and *νηστis* (nouns). In Acts 27:21, 33 the words *asitia* and *asitos* ('without food') are also used.

As far as general Jewish practice is concerned, the Day of Atonement is the only annual fast referred to in the NT (Acts 27:9). Some strict Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday (Lk. 18:12). Other devout Jews, like Anna, might fast often (Lk. 2:37).

The only occasion when Jesus is recorded as fasting is at the time of his temptations in the wilderness. Then, however, he was not necessarily fasting from choice. The first temptation implies that there was no food available in the place he had selected for his weeks of preparation for his ministry (Mt. 4:1-4). Cf. the 40 days' fasts of Moses (Ex. 34:28) and Elijah (1 Ki. 19:8).

Jesus assumed that his hearers would fast, but taught them when they did so to face Godward, not manward (Mt. 6:16-18). When asked why his disciples did not fast as did those of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees, Jesus did not repudiate fasting, but declared it to be inappropriate for his disciples 'as long as the bridegroom is with them' (Mt. 9:14-17; Mk. 2:18-22; Lk. 5:33-39). Later they would fast like others.

In Acts leaders of the church fast when choosing missionaries (13:2-3) and elders (14:23). Paul twice refers to his fasting (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27). In the former passage voluntary fasting, by way of self-discipline, appears to be

meant (neupsteia); the latter passage mentions both involuntary ‘hunger’ (limos) and voluntary going ‘without food’ (neupsteia).

The weight of textual evidence is against the inclusion of references to fasting in Mt. 17:21; Mk. 9:29; Acts 10:30; 1 Cor. 7:5, though the presence of these references in many mss in itself indicates that there was a growing belief in the value of fasting in the early church. h.a.g.b. 1

TITHE —a tenth of the produce of the earth consecrated and set apart for special purposes. The dedication of a tenth to God was recognized as a duty before the time of Moses. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20; Heb. 7:6); and Jacob vowed unto the Lord and said, ‘Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.’

The first Mosaic law on this subject is recorded in Lev. 27:30–32. Subsequent legislation regulated the destination of the tithes (Num. 18:21–24, 26–28; Deut. 12:5, 6, 11, 17; 14:22, 23). The paying of the tithes was an important part of the Jewish religious worship. In the days of Hezekiah one of the first results of the reformation of religion was the eagerness with which the people brought in their tithes (2 Chr. 31:5, 6). The neglect of this duty was sternly rebuked by the prophets (Amos 4:4; Mal. 3:8–10). It cannot be affirmed that the Old Testament law of tithes is binding on the Christian Church, nevertheless the principle of this law remains, and is incorporated in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:13, 14); and if, as is the case, the motive that ought to prompt to liberality in the cause of religion and of the service of God be greater now than in Old Testament times, then Christians ought to go beyond the ancient Hebrew in consecrating both themselves and their substance to God.

Every Jew was required by the Levitical law to pay three tithes of his property (1) one tithe for the Levites; (2) one for the use of the temple and the great feasts; and (3) one for the poor of the land. 2

TITHES. The custom of tithing did not originate with the Mosaic law (Gn. 14:17-20), nor was it peculiar to the Hebrews. It was practised among other ancient peoples. There are three main questions to consider.

1. What were the Hebrews required to tithe? The Torah legislated that ‘the seed of the land’ (crops), ‘the fruit of the trees’ and ‘herds and flocks’ (Lv. 27:30-32) were to be tithed. The manner of tithing livestock was as follows: the owner counted the animals as they passed out to pasture, and every tenth one was given to God. In this way there was no possibility of selecting inferior animals for the tithing of the flocks and herds (Lv. 27:32f.). If a Hebrew preferred to dedicate the tenth of his cereal and fruit yields in the form of their monetary value he was free to do so, but a fifth of that sum had to be added to it. He was not allowed to redeem the tenth of his flocks and herds in this way (Lv. 27:31, 33).

2. To whom were the tithes paid? They were to be given to the Levites (Nu. 18:21ff.). But in Heb. 7:5 it is said to be the sons of Levi ‘who receive the priestly office’ who are to be the recipients of the tithes. This departure from the Law may have been due to the Levites’ unwillingness to fulfil their duties in Jerusalem after the return under Ezra (Ezr. 8:15ff.). The Levites, because of the nature of their status and functions in the community, had no means of income, livelihood or inheritance to ensure their support; therefore, and in return ‘for their service which they serve, the service in the tent of meeting’, they were to receive ‘the tithe of the people of Israel’ (Nu. 18:21, 24). This passage in Nu. 18 mentions only the tithing of cereal and fruit crops (v. 27). The Levites, however, were not allowed to keep the whole of the tenth. They were directed to present an offering which was to be taken out of the tenth, which represented ‘a tithe of the tithe’ (Nu. 18:26). This ‘tithe of the tithe’ was to be ‘from all the best of them’ (v. 29) and was to be given to the priests (v. 28 ; Ne. 10:39).

3. Where were the Hebrews to offer their tithes? They were to bring them to ‘the place which the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes, to put his name there’ (Dt. 12:5f., 17f.); i.e. Jerusalem. And the offering of the tithes was to take the form of a ritual meal, in which the Levite was to share (Dt. 12:7, 12). If Jerusalem was a long way off from a

man's village the transporting of the tithe of his crops might create a problem, but he could always take his tithe in the form of money (Dt. 14:22-27). Every third year the tithe was to be offered in each man's own locality (Dt. 14:28f.), although on these occasions he was still obligated to go up to Jerusalem to worship after the offering of his tithes in his home community (Dt. 26:12ff.).

To these comparatively simple laws in the Pentateuch governing tithing there were added a host of minutiae which turned a beautiful religious principle into a grievous burden. These complex additions are recorded in the Mishnaic and Talmudic literature. This unfortunate tendency in Israel undoubtedly contributed to the conviction that acceptance with God could be merited through such ritual observances as tithing (Lk. 11:42), without submitting to the moral law of justice, mercy and faith (Mt. 23:23f.).

The tithes paid by Abraham, the ancestor of Israel and, therefore, of the Aaronic priesthood, to Melchizedek (Gn. 14:20), and his receiving the blessing of this priest-king (Gn. 14:19), signify in Heb. 7:1ff. that Melchizedek's priesthood was infinitely superior to the Aaronic or levitical priesthood. Why Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek is not explained in Gn. 14:18-20.

The NT reference to the tithing of 'mint and dill and cummin' (Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42) illustrates a Talmudic extension of the Mosaic law, ensuring that 'everything that is eaten . . . and that grows out of the earth' must be tithed. j.g.s.s.t 1

GIFT —(1.) An gratuity (Prov. 19:6) to secure favour (18:16; 21:14), a thank-offering (Num. 18:11), or a dowry (Gen. 34:12).

(2.) An oblation or proppitatory gift (2Sa 8:2,6; 1Ch 18:2,6; 2Ch 26:8; Ps. 45:12; 72:10).

(3.) A bribe to a judge to obtain a favourable verdict (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19).

(4.) Simply a thing given (Matt. 7:11; Luke 11:13; Eph. 4:8); sacrificial (Matt. 5:23, 24; 8:4); eleemosynary (Luke 21:1); a gratuity (John 4:10; Acts 8:20). In Acts 2:38 the generic word *dorea* is rendered "gift." It differs

from the charisma (1 Cor. 12:4) as denoting not miraculous powers but the working of a new spirit in men, and that spirit from God.

The giving of presents entered largely into the affairs of common life in the East. The nature of the presents was as various as were the occasions: food (1 Sam. 9:7; 16:20), sheep and cattle (Gen. 32:13–15), gold (2 Sam. 18:11), jewels (Gen. 24:53), furniture, and vessels for eating and drinking (2 Sam. 17:28); delicacies, as spices, honey, etc. (1 Kings 10:25; 2 Kings 5:22). The mode of presentation was with as much parade as possible: the presents were conveyed by the hands of servants (Judg. 3:18), or still better, on the backs of beasts of burden (2 Kings 8:9). The refusal of a present was regarded as a high indignity; and this constituted the aggravated insult noticed in Matt. 22:11, the marriage robe having been offered and refused. 2

GIFT. In the OT a dozen words are used of gifts of one kind or other. The sacrifices and other offerings were gifts to God (Ex. 28:38; Nu. 18:11, etc.). The Levites were also, in a way, a gift to the Lord (Nu. 18:6). Occasionally there is the thought of God's gifts to men, as health and food and wealth and enjoyment (Ec. 3:13; 5:19). Men gave gifts on festive occasions (Ps. 45:12; Est. 9:22), or in association with a dowry (Gn. 34:12). Gifts might be tokens of royal bounty (Dn. 2:6). But there was little goodwill in the 'gifts' (RSV, 'tribute') the Moabites brought David (2 Sa. 8:2). Gifts might be the expression of shrewd policy, as when 'a man's gift makes room for him' (Pr. 18:16). Indeed, a gift might be offered with altogether improper motives, so that the word comes to mean much the same as 'bribe'. The Israelites were commanded, 'thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise' (Ex. 23:8, av).

In the NT there is a marked change of emphasis. Some of the 9 Gk. words for 'gift' refer to men's gifts to God, as *anatheuma* (Lk. 21:5), and especially *douros* (Mt. 5:23f.; 23:18f., etc.). Some refer also to men's gifts to one another, e.g. *douros* (Rev. 11:10), *doma* (Mt. 7:11; Phil. 4:17). But the characteristic thing is the use of several words to denote entirely or primarily the gifts that God gives to men. *dourea* (the word expresses freeness, bounty) is found 11 times, always of a divine gift. Sometimes this

is salvation (Rom. 5:15, 17), or it may be undefined ('his inexpressible gift', 2 Cor. 9:15), or it is the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). James reminds us that 'Every good endowment (dosis) and every perfect gift (dōreuma) is from above' (Jas. 1:17). A most important word is charisma. This may be used of God's good gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23), but its characteristic use is for the *'spiritual gifts', i.e. the gifts which the Holy Spirit imparts to certain people. Everyone has such a gift (1 Pet. 4:10), but specific gifts are reserved for individuals (1 Cor. 12:30), and individuals endowed with these gifts are themselves 'gifts' from the ascended Christ to the church (Eph. 4:7ff.). The important passages are Rom. 12:6ff.; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 28-30; 14; Eph. 4:11ff. Salvation is God's good gift to men, and all the rest arises from this basic truth. l.m. 1

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WHY GIVE TO GOD?

A very good question! Surely, if God created us and owns ‘the cattle on a thousand hills’ (Psalm 50:10) there is nothing we can give Him anyway! Sounds pretty good logic to me! Reminds me of a good joke. “Yesterday I got given everything in the world. Now I don’t know where to put it all!” (Steven Wright)

But there is one thing God doesn’t own – us! Why? Because He wants us to own Him! If God had wanted to own us He would have created us as human robots, programming us to do His will. Now that sounds a pretty good idea for teenagers – from a parent’s perspective anyway! But God desires from us what most seek in a marriage – love, relationship, companionship, etc. It is most interesting that none of these things can be purchased over a shop counter. The world may try to convince us that they can be bought, through deceptive counterfeits. For example, lust for love. But, in reality, love is voluntary, given as a matter of choice.

But in order for a choice to be made, there must be at least two alternatives to choose between. Now, can you start to see where God is coming from? To develop a loving relationship with us, He had to give us the choice (called freewill) of loving Him or not. So we can choose to live in ‘sin’ (apart from God) or in ‘righteousness’ (right standing with God). It is our choice.

But David, what does this have to do with giving? Everything! How? Well, there are several ways we communicate to another person that we love them.

1. We tell them so. Spiritual equivalent is ‘praise and worship.’
2. We give them presents. Spiritual equivalent is ‘tithes and gifts.’
3. We put our own desires second. Spiritual equivalent is ‘prayer and fasting.’

Isn't it amazing how the natural patterns are duplicated in the spiritual . This is the way we obtain much of our understanding about things spiritual – by applying natural principles to the unseen spiritual world, as revealed to us through God's word, the Bible.

We can sum up our Christian walk with the '3 S's' of Salvation, Spirit and Submission? We will see that our attitude towards each of the 3 areas of giving detailed below, depends on what stage we are at in our walk with the Lord. Some of the ideas presented may appear a bit radical to you. Please don't just reject them out of hand though. May I suggest you put problem areas to one side and come back to them another time.

For these matters are very personal and challenging, cutting to the very core of our beliefs and faith level. I know it! For I have experienced many challenges in these areas over the years too! I have argued with myself, with my wife, with my pastor, with my God, and lost, nearly every time! I well know the feeling of knowing what I should do, then finding every excuse not to do it? Just a tip from experience! It is easiest to give in quickly and gracefully, because it makes bowing to the inevitable a lot less painful! That is, of course, if we really do desire to walk in God's will for our lives.

Please remember that there is no condemnation from God or David if you don't feel able to agree with, or aspire to, what is written. For God does not set religious rules. He just desires our love to the extent we are able to give it. For even the best of us, (which I am not) fail from time to time, none having reached perfection just yet! So please be encouraged, we are all in the same boat.

For we are all challenged in these areas.

PRAISE AND WORSHIP

I am really into praise and worship! That has not always been the case, as I described earlier. Won't bore you with the details again! But I have been through all the stages and still seek even more! As my love and appreciation for my God grows, so I desire to worship Him more and more! This is a very unnatural reaction for the natural David, I can assure you! It just has to be God working in me!

Now I am probably not going to win friends and influence people with the following. We all like to think we are worshipping our Lord as He desires. In reality though, it is rather more likely that we are worshipping Him to the extent we are prepared to let go of our reserve. The two are normally quite different! For we very easily fit into a 'worship culture', hugely influenced by those we are worshipping with. Try going into a church where the worship is significantly more, or less, exuberant than we are used to and you will soon know what I mean! I am most fortunate to be in a church where worship is highly esteemed. A right rowdy, enthusiastic bunch we are! 'But David, I am not comfortable in that sort of environment', I hear you say. Surely it is not the 'I' that is important but rather the 'He'! Mark 12:30, the most important commandment of Jesus, gives us the clue as to the desire of the Father in this matter.

"Love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30)

Now that is very straightforward to me, praise and worship being the outward expression of our inner love. No ifs, no buts, no maybes! One word in every 6 of this verse is that most uncompromising, concise, yet big word, 'all'.

When I joined a Pentecostal church I discovered that there is a 3 step (surprise, surprise, surprise!) pattern that God has revealed for praise and worship, that pleases Him. It is based on the 3 parts of the Tabernacle of Moses. The exciting thing about this pattern is that it shows us where we are heading, as well as how to get there! Let's take a look.

1. THE OUTER COURT – GIVING THANKS TO JESUS:

The Outer Court had, as its focus, the Brazen Alter, on which animal sacrifices were offered, specifically for the sins of the people. This is of course a picture of what Jesus was to do for us on the cross, 1,500 odd years later. He was sacrificed for all our sins. Therefore the emphasis in this first part of our praise and worship is on Jesus, giving Him thanks for all He has done for us. This is typical of many of the great hymns and songs of the Traditional and Evangelical churches.

But our praise and worship is not to stop there. For the Lord has revealed more. That is why, even in these churches, more modern songs, often identified as ‘choruses,’ have been introduced. For there are less and less churches where the traditional 3 or 4 hymns of my youth, admittedly many years ago, (in pre-historic times according to my family!), separated by prayers and a sermon, are still in vogue. Generally such churches are populated by older folk, and are likely to finally die as their shrinking congregations dwindle away to zero. Please, but please, neither God nor myself, is being critical of these, mostly God honouring people. But it is simply reality. And there is so much more available to us.

2. THE HOLY PLACE – PRAISING GOD BY THE SPIRIT:

More controversy! To those who don't participate - it's all just emotion and no substance. Those who do participate in Pentecost, believe they place equal emphasis on both praise and worship. So I might as well be in trouble with everyone! Show no favouritism that way!

For my observation of many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches is that most are more comfortable in, and have a greater understanding of, praise rather than worship. For praise is typical of the added dimension of the Holy Spirit, (Jesus plus the Holy Spirit) which go to make up the realm of Pentecost. Pentecostal praise is typified by enthusiasm, noise, clapping, dancing, etc. Hence the name ‘happy clappies’. Although used in a derogatory way by many of those who won't participate, in reality it is a positive nickname. It's an accurate description of the praise and worship of Pentecost.

This worship type represents a huge advance on the older, traditional form of worship and has literally been responsible for keeping the church alive in many places during the 20th century. But there is still more.

3. THE HOLY OF HOLIES – WORSHIPPING GOD THE FATHER:

This is the ultimate. To enter the very throne room of God, to be in His presence. How can we worship in the very presence of The Father? Only by being perfect, which none of us yet are. But we are on the way, aren't we? Aren't we? I hope so, for that is what our walk is all about. As Paul says in Philippians 3:12-21.

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.....I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.” (Philippians 3:12-21)

WORSHIP THROUGH THE AGES

So let's have a look at how worship has evolved throughout the ages and where we are heading to in the future. Never believe any person or church that says that they have it all. For God's 'all' has not yet come in any area of the church. Thank God for that! For there just has to be something better than we currently have, don't you agree? Yes, God's best is yet to come. God's best is perfection!

a. In The Past (Old Testament):

All man's encounters with God the Father to date have been strictly limited, because of human impurity. For an impure man cannot exist in the presence of pure God. It is man who gets zapped, not God! For God told Moses,

"you cannot see my face for no one may see me and live." (Exodus 33:20)

God then, protected Moses from the full glory of His presence with His hand. In the Tabernacle itself, God's presence was in the ark, which in turn was in the Holy of Holies, inaccessible to all but the High Priest, and then only on the annual Day of Atonement.

b. At Present (New Testament):

What applied in the past is still of practical relevance today, because we cannot yet physically enter into the full presence of God himself, even after salvation. The curtain to the Holy of Holies in the temple was torn at the time Jesus died, spiritually giving us access to God's presence through belief in Jesus, but we have not yet been able to access it in the natural as sin remains in our life. In mine anyway! So we all for now, have split personalities! Our old human nature living side by side with our new spiritual nature. Only once we become 100% pure will we be fully physically able to enter His presence.

With the arrival of

“the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name...” (John 14:26)

at Pentecost, a new revelation of, and enthusiasm for, worship was given. This was lost after a short time by the early church. It was always retained by ‘a remnant’ over the centuries, but only in the last 100 years has the influence of the Holy Spirit returned in a more general way.

The Spirit works primarily in the area of faith, involving the heart, the seat of our emotions. So we have seen in the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement a great development of thanksgiving, praise and worship, both structured and free. We desire to stretch out our hands towards God, to get closer to Him, which we do in the Spirit.

‘Happy clappy’ does not necessarily mean that God is a ‘happy chappy’ with us! For our worship must come from the spirit of God living within us, not solely, (get the pun!) from our human or ‘soul-ish’ emotions. For praise and worship is not just having a happy time – sometimes we don’t even feel like it – but rather the giving of all we have and are to God.

c. In The Future (Book of Revelation & Other Prophetic Scripture):

Now for the radical! You see, most people are looking for a more intense experience of the same to get even closer to God. That is what I thought too, until God revealed to me otherwise. Two verses, John 4:23 & 24 reveal the truth!

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23-24)

What is that horrible ‘T’ word? TRUTH! Not just in spirit, which is where we are at currently, but in truth also. ‘Happy chappy clappies’ who worship with all their emotions on a Sunday, yet live sinful lives for the rest of the week are not the worshippers God desires! Now I am sure that you have

never fallen into that category! But I know I have, from time to time. It's so easy to do! To have the form but not the substance.

Know what I am talking about? To break through to the next level of praise and worship does not mean singing louder, but rather, getting our lives right with God. I sense that the Lord is starting to bring us closer to that place, as a people arise who are sold out to Him.

The process is explained in Hebrews 10:19-22.

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, (Salvation – Traditional/Evangelical Church) by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart (Spirit – Pentecostal/Charismatic Church) in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies (Submission – Tabernacle Church to come) washed with pure water.”
(Hebrews 10:19-22)

From these verses, we can see Jesus has done for us a completed work ‘positionally’, but this has to be worked through ‘experientially,’ personally and collectively as the church. To my simple mind – we must live it, not just believe it! For it is so easy to simply rest on the laurels of Jesus having done it all for us. So what are the implications for our praise and worship?

1. Now – in our Imperfect State: Experience shows, that as we draw nearer to the Father in our still less than perfect state, we fall down before Him in reverence and awe of His purity and power. Our worship quietens, sometimes being reduced to a whisper or even a groan, as we come nearer the presence of the glory of our God. It is as if we are just beginning to enter through that torn curtain, into the Holy of Holies itself, getting a foretaste of the majesty of our Father. But is that all we can expect? No.

2. Later – When we are Made Pure: Those who have been fully cleansed and purified will be able to stand, to live in the very presence of God, to honour and glorify Him and to rule and reign with Him. For God has done everything to finally bring us back into relationship with Him. And relationship is a two-way thing.

*“They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.”
(Revelation 3:4)*

Yes, we will be able to walk with God, to relate to the Father as a child to a parent, to Jesus as a wife to a husband, and to the Holy Spirit as a mentor and closest friend. I appreciate that the full implications of this restored state are not easy to grasp. I know that it is common for Christians to believe that when they get to heaven they will spend all their eternal time singing praises to God, an eternal praise and worship session. Right? Wrong! In the sense we understand worship now, anyway. For we are to become as one with Jesus, given

“the right to sit with me (Jesus) on my throne.”(Revelation 3:21)

The full implications of this are impossible for us to currently grasp. For as God is one yet three in a way we don't yet fully comprehend, so we will become as one with Jesus in unity of purpose, in a way that we don't yet fully understand either. It remains a mystery to us.

“For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”(1 Corinthians 2:16)

As we submit in a greater way to the Father's will, in which Jesus set the perfect example, so our understanding will increase.

To attain fulfilment in praise and worship we must become pure. Now, of course we need God's help to do this. We cannot attain purity or perfection by our own efforts. But this does not mean that we give up and leave it all to God! Remember Paul's quotation earlier. It is our responsibility as mature Christians to “press on toward the goal” of perfection in Christ. As

we submit to God, so He brings us closer to Him, enabling us to enter new realms of praise and worship. It is up to us! Radical - yes, different - yes, true - yes, exciting - yes! Then let's do it, shall we!

PRAYER AND FASTING

“Why combine these two,” I hear you ask. The one I love! The other I hate! A bit of an exaggeration, but you get the idea. Yet together, they fit into the true Christian lifestyle in a similar way that praise does with worship. And no, it is not just an Old Testament concept. For example, in the appointing of elders.

“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”(Acts 14:23)

In spite of many ideas to the contrary, Jesus very often fasted when He prayed. The classic example is the time He spent 40 days in the wilderness, preparing for Satan’s temptation. No doubt He spent most of this time in prayer and He fasted too.

“After fasting 40 days and 40 nights he was hungry.”(Matthew 4:2)

Not surprisingly! But fasting and praying, together provided Him with the strength to resist Satan. Jesus often went away by himself to pray and I suspect He didn’t take a cut lunch with Him! You see, Jesus was very much against making public spectacles of both fasting and praying. For Him, these were His primary means of personal communication with His Father. Interestingly Jesus talks about them both in the identical way,

*“.....your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”
(Matthew 6:6 & 18)*

He was particularly critical of the Pharisees for their hypocritical public displays of both praying and fasting. Why? Let’s find out.

WHY PRAY AND FAST?

a. PRAYING:

Prayer is our primary means of establishing and maintaining an ongoing relationship with our Father in heaven. Without mutual communication no effective relationship can survive, let alone thrive. Every marriage seminar focuses on the key importance of communication, yet most of us continually continue to ignore it! What a difference it does make, when we are prepared to put in the time and effort, as Kathy and I have found out over more recent years.

As Christians, we are meant to be the bride of Christ. So how are we doing in establishing our communication channels with God? Yes, prayer is our ‘bread and butter’ means of keeping in touch with our Lord. We may occasionally have dreams, visions or receive prophecies, but prayer is the primary means we have of getting to know God. I find it ironic that we spend most of our prayer time telling God about our problems and desires, when He knows all about them already! After all He is God! But we spend very little, if any, time listening to what He might want to say to us.

Don't you get really put out when you have a conversation with someone, and all they are interested in talking about is their own self? It saddens rather than annoys me now, as I have grown so used to it over the years. How do you think God feels about it, particularly as He knows the full story anyway! But then, you or I would never bore God like that, would we? My thoughts do happen to concur with those of Jesus, at least in this area!

“And when you pray do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”(Matthew 6:7)

b. FASTING:

I can see myself getting into another minefield here! But if the cause is good enough, a soldier is prepared to risk his life! And the cause is good enough! In fact it is so good that it is worth dying for – but not by fasting though! Too slow! For fasting is a principle of God that has been largely ignored by the modern church. By coincidence, I am on a regular fast day today, so I am not just speaking (typing actually!) theoretically.

Why fast? Fasting involves the submission of our natural bodily desires (food and sex) to the Lord for a period of time so that we may seek and be open to receiving God's desires for our life. Fasting creates clearer communication channels with God. (alliteration is fun – helps the memory too!) Apparently fasting is also good for our health! Now I appreciate that some people have medical conditions that do not allow fasting, but very few of us do have the luxury of that excuse.

For fasting is the most concrete physical means (outside martyrdom!) through which we can demonstrate our commitment to our Heavenly Father. It also follows in the personal example of Jesus.

If you like food as much as me, you too will know that it is not easy – it takes personal discipline and commitment, two principles that are not popular in our modern, humanistic, if it feels good - do it, world. Fasting may not be easy, particularly to start off with, but is definitely worth it. Take the word of one who has had tremendous struggles over the years, failing often, but keeping on coming back to it.

If the thought horrifies or scares you, can I suggest you just try missing a single meal for a start? We all miss a meal occasionally anyway, don't we, so that isn't too hard to do. God will reward you for it, although that shouldn't be our reason for doing it – just a nice side benefit.

PRAYING AND FASTING IN THE CHURCH

I must be a 'glutton' (excuse the pun) for punishment because I know what I am going to share now is going to create still more controversy, amongst those who don't understand where I am coming from. It is not said to hurt or to criticise, but to encourage those who are seeking more of God. To press further and further into these most vital areas, in order to develop a deeper and deeper relationship with Him. It is most interesting to see the development of prayer and fasting through the types of church we have discussed earlier. Having been involved in both evangelical and Spirit filled churches I have experienced the differing attitudes towards prayer and fasting, plus the Lord has shown me a little of what is still to come.

a. TRADITIONAL/EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS

1. Fasting: Basically is either unknown or generally ignored.

2. Prayer: Consists of giving God thanks for salvation and the good things of life He has graciously given us, followed by a long list of requests for things we would like to have or see done. This prayer is generated primarily from the mind, is low key, and non-demanding. It is preferably done in private, with prayer meetings being hard work and generally poorly attended.

3. Concentrating on: Meeting man's desires and needs.

b. CHARISMATIC/PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIANS

1. Fasting: The principle of fasting is generally recognised and usually, but not always, entered in to for specific events, or when special requests or favours are required of God.

2. Prayer: The release of the Holy Spirit adds an extra dimension to the believer's prayer, releasing too the realm of spiritual gifts.

*"To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."
(1 Corinthians 12:8-11)*

These gifts result in greater enthusiasm both for and in prayer, particularly when praying in a group, as the prayers are now sourced from the heart or emotions. An increased element of faith (a spiritual gift) is invoked, faith primarily being of the heart, as we have learned previously. There is an emphasis too on spiritual warfare, as Satan concentrates his attacks on those who have been released into the Spirit. Aspects of praise and worship

to the majesty of God are introduced also. But this enthusiasm can give rise to certain problems also. Faith in faith, rather than in God – such as the name it and claim it theologies falsely promote - noise being equated with power - a product of over enthusiasm - with more power being ascribed to Satan than is his due – because of his reality in Spirit filled believers lives.

3. Concentrating on: Overcoming Satan.

c. TABERNACLE CHRISTIANS

1. Fasting: Becomes a way of life, not for reward, but as the submission of our natural human desires to the Lord of our life. In so doing, to remove the static from our lines of communication with Him. To give of ourselves and to hear from Him.

2. Prayer: To seek God's will for our life and actions, rather than making demands of God. Seeking what God wants of us, rather than what we want from God. To listen rather than to speak. To relate as a friend on a one to one basis. To work towards becoming one with Jesus, so that His desires become our desires, His will our will. To break through the barrier that Satan has established around the earth. To enter into the magnificence of what is known scripturally as the third heaven, the dwelling place of our God. Impossible? No. There are reports from leading intercessors world wide, that such breakthroughs are starting to take place. For paradoxically, to receive everything, we must give up everything. But what we give up is merely a shadow of what we will receive. Just look at the promises made to the "overcomers" in the earlier chapter on the promises to the churches of the Book of Revelation for confirmation.

'To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.'
(Revelation 3:21)

Who could ask for more, than to be one with Jesus!

3. Concentrating on: Becoming as one with God's will.

This obviously, is only an brief overview of a huge subject. For prayer and fasting are at the very core of our relationship with our God. There is no way out. Without prayer and fasting we can't have a personal relationship with God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A 'Christ'ian cannot be a Christian without believing in Jesus 'Christ'. And what did Jesus do for us? He gained access for us to, and communication with, God the Father, the Ruler of the universe and (hopefully!) our lives too, through the power of the Holy Spirit, our teacher, friend and guide who dwells within us. Yes, God has made the way for us to be restored into a full relationship with Him, through Jesus taking upon himself our sins, on the cross. That relationship grows and matures through prayer and fasting. You can't be a Christian without it! Let alone a Tabernacle Christian!

TITHES AND GIFTS:

Another area of testing! Parting a man from his money! Invisible glue! A real test of faith!

To me there are two simple tests of a genuine conversion to Christianity.

1. Putting matters right with people you have wronged prior to your conversion, and
2. A change in what you do with your money.

These two actions clearly show the true state of our heart, far more than any religious words that may pour forth from our mouths. I am a very practical person at heart and look for reality, both in my own and other people's lives. I am my own worst critic too by the way, being harder on myself than on others, although my kids would probably disagree - but then most kids do, don't they! But back to the point!

What we do with our money really shows the state of our heart towards God. Jesus knew it too! For Jesus talks more about money than he does any other subject! Considerably more actually!

Not that there is anything wrong with money in itself. Surprising though it may seem at times, money is nothing more than a very useful, inanimate means of exchange. Is far more convenient than carrying around 2 chickens in our pocket, ready to exchange for a sack of potatoes. The change could be quite messy if the potatoes were only worth 1½ chickens! Plus we would need bigger pockets! Blood and peck proof too! Stop it, David!

Why then, does such an inanimate item get us into so much trouble? Because of what it stands for. Wealth brings security, independence, comfort, power and luxury to name but a few attractions. I had better stop now before I convince myself! I am sure you can add many others. For 'there is nothing wrong with money in itself, it is just the self in money that is wrong!'(I like that – it is original, although, no doubt, someone else will

have thought of it too!) For the human benefits of money are all self centred. And we can so easily be lured by them, can't we. Let's be real! But in Luke 16:13 & 15 Jesus tells us,

"You cannot serve both God and Money" and "What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight." (Luke 16:13 & 15)

Most interesting that "Money" is spelt with a capital "M". I hadn't noticed that before I came to type it out. The choice is ours. To serve God with a capital "G", or Money with a capital "M"! God does not say that money is evil – it can't be as it is inanimate - but it is our obsessive desire for it that causes the problem.

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (1 Timothy 6:10)

I just love how the bible is such a practical as well as a spiritual book. So what does the bible require of us, in practical terms, when it comes to money?

It amuses but sometimes saddens me, when I go to a Christian meeting, that the best prepared and presented 'sermon-ettes' are often given just prior to the collection, on the subject of giving. You are not going to get another one here!

For the biblical principles are clear and straightforward, when it comes to giving to God. Applying them is the problem! There are two forms of giving – in money and in kind.

1. THE TITHE: (meaning one-tenth)

The first 10% of what we are given by God (which is everything!) is to be given back to Him, to His storehouse (Your place of spiritual sustenance).

'But how can you be so dogmatic, David?' It is not just I. God is even more straightforward!

“‘Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.’ But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ ‘In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.’”
”(Malachi 8-10)

Wow! No punches pulled here! ‘But it’s Old Testament, David.” Yes, but it is an established principle in God that the New Testament nowhere rescinds. However, today our motivation is different. For we tithe, not because it is the law, but from our heart, as a big ‘thank you’ to God for what He has done for us. The definition of ‘the house’ also causes problems. May it be where you are spiritually fed.

We are to give the first tenth, the very best to God, not what we happen to have left over at the end of the week. As a former flower grower, I know that the first flowers of a crop are the best, quality wise. ‘If we give the best, God will provide the rest!’ (Another original! Want it? You can have it!) I don’t need to say any more really.

We either believe God or we don’t. It can be hard at first to take the necessary step of faith. If you don’t currently tithe, all I ask is for you to give it a trial for a month, then see if God keeps His word. You can’t lose too much in that time anyway, can you? Look what you stand to win! Beats a lotto ticket any day!

As mentioned, the true difference between the Old and the New Testaments is that now we tithe by heart desire, not the earlier compulsion of the Law.

Nor are we to be ‘religious’ about it! In our family my wife Kathy works for wages while I work fulltime for the Lord for nothing, which is our tithe. Effectively 60+% of our earning potential.

2. GIVING:

Giving is to tithing, what fasting is to prayer – the icing on the cake! Notice the verses quoted from Malachi talked not only about tithes but also offerings. The tithes were to go to the storehouse, but what about the offerings? ‘Surely we don’t have to give more than 10%, David?’ Well, yes actually!

‘But when (Not - if!) you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.’
(Matthew 6:3-4)

We are to give, as the church should also be doing too out of our tithes, to the needy, to missions, to all those who are looking after people and/or spreading the Word of God. The amount of giving is voluntary, and should be according to the Lord’s leading. My wife Kathy is a great giver and is blessed by it in many ways, although that is not why she/we give.

3. OUR ATTITUDE:

When it comes to tithing and giving, and everything else we give to God for that matter, it is our attitude that is important. Let’s take some human examples.

Who likes paying taxes? Not too many of us! That is reflected in our attitude to the Tax Department, and the Tax Department’s attitude towards us, however many public relations programmes they run! In New Zealand, the Inland Revenue Department has had a slogan, ‘It’s our job to be fair’, which has been the butt of many cruel jokes over the years. We all know we need to pay taxes to run community services, but none of us like doing it.

If that is the attitude that we take towards God’s simple tax system, the tithe, (one flat rate of 10% on net income – Like GST or VAT!), it is hard to imagine God being too happy with us either.

Even worse of course, are those “tithe evaders” who don’t bother tithing at all! They think they can get away with it because there are no earthly “Tithe Investigators” to enforce God’s tithe system. However we will all be called to account at the time of our judgement, a ‘going over’ which will be more thorough than any earthly tax investigation!

Similarly with giving. If I give my wife a bunch of flowers because I feel guilty or feel I ought to, her reaction is going to be vastly different than if I buy them just because I love her, and tell her so. As long as she believes me! Which she does!

These words about giving from 2 Corinthians 9:6-9 summarise well, God’s views on giving.

‘Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: ‘He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’
”(2 Corinthians 9:6-9)

Who are we to disagree with Him?

SUGGESTED ‘3 x 10%+’ PERSONAL GUIDELINES:

VERY IMPORTANT NOTE: The following are not rules or requirements but simply one person’ s testimony. Obviously we are all in different situations and mine has changed in the years since this was first written. At the time, I was working in my business whereas now I have no income, but work fulltime for the Lord. Obviously adjustments have been made. Please seek the Lord’ s face as to His desire for you in your situation.

These are guidelines that I have worked out for my own life and I believe the Lord would have me share them with you. For I believe that, if we are sold out to God, the tithe, the 10% principle, should extend beyond mere

money, and apply to all areas of our personal lives. As with the principle of giving being on top of tithing, I see these ‘10%’s’ as being a minimum rather than a maximum for me. And I again stress the ‘for me’ bit. I am not saying that the same has to apply to you.

I see 3 areas in my personal life where this 10%+ principle should apply.

1. TITHING MY TIME: (1½ hours + Daily)

Building any relationship takes time. Time is the most valuable gift we can give our spouse and family. Time is also the most valuable gift we can give God. I therefore believe that I should spend at least 10% of my waking day (1½ hours +) seeking to build my personal relationship with Him and doing His work as He leads. (Apply the same criteria to my marriage and family too? You need to remember this, David!) This time doesn’t include church or church type meetings – they are extra. For it’s not easy to develop a personal relationship in a group situation.

We can, and must, if at all possible, meet with our fellow believers for praise and worship, giving and receiving teaching, mutual encouragement and support, etc., etc., all things we cannot easily do by ourselves. But if we are foolish enough, we can do all those ‘meeting things’ without ever being mates with Jesus. It is called religion. How very sad. Bible study, personal praise and worship, prayer, (including time just listening for what God has to say to me), helping people out and doing whatever the Lord leads me to do for Him. e.g. writing this book. Worth considering?

2. TITHING MY MONEY: (10% + Gifts)

As I have testified previously, this has been an amazing blessing in my life. For I started my Christian walk with nothing, as a bankrupt, and God has faithfully looked after me over the past 10 years. He has enabled us to give lots away, as well as having sufficient left for ourselves.

3. TITHING MY BODILY DESIRES:

(3 Days Fasting per Month) I have talked about the difficulties I, and everyone I know who fasts actually, have in relation to fasting. Submission, particularly for men, is not easy. I do find it easier to fast on a

regular basis, rather than intermittently. But that is just me. 10% fasting requires one day a week, for 3 weeks of the month. It is not so difficult when you look at it that way – so I kid myself anyway!

An interesting and sometimes more convenient alternative, the one which I generally follow, was instituted by John Wesley for his Methodist ministers. They were required to fast 2 days a week until 4pm. A similar approach to the above time-wise. I do this each week. Fasting is not just very old or very new!

If you don't feel able to do either of these, you could try starting by fasting for just one meal. You will soon find you can extend to two, and so on. Worth considering?

Well, that's it! God has given us everything. Surely we should return the compliment. For giving, in whatever form, is a practical measure of our commitment to our Lord. Our giving of time, money and ourselves is a practical yardstick of the depth of our commitment to our God. Let's show Him then, shall we, how much we really love Him.