

Christian Giving

Part 1

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[00:00:00] The scriptures that we've read together may appear to be diverse, but in fact there is a thread which draws them all together. About a year and a half ago, in looking through a magazine, which I get from a colleague at work, with whom I exchange my magazines and monthly periodicals, I saw a review of a book called Tithing by R.T. Kendall, and it started a process of thought, looking at scriptures, the end of which I hope to share with you in the next 40 minutes or so. I want to speak about Christian giving.

I haven't ever heard anyone take it up in ministry of the word, nor can I think that I've ever heard [00:01:02] it taken up as an isolated subject. We've certainly touched on it in readings. I recall only once where this subject was raised, and certainly one other in this meeting will remember the occasion, when in the late 50s, on Tyneside, our late brother Anthony Doherty spoke on the sixth chapter of 1st Timothy, about where we stand in relation to money. I can't remember a lot of what he said. What I do remember is, I never heard an address so objected against as the one that was given that night. Now, I'm not looking at scriptures with a view to raising objections. It's with a view to challenging us about our response to the matchless grace of God which has reached us.

It seems to me increasingly that only where there's a deepening appreciation [00:02:05] of the matchless grace of God which has reached us in the person of his son, will there be the very thing which gives the spring to all Christian response and character. So what I want to do in looking at the scriptures is firstly to raise the matter of response, because it seems to me it's fundamental to everything, and in that setting I want to look at the verses that we read in Romans 12. And then to look at some of the principles which lie at the very basis of it, and we'll be looking at the verses that we read in Luke 16. And then to take up some guidelines from the Old Testament in the 14th chapter of Deuteronomy, and to trace parallel guidelines in the New Testament from 1 Corinthians 16. And then to see the thing exemplified, firstly in [00:03:08] Christ personally, secondly in a man of like passions, thirdly in an assembly of God's people here in this world, and then perhaps to bring it home to the very day in which we live. And by that time I think our time will be largely through. About 1957 or 58, our late brother Rushton Jameson, in taking a series of addresses on Tyneside, on the journey from Egypt to Canaan, right at the end of the week, read these verses in the 12th chapter of Romans, the first and the second verses. And he raised something that I'd never heard before, and looking back I'm sure I have to thank God through him, it raised something which [00:04:05] changed my life. He raised with us all that evening whether we had presented our bodies a living sacrifice. In tracing the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to the land flowing with milk and honey, he came to the end of his address on the Friday evening by saying that when they got into the land, into the very best that God had for them, it was expected that they would live in a way that they'd never lived

before. And for that matter they would enter into a conflict that they'd never entered into before, despite the conflicts they'd passed through en route to the land. And he particularly raised with us all and a large number of younger people that evening whether we'd presented our bodies a living sacrifice. And Paul says, [00:05:03] I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the compassions of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your intelligent service. Now it's certainly beyond our time and beyond my ability to fill out the expression, the compassions of God. But if I just refer to expressions that occur earlier in the book, such as in chapter 5, if when you were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life. And in the truth which is developed in the Roman epistle, you get filled out what lies in the words, the mercies or the compassions of God. I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies [00:06:03] a living sacrifice. Now he said, and I later traced it out to be so, that when it speaks about presenting your body a living sacrifice, it pleased God to give us the New Testament in a language which is capable of doing something that English cannot do, that is of distinguishing between something which is done once and something which is done on many occasions. Something which is done once is found in chapter 1, presenting your bodies a living sacrifice. God has given us renewed minds, minds that are able to think in a way in which the world is not able to think. The most accomplished intellect in this world, apart from the renewing of the mind, is not able to think as the simple Christian is able to think. And the man, Paul, who said elsewhere, we thus judge that if one died for all then all have died [00:07:07] and they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him that died and rose again for them, was a man who was saying he presented his body a living sacrifice. Divinely renewed intelligence within him said, if God, through Christ, has done so much for me, the only right thing that I should do is to hold all that I am and that all that I have for his service and for his glory here in this world. Now I'd like to raise with you, as I had raised late in 1957 the challenge with me, whether you in your own soul have been brought to that experience. I lingered over that for a while and by the grace of God I think I reached that point. I'm very conscious when I look back that maybe my life doesn't bear the stamp of it but I can say [00:08:05] from a particular moment I said and increasingly as I go on I realize how little I have but I held it for Christ's service and glory here in this world. And I wonder whether the grace of God, the matchless grace of God, which has reached you in the person and through the work of the Lord Jesus, has produced that kind of response in you to present your body a living sacrifice. Now you too might think well it's a very feeble thing but this verse assures me that it's holy, acceptable to God and it's the kind of thing that a renewed mind prompts within you, not to live this world dominated by what pleases you and as natural men we can be dominated that way, but rather to hold all that we have and all that we are for Christ's glory and for Christ's [00:09:05] pleasure here in this world. And he says in the following verse, something which is constantly done, he said, and be not conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, something that we do every day. My memory is that whenever verse two is referred to, certainly on Tyneside, it's usually in the context of women wearing worldly dress. That may be one very small facet of it. When it talks about being conformed to this world and transformed by the renewing of your mind, it's talking about the way in which we think, what goes right to the very heart of our beings, not being governed by the kind of thing that governs men of this world, who lay up for the future for themselves and do what pleases their every whim, but again, right at the very heart of our beings, being transformed by the renewing of our minds, [00:10:05] that we might prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. And I've referred to these verses because I honestly feel that what lies right at the very root of the matter of Christian giving is firstly, having given our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our intelligent service. I've spoken over years to saints in the meetings and it seems to me that the danger of going through the motions and on the surface having things which appear to be right and yet underneath having lost the very spark which gives it all character and validity before

God is a very real danger. And Romans 12 verses 1 and 2 [00:11:02] go right to the very heart of the matter, that which springs from a heart which is totally taken up with and desires to answer in this world too all that Christ has done. Response lies at the very heart of the matter. Now I read the verses in the 16th chapter of Luke to you for three things particularly. I don't want to refer much to the actual details. I think the picture is all too clear. Somebody about to lose something that he's relied on for years and the only way that he can secure a future is dishonest and don't let's mince matters. The Lord didn't commend that. The Lord said plainly the man was unjust but he did say about it that there was an important principle that lay at the root of it. Now there are just three things I want to refer [00:12:05] to. The first is in verse 12. If you've not been faithful in that which is another man's who shall give you that which is your own. If you've not been faithful in that which is another man's. I puzzled for years over a certain verse in the scriptures. I could never understand why the disciples were amazed when the Lord said it's easier for a rich man to rather it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And one day after a Bible reading and I came to the conclusion that we've made a pretty wretched mess of it I said to quite a young sister who no longer lives in this country I said to her I think [00:13:01] we made a bit of a mess of that Jean didn't we she said yes she said if you thought about the fact that those to whom the Lord was speaking had been brought up from their infancy to look upon material prosperity as being a mark of God's favor and someone suddenly says not only it is it not a mark of God's favor but in fact it can be a hindrance in securing the blessing of God you'd be as astonished as they were and that was light to my soul from that moment on and not only on that but on this part of the scripture if words mean anything what the Lord is saying here is what we have our material possessions our money it's not ours it's another man's it's God's. Now I've no doubt that many of you when you have your money use your money to [00:14:01] for the Lord's service and you sort of say well I'll set that aside for the Lord and the rest of it is mine no it isn't listen to what the Lord said if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's who shall give you that which is your own everything that we have on a material plane it's not ours it's God's and it's given to us as stewards. The second thing the Lord said and I direct your attention to verse 9 now the Lord said I say unto you make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations make friends to yourselves of the mammon of unrighteousness the Lord begins to apply the parable. Now about six or seven months ago I had some responsibility in my job for stores [00:15:05] for a training unit and I thought I'd better have a look at what was being done so I went to the chap who was responsible and I said to him can I have a look at some of the things that have been signed the vouchers that have been signed and he I said my we have an awful lot of pencils and he said yeah we've got quite a number when we looked we got enough to go to about the year 2010 and I said to the chap that's ridiculous he said I don't worry it isn't your money that I'm spending now that's what I think the Lord meant you can be profligate to what belongs to somebody else it belongs to God use it as this man used not what belonged to him but what belonged to his Lord he looked on to future benefit and so he said to those who owed his master something instead of a hundred write down 80 he sacrificed for the future because of the benefit that would come [00:16:04] he used the unrighteous mammon for future benefit and the Lord says make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness that when ye fail ye may be received into everlasting habitations the third thing that I want to make a comment on and you may not agree with this is centered in verse 11 and the end of verse 12 I think one brother here will recognize this that the the feet of a man of God at whom we sat for many years used to use the expression true riches which are your own now I'd never knew for years that he was putting together two expressions in scriptures but he often used to emphasize true riches which are your own material possessions they're not the true riches the true riches are the things which we have in Christ and they are our own God says [00:17:05] of material things they're not yours they're mine they belong to another man he says of the spiritual riches they're your own now

this is the thing that you may not agree with I look around my experience in meetings really is fairly limited I've broken bread with the Saints over 30 years I've seen a dramatic change in the 30 years I think I'd have to say humbly also looking back that I'm perhaps not the man I was some years ago but if words mean anything the Lord says here if you're not faithful in what belongs to God you'll never get committed to you the true riches which are your own now you might think that things pertaining to money are a vital importance you might say that they're the last item of importance the Lord says no they're that which is least the really truly important [00:18:07] things are the true riches which are your own and if you're not faithful if I'm not faithful in that which is least will we have committed to us the true riches which are our own now I'm not saying that this is the one reason why we face many of the difficulties that we do but along with the many other contributory reasons which caused the present spiritual weakness that cast us upon God it may well be that what the Lord says here goes to the very root of the matter in verse 11 if therefore you have not been faithful in the mammoth the unrighteous mammon who will commit to your trust the true riches and if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's who shall give you that which is your own the true riches are those things which are found in Christ [00:19:05] they are true riches and they are our own now I read to you the verses in the 14th of Deuteronomy because it seems to me they lie lay down the basic guidelines for the Old Testament and that's not mistake we're talking here about a plain stated command which was given to the children of Israel verse 22 of Deuteronomy 14 thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed that the field bringeth forth year by year and thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose to place his name there the tithe of thy corn of thy wine and of thine oil and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always [00:20:05] now if you look quickly at a verse I think in numbers 18 it tells you plainly what a tithe was yes you didn't turn to it I'll read it to you in numbers 18 verse 21 it reads and behold I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance for their service which they serve that it is referring to the tithe is plain because in verse 24 it says but the tithes of the children of Israel which they offer as an heave offering unto the Lord I have given to the Levites to inherit now from those two passages of Scripture at least four things emerge firstly it says that it is personal giving verse 22 of Deuteronomy 14 thou shalt truly tithe it was [00:21:10] regular giving at the end of verse 22 thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed that the field bringeth forth year by year thirdly it was proportionate thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed and at the beginning of verse 23 it was a God-centered thing and thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose to place his name there it is as plain as a pipe staff that to the children of Israel there was a command that a tenth of all they received year by year was to be devoted to the service of God and connected with the place where he chose that his name should dwell that's the Old Testament position there may be are other [00:22:06] things that others could adduce from those scriptures but certainly it's talking about personal regular proportionate God-centered giving now would you like to turn to the 15th chapter the 16th chapter of 1st Corinthians 1 Corinthians 16 and verse 2 1 Corinthians 16 verse 2 upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him that there be no gatherings when I come individual response verse 2 let every one [00:23:07] of you regular upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him proportionate upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him and that again it is a God-centered matter that there be no gathering when I come I don't suppose we'll have many difficulties or quibbles over the fact that it's an intensely individual thing although the response of the individual collated made together that bounty that Paul speaks of in the second epistle I don't think we'd have any difficulty about it being regular I don't think we'll have any difficulty about it being God-centered I wonder where we all stand [00:24:03] in relation to the proportionate regular individual God-centered proportionate giving now I'm equally clear on this and it's it's one of the ways presumably in which we diverge widely from the evangelical world roundabout

I don't know whether you realize this I only realized it about ten years ago but maybe it's a timely word for those of you who are going to colleges and universities but and I don't want wish to be misunderstood on this I I take every opportunity to enjoy fellowship with every true saint of God wherever I meet them but let me say this we widely diverge from the general evangelical world not in fringe issues in major issues one of the major issues is generally the evangelical world believes that the guide for life is the law what actually [00:25:08] sparked off this exercise in the first place with me I referred to as a book written by a man called Kendall it's tithing and he makes no bones about it he presses the verses in Deuteronomy 14 and says the guideline for the Christian today in his giving is one-tenth of his income it's as plain as a pipe staff he doesn't mince matters I just wonder where we stand in relation to this I sometimes think maybe when we say in this particular setting we don't believe the law applies that maybe it's to turn aside the plain word and it seems to me it is a plain word about proportionate giving if God has blessed us in such a way and far beyond the measure in which God blessed Israel Israel was blessed with a land flowing with milk and honey and had they fought [00:26:02] for it and enjoyed it they would have been as they will be in a coming day the head of the nations and not the tail but Israel's blessing pales into insignificance when we consider the far more wonderful way in which it's pleased God to bless us the response cannot be less it cannot be less than the children of Israel I think on 1 Corinthians 16 you could fairly lay down a foundation of individual regular proportionate God-centered giving and I just wonder where we stand in relation to it in discussing when I was thinking about this with this fellow believer at work with whom I have a walk a couple of dinner times a week and saying to him I'd come to those conclusions he said yes he said the great difficulty is a proportion of what and I said him how do you mean [00:27:03] he said a proportion of your gross income or a proportion of your net income so I thought about that for a good while and I can only say I've come to the conclusion that what is said in Deuteronomy 14 plainly envisages what came from the trees what came from the land what came from the flock what came from any source was to be given I've come to the conclusion it's talking about gross income that which is deducted any case ministers at the end of our day to benefit those things which the government take off provide all the things that we enjoy in this fairly stable land 1 Corinthians 16 talks about regular individual proportionate God-centered giving I read the words to you in the 9th of 2nd Corinthians to see that kind of thing exemplified [00:28:04] I have a great debt to a brother who he once said he was not a gifted man but certainly over the years I've had occasion to look back and to thank God for things that he said to me and one of the things he said to me as a very young believer was this he said you'll never be marked by the grace of Christ in this world in any way unless first you see the thing exemplified first in Christ and in the measure in which the Spirit of God enables you to see anything perfectly displayed in Christ in just that measure the same thing will be reproduced in you down here in this world I've thanked God for that many times I believe it to be a maxim of Christian teaching I can only say in repeating it that I hope it's done it does for you what it's done for me and when you think of [00:29:03] this you cannot but think of one person and I didn't read the words but they're well enough known to you Paul Acts chapter 20 taking leave of the Ephesian elders at Miletus gathers them together and he says to them you know that these hands have ministered to my wants and those that were with me and I have shown you that so laboring you ought to meet the needs of the poor and then he says as you remember the Lord Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive in all its wonderful perfection when the Son of God was here giving was seen he gave of his time he gave of his substance and ultimately when he had nothing else to give he gave his life it seemed perfectly in Christ but it was seen in a man of like passions Paul says I have shown you I read recently some [00:30:04] words of Spurgeon Spurgeon was no lover of brethren but on one occasion he said about them high truth and low practice you know I wonder just how much a challenge like that would stick today there's no there's no lack of understanding of the Word of God but when it comes to putting it practice where do we stand and the very thing that Paul says long

before he says I have taught you publicly from house to house he says I have shown you Paul was a living exponent of the very truth of God that he expounded and he said these hands have ministered to my wants and the needs of those that were with me but it's not an historical thing you know I was saying to a farmer at the beginning of the week if you go to the north of Northumberland they tell you what happened in 1890 and what happened in 1910 but Christianity is not an historic thing it is worth [00:31:02] referring to the beginning of the movement of God of which we form so feeble a tail end I don't know whether anybody has viewed a very interesting history of early brethren written by Miss Stoney the daughter of JB Stoney it's interesting because she says things like this she said in the town of Plymouth response was so real that for a period of about five years there was so much money being contributed to the Saints there that long after they'd met all the needs that were represented in the meeting they were able to go out into the streets of Plymouth and for a period of five years the poor law institution was never called upon little wonder that Satan wanted to spoil a work like that it was almost like a millennium being set up I remember reading that one of those early brethren Wigwam got an amount of money which I think converted into present-day terms would [00:32:04] amount to somewhere around 350,000 pounds what did he do when he got it he asked for the prayers of the brethren that he might devote it to the Lord's work and anybody who's benefited from his Greek and rather called II and Hebrew concordance will witness the benefit that's come from a man's sacrificial giving but it's not in the past it's not an historical thing Christianity is intended to radically affect us today and within living memory there was a man in London a brother in London and I remember once being in his company when the will of another brother was published and several hundreds tens maybe hundreds of thousands of pounds were left in his will and I remember this man saying if God gives me grace there'll not be anything left in my will now certainly to my knowledge in excess of about one the third million pounds passed through his hands [00:33:07] and his estate at the end of the day I think totaled about 41 pounds but it's not in the past brethren regular proportionate God-centered individual giving is a thing for the day in which we live there are only two things I want to say what about it why should it command our attention well we read in the ninth chapter of 2nd Corinthians these words to Corinthians 9 we read these words for the administration of this service not only supply of the wants of the Saints but is abundant also by many thanksgiving unto God and in verse 11 which causes through us thanksgiving to God it leads to the glory of God it's destined to support the Saints of God [00:34:08] in this world I can't read the verse time is almost gone but if you look I think in the ninth chapter of 1st Corinthians it speaks about thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out corn I can't hold back saying this when I came into the gatherings there were nine brothers in full-time service moving round it wasn't long on time side the interval between listening to some ministry or the other and I have no personal doubt that there was a better spiritual tone about when that kind of thing happened today it's greatly reduced certainly in one case one brother withdrew from the work because of the lack of support if it's in the Word of God and I can only leave it with [00:35:01] you as a plain stated guide from God it must command our obedience I've lived long enough now to know that in my own personal life digressions are not connected with a failure to understand they're connected with a simple failure to obey plain stated guidance and commands from the Word of God what will it bring us well this is like this crop in mine I may not have it word perfect but it's the thrust of the thing in Proverbs the early chapters of Proverbs it says honor the Lord with thy substance and with thee with all the increase of thy substance so shall thy barns be filled and thy presses burst out with new wine and I was quite surprised when tracing this through to find that the words whatsoever a man sows that also shall he reap are found in this setting let [00:36:08] him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teaches in all good things be not deceived God is not mocked whatsoever a man sows that also shall he reap God grant that by deepening appreciation of that grace which has reached us there may be found with each one of us individual regular proportionate God-centered giving all I want to do just in closing is to read some

words to you which it seems to me are calculated to touch the day in which we live I know that the actual words were directed for people of a different day but I read from Malachi chapter 3 verse 10 bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be meat in mine [00:37:10] house and prove me now herewith saith the Lord of hosts if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it God is no man's debtor in the measure in which we respond we should be blessed in ourselves and be a blessing to those amongst whom we move God grant that it might be so in better and deeper measure whilst we wait for the coming of the Lord