

Matthew 23:23-24

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 9/23/2012

What is Jesus' View of False Religious Leaders? – PART 3

Prayer

Father, what a privilege it is to be able to boldly come before your throne; to know that we have been declared righteous because of Christ; to know that we are accepted in Your sight not because of ourselves or anything that we have done but because of the sacrifice of Your Son. Father, what a privilege it is to know that we can worship You in Spirit and in truth; that we can come before You and come before Your very throne and know that You hear our requests and know that You hear our praise. Father, we praise You and thank You for who You are and what You have done in Christ. Father, we thank You that You revealed Him through Your Word; that You manifested Him in the gospel; that You revealed our sin and Your Son, the Savior – the Christ. And Father, we thank You that You take Your Word and You use it in our lives; that You make us like Your Son. You conform us to the image of Your Son. And I pray that You would do that today; that You would take Your Word and convict, Lord God; you would convict those who do not know You; you would convict us that do and that we would then be corrected and trained in righteousness that we would be adequate, equipped for every good work. Father, I pray that You would just enable me to share Your Word in the way that You intended; that we would leave here today with exactly what You intended in Your Word and we would not just be hearers but we would, by Your power and strength, do what You say. In Your precious name we commit this time to You now. In Jesus' name, amen.

Sermon

Why do you do the things you do in terms of religious things? Why do you come to church? Why do you pray? Why do you read your Bible? Why do you obey at times what God says? Why do you do this? What is the reasoning behind why you are here right now? What is the reasoning behind how you serve the Lord – if you are serving the Lord? Why do you do the things that you do? Well, the reality is we can have the same truth; and there are those who can do things externally from a sinful, hardened heart and there are those who can do it generated from a heart that has been changed by Christ. And we are going to see today that you can do the things that God would not say are wrong, but you can have a heart that is totally wicked, that ignores the things that God would have us do. We are going to see today what Jesus' view is again of false, religious leaders. This is the last public time that we will see Jesus before He is crucified. And in this last public time, He is declaring condemnation on those false, religious leaders. We are going to see today that these condemned hypocrites, they focus on the insignificant and in their blindness miss the most important things concerning a true relationship with the living God.

Would you turn with me in your Bible to Matthew 23, and we are slowly going through the book of Matthew. We have come to chapter 23, as I have shared – a portion in which Jesus is in the temple. He is publicly giving condemnation to the Pharisees. He has been teaching and preaching after the Pharisees

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have tried to bring Him down, to deliver Him up. But unsuccessfully, they have not been able to do so, so far. He has been receiving worship in the temple. This is the last week of His life. A gracious God, the King of Kings and the King of the Jews, who came to His people who were sitting in darkness in the shadow of death. They believed they knew the Lord, but they did not know the Lord. They were sitting in their sins. And the people, by and large, had rejected the Lord. They had rejected Him. They loved the stuff and the miracles, but they had rejected His call to repentance and faith in Him.

We have seen the leaders who have rejected Him completely, who were hateful and desired to destroy Him. And in this last week of the Lord's life, He now brings the most scathing condemnation you see in Scripture concerning false teachers. With that in mind again, let's turn in our Bibles to Matthew 23. And we are going to see very clearly Jesus' woe on those who focus on the insignificant and in their spiritual blindness miss the important realities of a relationship with the living God. Let's take a look at Matthew 23, and we are going to be looking at verses 23 to 24.

²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" [Matthew 23:23-24]

We are going to see very clearly in this fourth woe in Matthew 23, the Lord Jesus points out that they are focusing on the insignificant externals rather than a true relationship with the living God. Externals rather than a true relationship with the living God. And we are going to see in this context very clearly the fourth woe of these hypocrites. Now we have been looking at these woes, and we have seen already in the beginning of chapter 23 very clearly the Lord Jesus speaking to the people, speaking to them, speaking concerning the wickedness of these scribes and Pharisees. Look at chapter 23, verse 1:

¹ Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, ² saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; (and we looked at that; they have made themselves the authority of the law in Israel) ³ therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them. ⁴ And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. ⁵ But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; (they are hypocrites; they do everything to be noticed by men. And that word notice is *qeaomi*. It is a play; it is a theater. They are putting on a face; a façade. And notice he says) for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. ⁶ And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, ⁷ and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi." [Matthew 23:1]

And then we have the Lord Jesus turn, I believe, to His disciples (as we have seen in the last few weeks) to tell them never to be like them. He says in verse 8,

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⁸ ***“But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher...”*** (Do not take the place that only the Teacher of the Spirit of God who teaches us has. Do not take the glory and authority that God has. And He says,) ⁹ ***And do not call anyone on earth your father...*** (And that is in the sense of a spiritual father, One who brought about your salvation. Give no one the glory that is due to God the Father alone.) ***For One is your Father, He who is in heaven.*** ¹⁰ ***And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.*** (Christ is the head of the church, not men. Do not ever be so arrogant to take on titles in which you usurp the authority and glory of God. That is the point. And then He says,) ¹¹ ***But the greatest among you shall be your servant.*** ¹² ***And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”*** [Matthew 23:8-12]

The reality of the humble, those humble servants – that is what God’s leaders should be, those who serve Christ in the context of inadequacy. They are humble in this context, we see.

And then we came to the seven woes. And we looked at the first two a couple weeks ago. Verse 13:

¹³ ***“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”*** [Matthew 23:13]

They closed the door to those coming to Christ and we saw many examples how the Pharisees had redirected the multitudes away from the Christ, speaking things that were not true and teaching things (their traditions) invalidating the Word of God. They closed the door to those coming to Christ – very wicked, wicked, wicked men. “Woe to you.” Eternal condemnation for such wickedness.

And then we saw verse 14 which is noted in your text that it is not probably in Matthew but we do see it in Luke and Mark. It is true, but most likely an over-zealous scribe put this woe in here so we went to verse 15:

¹⁵ ***“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”*** [Matthew 23:15]

Woe to you, hypocrites. Your converts become twice as evil as you. And then we went to 16 through 22 which we saw last week – the third woe.

¹⁶ ***“Woe to you, blind guides*** (they are those, they are the spiritually blind leading others in their blindness all the way to hell. Woe to you, blind guides), ***who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.’*** ¹⁷ ***You fools and blind men; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold?*** ¹⁸ ***And ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.’*** ¹⁹ ***You blind men, which more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?*** ²⁰ ***Therefore he***

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who swears, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. ²¹ And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. ²² And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.”
[Matthew 23:16-22]

Now if you were not here last week, you will know that you needed to be a Jew or understand the culture to understand that portion. But the point of what Jesus was making was that they were condemned for saying that you could say one thing and be obligated and say another thing and not be obligated – to lie and deceive people in a religious sense. Woe to you for saying these things; for teaching such wickedness to your people; for covering up sin. And then we move to our passage here again today where I think we are going to see very clearly that these religious hypocrites (and maybe some of you) focus on the unimportant to the exclusion of what God requires for true relationship with Himself.

Again verse 23, “Woe to you (again now the fourth woe), scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” (These are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.) Now remember this term “woe” was a term of verbal condemnation. It is a reproach; it is a reprimand. It is a reprimand from the living God. It is an eternal condemnation for these Pharisees and scribes. Everyone thinks of Jesus as a gentle, gracious, loving Jesus, and He is. But yet we serve a holy God who is righteous; He is a righteous judge. And here we see some of the most scathing reproof of those who would appear to be following the Lord and leading people in that. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”

Now for those of you who have not been here, we recognize who the scribes and Pharisees are. The scribes were those legal experts in the Law who seated themselves in the chair of Moses. And the Pharisees, they were the strictest religious sect. They were self-righteous, legalistic, and nationalistic. They were isolationist, and they were, as Jesus would say, on their way to hell. And notice what He says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” Hypocrites. As we saw, they are self-appointed hypocrites; they do everything for men to see, and not God. They are hypocrites; they love man’s approval. They are hypocrites. We even see this in the next passage. Look in verses 25 to 28:

²⁵ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. ²⁷ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” [Matthew 23:25-28]

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You look great on the outside; but on the inside, you are wicked. They are hypocrites, and the Lord Jesus calls them exactly what they are – something that no one

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at that time would have dared to have said. They were highly-revered, in a sense, but the Lord Jesus called it as it was because He is God in human flesh and He sees through into the heart.

So with this in mind, why does He say, “Woe”? What is the reason for this fourth woe? Look in the middle of verse 23: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (And we have the term *for*; it should literally be *because*. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,...) because (and here is the reason you are eternally condemned – one more reason) because you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness...” Now with this in mind, what is mint, dill, and cumin? Most the men have a little idea; the women probably know what it is. These are kitchen spices; these are kitchen spices. Mint and dill and cumin. You had these garden herbs. And cumin were common seeds. And He says, “Woe to you for tithing these things but neglecting the weightier provisions of the law.”

Now with this in mind, what is this idea of tithing? We do not see this in the New Testament very often. We rarely see it, but we hear it a lot. We hear it a lot in churches: “You need to tithe!” You hear tithing all the time, right? Well, what is tithing? We are going to take a look at that in a minute; but as you know, if you have been in this body before, we do not sit here and go through and tell you to give money. We proclaim the Word of God and allow God’s Word to work in your heart. But today we are going to look at a little sidetrack of what is tithing, what this is because it is so misunderstood in the body of Christ.

But first of all, the term *tithing* here in our passage means to pay a tenth. *Apodekatoo*. It means to pay a tenth; literally, to pay a tenth. Well, what was the Old Testament teaching that these Jews here were accountable for? When He says, “You tithe your mint and dill and cumin,” what is He talking about? What would Jews understand when they heard the word *tithe* as Jesus was condemning these Pharisees? Well, very clearly we see in the Old Testament in Genesis 14 that Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek, the priest and the king of Salem. We see that he gave a tenth of the spoils. And we see this referred to Hebrews, chapter 7. And at that time, they were not under the Law of Moses. Tithing was not mandatory. It was optional as we see by that one example. But when God made a covenant agreement with Israel at Sinai, He gave them His Law, His Law which gave His moral attributes in the context of the ceremonial and those sacrificial things that pointed to what Christ would do. And in that context, if you look in the Law, you will see that Israel was required by the law to pay three specific tithes. And Israel was an agricultural society so tithes were paid in livestock, agriculture, grain and wine, and from the firsts of their flocks. Or they could exchange that for money and give the money.

So the first tithe, we see, was to support the priest. You can look at that in Leviticus 27:30-33 and Numbers 18. That is, the first ten percent tithe required of Israel was to support the priests – the Levites. And then there was the second ten percent tithe which came to be known as the festival tithe. And if you go to Deuteronomy 14:22-27 and you study it - it is a difficult passage – it came to be understood as the festival tithe to pay for the festivals that they had, those religious festivals. Another ten percent. And then there was a third tithe which was to be given every three years. And this was a tithe to help the poor and needy. If you look at Deuteronomy 26, we see that tithe. Actually, let’s look at that, Deuteronomy 26, verse 12. So we need to understand what these Jews understood when they heard the word *tithe*. When Jesus says

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to the Pharisees, “You tithe your mint, your dill, and your cumin,” what were they thinking when they heard that word? Deuteronomy 26, verse 12. This was a tithe that was due every three years.

¹² "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied. ¹³ And you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow...'" [Deuteronomy 26:12-13]

This tithe that was required every three years was for those who were in need. It was for the priests also; it was for the orphans, the widows, the foreigners, we see. And then if you study the Old Testament, you will see there were also volitional offerings and freewill offerings above these tithes. So now, tithing for the Jew was a mandatory thing. It is not for us, we will see. It is a mandatory thing for the Jew. It was directly prescribed. They had made a covenant and an agreement with the Lord. And basically, there are many who say (this might be true to a certain extent) that because Israel was a theocracy – God had set up the government – that it was basically a form of tax in a theocracy. It was to support that which the Lord had ordained in His law: the functioning of the temple, the Levite, the festivals, and taking care of the poor and needy. And it was required. And so basically, twenty-three percent was the tithe that they would pay. You had ten percent each year twice and then you had ten percent over three years. About twenty-three percent total every year was the tithe. So when you think of Old Testament tithe, do not think ten percent; think twenty-three percent. That is what we see in Scripture.

So back to our passage. Verse 23: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you tithe your mint and dill and cumin.” Now the Law did not prescribe them to tithe these spices. The Law did not say you needed to tithe your spices. But you can see these Pharisees and Sadducees counting out every little seed and counting the leaves. They were placing effort on the minutia, as we will see. And Jesus points out how hypocritical they are in contrast to what they should have been focusing on – the more weighty portions of the law which have to do with a genuine relationship with the living God.

Now at this point, I want to take just a quick sidetrack to look at this idea of tithing again. We are going to see this quickly and go through some New Testament passages because how does that apply to us? We do hear a lot. “I give my tithe.” We have this term *tithe* and we need to understand biblically speaking what it is. I am not going to share any other Sunday; but when we hit this word in Scripture, we need to look at it. So let’s take a look at a few passages. Are we believers to tithe? Are we to tithe? What does Scripture say? There are many believers that believe we are to give ten percent, right? Maybe some of you are that way. We believe we are to give ten percent. That is kind of a rule. We think of that when we think of tithe. Are we to tithe? Let’s take a look quickly at tithing in the New Testament. First of all, in the New Testament, besides the gospels which speak of this occurrence where Jesus is condemning the Pharisees for tithing their spices, there is only one other spot in which we see tithing in His Word. And that is in Hebrews, chapter 7. And that refers to the tithe that Abraham gave to Melchizedek which was ten percent of the spoils of war. That is the one other occasion we have so keep that in mind. But there

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is no command in Scripture to tithe at all. And it is interesting that those who believe we are commanded do not seem to recognize that if they want to take an Old Testament view, it would be twenty-three percent. But we will take a look at this because some of you might be saying, "Okay, I do not need to give now," but that is not the reality of what we see in Scripture. We are going to see in reality that when God changes the heart, that it is an evidence of a true relationship with the living God to give. And these Pharisees, they did not evidence mercy and faithfulness and justice.

So what do we see in the New Testament? Well, we do not live in a theocracy. We see in Romans 13, God says we are to pay our taxes, right? But what about giving in the church? So let me briefly review some things. You can jot these down and we will get through this so we can get back to our passage. The New Testament reveals that we are to be giving to the local church. We are to be giving for the saints, as we will see. 1 Corinthians 16:1, they called it a collection for the saints. 2 Corinthians 8:4 (which we will look at later), it was for the support of the saints. 2 Corinthians, chapter 9, it was to supply the needs of the saints. And by the way, men, one of the reasons you are actually working is so that you can provide for those in need. Let's turn for a second to Ephesians, chapter 4. When you have a redeemed heart and a renewed mind, we ought to be doing our work heartily unto the Lord. Men, we are to be working. And we see part of that is so that we can supply for those who are in need. Ephesians, chapter 4:28:

²⁸ Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, (that means work) performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. [Ephesians 4:28]

Men, if you do not recognize part of the work that you provide is to share for those in need, then you have missed a biblical truth in Scripture. Part of the reason we work is to share with those in need and we will see how God does that.

We also see in Scripture that the church supplies for the needs of those proclaiming the Word of God. 1 Corinthians, chapter 9. Let's turn there really briefly. 1 Corinthians 9. The apostle Paul is combatting the accusations of the false teachers and those who were wicked in Corinth concerning his rights as an Apostle. 1 Corinthians 9:7:

***⁷ Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?
⁸ I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰ Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. ¹¹ If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? [1 Corinthians 9:7-11]***

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He is saying that is the reality of God's paradigm that was even instituted in the Old Testament where the priest received their earnings - their wages - from the ministry. And then in 1 Timothy, chapter 5, verse 17, we see specifically this also. 1 Timothy 5:17:

¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing (that is the same quote Paul shared and then from Luke)," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." [1 Timothy 5:17-18]

So the support is for the support of the saints, including those who are bringing the Word. But also we see how finances are taken care of in the church. Acts, chapter 4. Turn with me to Acts, chapter 4, verse 33. And for those of you who are visiting, you are probably saying, "I cannot believe I came to a sermon on money!" That is not the case. I just want to address biblical tithing as we go through Matthew here. It is the only place we are going to see it until we get to Hebrews again. Acts, chapter 4:33:

³³ And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, ³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need. [Acts4:33-35]

You have a precedent for the leadership of the church distributing to the needs of the body of Christ, for the support of the saints. That is what we see. If you turn to 1 Corinthians 16, we see this same principle concerning a collection that was being made for the Jewish saints who were suffering greatly, a collection by those in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 16:1:

¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. ² On the first day of every week (that is Sunday) let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. [1 Corinthians 16:1-2]

And certainly as we give, we do not do it that anyone can see. The hypocrites did that. They sounded the trumpet and they gave so everyone could see. You see a principle in Matthew 6 that we are not to let the left hand know what the right hand is doing. It is in secret that we give back to the Lord. And just a caveat: we need to be wise givers, too. Do not give to anything that would be used wickedly or would be to false teachers. You share in that. You share in that. You share in their sin if you give to those ministries. Give to that which would be what God would be doing in the local church – a godly local church. Now at this point, the question is not should we be giving but maybe how much, right? You are saying, "How much should I give?" Let's take a look at a passage that help us out and we will finish up this portion with this. 2 Corinthians, chapter 8. Let's turn there. This is a wonderful passage between chapters 8 and 9 which gives us a paradigm of a biblical picture of giving in the body of Christ. It shows us where God would relate how we are to give. 2 Corinthians 8:1:

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¹ Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia ² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, ⁴ begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, ⁵ and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. [2 Corinthians 8:1-5]

Paul is going to commend the godly actions of the Macedonians who were in deep poverty, who desired greatly to help the Jews who were in need in Jerusalem. And the reality is they first gave of themselves to the Lord first and then to the apostles. They submitted themselves and then they gave. You see, the Jews were struggling in Jerusalem and the Macedonians had the heart of Christ, the grace of God. Notice what he says, "We want to make known to you the grace of God which has been given." If you go to verse 9:

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. [2 Corinthians 8:9]

An amazing thing! Paul uses the sacrifice of Christ as an illustration of the Macedonians' giving to the body of Christ. It is God's grace, through His people, to take care of the needs of the body of Christ. Giving is in the context of God's grace. God's grace. And we see as God manifests His favor through us – His grace through us – the heart of a true believer is to give. Take a look. They begged to give. He says in verse 3, "For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability *they gave* of their own accord, ⁴ begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints..." The Macedonians had the heart of Christ: joyously giving in the midst of deep poverty beyond their ability. And if you have ever heard someone say, "Well, when I have more money, I am going to give..." What you are really saying is "I do not have generous heart like Christ!" That is really what you are saying. When there are genuine needs in the body of Christ, it is a manifestation of a true relationship with the living God to give. We see that in 1 John. How can a brother close their heart to someone in need? You cannot be saved if your heart is like what we see in 1 John, chapter 3. It is the heart of Christ to give graciously to the needs in the body of Christ for the support of the saints. We see that principle here.

And notice, "...they first gave of themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." Your heart has to be given over to the Lord first and submitted to the leadership in that context before you are going to have the right heart to give. And the Macedonians did. So how much are believers to give? Are believers to give? Yes! We will see very clearly believers are to give. It is expected in Scripture as we see from the heart of Christ as we will see even farther in this passage. How much? Is it ten percent? Turn to chapter 9 of 2 Corinthians. Let's take a look there. Chapter 9, 2 Corinthians, verse 6. And you can read these passages on your own time because they are a great instruction on the heart of genuine giving in the body of Christ. This is where we get our instruction very clearly about giving. 2 Corinthians 9:6:

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⁶ **Now this I say, he who sows sparingly** (this is the same context of the support of the saints) **shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.**
[2 Corinthians 9:6]

Here we have a myriad of principals in this passage. We can only touch on them for a few minutes here, but they are very clear. So what does the Lord say here? How much are we to give? Notice He says... He does not say "He who does not give" and "He who gives." He says, "He who sows sparingly" and "He who sows bountifully." You are to give, but you can give in a way that is chintzy or you can give bountifully. That is what He is saying. And if we look here, He says here very clearly there are in a sense chintzy givers and bountiful givers. And this is not "give to get" verse, as we will see. It is not a "give to get" verse. It is in the context of the heart of Christ taking care of the needs of the body as brought forth and relayed through the leadership of the church and, here, the apostle Paul. So there were chintzy givers and bountiful givers. Look at verse 7, chapter 9:

⁷ **Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart;** (here you go – *purposed* in your heart) **not grudgingly** ("I've have to give!") **or under compulsion** ("You must all give to help."); **for God loves a cheerful giver.** (Yes, God loves His believers, but there is a special love for cheerful givers. God loves those who are His – yes! But in this passage there is a special love for those who give with His heart, with His heart – the grace of God manifest to the true needs of the body of Christ. God loves a cheerful giver.) ⁸ **And God is able to make all grace** (Again, it is grace. Giving is seen as God's grace. It is His grace when you give to the needs of the body. It is God's grace manifest) **abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;** ⁹ **as it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness abides forever."** ¹⁰ **Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;** ¹¹ **you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.** **[2 Corinthians 9:7-11]**

Again, it is not a "give to get," but the principle is that if you are generous and gracious as led by the Spirit of God, God is going to provide for you. If you sow sparingly, you are going to reap sparingly. If you sow bountifully, you are going to reap bountifully – not for yourself but for the body of Christ, for the body of Christ. Are you a chintzy giver? Do not expect God to provide much more for you to give. He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly. Are you generous with the heart of Christ, not foolishly throwing your money around but for the needs of the body of Christ? Are you generous? Then God will supply that which you need that His grace would abound and the giving of thanks would be manifest. God provides bountifully back to those who give and He graciously supplies the saints; and that brings thanksgiving. Look at verse 12:

¹² **For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints,** (That is what the giving is for! It is not only doing that) **but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.** (It is bringing people to thank God for His graciousness. Praise the

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Lord. And He says here) ¹³ **Because of the proof given** (now look at this) **by this ministry they will glorify God** (Look at this!) **for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ**, (That is pretty powerful. If you do not have a heart to give to the needs of the saints, you are not obedient to your profession to the gospel. An evidence of someone who has been changed by Jesus Christ is having the heart of Jesus Christ, the gracious heart to provide for the needs. And he is saying if that has not happened to you, it is proof that you do not know Him. But here he says it is proof that they do know Him – “proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel”) **and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all,** ¹⁴ **while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing** (again) **grace of God in you.** ¹⁵ **Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! [2 Corinthian 9:12-15]**

He says at the very end, “Thanks be to God” for the most gracious gift which is Christ! And so in the right context we see the giving in the body of Christ in line with Christ giving Himself for us! What an amazing parallel!! Paul likens gracious, generous giving to obedience to their confession of the gospel of Christ. When you recognize what Christ has done for you, you will want to give your things to the Body of Christ. I did not need to be told, when God got a hold of my life that I needed to give; God prompted my heart to be generous. If you are following Christ and walking with Christ, you do not need to be told. God will bring about His heart which is to provide for the needs of the body of Christ. It is an affirmation of your confession and obedience to the gospel.

Okay, so we give out of a changed heart, not an unchanged heart. We give cheerfully, not grudgingly or under compulsion but by God’s grace to the needs to the saints which will bring thanksgiving. But you say, “You still have not said how much. You have not said about the ten percent thing yet.” We do not have numbers in the New Testament, to be honest with you. I do not see it here. I do not see any teaching in the New Testament about ten percent. But let’s take a look with what we have seen what God does share. Verse 7, back in chapter 9. “Let each one do as he has purposed in his heart.” And I will read 1 Corinthians 16, verse 2:

² On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper...[1 Corinthians 16:2a]

We see in Proverbs, chapter 3, the reality – it is Old Testament – but we see the principle:

⁹ Honor the LORD from your wealth, And from the first of all your produce; ¹⁰ So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine. [Proverbs 3:9-10]

If you are poor and your heart is changed, you will give abundantly. That is what we see, out of your poverty like the Macedonians who gave to the Lord first. If you have prospered, you will give more as the Scripture says “As you have prospered.” And if you are wealthy and you are just giving ten percent, I believe God would say you are being sparing in light of that. I really would; I really would. And I will share why. 1 Timothy, chapter 6. And I am not trying to tell you what to give. I am trying to convict your heart

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from the Word of God. As you have prospered. Not sparingly, but bountifully. Now folks again, for you visitors, we never (in the last ten years) we never teach on giving money. But you are here today so....okay.

1 Timothy 6:17:

¹⁷ Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches (If you have got wealth, do not hope in it; do not fix your heart on it. It is uncertain *but*, in contrast) **but on God**, (Hope in God. Fix your hope on Him) **who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy**. (God is gracious to us.) **¹⁸ Instruct them to do good, to be rich** (not chintzy, but to be rich) **in good works, to be generous** (not sparing) **and ready to share**, **¹⁹ storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.** [1 Timothy 6:17-19]

If you are rich and giving what you may call tithe (you can call it that, it's just a term), it should be huge! I am just telling you from what I see here. Does that make sense? Give bountifully as you have prospered. If you have a ton of money and you are only giving a tiny bit, then that is sparingly. That is what I see in these passages. You need to be rich in good works; generous; ready to share. The context is giving. So how much? There is no percentage in the New Testament. There are principles. You see a principle with Abraham tithing before the law; that was ten percent. You see a principle there. You see the principle more so, than that principle of the ten percent, it should be the principle of God's grace coming through a changed heart to provide for the needs of the saints in a bountiful fashion. That is how much we should give. And it should be as you determine in your heart in that context. That is how we should be giving. Purpose: set aside as you prosper. Cheerfully: not out of compulsion. So then, do we tithe? Not technically. No, we do not. The term *tithe* is not a biblical term for the New Testament. I know we all use it and some people may say that. We understand what you mean by that (hopefully) if it is not an Old Testament sense. Do we give? Yes! Out of a changed heart.

And lastly, we will see it is worship of the living God. Turn to Philippians, chapter 4. It is worship of the living God. Philippians 4:15. Paul says,

¹⁵ And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving (now Philippi was in Macedonia, by the way. Remember that. I believe the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians is speaking of Philippi in that area) **but you alone** (When I left, you were the only guys who supported us. He says); **¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.** **¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.** **¹⁸ But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.** (It is worship! It is worship!) **¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.** [Philippians 4:15-19]

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You give bountifully in the right context, by the grace of God, for the needs of the saints, God will supply your needs. Those are the principles we see in Scripture. I do not see a specific number; I see it going way beyond that – bountiful! Bountiful versus sparingly. Bountiful versus sparingly. Okay, long sidetrack! Let's get back to our passage.

Matthew 23: ²³ “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For (because) you tithe your mint and dill and cumin...” They were experts in twisting and omitting God's Word and going to the extreme. The Mosaic Law did not tell them to tithe their spices. It never required hand washing or fasting which was voluntary, but they did those things as if they were required. They did those things to be noticed by men. Was it wrong to tithe your mint, dill, and cumin? Jesus does not condemn that; He will condemn the motive, not the action. If you want to tithe that in that Old Testament sense (that is what He is saying) that is fine. But look at our passage again. In the middle of 23: ^{23b} “...and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” The term *neglecting* is “letting go.” He uses this condemnation against them, but He says this term *weightier* and in their culture, that is how the rabbis would level out different portions of the law. They had a system of which things were more important and which were not and they would call them the weightier provisions or the lesser provisions. And Jesus takes their own terminology and says, “You have neglected the weightier portions.” And He says, “Here they are. Justice, mercy and faithfulness.” They are condemned with their own terminology. “You have got everything ‘down to a tee’ with your tithing, but you have neglected the weightier provisions: justice, mercy, faithfulness.” Luke 11:42 – we see the same portion:

⁴² “But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God...” [Luke 11:42a]

It is my view that Jesus was probably paraphrasing from these passages. Obviously God can say anything He wants, and I believe He was keying in on what He had shared in the Old Testament reflecting back to His Old Testament passage in the book of Micah, chapter 6, verse 8, where the people were condemned for their self-righteous sacrifices rather than a true relationship with God which should have been manifest in them. Micah 6:8:

⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you? (Does He require all this sacrificial stuff from an unchanged heart? No!) But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God? [Micah 6:8]

What does God require of you? He requires the character of Himself. And we see that. When you trust Christ, it will manifest; and these Pharisees did not trust Christ, and they had ignored the most important thing for the most menial stuff. They ought to have been just, merciful and faithful. If they had a real relationship with Christ, they would have understood what God requires. They would not have been focused on the minutia; they would have been focused on the truth of what God requires in a real relationship with Him. And some of you are all focused on all the side stuff of church and not on a real relationship with the living God. He says they have neglected or forgotten or put away (let go) justice.

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The term *justice* really spoke of what was just or right. Remember they were thieves. Jesus had called them a den of robbers. They were not just; they were unjust. They were cheating people. They were cheating people under the guise of religion. They were not just. The next verse says they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. They were not just: they had neglected the weightier provisions.

And notice they neglected mercy. The term *mercy* speaks of help for the helpless. They are doing these little tithes; but part of the whole purpose – one third of the purpose of the tithe was to be merciful on those who were in need. And they neglected mercy. They neglected mercy – it is a characteristic of the living God. We have been born again by His mercy. It is a characteristic of those who are saved. “Blessed are the merciful.” They were unmerciful: they robbed widows. Mark, chapter 12, verse 38:

³⁸ And in His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, (same context, right?) ³⁹ and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses (these poor widows are thinking they are serving the Lord and these wicked people are cheating them out of their money "religiously" – they lacked mercy; they lacked mercy)..." [Mark 12:38-40a]

And lastly, we see very clearly, they were not faithful. They did not keep their word. They were unlike God in every way. In the last woe, we saw they twisted Scripture to show that they could lie and not be faithful to what they said. “I promise you on the temple... and the gold...” Or whatever it might be! But they would lie and say, “I am not obligated because I said it that way.” They were not faithful. They were wicked. They were liars. They were liars. They were full of robbery, not just. They devoured those in need in mercy. They were not merciful. They were liars. They did not in any way, shape or form understand the reality of a true relationship with the living God which would manifest His character, manifest His character. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe your mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness...” And then He say, “...but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” You can do your seed counting but it is in the context of loving and trusting the living God, manifesting the truth of a relationship with Him which they totally missed. Some people are very religious and they miss the reality of a genuine relationship with the living God. And they are condemned for this.

If you are abiding in Christ, you are going to be just. You are going to be merciful. You are going to be faithful. When we trust in Christ and walk with Him, we will exhibit His character. If you do not know the living God, you are full of robbery and self-indulgence. Everything is external. You can have the veneer on the outside – you may be counting your seeds – but on the inside, you are corrupt and in need of a Savior.

Notice He finishes with an illustration. Verse 24, Matthew 23. “²⁴ You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.” He calls them blind guides again; we saw that in the third woe. They are spiritually blind, hardened in heart, because they are still in their sins leading others in the same fate all the way to hell. “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.” What is He talking about here? Well,

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this is a practice of the Pharisees to strain out gnats. What do you mean by that? Gnats were the smallest of unclean things from the Old Testament. Camels were the largest of unclean things. And they would drink their wine with clenched teeth so the gnats would not be swallowed and they would not eat something unclean. He is saying "You strain out these little bugs and you miss the largest thing! You miss it completely, completely, you blind guides." "Woe to you, Pharisees (*Luke 11:42*), for you pay your tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God..." You missed it all! You missed it all! Your priorities are all mixed up. You are focusing on the minutia – the insignificant – and missing the important and you are on your way to hell for it.

And some of you are like that. It is pretty easy to understand this woe. Some of you, your priorities are upside down. You are doing all the external things for Christ (or whatever it might be) but yet you internally are not just, merciful, and faithful because you do not know the living God. You focus on the formalities and trivial religious things rather than a true relationship with the living God. That is what this is all about here.

How does this apply to us? Look at just about every false religion. You will see there is much focusing on what is insignificant (you will see that) to the exclusion of what is important which is our sin and our need for Jesus Christ and His character manifest in our lives. You see it in the commentaries of the liberal theologians who focus on every little bit of the Scripture except the point. You see it in the religious rituals of the Catholic church who focus on insignificant rituals and prayers in lieu of conviction of sin and a genuine relationship with Christ. You see it in the dead denominations from high minded - intelligent church to a mystical focus, a focus on externals and rituals rather than the Word of God which convicts us of sin and points us to Christ. You see it in all kinds of Seventh Day Adventist and Messianic congregations at times. To the exclusion of teaching God's Word, they focus on the food aspects or whatever it might be to the exclusion of sin and the Savior Jesus Christ. They took tithing to the "nth degree," these Pharisees, but missed the reality of how wicked they were.

Some of you are like this here. You take it to the "nth degree" but you miss the reality of how wicked you really are. Are your priorities upside down? If you are like the Pharisees, you are condemned. But there is good news. It is this same Jesus who condemned them who within a week went to the cross, and He bore our sins in His body on the cross and He paid the penalty for our sins. And you can be forgiven by coming to Christ, repenting of sins, trusting in Him. He will forgive you. He will give you a new heart which will be generous, which will be merciful, which will be just, which will be faithful, not perfectly all the time but you will have a changed nature. You will have the Spirit of God in you.

What can we believers learn from this? We can fall into this trap of the externals and missing the important reality which is the simplicity of a devotion to Christ: walking by faith, trusting in Him, allowing His character by His Word to be manifest in our lives on a daily basis. You can be very involved but be cold to the genuine needs of His people. We should not be focused on the insignificant but on the most significant which is Christ who gave Himself for us.

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Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for this warning and condemnation on those leaders who were leading people to hell. I pray for anyone here who does not know You; who is focusing on the externals; whose relationship is made up of doing stuff rather than being changed by Your Son – a heart that is like Yours, Lord God. I pray for them that they would see their sin; that they would see that although the outside may look clean, the inside is full of hypocrisy and they would come to Christ and cry out for salvation. And I pray for those of us believers here: may we not fall into the trap of doing things externally and merely for that reason. May we walk in obedience and trust in Your Son and in You. May we manifest Your justice and Your mercy and Your faithfulness that You would be glorified. I pray this in Your precious name, amen.

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