

## A Money-Back Guarantee?

### *Selected Scriptures*

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In an ideal world, we would spend all of our time speaking of the glories and blessings of our mutual faith. We have much for which to rejoice, in the Lord. God has given us his Son and the gift of faith so that we might be saved from the wrath of God, in him. And he has united us to Christ so that we are now the children of God, though it is yet to be fully revealed what we shall be when we see him as he is (1 John 3:1-3). Our daily conduct is determined not by this present evil age, but by the power of the coming age which we live out in the present, by the power of the Spirit. Nonetheless, the Christian community is called to be a discerning people who “contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude v.3).

On that note, it has come to my attention through many sources that a new gimmick is now offered by church leaders: a money-back guarantee as a motivation for giving. That’s correct. You read it right. A money-back guarantee on giving. Here is how it goes: Give, and if you do not feel an increased blessing after 90 days, you can ask for your money back. What is this but the latest scheme by shallow, worldly-minded Christian leaders to extract money from congregants? It’s a gimmick. It is akin to late-night tv ads which offer useless gadgets at a two-for-one price and with a guarantee of satisfaction or your money back. It is another perversion of the gospel and distortion of genuine motivation and purpose for Christian giving.

#### Giving Under the New Covenant

So, what does the New Testament say about motivation and purpose of giving? First, New Testament giving is primarily is about caring for those who cannot provide for their basic needs — the weak, the sick, the widow, the orphan. Second, New Testament giving is to justly support those who are spiritually gifted to teach and have taken the time and energy typically used to work for a living, in order to do serve the community. Nowhere does the New Testament teach that giving is to fund the career ambitions of seminary graduates, or to fund the building and maintenance of sacred buildings, or to gain a personal blessing. Nowhere.

The tithe in ancient Israel was part of a generalized income tax within a theocratic, temple system of worship and service; it was to provide for the Levitical priests, and to care for the poor and the needy stranger. Under the New Covenant, there is no Christian nation in a geo-political sense, nor is there a physical temple, a standing priesthood, and thus the care for the poor and the stranger is not centralized within such a system. The Christian community collectively and individually is the new temple, as the people of God, not the building, nor is there a priestly class which requires special financial support.

But beginning with the Constantinian change in the fourth-century, sacred buildings modeled after the Roman pagan religions became central to Christian worship and community, as well as the return of a levitical-like, temple priesthood. And all of this, of course, had to be funded by the state. So, at the Council of Tours in 567, the Roman state-church reimposed an old covenant, mandatory tithe system upon the people. At the second Council of Macon in 585, the tithe was “enjoined under the pain of excommunication.”<sup>1</sup> The teaching of Jesus and the apostles on giving and receiving was set aside in favor of new Judaized church system within a state controlled Christian nation. And the Reformation did little or nothing to reform this oppressive practice by a clerical hierarchy. And there are many today that seek to create such a European, state-church system within a “Christian America.”<sup>2</sup>

But until such a state system is actually created in America, most churches and their leaders teach giving based upon that old covenant theocratic model, with a proof text of Malachi 3:8-12. Such a teaching is proof positive of a Judaized form of religion masking as Christianity for which there is no New Testament warrant and authority.<sup>3</sup> In addition, these

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<sup>1</sup> Bible Encyclopedia: Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical literature. Available on-line at <https://www.studyight.org/encyclopedias/eng/mse/t/tithes.html> [retrieved September 6, 2022].

<sup>2</sup> Popular evangelical teacher, John MacArthur, has even called for the abolishment of religious freedom stating that it encourages idolatry. Some right-wing politicians have also called for abolishing of the separation of church and state.

<sup>3</sup> Many pseudo-Christian leaders will contend that the tithe existed before the law of Moses, and use Abraham giving to Melchizedek as a proof text. They fail to tell people that Genesis is part of the Pentateuch, or *Five Books of the Law*, nor do they tell you the singular story of tithing by Abraham is descriptive, not prescriptive in Scripture, meaning the purpose of the story is not to teach tithing, but the superiority of Melchizedek to Abraham, and thus the superiority of Jesus to Abraham, for Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (see Hebrews 7-10). The same is true for those who contend that Jesus commended tithing based upon Matthew 23:23, where Jesus curses the practice of the Pharisees who tithed but ignored the weightier matters of the law, “justice,

pseudo-Christian leaders adopt the modern business and entertainment model from which the money-back guarantee is derived. The real tragedy of all this distortion of Christian giving is the loss of genuine New Testament giving and receiving.

### Why and How Christians Give

As stated earlier, New Testament giving is about caring for the weak, and justly supplying the material needs of missionaries and teachers who devote time otherwise spent earning a living, to exercising their spiritual gifts; though some missionaries and teachers choose not to receive such support (Galatians 6:6; I Corinthians 9:1-18). At those places in the New Testament in which the Lord Jesus and his apostles would have been most likely to teach tithing, they did not; Matthew 6 and II Corinthians 8-9, are examples.

At Matthew chapter 6, our Lord teaches the kingdom principles that serving God and money is impossible for one will eventually be utterly devoted to either money or God, but not both. Money and God each demand absolute devotion from us, and so it is impossible to serve both God and money. And Jesus therefore assures his readers that the Father knows the needs of his children and provides. And God does not require that his children prime the pump by giving in order to get the blessing. The Father provides his children, because that is what a Father does (see Matthew 7:11), and not in response to some formula.

In II Corinthians 8-9, the apostle teaches that giving under the new covenant is a work of grace in which each should excel (8:7). In general, he offers two principles: (1) it is to be done freely, II Corinthians 9:7; and (2) according to what one can afford, 8:12. Some find another principle in Paul's instruction to set aside a sum of money on the first day of the week in keeping with your income. But this is specific instruction given for a specific occasion, that being the relief of the needs of the Christians at Jerusalem who were experiencing hardship. It is questionable then that the apostle meant this to be a generalized principle of giving.

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mercy, and faithfulness." And they speak non-contextually, since at the time Jesus said these things, both the Pharisees and he himself remained under the law; the new covenant had yet to be consecrated by his own blood, and empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Yet, these things are widely taught as biblical truth, and untold millions of God's people labor under the yoke of these false teachings.

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any mention of “seed faith,” giving in order to receive, or to fund the self-indulgence of pastors, or to support buildings and staff salaries. All blessing comes from God, but we must never think we can invoke or earn that blessing by our giving. Giving is a good work of grace directed primarily for the relief of the poor, “As it is written, ‘They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever’” (II Corinthians 9:9). The righteous give to care for the poor; the unrighteous give in order to receive a blessing for themselves, and with money-back guarantees. I beg you, give righteously. You have no obligation to tithe; you have no obligation to give to support clerical egos, or to fund massive building projects. You are called to the grace of giving, and to do so freely, willingly, and primarily to care for your brothers and sisters in need (Matthew 25:35-36; I John 3: 16-18; James 2:14-17). **AMEN.**

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