

*Note from Randy Alcorn:* The webpage this is drawn from contains many links to helpful resources. See <http://www.generousgiving.org/page.asp?sec=43&page=45>. The organization “Generous Giving,” launched by the Maclellan Foundation in 2000, is a godly grace-oriented catalyst for giving that’s having a profound influence on evangelical churches. I highly recommend their website and their conferences.

## **Position Statements of Generous Giving,** [www.generousgiving.org](http://www.generousgiving.org)

In addition to our general statement of faith, Generous Giving has written position statements on specific issues that we have found to be important in the arena of stewardship. You may have a disagreement or question with one or more of these statements, as some of them are difficult issues on which Christians disagree. If so, please consider our answers to frequently asked questions. These position statements do not delineate our sphere of Christian fellowship; we receive as a brother or sister anyone who confesses Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. But because we are committed to the study and promotion of biblical generosity, we believe in tackling the more difficult issues as well.

**The Sacred/Secular Distinction.** All of life is spiritual, including the use of money, because God is involved in it. There are philosophies that separate reality into “spiritual” and “material” spheres, but Christianity is not one of them. The Bible covers the waterfront of human life because the gospel of God’s redemption covers the waterfront of human life. In the words of Scripture, God is reconciling all things to himself through Christ (Colossians 1:20).

**Wealth.** Money itself is morally neutral, a medium for the exchange of goods and services. But because human beings are sinful in their attitudes toward money, large amounts of it are spiritually dangerous. Wealth makes it hard for a person to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18:24) because people are so strongly tempted to love it (1 Timothy 6:10). But the mere fact of wealth is not itself sin. The sin lies in a person’s attitude toward and use of wealth, not in the possession of it. We are to be content with the wealth God gives us, not anxious to have more.

**Prosperity.** The Bible teaches that there is a general connection between faithfulness to God and prosperity in this life (Proverbs 12:21), but not a one-to-one correspondence (Psalm 73:1-14). In addition, there is a special connection between generosity and prosperity (2 Corinthians 9:6) which exists for the particular purpose of further generosity (2 Corinthians 9:11). To those who give generously, God gives more. But what he gives is seed, which is meant to be re-sown.

**Poverty.** There are several reasons why God chooses to allow poverty (1 Samuel 2:7). Some kinds of poverty are directly related to our own behavior (Deuteronomy 28:48, Proverbs 14:23). Others simply happen to us, and many of these cases are manifestly unjust. Therefore, while no human life is worth more or less than any other (Exodus 30:15), the poor do have a special place in God’s affections (Luke 6:20), because God is not blind to the unjust economic realities of the world (Psalm 140:12). Even the Lord Jesus himself was poor, and Christians should not consider it a dishonor to be poor in this life (Luke 9:58).

**Stewardship.** Stewardship is a lifestyle based on the biblical belief that God is the rightful owner of everything (Psalm 24:1) and that we are stewards or caretakers of his world, responsible to do with it what he wants done. Biblical stewardship includes many aspects, including ecology, physical fitness, personal finance, use of one’s abilities and more—even the gospel itself. But of all the various aspects of stewardship, the Bible frequently singles out financial generosity as the one most representative of a person’s heart (Matt. 6:19-21).

**The Christian Motivation for Giving.** The Bible gives a number of reasons why Christians should give their money, including apostolic command (2 Corinthians 8:7) and the promise of reward (Luke 12:33). But above all else, Christians give because it is a natural response to the gospel of God’s grace. Because God has given

us his Son, it is only fitting that we should offer ourselves as sacrifices to him (Romans 12:1), and specifically in part by giving our money (2 Corinthians 8:8-9). We do not give fearfully in order to receive God's grace, but joyfully because we have already received God's grace. For this reason, all Christians—not just the wealthy—are called to practice radical gospel generosity.

**The Role of Giving in Salvation.** Salvation is utterly and completely a gift of God, accomplished by Jesus on our behalf. In no way does giving (or any other good work) secure God's favor, because our very best acts fall far short of God's holiness. However, once we have been made new by the gospel, that same gospel changes us through and through, causing us to practice generosity (and other good works) out of thanksgiving to and love for God (Ephesians 2:10). Thus, while a person's giving does not in any way determine his salvation, it is an excellent indicator that salvation has come to him (Matthew 25:31-46).

**Public Giving.** Jesus commands us to do our giving in secret out of concern for our motivation, whether we give to be praised by men or to please God (Matthew 6:1-4). But the Scriptures also illustrate that Christian giving can sometimes be a public event (Acts 4:34-37), provided we "give out loud" in order to praise God and encourage others, avoiding possible abuses. Insofar as the church shares a mutual responsibility for the spiritual growth of its people (Galatians 6:1-5), including their use of money (2 Corinthians 8:7), it is right to talk about giving in the church. This means that pastors should preach about giving (Acts 20:27), and that public testimonies of generosity can be a fitting way to edify the church (2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:2).

**The Tithe.** The tithe, a one-tenth offering of the first and best of one's income from the promised land, is merely one aspect of giving in the Old Testament. The law taught three tithes totaling about 23.3 percent of one's income, but in both testaments tithers are called beyond tithing to mercy, justice and freewill giving in response to God's grace (2 Corinthians 9:7). Faithful tithing can even mask selfishness or legalism. Since most Christians can and should give far more than one-tenth, mere tithing becomes a tool to avoid the more difficult pursuit of justice and mercy with our wealth (Matthew 23:23). God's standard for our generosity is not a percentage; it is obedience to the radical command to love others as we love ourselves, imitating the pattern of Jesus' radical sacrifice on our behalf (2 Corinthians 8:9; John 13:34; 1 John 3:16-18).

**Christian Liberty.** The New Testament does not give us a mandatory percentage for Christian giving. The apostle Paul says, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion" (2 Corinthians 9:7). There is a liberty of conscience in Christian giving. But its purpose is not to indulge selfishness but, rather, to cultivate voluntary generosity by God's people. This is a sort of freedom unfamiliar to the Old Testament Israelites. But it is a freedom to excel in good deeds, not a freedom to sin; a freedom to give more, not less.

**The Last Judgment.** There will be one final judgment when the Lord Jesus returns at the end of this age. All people, Christians included, will stand before the throne of God to be judged according to what they have done (Revelation 20:13). At this judgment, the Lord will announce eternal destinies (heaven or hell) and apportion degrees of reward and punishment (greater or lesser). Faith in Christ is the only source of salvation, but good works will be the necessary evidence of salvation at the judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). Thus while generous giving does not save a person, it is a telltale sign of a saved person and a determining factor of that person's degree of reward.

**Eternal Reward.** As part of his gospel of grace, God promises to reward believers for their good works (Ephesians 6:8), including generous giving (Matthew 19:21). These eternal rewards are gifts of divine grace, having no human merit of their own, and their biblical purpose is not to provoke us to greed but to encourage us to persevere in obedience. God promises to reward us "according to what we have done" (Matthew 16:27), so there is a principle of correspondence. But the parable of the vineyard-workers (Matthew 20:1-16) makes it clear that the divine economy is no mere tit-for-tat calculation. And in the end, whatever other rewards he chooses to give, God himself is the one great reward of every Christian.