

## ARTICLE V.

## THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL OF GIVING.

BY THE REVEREND FRANK FOX, D.D., SIOUX FALLS,  
SOUTH DAKOTA.

AN old English fable tells us that once a barefooted boy trudging along a dusty highway found a golden coin. He lived threescore years and ten, and found a fortune; but he never saw one of Turner's sunsets or landscapes. Fields, forests, fountains, and flowers had no beauty or attraction for him. For him the path of life was but a dusty highway in which to hunt for dollars. For an ever-increasing number of men, life is a search for material treasure. There is one little, wretched, shriveled, mean, contemptible word which expresses the ideal and sums up the ambition of earth. That word is *get*. The ideal and ambition of heaven are expressed in the little word *give*. To right the wrongs and relieve the wretchedness of earth, we must oust that word "get" and enthrone in its place the heaven-born word "give." In the Old Testament, God gave man a law to guide his giving: in the New Testament, He gave him the gospel to govern his giving.

## THE LAW OF GIVING.

1. The tithe is older than human history.

Man steps across the threshold of sacred story with an offering in his hand from field and flock. Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of battle to Melchizedek, the priest of God. At Bethel, Jacob vowed to give to God a tenth of all

he should give him. Greek, Roman, Arabian and Carthaginian devoted a tenth of the spoils of war and of the profits of trade and of confiscated goods to sacred purposes. Tithing, then, in its origin was a voluntary system. It seems to have been incorporated into the Mosaic system as a simple and reasonable requirement, already justified by a well-nigh universal practice.

2. There was a threefold requirement in the law of tithing.

(1) A tenth of the increase of field, and flock, and herd, and orchard, and vineyard, and of the spoils of war was given to God. This tenth must be paid in kind; if redeemed, one-fifth must be added.

This was for the support of the Levites who ministered in Tabernacle and Temple. The Levites in turn gave a tenth of all they received to support the High Priest.

(2) Forty years later, when the tribes were about to enter Canaan, the law of tithing was extended. An additional tenth must be brought to the central sanctuary for a public festival (Deut. xii. 5-18). Those living far from the central place of worship might sell their sacrifice and buy again in Jerusalem. The Levites were to share in this feast.

(3) Every third year another tenth was devoted to a home festival. The poor and the Levite were to have a part in this feast (Deut. xiv. 28-29). After taking the tithe every third year, every Israelite must declare before God, that he had done his best to fulfill the commandment of God (Deut. xxvi. 12-15). In tithing sheep the flock was shut up in a pen, and, as they passed out in single file, every tenth animal was marked with a rod dipped in vermilion. No man dare change the animal so marked (Lev. xxvii. 32-33). So, under the law, one tenth was given to the Levite and the

priests; a second tenth was set apart for festival purposes; and every third year, a third tenth was to be eaten in the home town in company with the poor, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. This is supported by Tobit i. 7-8, and by Jerome and Josephus.

3. Tithing, being voluntary, was often neglected, there being no way to compel a recreant Israelite to pay his tithes.

The obligation, being a moral one, was left always to the free will of the worshiper. Any decay in the religious life of the nation affected the tithing system at once (Mal. iii. 8-10). Failure to pay tithes brought financial as well as moral loss; for drought and locusts and invaders came in to consume that which men withheld from God. Even with bursting barns there came leanness and barrenness of soul.

4. Little is said in the early church about tithing.

However, in the fourth century, Jerome, Augustine, and other church leaders began to advocate tithing. Soon the law of tithing became an established rule in the church. In the Reformation tithing passed over from the Roman to the Reformed churches. The modern church has developed an exaggerated voluntarism, and tithing has almost disappeared from Protestant Christendom. The church, after facing failure after failure to provide funds to carry on her work, is turning more and more to this ancient institution of the tithe as the solution of church finances.

There are two elements in the law of tithing, — one moral, and the other legal. The principle that it is every man's duty to set apart a portion of one's income for the service of God is forever binding on every child of God. The legal side said just how much should be given. The New Testament recognizes and reaffirms that the first principle continues

valid in this dispensation; but just what proportion shall be given the New Testament writers do not tell us. They do teach, however, that proportionate giving is binding for all.

Some think that their silence infers that tithing is no longer binding. The Jew was under law, the Christian is under grace. There was practical equality of wealth in Israel. The land was divided by lot among the tribes.

The tithing system tended to prevent large accumulations of property in the hands of a few individuals.

With us social and economic conditions are very different. Our wealth is very unequally distributed, and no law could cover all cases with equal justice to all.

Though the New Testament writers do not reaffirm the law of tithing on its legal side, the principle of proportionate giving they do declare. Heathen temples were the treasuries where their worshipers kept their treasure. Jesus made the hearts of his people the chests where his treasure was deposited. God prepared Paradise and turned it over to man. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The silver and the gold are his; the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God. He has committed the keeping of all this treasure to his people.

Jesus was as poor as the poorest toiler in his town. Notwithstanding the importance of his work, he lived, and laid the foundations of his kingdom, on the freewill offerings of his people. So completely did Jesus abandon himself to the affection of his followers, that he was at times forced to say: "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests: but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." The lad must give his loaves and fishes to feed the famished multitude. Jesus sailed in Simon's boat; he rested and entertained his disciples in Martha's home in Bethany; he rode in his

triumph on a borrowed beast; he celebrated the last supper in a borrowed room, and was buried in another's tomb. Jesus in his hour of extreme need levied no tribute, neither did he accept anything that was not freely given. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver."

We are indebted to St. Paul (2 Cor. viii. and ix.) for the most elaborate statement in the New Testament concerning

#### THE GOSPEL OF GIVING.

Money, like scandal, is a delicate thing to handle in the church. We are fortunate in having two chapters from the pen of St. Paul in which he treats at length of a collection. These chapters reveal the wealth of thought and feeling which St. Paul could bring to bear on an unwelcome theme. He illumines his subject from many sides. Money in itself has no character: so he never mentions money. He calls the thing he wants a "grace," a "service," a "communion in service," a "munificence," a "blessing," a "manifestation of love." St. Paul has transfigured, spiritualized, and glorified a very materialistic topic. The business and charity of the church must be met and mastered in a Christian spirit. The grace of God had been poured out on the Macedonian churches; and, though they were in great affliction and deep poverty, in joy they gave with incredible liberality for the relief of the poor in the church in Jerusalem. St. Paul makes the example of the Macedonian Christians an occasion for exhorting the Corinthian church to a like liberality.

Titus, while in Corinth delivering St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, had started the collection there. St. Paul met him at Philippi, and wrote this second letter to the Corinthian church, and urged Titus to return with it and complete the collection. Liberality is, first of all, a work

of God in the heart. Spiritual joy and grace, though hampered by distressing material poverty, poured forth a rich stream of liberality. Those who suffer most for the gospel are the most liberal contributors for its support. Ease and luxury conquered Hannibal and his victorious army, laid Alexander in an untimely grave, and ruined Rome. Ease and luxury have conquered many Christians. St. Paul feared their enervating effect on the Corinthian Christians.

Second Corinthians viii. 7 reads: "But as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in your love to us, *see that ye abound in this grace also.*" The command to grow in grace covers the grace of giving. Here, as everywhere else, St. Paul appeals to Christ as the source of authority. First, he appeals to the example of Christ: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. viii. 9). Jesus was reproached for his poverty and lowly origin, by those in authority. They said: "Is not this the carpenter's son?"

Jesus never had money to give; but he gave that which costs infinitely more — he gave himself, a living sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. "Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being of an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death." "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Ordinary charity is but the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table. The spirit and the example of Christ demand the giving of self. The Macedonian Christians first gave themselves to God, in complete consecration,

— that was the first part of their offering. The widow had given herself to her Lord before she put her all into the temple treasury. Mary had given herself to God before she brought the beautiful alabaster vase with its precious contents, representing the toil of years, and anointed Jesus. Only of such devotion could Jesus say: "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached, in the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." The example of Christ, with its patience and suffering and sacrifice, is a never-failing source of instruction and inspiration.

In this connection we may note St. Paul's three principles of Christian liberality.

1. There must be a willing mind, the mind of Christ being the model. Moses was instructed to receive gifts for the Tabernacle from "every man whose heart maketh him willing." God wants no gift that is not given freely: "for God loveth a cheerful giver." 2. The gift must be "according as a man hath." 3. There must be reciprocity, there can be no one-sided brotherhood with God. Man coöperates with God by giving to the poor. The church in Jerusalem had ministered to the Gentiles in spiritual things: reciprocity demanded that the Gentile churches should minister to them in material things.

St. Paul appeals to the Word of Jesus: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35). This is a saying of Jesus not recorded elsewhere in Scripture. But it seems to have been familiar both to St. Paul and to the Ephesian elders. Jesus told men of God's love for lost men, and the gift of his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Satan offered to give him the world; but Jesus said it was

more blessed for him to give himself for the world than that he should receive the world from the hands of Satan. After Jesus fed the five thousand, the multitude was ready to take him by force and make him king; but sending them away, he prayed for strength to continue his lowly ministry to the cross.

St. Paul points to the prosperity of Providence: "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper [or, as God hath prospered him]" (1 Cor. xvi. 2). Second Corinthians ix. 6-15 contains the important lesson that sowing and reaping will be proportionate. He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he that soweth with a bountiful hand shall have a bountiful harvest. Charity is an investment. Money lent to the Lord bears fruit in Christian character and joy. Money is nothing to God, except as an index of the soul's affection for him. Giving must ever be a cheerful act, — never a grudging one. God loves the cheerful giver. Poverty is not located, as many suppose, in the purse, but in the soul.

Dr. Samuel Johnson lived in misery and poverty. He toiled eight years preparing a dictionary of the English language, rendering an immense service to the entire English-speaking world. In tardy recognition of his great service the king of England sent him a pittance of a pension. Dr. Johnson said: "He sends me a pension because I live in a garret. His soul lives in a garret." The soul of many a rich man lives in a miserably mean garret, where every window is covered with the cobwebs of selfishness to keep out the sunshine of God's liberality. The man who desires to be generous will have the means to be charitable; "God is able to make all grace abound unto you; that ye, having always all sufficiency in every thing, may abound unto every good



work. . . . He that supplieth seed to the sower and bread for food, shall supply and multiply your seed for sowing, and increase the fruits of your righteousness: ye being enriched in everything unto all liberality, which worketh through us thanksgiving to God.”

Years ago Americans rushed into western Kansas, bought up large tracts of land, built towns, and tried to transform the desert into fruitful fields. After a few years of failure they left every thing: farms, schoolhouses, and even some small towns were forsaken.

Then a colony of Russian Mennonites went upon the same land, and faced the same difficulties that drove the Americans out. Their first building was a church. They gave tithes of all they possessed as the Lord prospered them. Those people are getting rich, proving the promise, “Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” “Them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” The wealth of this nation is increasing by leaps and bounds. It is a test of our devotion as to whether God shall have his portion of our ever-increasing wealth.

A Columbus (Ohio) banker, wishing to train his wife in business methods gave her a check book and a bank account, requesting her to pay all her bills by check, and then let him see her check book, that he might know how she spent her money. After some months, he found, in looking over her check book, an item of \$75 for church expenses. He said: “How is this? I pay our church subscription. What have you been paying?” “Oh,” she exclaimed, “that \$75 is for

an Easter hat." The church gets but a small proportion of what we spend for pleasure and for personal adornment. Much is said about the enormous annual outlay on the United States navy — about \$133,000,000; but this about balances our annual outlay for automobile tires.

#### CONCLUSION.

1. The law was a tutor to bring men to Christ.

This is as true of giving as it is of living. God gave the Jews Canaan: he gave us Christ. The Jew gave two and one third tenths annually. Yet he never was so prosperous as when he faithfully brought all of the tithes into the storehouse.

2. Whatever is given while self is withheld is tribute, not charity.

The Colonists refused to pay tribute; but they gave themselves and their substance to establish and to maintain their free institutions. Self is always the greatest that man can give. Peter had neither silver nor gold to give the lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple; but he gave him life and health, through Christ, which were worth infinitely more than the alms for which the beggar asked. Give yourself to God in complete consecration, keep back no part of the price. "Freely ye received, freely give." Christ gave himself for you, even to the last drop of his heart's blood. Give yourself as fully and as freely to him.

3. Not the standards of the law, but the spirit of the gospel, is the Christian rule for giving.

Follow the example of Jesus (who exchanged the riches of heaven for the poverty of earth, that the people of earth might enjoy all of the riches of Heaven). His holy Word declares, "It is more blessed to give than it is to receive."

He declares that the one parting with possessions or with position for him shall receive an hundred fold more here and now, and eternal life in the future. There are scores and hundreds of Christian business men who are learning that it pays to follow Christ in giving.

Years ago an English kitchen girl married a Halifax weaver. They worked hard and lived in a rented house. A family of children came. By industry and frugality they bought a home of their own. Bright and early one summer morning, mother and children went to the new home. In the front yard, the mother knelt with her children, and thanked God for the new home, saying, "O Lord, if thou wilt bless me in this place, the poor shall have a share of all you give me." Time rolled on and a fortune rolled in. Some years ago, one of her sons, a member of Parliament, declared on the floor of the House of Lords, that the secret of the prosperity of the Crossley family was due to that mother's prayer and the faithfulness with which she kept her vow.

Give to God's work according to the prosperity of Providence. Give as God has prospered you. As your income increases, increase your contributions — not the increase of your salary alone, but tithe the increase on your investments. Remember "The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." Never expect spiritual dividends to be declared on financial deficits.